



## PROMOTING RESPECT IN THE CLASSROOM

UMass Amherst conducted a Campus Climate Survey in November 2016 to better understand the challenges of creating an environment that is respectful and inclusive for all. The classroom climate emerged as an area in need of additional support. This resource is intended to identify challenges and provide strategies for promoting dignity and respect in the classroom.

### ENSURE ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The University of Massachusetts Amherst strives to create an environment of academic freedom that fosters the personal and intellectual development of all community members. In order to do this, the University protects the rights of all students, faculty and staff to explore new ideas and to express their views. A necessary condition for these pursuits is an acceptance of the spirit of inquiry and a respect for diverse ideas and viewpoints. For true academic freedom to exist, this acceptance and respect must exist in both the overall campus environment and in the classroom.

*Excerpted from UMass Amherst Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect Campus Policy*

### MAKE YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS CLEAR FROM THE OUTSET

- Treat each other with dignity and respect.
- Listen to each other's point of view, recognizing that there may be disagreement.
- Keep discussion and comments on the topic, and off the people.
- Do not use inflammatory or offensive language, sarcasm or raised voices.
- Remind students that if they have a disability or impairment that might affect participation you can support them better if they let you know.

*Adapted from [Dignity and Respect in the Classroom](#), Mossman (2017)*

### CREATE A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE

Whether you're a seasoned instructor or a new teaching assistant, the tips outlined below are best practices to promote a positive classroom environment. Dignity and respect are established and maintained through the simple things.

- Arrive, start and end on time.
- Ensure that everyone can hear and see what's happening.
- Make eye contact with all students.
- Use students' names and personal pronouns when you speak to them.
- Invite students with disabilities to discuss their accommodations with you.
- Demonstrate respect for authors and researchers with whom you disagree.
- Provide opportunities for questions, and respond to them seriously and thoughtfully.
- Communicate your expectations and criteria for assessment (especially your standards for academic honesty).
- Turn up for advertised office hours.
- Provide course and session outlines (and stick to them as much as is reasonable).

***"When students and faculty come together, the expectation is always that mutual respect and civility will prevail to ensure that every student has the optimum opportunity to learn and that each faculty member has the best opportunity to teach."***

*Excerpted from UMass Amherst Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect Campus Policy*

# Behaviors that **Undermine** Dignity and Respect in the Classroom

## **Insensitive remarks**

Examples:

"You're pretty good at math for a woman."

"Your English is so good!"

"You're so articulate!"

"That's so ghetto."

*From the Campus Climate Survey:*

"When I hear, 'I'm not trying to sound racist but...,' I usually know that what they are about to say is probably going to be offensive...I do not feel comfortable sharing my opposing thoughts."

## **Belittling jokes**

Jokes that poke fun at individuals on the basis of an aspect of their social identity erode a community of respect, whether the jokes are meant maliciously or not. Upholding the dignity of others is important regardless of whether a person from that identity group is present in the classroom.

## **Non-inclusive language**

Examples:

Using "he" or "she" when an individual has asked you to use "they" or "ze."

Using "men" or "you guys" when the classroom contains a diverse group.

## **Stereotyping**

An over-generalization about a group.

*From the Campus Climate Survey:*

"People think I'm an international student and can't speak English."

"Instructors and peers don't take me seriously as a student because I am older."

## **Hostility**

*From the Campus Climate Survey:*

"Because I am white and because I tend to have more conservative viewpoints (fiscally at least), I find that at UMass my words are immediately discounted."

"I'm made to feel like using my UMass approved accommodations is cheating by teachers."

## **Silencing and humiliation**

*From the Campus Climate Survey:*

"I was explaining sexism in my class and a group of three young men actually laughed at me and attempted to humiliate me in front of my class."

"When expressing my feelings in class, my professor cut me off. It's happened a few more times. Now I don't want to participate in class because I don't feel my opinions are valid."

## **Targeting**

Singling out groups or individuals for their *perceived* background or identity.

*From the Campus Climate Survey:*

"Now let's hear from the CHINESE group!"

"I've been singled out in a class during a discussion about minimum wage and while nodding in agreement at a particular point made in the lecture, was asked by the lecturer if I wanted to share any personal experiences, which was mortifying."

"My professor confronts Black athletes when they're late, but not late students from other racial groups."

## **Othering & name-calling**

Derogatory terms used to insult individuals or groups. Including terms used in the past that are now considered derogatory (e.g. colored). As well as statements that broadly marginalize groups.

*From the Campus Climate Survey:*

"Instructors and students make many remarks about 'the poor' under the assumption that no one in the class falls under that category."

## **Favoritism**

*From the Campus Climate Survey:*

"Often in lab settings I've noticed male students getting more attention and more opportunities for learning while female students often don't speak up."

"Male students get credit for ideas that female students raised first."

# Behaviors that **Foster** Dignity and Respect in the Classroom

## **Set expectations**

Clarify what is expected from everyone in the classroom.

- Develop rules for effective discussion, including turn-taking.
- Include these expectations in your syllabus and reinforce orally.

Examples:

“Respect is the cornerstone of classroom culture.”

“Differences of opinions or concerns related to the class are welcomed if presented in a mutually respectful manner.”

“In class discussion, the goal is to understand other people’s reasons for their points of view and to articulate the reasons for your own.”

## **Model respect**

The instructor sets the classroom tone.

- Develop and maintain a feeling of safety in expressing ideas in the classroom.
- Validate students who demonstrate mutual respect when engaging in classroom discussions, particularly when these discussions are fraught.

## **Encourage self-awareness**

Know yourself. Ask students to think reflexively about their positions on issues. As the instructor you can model reflexivity as well. Controversy will be less likely if students and the instructor are aware of their sensitivities. Differentiate between personal beliefs and course content to ensure the focus remains on the goals of the learning environment.

## **Model critical thinking**

Be thoughtful in your response to controversial or offensive statements. Help students to see that it is possible to disagree respectfully and articulate views in a way that problematizes the ideas not the person.

Examples:

“Can you tell us more about this?”

“Can you elaborate on that?”

“Did you mean to...?”

## **Encourage active listening**

Ask students to acknowledge the previous viewpoint before presenting their own by:

- Restating the point made by the previous speaker.
- Picking up on a question that was raised.
- Asking a related question that was prompted by what they heard.

## **Distinguish between evidence and speculation**

There is an important difference between opinion and evidence in the classroom. Encourage students to use “I” statements when expressing opinions and to point clearly to the course readings or other source material for evidence.

## **Ensure fair and equal treatment**

Make sure the rules are applied to everyone. Make room for diverse voices and perspectives.

## **Create teachable moments**

When class discussions go awry, embrace it as an opportunity for honest dialogue. Ask students to reflect on the discussion thus far:

- What do they want to change?
- What do they want to continue?
- How can they re-enter the conversation with the goal of understanding the position or perspective of someone else even if they disagree?

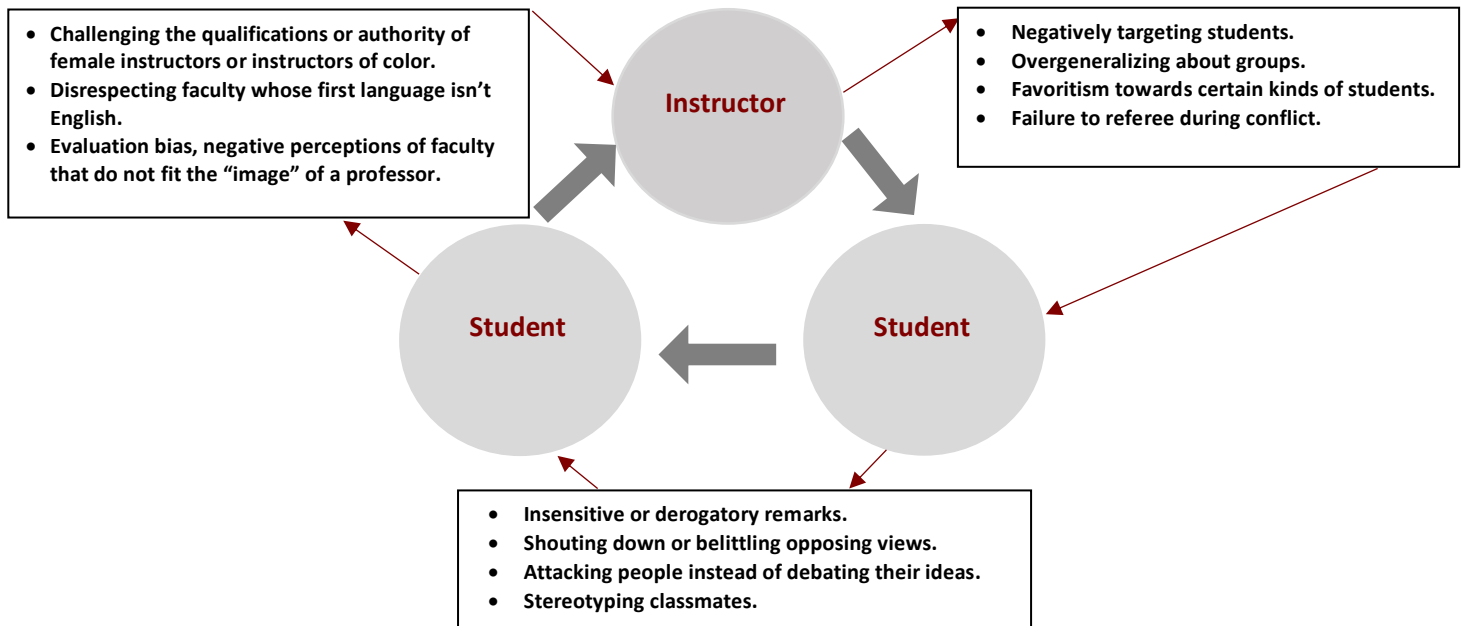
## **Assess and improve**

Reflect on your course and teaching methods.

Consider the following questions:

- What content am I teaching? Why?
- How do I engage with my students?
- Am I aware of my own biases?
- Can I incorporate new teaching strategies to effectively engage with students?
- Do I need additional support to manage the classroom?

# Understanding *Interpersonal Dynamics in the Classroom:* *Potential Pitfalls*



## **UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF INSTRUCTOR IDENTITY IN THE CLASSROOM**

Recognize that instructors from some social identity groups (e.g. racial minorities and women) are more likely to be challenged by students in the classroom. Whether you are a graduate student, lecturer, or professor, take advantage of support resources. Your department chair is always a great place to start.

## **INTERRUPT NEGATIVE DYNAMICS IN THE CLASSROOM; REFEREE EFFECTIVELY**

Keep calm and maintain a productive dialogue.

- Remind students of the goals of the course and the behavior expected from each individual in the classroom.
- Stop the discussion when it gets heated.
- Ask students to reflect on the discussion and take time to write down their thoughts before restarting the conversation.
- Make room for divergent perspectives; invite students who have been silent into the conversation.
- Discourage disrespectful behaviors such as cutting people off, shouting, broad negative characterizations of groups, and slurs.
- Help students to acknowledge and respect others' experiences and positions even when they differ from their own.

## **DEAL WITH PERSISTENT DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR**

Per the [Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect campus policy](#), student behavior or speech that disrupts the instructional setting or is clearly disrespectful of the instructor or fellow students will not be tolerated. Disruptive conduct may include, but is not limited to:

1. rude or disrespectful behavior,
2. unwarranted interruptions,
3. failure to adhere to instructor's directions,
4. vulgar or obscene language, slurs or other forms of intimidation,
5. physically or verbally abusive behavior.

Course instructors at the University of Massachusetts have the professional responsibility and authority to maintain order in instructional settings. If issues persist after attempts to moderate, the instructor should inform their department chair or supervising faculty and the Dean of Students Office of any such incidents and provide written documentation, if requested.