

TEACHING IN TIMES OF CRISIS

LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS ON STUDENT ABILITY

- Students do not need to be directly involved in the event or crisis to experience anxiety or trauma; they may experience it through:
 - the sheer magnitude and scale (event and media coverage)
 - direct and cascading impacts on their family, friends, and communities
 - vicariously through close identification as a "fellow" (i.e. fellow student, fellow LGBTQ community member, fellow woman, fellow person of color)
- Communal crises can lead to anxiety and trauma that reduces the cognitive and psychological capacity of students, preventing them from performing at their best in the classroom.

HOW SHOULD EDUCATORS RESPOND TO THIS, AND IF POSSIBLE, AMELIORATE IT?

- **Surveys suggest that doing ANYTHING is better than NOTHING.**
 - Students have criticized responses when faculty ignore crisis events and have expressed gratefulness for faculty that acknowledge difficult current events.
- The worst responses include a lack of response or a response that acknowledges the crisis event occurred while stating that the class needs to move on with no mention of resources or extra help.
- General recommendations for responding to current events or crises include:
 - **Showing grace to students by attempting to reduce uncertainty wherever possible.** Uncertainty is a common feeling in response to crises and reducing the extent to which students have to feel this in and outside of class is a big step. This means giving explicit instructions, clearly communicating any changes, and giving students a clear window into instructor decision-making processes when assigning work and grades.
 - **Expressing and naming our own vulnerabilities, uncertainties, and struggles in response to crises.** This can serve to normalize collective struggle in situations when a communal crisis cannot be ignored. This humanizes faculty in students' eyes and gives students permission to be human as well.
 - **Actively listen to where students are and meet them there.** If students are in a state where they simply cannot complete an assignment because of current events, consider changing or removing it. If an aspect of the class is not working because of the reduced cognitive capacity in response to communal trauma, consider changing or removing it.
 - **Celebrate moments of resilience in yourself and your students.** Check-in with students and uplift their voices and accomplishments in times of crisis and uncertainty. Share your own accomplishments and small or large victories. This humanizes faculty and embraces the duality of communal struggle and resilience.

OTHER CONCRETE IDEAS FOR RESPONDING TO CURRENT EVENTS OR CRISES:

- Hold a moment of silence for those affected and the communities that mourn with them.
- Mind the cognitive load the class may be placing on students at this time.
- Pivot class assignments or materials to be relevant to current sociopolitical events or concerns.
- Take the appropriate steps to facilitate an affirming and productive discussion with students regarding the event or crisis. Only do this if you are willing to do the research on what it takes for productive conversations in "hot" moments.
- Provide direct resources to students verbally and via email. If you are unsure of your ability to properly provide the support students may need, provide them with academic and psychological support options they can choose to pursue.

SOURCES

- Harder, W., & McGowan, B. "Recognizing COVID-19 as Trauma: Considerations for Student Affairs Educators and Faculty Developers - ACPA Developments."
- Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. "Teaching in Times of Crisis."