

FACULTY GUIDE FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

This resource is a guide for Kansas State University faculty to engage in difficult conversations.

To engage in difficult conversations we must all acknowledge, as faculty, that there are times when some of our students do not feel safe in the classroom. This can be for any number of reasons. When our students do not feel safe in our classrooms, they are not able to learn. It is our duty to provide a safe, productive, and student-centered learning environment. We must embrace opportunities to reach out to students and create spaces in our classrooms to discuss difficult issues such as racially charged incidents in our community, sexual violence, and many other issues. This guide and the resources provided with it exist to help our faculty engage in these difficult and necessary conversations and to serve all of our students and to fully realize our Principles of Community.

These issues span across all disciplines. We all must acknowledge that we play a role in making our campus safe and supporting our students. It is our duty to do so. Faculty in all disciplines are encouraged to support our students and each other when these issues arise and to also engage in their own learning and development about diversity and inclusion.

We encourage all faculty to attend and engage with the various diversity and inclusion related events on campus and in the community. This simple step can help you become more comfortable engaging in difficult conversations.

Engaging in difficult conversations around diversity and inclusion is critically important for our campus community for many reasons. 1) Embracing and supporting diversity and inclusion is a core value of our campus community and it is the right thing to do. 2) Embracing and supporting diversity and inclusion are a vital part of our K-State Principles of Community and who we aspire to be as a community. 3) We know employers value diversity and inclusion and knowledge and skills in navigating difficult issues and it is our duty to foster that knowledge and those skills in our students.

We affirm our principles of community below. Further, we encourage all faculty to personally affirm our principles of community. Please use the principles to anchor your discussions and refer to them as you engage in difficult conversations.

Kansas State University is a land-grant, public research university committed to teaching and learning, research, and service to the people of Kansas, the nation, and the world. Our collective mission is best accomplished when every member of the university community acknowledges and practices the following principles:

We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain an atmosphere of justice based on respect for each other.

We affirm the value of human diversity and inclusion for community. We stand united against all forms of discrimination.

We affirm the right of each person to freely express thoughts and opinions in a spirit of civility and decency. We believe that diversity of views enriches our learning environment, and we promote open expression within a climate of courtesy, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

We affirm the value of honesty and integrity. We will operate with honesty in all professional endeavors and expect the same from our colleagues.

We acknowledge that we are a part of multiple communities, and we have an obligation to be engaged in a positive way with our civic partners.

We recognize our individual obligations to the university community and to the principles that sustain it. We will each strive to contribute to a positive spirit that affirms learning and growth for all members of the community.

These principles have been endorsed by the following university governance bodies:

- Student Governing Association
- Graduate Student Council
- Graduate Council
- Faculty Senate
- University Support Staff Senate
- Office of the President
- Office of the Provost

Following the Recommendations for Action from the College of Arts and Sciences Diversity Committee:

We encourage administrators, students, faculty and staff to:

- Educate themselves on the history of hate that informs stereotypes and systemic injustices.
- Use their voice to address instances of hateful speech, actions and symbolism, as they occur.
- Educate themselves on the university anti-discrimination policy.
- Report discrimination to the Office of Institutional Equity.
- Report crimes to the K-State police.
- Document (e.g. pictures, video recordings, etc.), when and where these instances happen, as well as the response from the campus community, and add to your reports as listed above.

Creating and supporting a respectful and supportive environment in your classroom. What are some basic rules I should instill before a difficult conversation?

You could say the following: "Everyone has a voice. Every voice should be respected. We also need to listen empathetically and be mindful to listen to *understand* those students that want to be heard. If you don't know how to articulate what you're are feeling or experiencing, take some time to process and reflect, then share when you are ready."

Listen to your students actively and ask students to listen to each other. Mirror back what they say in your own words - "What I'm hearing is..."

Demonstrate what you would like your students to do – listen, support, and affirm the realities of each student's experience.

How can I address a racially charged incident that happened in the community with my students?

Take some time to plan and prepare to address the issue in class. Read through this guide to help you prepare for the conversation. Set some ground rules of respect and allowing students to be heard. Even taking 10 minutes at the beginning of class to let students talk about an incident can be a big step in providing a safe learning environment.

You can read the Principles of Community to your class and affirm your support of them.

<http://www.k-state.edu/about/community/>

You could use the Principles of Community to start a conversation about an incident.

I saw an incident on campus or in the community and/or one of my students saw an incident on campus or in the community. What should I do? Who should I contact?

You should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and file a report. They are located at 103 Edwards Hall, 785-532-6220, equity@k-state.edu, <http://www.k-state.edu/oie/>. If it is an emergency, you should call 911.

How can I facilitate a discussion on a controversial topic?

Acknowledge the issue and ask students what they are thinking and feeling. Remind students of the Principles of Community. Ask students what you can do to make them feel safe in the classroom. Tell students that you are available to talk to students and will help direct them to any resources they might need to feel safe in the classroom (see **Resources for Faculty and Students** at the end of this document).

I'm not comfortable discussing sensitive issues with my students. How can I move forward?

First, acknowledge your own discomfort. It's okay to be uncomfortable. If you're feeling uncomfortable, then some of your students are probably feeling uncomfortable. Use this guide to help you begin developing some strategies for engaging in these discussions. Seek out activities and events across campus and the community to further your own learning and development around diversity and inclusion issues. These are also great opportunities to encourage your students to attend these events and your leadership in encouraging your students to do so will go a long way towards building a more inclusive campus.

How can I move forward with my own thinking on various issues involving diversity and inclusion?

An important first step is to recognize that we are all on a journey in becoming knowledgeable and educated about diversity and inclusion issues and we must recognize where we are in our own personal development to begin moving forward with our own thinking.

K-State has many opportunities and events around diversity and inclusion. Attending even one of these events can help you move forward on issues of diversity and inclusion. Events such as the Wildcat Dialogues and KSUnite are good places to start.

How can I ensure that all my students can come to class ready to learn?

Students face a wide range of issues that can affect their learning in the classroom and we must all acknowledge that some of our students may be dealing with issues that we cannot solve. We can support those students by telling them that we are there for them and will do what we can to support them. We can also make sure they know where they can go on campus for support. See the **Resources for Faculty and Students** at the end of this guide. We should commit to a safe and respectful learning environment. If one student in the class doesn't feel safe, then it's likely that others do not feel safe as well.

How can I support students that do not feel safe in the classroom?

You can contact Student Life (785-532-6432, stulife@k-state.edu) and refer students to appropriate resources.

You can also visit this link if you are concerned about a student in your class:

<http://www.k-state.edu/studentlife/concern-guide/quick-guide.html>

How can I be vulnerable to my students about my own lack of knowledge around diversity and inclusion and still maintain my role as the instructor in the classroom?

Acknowledging that you have limited knowledge around diversity and inclusion can be a powerful way to engage your students as well as help you understand where you are with your level of knowledge. Some of our students will be more knowledgeable than we are and that is okay. Being vulnerable in this way does not take away from your role as the instructor in the classroom.

How can I have a conversation about something like race if I'm teaching biology, engineering, agriculture, etc.? Why is it important that I embrace this opportunity?

These issues affect all the students at K-State whether they are in biology, engineering, agriculture, or sociology. It is important for all of us to embrace these opportunities to ensure that all our students can come to class ready to learn in a safe environment. Neglecting these issues and opportunities does a disservice to our students and our campus.

It is all our duty to uphold the K-State Principles of Community.

Use the information in this guide to help you start these conversations and use this opportunity to expand your own knowledge of diversity and inclusion issues.

How much of my own views or perspective should I share with my students about a difficult topic?

On the one hand it is good to be authentic and vulnerable about your own views and knowledge. It is important to understand how sharing our views can affect students' ability and willingness to share their own views. You may have strong views on a certain issue and that is okay. Just be aware how you can affect the environment of the classroom. When discussing difficult topics, it is important to let the students' voices be surfaced, heard, and respected even if those views differ from our own views. It is

helpful to refer to the Principles of Community. It is also helpful to understand how students from marginalized groups may not always want to share their views. In other words, it generally is not a good idea to call out the one person who is the "other" out to comment on a topic, e.g. the only man, the only woman, the only person of color in the room, the only person with a physical disability, etc. Let that person decide when to speak. They may not feel safe or comfortable doing so and we should respect that.

In what ways can students participate in setting guidelines around difficult conversations in the classroom?

One way to start a conversation around a difficult issue in the classroom is to ask your students to set some guidelines for the conversation. Take a few minutes to have students come up with some ground rules for a difficult conversation. Often, they will surface important issues to think about as you engage in these conversations. You can also say that difficult conversations should be both a "safe space" where you can feel comfortable sharing your story, and a "brave space" where you acknowledge that a level of discomfort is required for growth. Some suggestions might include being respectful, staying open and curious, listening to understand and learning from others' perspectives, and acknowledging discomfort. Students may share stories from their personal contexts and values, so we should seek to create the conditions for mutual respect and sensitivity.

The **Kansas State Wildcat Dialogues** presented some principles for difficult conversations. They are: Acknowledge one another as equals; Stay curious and be present; Listen to what others have to say, and appreciate their journey and perspective; Be open to the process; Acknowledge these are difficult conversations; Embrace courage over comfort; Expect it to be messy; and Trust intent and name impact.

How can I discuss the issue of guns on campus?

Make sure you are familiar with the campus policy and that you are following the guidelines for required statements for all course syllabi. Acknowledge that this is a divisive issue and give your students an opportunity to talk about the issue – following the guidelines of respectful discussion mentioned earlier in this guide.

Kansas State University prohibits the possession of firearms, explosives, and other weapons on any University campus, with certain limited exceptions, including the lawful concealed carrying of handguns, as provided in the University Weapons Policy, found at <http://www.k-state.edu/police/weapons/index.html>.

You are encouraged to take the online weapons policy education module (<http://www.k-state.edu/police/weapons/index.html>) to ensure you understand the requirements of the policy, including the requirements related to concealed carrying of handguns on campus. Students possessing a concealed handgun on campus must be 21 years of age or older and otherwise lawfully eligible to carry. All carrying requirements of the policy must be observed in this class, including but not limited to the requirement that a concealed handgun be completely hidden

from view, securely held in a holster that meets the specifications of the policy, carried without a chambered round of ammunition, and that any external safety be in the “on” position.

If an individual carries a concealed handgun in a personal carrier such as a backpack, purse, or handbag, the carrier must remain within the individual’s exclusive and uninterrupted control. This includes wearing the carrier with a strap, carrying or holding the carrier, or setting the carrier next to or within the immediate reach of the individual.

I teach an online course. How can I engage in a difficult conversation in an online environment?

All the suggestions included in this document can be adapted to online settings. Additionally, please refer to the Netiquette standards <https://global.k-state.edu/students/courses/netiquette/> from Global Campus.

How can I engage in a conversation around disabilities?

Acknowledge that it is likely people in the classroom are living with disabilities. Many disabilities are not visible so it’s important to not make assumptions about people. If students with disabilities are open about their disabilities, then you can make room for them to discuss it. However, we should avoid openly discussing students’ disabilities if they are not comfortable doing so or without their consent. Refer to the suggestions mentioned earlier in this document. Refer to the principles of community. It is also important to know your responsibilities as faculty about providing accommodations and the requirements for including the statement regarding students with disabilities in your course syllabi.

<http://www.k-state.edu/accesscenter/>

<http://www.k-state.edu/accesscenter/faculty/>

What should I do or say after a student’s death?

It is important to remember that student learning will be affected by another student’s death. There are some useful do’s and don’ts and the link below does a good job going through those as well as giving you some useful language and approaches to students and classes when a student has died.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/What-to-Say-After-a-Student/241534>

How can faculty participate in and contribute to this document?

Faculty that wish to contribute to this guide are encouraged to contact wefald@ksu.edu.

How can students participate in and contribute to this document?

Students that wish to contribute to this guide are encouraged to contact wefald@ksu.edu.

Resources for Faculty and Students

Office of Institutional Equity

<http://www.k-state.edu/oie/>

Office of Student Life

<http://www.k-state.edu/studentlife/>

Student of Concern Guide

<http://www.k-state.edu/studentlife/concern-guide/>

K-State Policies & Procedures Manual

<http://www.k-state.edu/policies/ppm/>

Policy Prohibiting Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Violence, Domestic and Dating Violence, and Stalking, and Procedure for Reviewing Complaints

<http://www.k-state.edu/policies/ppm/3000/3010.html>

3010 .010 A – Prohibited Conduct

Kansas State University endeavors to maintain academic, housing, and work environments that are free of discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment and sexual violence), retaliation, domestic and dating violence, and stalking. Discrimination based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, ancestry, disability, genetic information, military status, or veteran status is prohibited. Retaliation against a person for reporting or objecting to discrimination or harassment or for participating in an investigation or other proceeding is a violation of this Policy, whether or not discrimination or harassment occurred. This Policy is not intended for, and will not be used to, infringe on academic freedom or to censor or punish students, faculty, employees, or staff who exercise their legitimate First Amendment rights.

Anti-Trafficking Policy

<http://www.k-state.edu/policies/ppm/3000/3013.html>

3013 .010 Anti-Trafficking Policy

Consistent with federal and State of Kansas statutes and regulations, Kansas State University has a zero tolerance policy on trafficking in persons. Forms of trafficking include the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of subjection to involuntary

servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. Trafficking also includes sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.

Manhattan Campus Resource Wheel in English

<http://www.k-state.edu/oie/documents/ManhattanResourceSupportWheel.pdf>

Salina Campus Resource Wheel in English

<http://www.k-state.edu/oie/documents/SalinaResourceSupportWheel.pdf>

Global Campus Resource Wheel in English

<http://www.k-state.edu/oie/documents/GlobalCampusResourceSupportWheel.pdf>

Olathe Resource Wheel in English

<http://www.k-state.edu/oie/documents/OlatheResourceSupportWheel.pdf>

Link to all Resource Wheels (including other languages)

<http://www.k-state.edu/oie/resourceswheels.html>

Cat's' Cupboard

<http://www.k-state.edu/cats-cupboard/>