# Problem Scenarios and Hypotheticals Related to Diversity

You may find it useful as an exercise to go through each scenario and brainstorm either by yourself or with others how you would handle each scenario below.

1. In a political science course, the instructor has assigned an article on feminism and pornography. You are a graduate TA and you will be teaching a section on this issue. The composition of your section is mostly female, with only one male student. The male student sends you an e-mail saying that he would like to be excused from section because he feels worried that he may have a point of view about the issue that may be “attacked” (in his words) in the discussion.

Consider establishing ground rules for difficult conversations at the beginning of the semester. You can also assign students to groups that have opinions that are preassigned. For instance, one randomly assigned group might be “pro” while another group might be “con”. Groups would then research their assigned position and debate it.

1. During one TA session, the class is having a very heated discussion about an issue involving race and racism in American politics. At one point in the discussion, a student refers to the opinion of another minority student in racially insensitive terms.

Have students help set up discussion ground rules at the beginning of the semester and provide low stakes opportunities for practice that offer an opportunity to remind students of the collaboratively created ground rules. Inform students that they have the right to hold each other accountable using the ground rules they created together, with your support. If the discussion gets too heated you may opt to interpose yourself. You might also need to address each of the involved students individually outside of class (office hours) and then debrief with the class as a whole.

1. You are a professor in a large lecture course and during the first day of class a student asks to speak with you after class. The student says, “I would love to take your class, but I am afraid I cannot afford to buy all of the books on the syllabus, I am a student on significant financial aid.”

You can advise students to check the library for the version of the text on reserve. You might also contact your subject specialist librarian and ask if there are digital multi user licenses available for your textbook. Finally, the book or the UF textbook affordability coordinator (Micah Jenkins, micahjenkins@aa.ufl.edu) might have some additional recommendations.

1. You are a graduate TA and you have just finished grading all of the final exams and you send them to the professor to be officially submitted. A week later, one student complains to the professor that you “have graded him/her down all semester because you are racist.”

Schedule a meeting with the instructor to discuss the complaint. If the student intends to file a formal complaint and you are a member of GAU, contact your union representative to request representation. Be prepared to provide details and information for how you graded all assignments, including rubrics, the grading process, and feedback given on each assignment. Offer to go over the student’s assignments and grades with them and the instructor.

1. You are an RA in a student dorm. Outside of the dorm room door of a student of color, it is apparent that someone wrote hateful words on his blackboard, expressing that his attendance at the university was unwelcome. The student later that night knocks on your door and asks you how he should proceed, given the hateful remarks.

You can let the student know that you support him and help him the best you can. Let him know there are offices on campus who can investigate the incident and provide him with that information. Document the incident and report it to the appropriate people. Speak with the UF counseling center to ask for assistance with hosting a session in your dorm to discuss the incident and how intolerance is not welcome at the university.

1. You are a professor of a large lecture course, where you are dismayed by student evaluations which state that “you have trouble speaking English clearly.” This is despite the fact that you are a native speaker of English, and just happened to have parents from a non-US background.

Remember to take it with a grain of salt. Use the student evaluation data to identify areas you can improve on and focus on making those changes. Include a mid-semester student feedback survey to hear from your student how the class is going. Make changes based on their suggestions if you are able. If you are unable to make changes because of conflicting feedback or because the suggestions would impact the quality of the course or the course outcomes, then set some time aside to explain this. Just reading and acknowledging the feedback is often enough. It shows you care which is central to great teaching.