

 WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

## Facilitating Classroom Discussion about Charged Topics

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### Specific Aims for the Day

- **To provide Participants with**
  - (1) Tools and strategies for moderating and managing difficult conversations around topics such as race, gender, and campus climate.
  - (2) Experiential activities that simulate charged topics and difficult dialogs, using case studies and scenarios

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### Difficult Dialogs in the Classroom

- Regardless of setting, what are some difficult dialogs?
- What makes them difficult?
- What is it about the classroom setting that makes difficult dialogs more difficult?
- What's conflict got to do with any of this?

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 **Difficult Dialog Examples**

- You will be paired up in a minute
- You will be provided with an index card
- As the recipient of the index card, expand on the topic with your partner as you see fit
- As the partner, listen to what the other person has to say without interrupting
- Take 2 minutes to do this, and we'll process on the other end

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 **Conflict 101**

- Conflicts are “super-sized disagreements” where one or both parties perceive a threat
- If ignored, conflicts tend to get worse
- We respond to conflicts subjectively more than objectively, with multiple influences
- Conflicts tend to trigger strong emotions, rooted in life experiences
- Conflicts tend to be the seeds for personal and professional growth

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 **Conflict Resolution 201**

- Strive to manage stress quickly from an attentive and level perspective
- Strive to monitor your own feelings and actions
- Strive to hone in on the emotions of the individuals speaking to you and/or each other
- Strive to respect and validate differences

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 **The Tool Kit for Facilitating Difficult Dialogs**

- Ground Rules for Civil Discourse
- Tips for Active Listening
- The Use of "I" Statements
- Tips for Diffusing Conversations

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 **Establishing Mutual Purpose**

**What are your objectives as an instructor in this facilitating difficult classroom conversation? Agreement? Consensus? Understanding?**

**Create a one-sentence statement of purpose indicating what you want students to do and learn from this exercise. Share and discuss.**

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 **Ground Rules for Civil Discourse**

- **Master Yourself and Your Domain**
- **Impersonal framing**
- **Active listening**
- **Mirroring and Acknowledging**

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 **The Instructor's Role**

- **Master yourself: Know your hot buttons and assumptions**
- **Create a safe space for honest talk by:**
- **Modeling appropriate tone and tools for civil discourse**
- **Remaining cool: "Get thee to the balcony"**
- **Remembering you are facilitating an exchange of views, not promoting your viewpoint**
- **Remaining open, curious and respectful**

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 **Tips for Talking**

- **Use "I" statements to relate opinions**
- **No personal or derogatory comments of any kind directed at others**
- **Be conscious of tone and body language**
- **Brainstorm what you think you might not know or understand about the issue, BEFORE**

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 **Tips for Active Listening**

- **Don't think about how you will respond or what you will say while listening**
- **No interrupting. Period.**
- **Listen for real understanding of the other person's viewpoint**
- **Listen for emotions and experiences**

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 **Paraphrase and Mirror**

- The listener mirrors back to the first speaker “What I heard was....” and gets confirmation of understanding the message (not agreeing!)
- Only then can listener frame a response using “I” statements
- Be ok with multiple views and disagreement
- Look for and affirm areas of agreement

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 **Difficult Dialog Examples**

- Let’s go back to original pairs
- You will be provided with a different card
- As the recipient of the index card, expand on the topic with your partner as you see fit
- As the partner, listen to the other person, using what we’ve learned today
- Take 2 minutes to do this, and we’ll process on the other end

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 **Managing Emotions in the Classroom**

- If things get intense in the moment: push PAUSE and ask students to refocus on the shared purpose and ground rules
- At the conclusion of discussion, invite a 2-minute writing exercise on: “This conversation made me feel...”
- At the conclusion, invite 2-minute writing on: “I learned....” or “It is important to me that others understand....” or “I still don’t understand.....”

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 **Managing Expectations in the Classroom**

- **As you prepare to have a “difficult conversation,” consider these processing questions at the conclusion:**
  - **“What were you expecting to get out of today’s topic?**
  - **“What did you find most difficult to discuss?**
  - **“What one thing would you share with a friend or roommate that you learned today?”**

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 **Practice Time**

- Over the next 2 slides, we will address a couple of different scenarios in the classroom
- You will do this as small groups of 4-5
- As a small group, think about
  - What is the “standard” instructor reaction?
  - What would you do differently based on what you’ve learned today?
  - What might be some unintended reactions to “doing things differently?”
- Each group will get a chance to share

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 **Scenario 1**

- **Two students are engaged in a heated back-and-forth over a specific presidential candidate in your classroom. The debate started when you raised the issue of how should social programs for disadvantaged populations are funded . However, the conversation has now digressed into name calling and is no longer related to your topic. What would you do...**

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 **Scenario 2**

- Over the weekend a student read an op-ed piece you wrote in the local newspaper about the overall value and benefits of a liberal arts education. It turns out the student strongly disagrees with your point-of-view, and the “waste of time and money these divisionals” happen to be. He decides to engage with you in this discussion during your office hours. What would you do?

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 **Concluding Remarks**

- Thank you for attending today’s discussion
- We’d also like to thank the TLC for sponsoring this event, and for providing the forum to engage in this discussion
- In an effort to continue this discussion, feel free to follow-up with us if need be
- Have a great Spring 2016 term

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