



Handling Uncomfortable Moments in the Classroom

For Teaching Assistants &
Graduate Student Instructors

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Pronouns: she, her, hers

Agenda



Uncomfortable
Situations

Ways of Handling
Uncomfortable
Situations

Case Studies

Goals for you

- Gained **language** to discuss different types of uncomfortable situations,
- Learned **techniques** to avoid, mitigate, and address uncomfortable situations, and
- Built a network of **people and resources** to refer to as you continue creating a culturally inclusive classroom.

“Conflict transformation rather than...conflict resolution. To me, the latter suggests going back to a previous state of affairs, and has a connotation that there may be a winner or a loser. [Conflict transformation has] the opportunity to create something new.”

– Brené Brown
(as presented in Ramos 2020)

Introductions

- Please introduce yourself.
- Tell us your name (pronouns optional)
- And the story behind any part of your name - first, middle, or last!
- Call on someone else to introduce themselves next.

Community

In small break out groups, please share why you decided to take this workshop. Was there an incident that sparked your interest? Have you been in “uncomfortable situations” before?

What are “uncomfortable situations”, really?

Please raise your electronic hand or use the chat box to share examples (real or possible) of “uncomfortable situations” in the classroom.

What are “uncomfortable situations”, really?

Implicit Bias

- Stereotypes that unconsciously affect our understanding, and actions.
- These implicit associations may not align with our declared beliefs.
- We generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own in-group, though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our in-group.

Microaggressions

- “Everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults”.
- Can be intentional or unintentional.
- Based upon marginalized group membership.
- Include: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations.



YOU'RE PRETTY

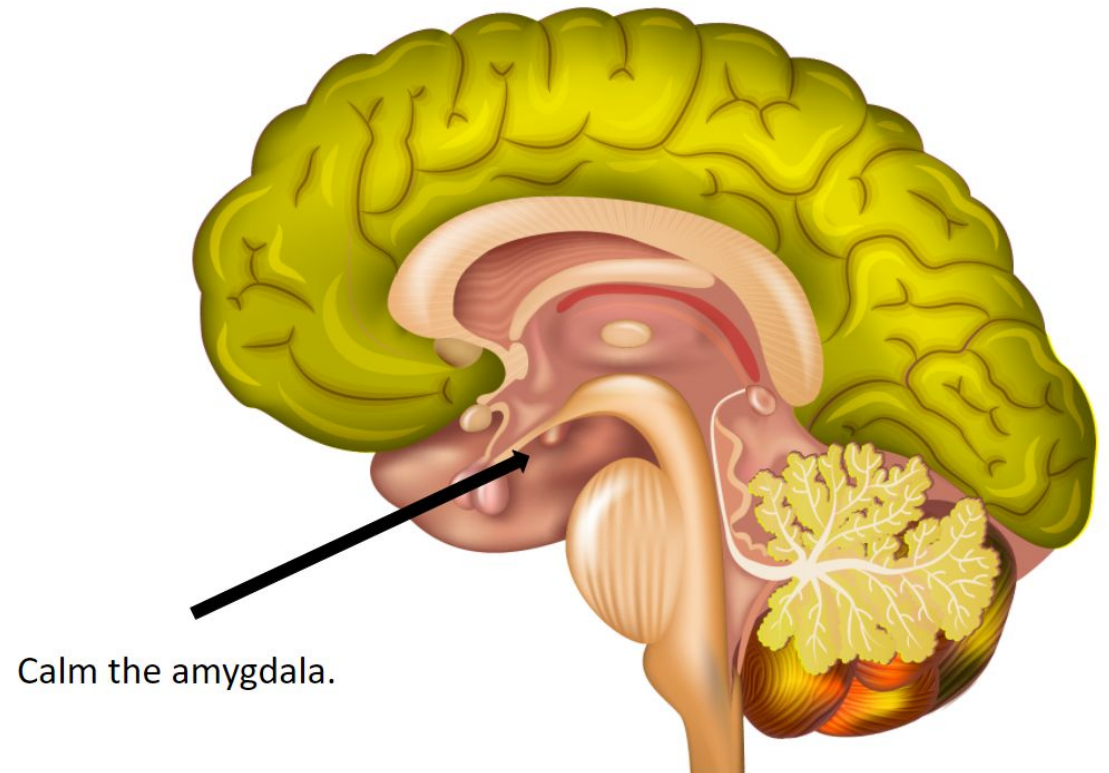
Why do microaggressions matter?

In the short-term, microaggressions...

- Interfere with learning (amygdala!),
- Lower problem-solving abilities, and
- Decrease productivity.

In the long-term, microaggressions...

- Effect emotional well-being of recipients,
- Promote a hostile campus climate,
- Perpetuate stereotype threat, and
- Create stress-related physical health problems.



What are “uncomfortable situations”, really?

Student Resistance

“any observable student behavior that makes an instructor less likely to use an instructional strategy”

- [Prince & Weimer 2017](#)

Root Causes

- Fear of change
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of looking foolish
- Poor self-image
- Student dislikes teacher
- Mismatch of teaching and learning style
- Relevance of class activity unclear
- Lack of clarity
- Going too far, too fast

Handling Uncomfortable Situations

In Advance

- Enlist an ally
- Set guidelines
- Model in-the-moment techniques

In the Moment

- Interrupt
- Appeal to authority
- Take a break
- Turn to others
- Direct intervention

After the Fact

- Talk one-on-one
- Ask an ally to intervene
- Reflect as a group
- Check-in with others
- Find resources
- Report
- Self-reflect

Take a stance in advance.

Before an uncomfortable moment happens..

- Enlist an ally
- Set guidelines
- Model the techniques

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Enlist an Ally :

Before the class begins, talk to the class instructor about how to address uncomfortable moments. Ask them how they'd like to handle these situations and ask them for their support in advance.

Take a stance in advance.

Discussion Guidelines

Be aware of how much you are contributing to in-class discussions. Try not to silence yourself out of concern for what others will think about what you say. If you have a tendency to contribute often, give others the opportunity to speak. If you tend to stay quiet, challenge yourself to share ideas so others can learn from you.

Listen respectfully. Don't interrupt, engage in private conversations, or turn to technology while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language.

Understand that there are different approaches to solving problems. If you are uncertain about someone else's approach, ask a question to explore areas of uncertainty. Listen respectfully to how and why the approach could work.

Take pair-work or group work seriously. Remember that your peers' learning partly depends upon your engagement.

Make an effort to get to know others. Introduce yourself to people sitting near you. Refer to others by name and make eye contact with them.

Speak from your own experiences. When it is your turn to speak, share briefly from your own experiences, using "I" statements. Incorporate others' comments, acknowledging disagreements. Be careful not to generalize about people or experiences.

Keep in mind that we are all still learning and are bound to make mistakes, as anyone does when approaching a complex task or exploring new ideas. Be open to changing your mind, and make space for others to do so as well.

Types of Guidelines :

Discussion guidelines

Community norms

Group contracts

Take a stance in advance.

IN OUR CLASSROOM



Types of Guidelines :

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1. Team Roles and Responsibilities.

TEAM MEMBER	ROLE/TITLE	RESPONSIBILITIES/EXPECTATIONS
	Client	Clarify research questions and deliverables of the MP. Help in connecting with other sources and communities during the research.
	Advisor	Read MP drafts and provide feedbacks on deliverables. Provide guidance on methods and sources of supporting materials in MP. Help in formalizing relationships between MP group, clients and other professionals. Help resolve conflicts between team members and external sources when necessary.
	Advisor	Read MP proposal drafts and provide feedbacks on deliverables. Provide guidance on methods and sources of supporting materials in MP. Help in formalize relationships between MP group, clients and other professionals. Help resolve conflicts between team members and external sources when necessary.
	Technical Advisor	Assist with GIS, data, or other technology related aspects of this MP
	Student Lead, Task 1	Lead tree planting prioritization project, interface with Mingfei to share GIS data and analysis methods, use Grace's stakeholder surveys and outreach to inform GIS analyses and vice versa. Other responsibilities include attending meetings, literature review, synthesis and proofreading, and meeting all deadlines.
	Student Lead, Task 2	Lead Task 2 to model tree canopy cover. Work with Alex on collecting GIS data and maintain database. Conduct GIS analysis and produce maps. Work with Grace to generate policy recommendations of Durham's code. Coordinate with city foresters and study forest management plan.
	Student Lead, Task 3	Lead Task 3: stakeholder engagement. Work with either Alex or Mingfei to establish demographic baseline for City of Durham. Conduct stakeholder survey and interviews to inform data layer relevant to Task 1, policy recommendations for Task 2, and community preferences/attitudes for TreesDurham Community Engagement Plan.

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Before an uncomfortable moment happens..

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An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

**Use the in the moment
techniques before you
need them.**

**Model appropriate ways
to handle mistakes.**

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Manage in the moment.

Interrupt the behavior:

- “Okay, let’s switch gears.”
- “Let’s move on.”
- “Let’s stay focused.”
- “We’ve got 15 minutes left, let’s turn to...”

Other ideas? What phrases can you have in your back pocket?

Manage in the moment.

Appeal to Authority

In situations where you need backup, but lack it, consider **appealing to authority**.

In this case, an authority might be:

- the professor,
- a school policy,
- a group agreement, or
- anyone with power in the situation.

Example: I just want to remind the class that according to our discussion guidelines, we are working to be respectful of all viewpoints.

Manage in the moment.

Take a Break.

Manage in the moment.

Turn to Others

In some situations you need backup, but an authority isn't present.

What do you do? Turn to others in the group.

Examples:

- How might we rephrase or reconsider the point that was just brought up?
- What emotions arise from the last comment?
- What is coming up for you?
- What would you want to say in response to that comment?

Manage in the moment.

Direct Intervention

What do you mean by _____?

I've always known you to be a fair-minded person, that doesn't sound like you.

When you said _____, I felt _____ because _____.

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Reflective Poll

Which set of techniques are you feeling most comfortable with, those that help you prepare for difficult situation in advance or help you deal with them in the moment?

Which “in advance” technique are you most comfortable with?

Which “in the moment” technique are you most comfortable with?

Case Studies

Case Studies

3 case studies. 5 minutes each.
Groups of 3.

Follow prompt on [Google doc](#).

Record:

- (1) intervention used,
- (2) how each intervention felt, &
- (3) other responses & important points.

Norms

Engage with empathy.

Seek to understand different perspectives.

Realize that our dimensions of diversity and contexts vary.

Speak from your own experience.

Dialogue, don't debate.

Case Studies

Debrief.

- Which case study was the most difficult to address? Why?
- Which techniques did you find yourself using the most often? Why?
- If you felt braver or stronger, would you use a different technique? Why or why not?

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After the Fact

**Talk
one-on-
-one.**

**Ask an
ally to
intervene.**

**Reflect as
a group.**

**Check in
with
others.**

After the Fact

Resources

- CAPS (919.684.3737)
- Women's Center
- Clergy

Reporting

- Office of Student Conduct
- Office for Institutional Equity
- Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity
- Harassment Prevention Advisors (OIE)

Reflection.

Reflection helps us...

- Identify our feelings,
- Discern the thoughts associated with our feelings,
- Determine if important boundaries have been crossed,
- Figure out if our values have been compromised, &
- Determine next steps.

How to Process

Release. Cry. Yell. Talk it out.
Write it out. Exercise. Pray.
Create.

Feel. Mindfulness.
Body-centered practices.

Learn. Journal. Lessons
learned. Your role. Next time.

Reflection

In small groups, discuss the following:

- What are your major takeaways from this workshop?
- What can you do next to sharpen your skills around handling uncomfortable moments?
- What would you like to learn about next?

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Use the Chat Box

What questions do you have?

Need to go? Thank you and please email nicolette.cagle@duke.edu to ask questions and share.
