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BASIC GUIDELINES ON CLASS DISCUSSIONS
Work in Progress

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Whether you like it or not, you will need to work well with other people. Below are some expectations I have of all my students when interacting with each other in person or digitally.

Listen attentively.

Pay attention to what someone is saying without being distracted by your technology, side conversation, or pre-planning your response. Thinking of how you will dismantle their point of view before they are finished making their point limits your capacity to understand and learn what they are fully trying to say and could leave gaps in your own arguments.

Be Aware of Interruptions.

Speaking over someone or having a side conversation inhibits your ability to listen effectively and is disrespectful to the person sharing their ideas.

No Name Calling.

This applies to individuals foremost. Be respectful of people and focus on challenging their ideas.

Respect Confidentiality.

Some people may raise controversial points of view or share personal information. You should not use what is discussed in class for outside conversations. I often offer perspectives not because it is my opinion, but to generate discussion or present alternative viewpoints. This is a healthy way to learn, so please be respectful of everyone's intellectual development.

Have a Genuine Exchange of Ideas

While it is healthy to offer different perspectives, the purpose is to improve our thinking about a subject. Merely challenging someone to frustrate them or ridicule their opinion is entirely different. "I'm just asking questions" is disingenuous to the pursuit of learning.

SHARING YOUR THOUGHTS

It is ok to make mistakes.

Mistakes are how we learn. Invite yourself and others to learn from mistakes by talking about their impact and how to avoid similar mistakes in the future.

Demonstrate your reasoning.

Consider how you are building connections between pieces of evidence and theory to justify your argument.

Connect the discussion to prior course material and discussions.

What are the connections that might be emerging?

Emotions are okay and to be expected.

Emotions are normal of course. Try to name your reaction and what you think is prompting it. Someone could learn about the impact of a particular idea or piece of knowledge. Many times when we have an emotional reaction to something we have difficulty identifying what we are feeling and why. It is always a good idea to refer [Dr. Robert Plutchik's emotion wheel](#) for help.

You do not need to be the sole representative of any of the identities you hold.

There is significant emotional labor involved with talking about your community's culture, and even then, you cannot speak for everyone. Do this when it is healthy for you.

Practice self-awareness.

Avoid the practice of telling others what they feel and consider the relevance of your own experiences and how they may influence your opinions. As a professor, I am aware that when I ask a student for something, they often view it as a demand. Or they may feel pressured to answer in a way they think I will approve of. Our roles are not just about how we act towards people, but how people act towards us.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO STATEMENTS

Use "I" statements to own your experiences and thoughts.

You cannot speak for everyone, only yourself. "I think", "I feel", and "I believe" are more effective than "We think", "They feel", or "You believe..."

It is okay to name an idea or statement as oppressive, problematic, or triggering as long as you also name why you believe it to be so.

Discuss the concerns you have about an idea, the logic/evidence/justification used, and why you think the idea is subsequently problematic, but referring to an idea as "stupid" or "ridiculous" errs toward judgmental name calling. Critique the idea using evidence and theory you think are relevant.

Seek to understand when you think something problematic or unclear is shared.

Ask a question that prompts the other person to clarify what they meant.

Trust intent and name impact.

Believe that your classmates are actively trying to learn, and that sometimes an idea comes out poorly phrased. Ask them to clarify what was said and share what you heard and/or felt.

LISTENING AND REFLECTING

Question your assumptions about people in the class and the ideas being presented.

In what ways can other points of view help inform your own stance? Practice empathy when listening to others.

Acknowledge and appreciate the effort of those that are sharing their perspectives.

It takes a certain amount of bravery to share ones perspective, especially if it is uncommon. Concurrently, do not feel as though you are entitled to someone elses knowledge or experience: you can ask for someone to share, but they may not feel comfortable doing so; respect their choice.

Acknowledge how some narratives are erased or represented from the evidence base, and we may need to accept other forms of knowledge.

Raise questions about where the evidence used in class originated from and the perspectives or evidence that they may have missed. Whose voices/images are missing?

Trust the process.

These conversations can be long and complex. Know that you might not find a solution to the issue on the table, or that you might not cover every facet of the topic in one class session. Learning may continue into another class or even on your own.