

Problem scenarios: sample responses

This is by far, not an exhaustive or even authoritative set of solutions to the scenarios, but hopefully they should give good tips for how to address the situations in the problem scenarios.

Scenario 1:

The issue is that the student fears that his views, which may not be in line with (what is perhaps) a more likely anti-pornography position, will be met with quite a bit of stigma and aggression.

Ways to limit this as a problem before hand:

- * Establish an atmosphere of listening to alternative points of view. Actively encourage students to advocate for and share ideas *even if* they aren't the views that they personally believe.
- * Tell students that you will not tolerate lack of respect for someone's principles or personal attacks.
- * In the course material emphasize the importance of taking opposing points of view seriously, including in all papers and assignments.
- * Ask the student why he is concerned and attempt to figure out if there's anything specific you can do to make the student feel at ease.

During the section, tips for addressing the issue:

- * Play devil's advocate, step in to defend the less popular view in the class.
- * Directly question and tease out the assumptions of the class if they take only one side of the issue.
- * Phrase questions in the conditional, "if you were to argue against X popular position how could you make that case?"
- * Make sure to follow up with student.

Scenario 2:

Immigration and the insensitive response:

This requires correcting behavior through:

- * Immediately disagreeing with the rhetoric, but without coming off as angry.
- * Rephrase the comment into a form that is acceptable.
- * Talk to student after class (the offending and the offended student) as a debrief.
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Scenario 3: the financial aid situation

- * Say explicitly that if finances are an issue to let you know. Many students who struggle fear admitting that they lack resources.
- * Try to find books that can be bought cheaply online or in other editions.
- * Put coursepacks (esp.) and books on reserve.

Scenario 4: grade submission dilemma

Beforehand: Have a professor-TA talk about expectations and whether or not they will follow up with you in case of a dispute. Also have guidelines in place about the "chain of command" with grading issues.

During the situation:

- * Have the professor talk to the student to ask specifically what if any situations of bias may have occurred;

Encourage the student to put their specific complaint about why the grading should have been different (i.e. what was misgraded and why)

While grading:

- * Consider using name blind grading (i.e. flipping over the cover page and assigning marks)

- * Using rubrics (that may/may not be handed out to students) and referring to them ensures objectivity.

- * Verify your grading with other TAs/professors--get feedback on how you make assessments.

Scenario 5: the hate speech position

- * Beforehand, be sure to discuss and be educated about any official procedures in place when such situations happen.

- * Assure students of their safety and the openness of the community.

- * Educate without coming off as preachy: speak in general about ways to resolve and communicate conflicts--not all situations like this are ones of malice, they may often be the result of lack of knowledge/understanding.

Scenario 6: language

Possible solutions:

- * Treat this as a public speaking matter: use of voice variation and energy can overcome lapses in fluency.

- * Use multiple modes of teaching in order to communicate i.e. written handouts and visuals.

- * Confidence is critical: the more personable you are the more likely you will get the benefit of the doubt.

- * Invite students to ask to clarify or re-explain: this allows you to diagnose if/when you are being unclear (this is a good tip in all situations anyway)

Scenario 7: the same-sex marriage scenario

- * Correct the pronoun problem: there is no "they're" in the classroom, there is a "we," so encourage the dynamic that the classroom is a shared environment for all, not an us-vs-them mindset

- * Demand that people phrase their arguments based on course material or text not on solely anecdote

- * argue for understanding the point of view of others even if it's not yours (this may require a TA to play "the questioner.")