

## **TEACHING GUIDELINES FOR LEADING CLASS DISCUSSIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE RECENT TRAGEDY AT NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERISTY**

As the leader of the class and the person facilitating the discussion, it is important for you to maintain your authority over the classroom environment in order to guide the discussion appropriately. Some suggestions to help you prepare and facilitate these discussions:

1. Think through supportive ways to introduce and close the session.
2. Ask the class to establish ground rules for the discussion. Some ideas you might want to propose to students before they begin discussion include:
  - Avoid blame and speculation.
  - Respect each other's views and avoid inflammatory language.
  - It is okay to share personal stories and feelings. (Be prepared for students to be emotional, and try to support and comfort them.)
  - It is okay to express anger and frustration within limits. (While it is important for students to express themselves, it is also vital to control the class and maintain an environment that feels safe for all students.)
  - Be prepared for the fact that, sometimes, in the wake of these tragedies, when a particular group gets blamed by the media or others, there is a backlash against people who share an ethnic/cultural/religious heritage with those accused. It is important that students not be doubly hurt by this tragedy -- first by the horrific news that has shaken us all and second by misguided generalizations.
  - Be mindful that when someone compares the severity of this event to historical or other events, it might offend or estrange those who see themselves in different relationship to the examples given. There are many reasons why students may have a different relationship with the examples, e.g., personal history or age, differing past experience of violence or tragedy, group membership, or different geographical or cultural origins or reference points.
  - Create a framework for the discussion. Possible discussion topics include:
    - What hopes and fears do you have about this discussion?
    - In what ways are you personally affected by these events?
    - How might these events affect your/our future?
    - What positive actions can individuals take in response to this tragedy (e.g., give blood, support students new to campus or far from home)?

- Allow everyone a chance to talk (when possible), but don't force students to participate. Ways to accomplish this include:
  - Use a "round" (give each student a chance to speak in response to a guiding question without interruption or discussion, allowing students to pass if they desire). Following the round, open the discussion for general response.
  - Divide students into discussion partners or groups.
  - Give students a chance to write before speaking.
- Other ideas for instructors to consider:
  - Join sections together to have more than one leader. In large classes, consider breaking students into small groups with discussion leaders.
  - Where you can, explore links to the content of your class or discipline.
  - Try to balance emotional with intellectual approaches.
  - Ask students to do some writing when discussion seems to be getting out of hand.
- Exchange ideas and strategies with other instructors, including debriefing the class discussion.
- Don't feel compelled to lead a discussion if your own emotions or reactions make you feel unable to do so. Give a simple statement to the class to this effect and move on into class work. Outside of class, be sure to seek appropriate support for yourself.
- Discuss with colleagues the issues you face in the classroom as a result of the tragedy we all have experienced. There are no right answers or approaches, so we all need to learn from each other.

\*(adapted from materials from University of Michigan)

For information on campus safety and confidential counseling and/or consultation services for students visit the following websites:

**Safety Resources for Faculty, Staff, and Students:**

<http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/vp/safety/index.htm>

**Counseling Center Websites:**

ASU – Polytechnic                    <http://www.poly.asu.edu/students/counseling>

ASU – Phoenix Downtown       <http://nursing.asu.edu/nmhc/asuhc/index.htm>

ASU – Tempe                           <http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/counseling>

ASU – West                             <http://www.west.asu.edu/sa/studenthealth>

**Emergencies After Office Hours**

**EMPACT Crisis Hotline ..... 480-921-1006**