Difficult Classroom Conversations: Navigating Controversy while Building Positive Learning Environments

Take a notecard and write down a few questions you'd like answered during the session

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Session Objectives

- Discuss characteristics of safe and supportive learning environments
- Consider strategies you can use to establish a supportive, community environment in your classroom
- Examine strategies for managing difficult conversations
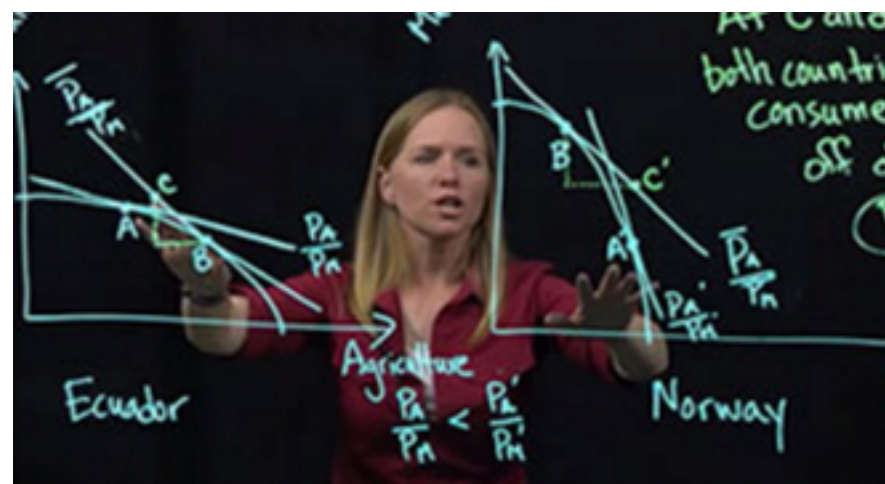- Explore approaches that can be applied to real classroom scenarios

What is CEE?

Learning + Teaching Support
provides learner-centered, research-based, instructional support for the UC Davis teaching community
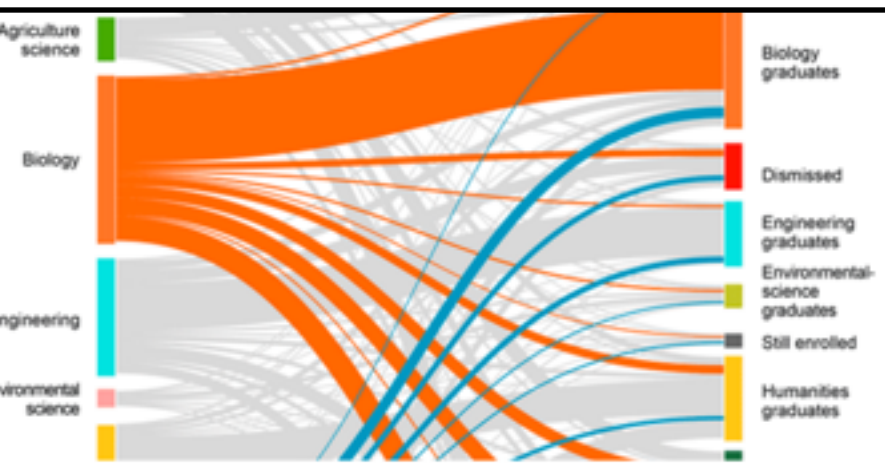
Educational Analytics
data analysis and visualization to support instructional effectiveness and development

Instructional Research + Development
explores complex instructional matters and conducts research to improve learning and teaching

www.cee.ucdavis.edu

About Kem
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Sterling College

Associate Director of Learning + Teaching Support

Educational Specialist

Director of Educational Technology

Adjunct Faculty Educational Policy Research, and Administration

Development Consultant

Assistant – College of Education

Assistant- or Teaching

Multimedia – Office of Admissions

Assistant Professor of Communication

Director of Mass Media

A GUIDE TO Teaching IN Active Learning Classrooms

HISTORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE

Paul Baepler, J.D. Walker, D. Christopher Brooks, Kem Saichaie, and Christina I. Petersen

Foreword by Bradley Cohen

How do you create community?

Workshop Agreements

We agree that here…

We promote an atmosphere for learning	We treat each other with respect	We take care of ourselves
We're present	We can have fun	Personal experiences stay here

An Age of Contempt

The New York Times | https://nyti.ms/2khQ3N5

The Opinion Pages

Our New Age of Contempt
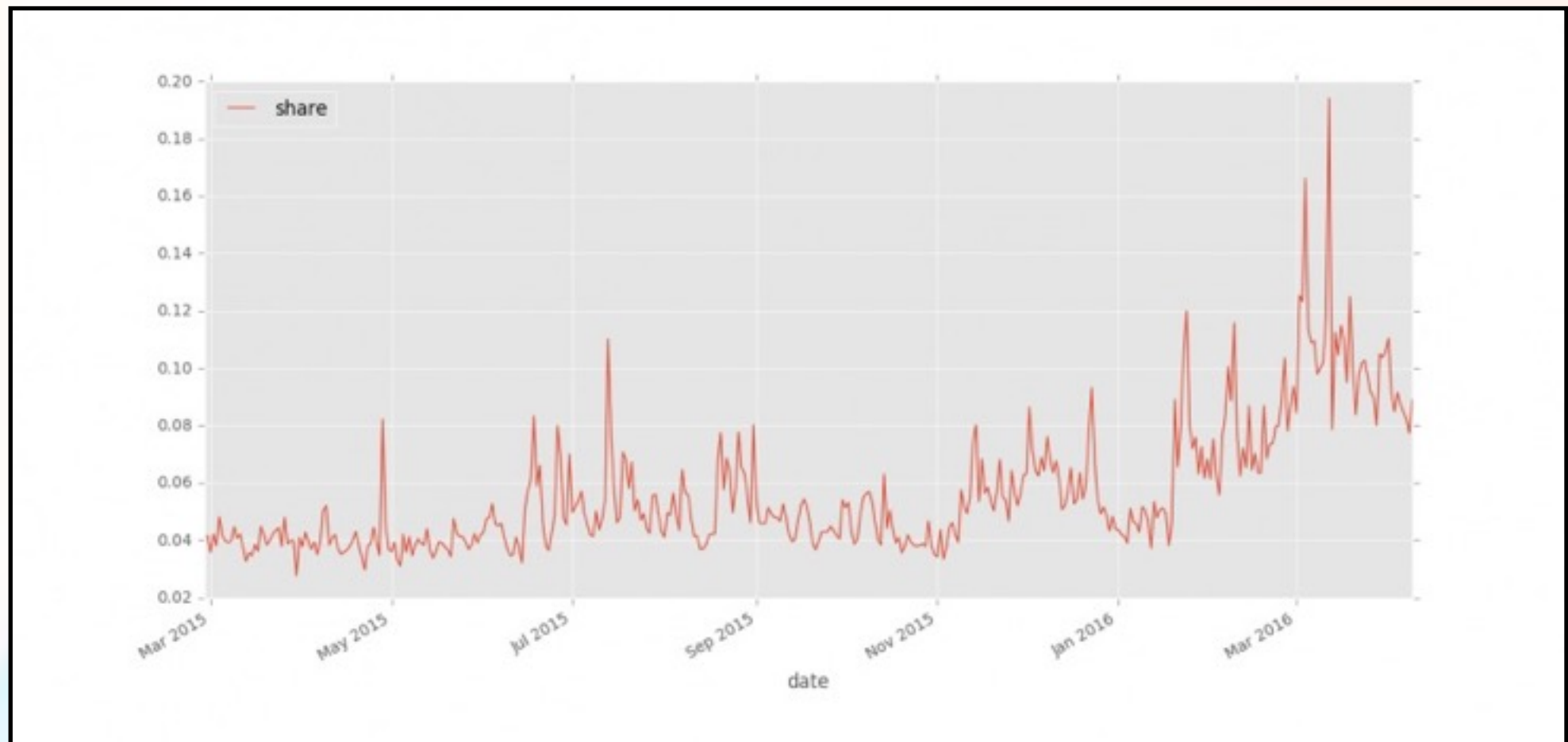
Karen Stohr

THE STONE   JAN. 23, 2017

Anyone who hoped that 2017 might bring a change in the tone of our political discourse has by now been thoroughly disappointed. The remarkable degree of contempt that characterized the 2016 election has shown no sign of abating in President Donald J. Trump's first days in office.

Contemptuous political discourse is not new, of course. What *is* new is the extent to which contempt has managed to slither into our daily experience of political conversation. Gone are the days when contempt for political rivals and their supporters was mostly communicated behind closed doors, in low tones not meant to be overheard. Whatever veneer of unseemliness we associated with contemptuous public speech has been stripped away. We are left with everyone's raw feelings, on all sides of the political spectrum, exposed and expressed in contexts ranging from social media and public protests to confrontational signage and clothing.

Immanuel Kant once remarked that "no man in his true senses ... is candid." It wasn't that Kant didn't value truthfulness and sincerity in our interactions with others; he did. He realized, however, that the stability and progress of moral and political community depends on our being able to restrain ourselves from expressing

Stohr, K. (2017, January 25). Our New Age of Contempt. Retrieved January 23, 2017, from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/opinion/our-new-age-of-contempt.html

(In)Civility in public life

MIT Media Lab found that **election-related Tweets** showed high levels of **incivility**.

Heyward, A. (2016, April 25). Introducing Tonar. Retrieved January 5, 2017, from https://medium.com/mit-media-lab/introducing-tonar-3bf161cba369#.wp1vyhtx

(In)Civility in public life

Standards for civility may be changing

Behaviors that should <u>not</u> be okay in politics	2010	2016
Interrupting someone you disagree with in a public forum	77%	51%
Shouting over someone you disagree with during an argument	86%	65%
Belittling or insulting someone	89%	74%
Personal attacks on someone you disagree with	87%	71%
Comments about someone's race or ethnicity	89%	69%
Comments about someone's sexual orientation	81%	65%

Universities are not left out

"Academic incivility may be considered as any speech or behavior that negatively affects the wellbeing of students or faculty members, weakens professional relationships and **hinders** the teaching-learning process."
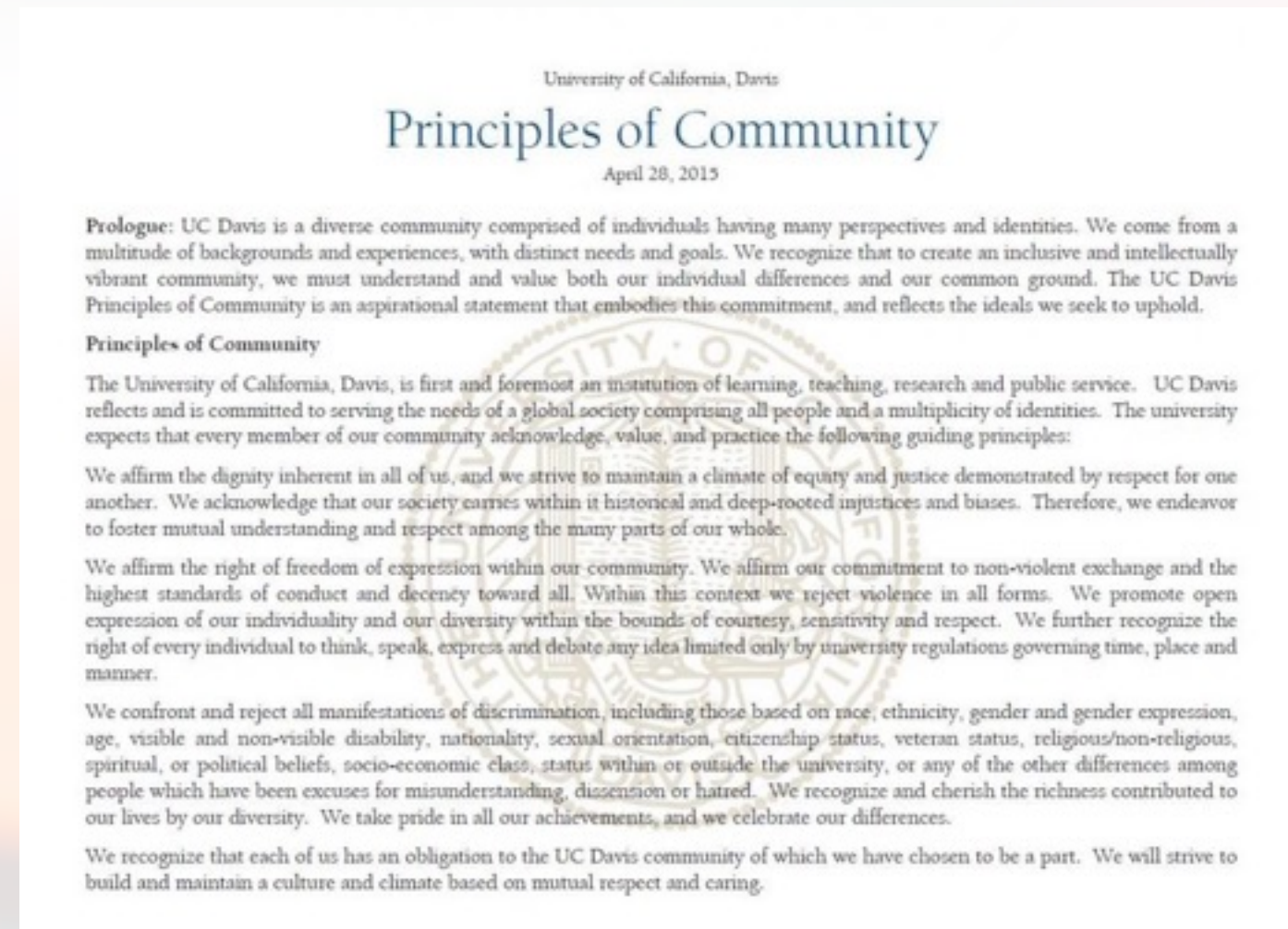
(Clark & Kenaley 2011)

Clark, C. M., & Kenaley, B. L. D. (2011). Faculty empowerment of students to foster civility in nursing education: A merging of two conceptual models. *Nursing Outlook*, *59*(3), 158-165.

UC Davis Principles of Community

"We affirm the **dignity** inherent in all of us, and we strive to maintain **a climate of equity and justice** demonstrated by **respect for one another**…

We recognize that each of us has an **obligation** to the UC Davis community of which we have chosen to be a part. We will strive to build and maintain a culture and climate based on **mutual respect and caring.**"

University of California, Davis

Principles of Community

April 28, 2015

Prologue: UC Davis is a diverse community comprised of individuals having many perspectives and identities. We come from a multitude of backgrounds and experiences, with distinct needs and goals. We recognize that to create an inclusive and intellectually vibrant community, we must understand and value both our individual differences and our common ground. The UC Davis Principles of Community is an aspirational statement that embodies this commitment, and reflects the ideals we seek to uphold.

Principles of Community

The University of California, Davis, is first and foremost an institution of learning, teaching, research and public service. UC Davis reflects and is committed to serving the needs of a global society comprising all people and a multiplicity of identities. The university expects that every member of our community acknowledge, value, and practice the following guiding principles:

We affirm the dignity inherent in all of us, and we strive to maintain a climate of equity and justice demonstrated by respect for one another. We acknowledge that our society carries within it historical and deep-rooted injustices and biases. Therefore, we endeavor to foster mutual understanding and respect among the many parts of our whole.

We affirm the right of freedom of expression within our community. We affirm our commitment to non-violent exchange and the highest standards of conduct and decency toward all. Within this context we reject violence in all forms. We promote open expression of our individuality and our diversity within the bounds of courtesy, sensitivity and respect. We further recognize the right of every individual to think, speak, express and debate any idea limited only by university regulations governing time, place and manner.

We confront and reject all manifestations of discrimination, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender and gender expression, age, visible and non-visible disability, nationality, sexual orientation, citizenship status, veteran status, religious/non-religious, spiritual, or political beliefs, socio-economic class, status within or outside the university, or any of the other differences among people which have been excuses for misunderstanding, dissension or hatred. We recognize and cherish the richness contributed to our lives by our diversity. We take pride in all our achievements, and we celebrate our differences.

We recognize that each of us has an obligation to the UC Davis community of which we have chosen to be a part. We will strive to build and maintain a culture and climate based on mutual respect and caring.

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Code of Academic Conduct

The University of California, Davis
CODE OF ACADEMIC CONDUCT
Honesty, Fairness, Integrity

This Code of Academic Conduct exists to support high standards of behavior and to ensure fair evaluation of student learning. Student conduct is taken seriously at UC Davis. Students who violate the Code of Academic Conduct are subject to disciplinary sanctions that include Censure, Probation, Suspension, Deferred Separation or Dismissal from the University of California. Unless specifically authorized by the instructor in writing, misconduct includes, but is not limited to the following:

➤ Cheating on exams or other coursework
- Copying or attempting to copy from another student, or allowing another student to copy.
- Displaying or using any unauthorized material such as notes, cheat-sheets, or electronic devices.
- Looking at another student's exam.
- Talking, texting or communicating during an exam.
- Looking around during an exam.
- Altering assignments or exams for re-grading purposes.
- Bringing pre-written answers to an exam.
- Having another person take an exam for you, or taking an exam for another student.

➤ Intimidation or disruption includes, but is not limited to the following:
- Pressuring an instructor or teaching assistant to regrade work, change a final grade, or obtain an exception such as changing the date of an exam, extending a deadline, or granting an incomplete grade.
- Refusing to leave an office when directed to do so.
- Physically or verbally intimidating or threatening an instructor, teaching assistant or staff person, including yelling at them, invading personal space, or engaging in any form of harassment.
- Repeatedly contacting or following an instructor, teaching assistant, or staff person when directed not to do so.
- Misusing a classroom electronic forum by posting material unrelated to the course.
- Interfering with an instructor's or teaching assistant's ability to teach a class, or interfering with other students' participation in a class by interrupting, physically causing a disruption, or excessive talking.

Handout #1: Scenarios Discussion

Please read and discuss Scenario #1.

How would you handle this kind of scenario in your classroom?

Be prepared to explain the approaches you discussed with the rest of the group.

Difficult Conversations

**Characteristics of
Difficult Conversations**

**Effects of
Difficult Conversations**

Heated
disagreements

Inappropriate
comments

Silence

Offensive language

Emotional outbursts

Aggressive
body language

Instructor: Loss of
control of class

Students: Reluctance
to talk

Escalations of
undesired behaviors

Negative effects
on learning

Reduction of Agency

Supportive Learning Environments

**Characteristics of
Supportive Learning Environments**

**Effects of
Supportive Learning
Environments**

Respectful

Inclusive

Promote
dialogue

Risk-taking feels safe
and is safe
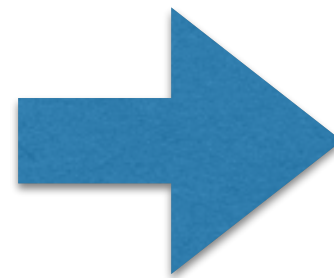
Shared goals

Instructor: Maintains
focus of class

Students:
Willingness
to talk

Appropriate
behaviors that
support learning

Learning can occur,
students are
participants

Principles for Creating a Supportive Environment

- Model Civil Attitudes and Behavior

- Set Classroom Expectations

- Facilitate Classroom Interactions

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Exploring Strategies

- Open the manila envelope at your table. Working with a partner, match the principle (white card) with the strategies (colored card) that demonstrate that principle.

- Make sure you read all three strategy cards. Then, each person chooses 1-2 strategies you have used or would consider using on the strategy cards to discuss using this focus question:

Why did you choose this strategy and how would/do you use it in your class?

Three Spaces for Managing Discussions

- Before Discussions: Set the Tone

- During Discussions: Manage in the Moment

- After Discussions: Encourage Reflection and Be Available

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Handout #2: Managing Difficult Discussions

- In groups, skim your assigned strategies on Handout #2.

- Choose 1 or 2 strategies that
  - **You think would be particularly helpful** in your class or that
  - **You have applied in your class**

- Discuss the strategies you have chosen with your group. How have you applied/would you apply this strategy? Be prepared to debrief with the larger group.

Managing Difficult Discussions

Many problems caused by difficult conversations can be prevented by the work the instructor does **before** *the discussions take place* to **_establish a respectful classroom environment_** and **_model expected behaviors_**.

Supportive Learning Environments

Characteristics of Difficult Conversations

Effects of Supportive Learning Environments

Instructor Planning/ Modeling (Before)

Heated disagreements

Inappropriate comments

Silence

Offensive Language

Emotional outbursts

Instructor Facilitation (During)

Instructor: Maintains control of class

Students: Willingness to talk

Appropriate behaviors that support learning

Learning can occur
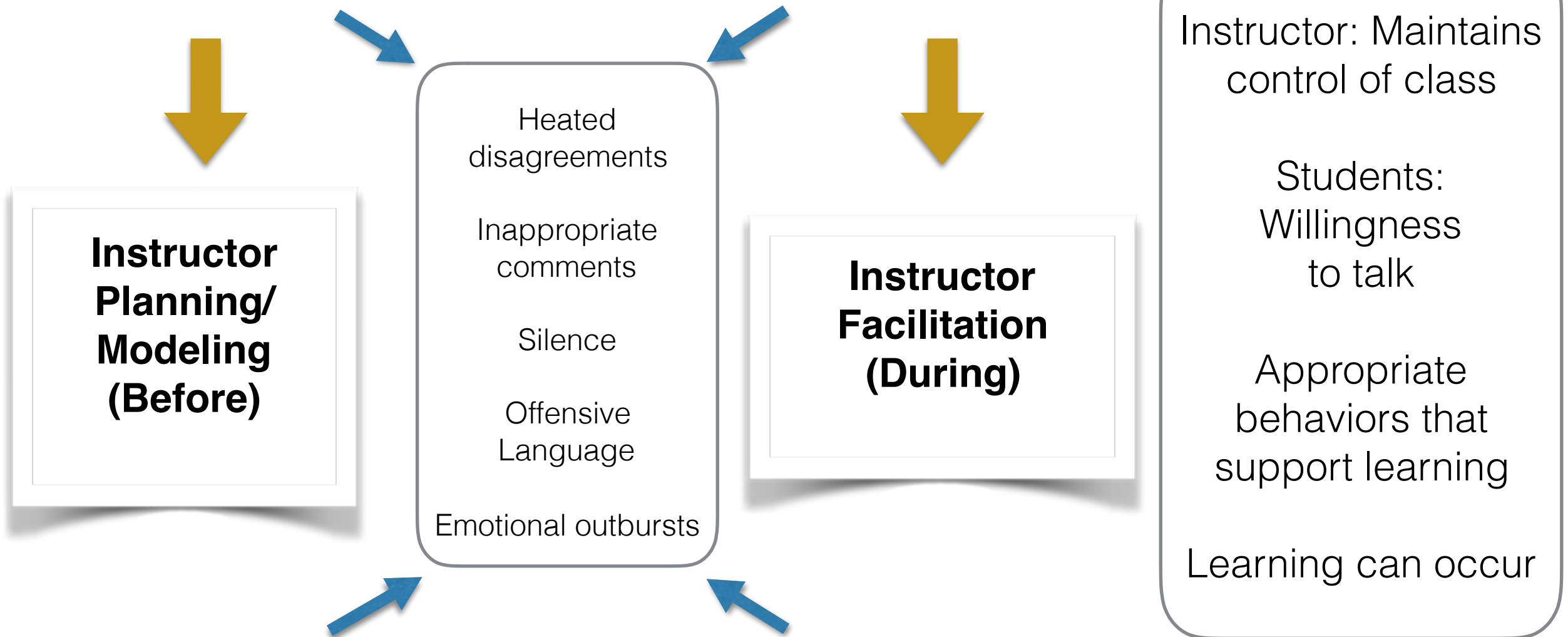
Scenario 1: Disorganized Discussion

Remind all students of the **goals of the discussion** and **guidelines for the class.**

Tell students you **value their engagement in the topic and explain that you welcome challenges/opposing viewpoints.**

Remind them that **in academia challenges are common because they require us to examine our stances** and claims.

However, at the university we need to remember to **challenges others' ideas in a civil way** - this helps to advance the discussion.

Handout #1: Scenarios Discussion

Please read and discuss Scenarios #2 and #3

How would you handle this kind of scenario in your classroom? What tools that we have discussed might be helpful?

Be prepared to explain the approaches you discussed with the rest of the group.

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Scenario 2: Unintentional Offense

- **Address** the issue - don't let it go
- **Respect the feelings** of both people
- **Name what is going on** ("I notice there's some tension; here's what we're going to do…")
- Take the **focus off individuals**
- **Avoid shaming** either student
- Talk broadly about **intent versus impact** - we may not intend to offend, but the impact is still there.

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Scenario 3: Instructor Reaction

- Be mindful of your reactions and **resist externalizing** your response.

- Understand that students may not realize that they have said something that has offended you and **may not have intended to**.

- If you feel you can't continue the conversation, **transition** to another topic and invite students to speak to you during **office hours.**

Creating Community

Be aware of biases and stereotypes	Clarify Expectations	Establish Guidelines
Model Practice	Monitor Climate	Convey Caring

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Sample Community Check-In

- Does the instructor treat students equally and evenhandedly?

- How comfortable are you participating in class? What makes it simple or difficult?

- Do you feel your your ethnicity/race/gender/sexual orientation affects your interactions with the instructor (and/or TAs) and/or with other students?

- Do you have suggestions for more promoting more open dialogue and discussion in class?

Seven Good Practices in Undergraduate Education

Closing Thoughts

- Managing Difficult Conversations is not always easy, but there is help

- Creating Community need to be intentional by all members

- Allowing for student agency increases a host of outcomes

- Explore biases: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

Additional Campus Resources

- TA Guide to Effective Teaching at UC Davis
  - http://cee.ucdavis.edu/docs/2016/2016_TAGuide_Final_accessible.pdf
  - Last 3 pages have resources about central support units on campus

- RedFolder.ucdavis.edu

The TA'S Guide to
EFFECTIVE TEACHING
at UC Davis

Download The TA's Guide to Effective Teaching at UC Davis
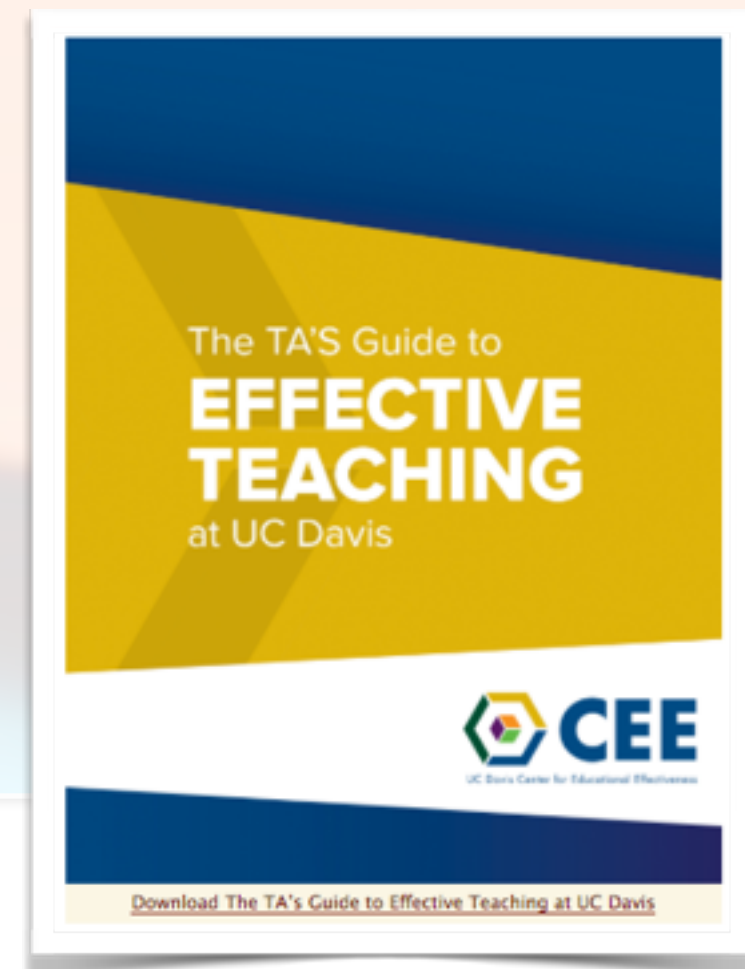
Mid-Quarter Inquiry

Mid – Quarter Inquiry

Instructor:
Class:
Date:

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1. My learning in this class in **enhanced** by:

2. My learning in this class is **hindered** by:

3. SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION: Is there anything your instructor could do to increase your ability or motivation to learn in this course? (Brainstorm below)

- Formative

- Confidential

http://cee.ucdavis.edu/teaching-support/mqi.html

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Winter 2017 Workshops

- **Digital Distractions and Devices** (Jan. 27)
- **Scaffolding Instruction to Enhance Student Learning** (Feb. 3)
- **Interactive Lecturing: Teaching practices for large lectures** (Feb. 10)
- **Designing Library Research Assignments to Enhance Learning** (Feb. 10)
- **Providing Meaningful and Timely Feedback** (Feb. 17)
- **Making Copyright Work for You and Your Students** (Feb. 22)
- **Writing Exam Questions to Promote Achievement for Diverse Learners** (Feb. 24)
- **Leveraging Technology in a Large Lecture Classroom** (March 2)

Look under "Teaching Support" Tab

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Questions + Evaluations + Thank You

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