

# SAFE Strategies to deal with Difficult Moments in your Online Classroom

Creating an inclusive and positive online learning environment is crucial to meet the needs of all students. Thus, it is important as instructional faculty to think about how you will respond to discriminatory comments or behaviors should they arise. The following strategies can help ensure students that you are committed to equity and inclusion in your online class.

## SEE

While we want students to share their ideas, knowledge, and voices, we also want to immediately address any inappropriate communication (e.g. offensive or discriminatory language, personal attack). Thus, it is important to:

- Monitor their responses, messages, and communication. For example, you can have your teaching assistant to follow the chat session if you are conducting a large, synchronous class. Also, consider reviewing the discussions that occur on the discussion board if you are using it for your course(s).
- Spot check online discussion boards to make sure students' comments are appropriate. Participate when needed to help them stay on topic.
- Take swift action if inappropriate content is shared or comments are made during the session or in the chat. Review [OIT's Best Practices to Avoid Zoom-Bombing](#) for more information.

## ACT

Once you see something inappropriate, it is important to act to minimize any adverse impacts. Here are some actions you might take.

- Remove or block the offending comments. As the host of the Zoom session, you have the ability to take down any offensive content. Please visit the [Zoom website](#) to see how you can do this through Zoom.
- Acknowledge the incident and explicitly express your intention to address the problem. Do not ignore the problem. You may choose to address it later, but make sure to indicate how you plan to address it through the chat box or via a Canvas announcement. For example: "we are going to take a 10 minutes break, but we will come back for a discussion to address this."
- Reinforce your ground rules for online classrooms. For example: "we value different ideas and voices from each one of you, but personal attacks and discriminatory language are not be tolerated".

# FOLLOW-UP

After the incident, make sure to follow up. Addressing difficult moments is not easy. Often times these moments involve frustration, anger, anxiety, and confusion. However, when addressing these difficulties, consider your emotional state, use patience, and seek to create understanding amongst your students that everyone can learn from the experience. After the incident, you can:

- Set up an individual Zoom meeting with students directly involved in the incident. Ask students to clarify their thoughts behind their comments that they originally made. For example: “Can you help me to understand what you meant by commenting....?” You can also ask students to share how the actions impacted them. For example: “How are you feeling about what just happened?”
- Conduct a brief reflection about the incident at the beginning of the next seminar/recorded lecture. Direct students with external support through corresponding academic units, e.g. the [Counseling Center](#) or call 974-HELP.

# EDUCATE

Use the incident as an opportunity to educate your students, and provide enhanced expectations and instructions for effective learning in your course.

- Encourage students to challenge their own biases through deep reflection about their own identity and their perceptions of others (e.g. using the Assignments feature in Canvas to allow students to submit a private reflection journal, or see [Harvard implicit bias test](#)).
- Where appropriate, connect the incident with the content or discipline you are teaching.
- Provide students additional learning resources related to the incident addressing diversity and inclusion (e.g. providing literatures to read, or workshop/training opportunities)



## Additional Resources

- [TLI's Inclusive Teaching Tool Box](#)
- [The University of Michigan's guide for "Responding to Difficult Moments"](#)
- [Arizona State University Teach Online: "Fostering an Inclusive Environment when Developing Online Courses"](#)

## References

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