



# Teaching through Tragedy and Conflict

Handout for the CETL Hot Topic Discussion on Wednesday, March 6, 3-4pm.

## Main Issues

1. Local, national, and global events can personally affect ourselves and our students in a way that can disrupt course plans (i.e., ability to focus, process new material).
2. We can be unsure how to respond to the situation with the collective class, as events will affect students differently.
3. The issue may surface in class in ways that are difficult to manage.
4. Personal tragedy may affect us and our students individually in ways not apparent to others.

## Actions

1. **Pause to reflect, listen, and plan.**
  - Consider how the issue affects you personally.
  - Listen to timely information offered through the university, saving those you want to pass along to your students (see No. 4).
  - Reflect on [Who's in Class](#), recognizing that the issue will affect students differently based on their identities and experiences.
2. **Say something, as [students find it encouraging for instructors to address the issue](#) even if simply or imperfectly** (Huston & DiPietro, 2007). Based on your teaching context and approach, you can send a supportive message, open class briefly acknowledging the situation, or facilitate a discussion.
3. **Send pertinent information.**
  - **About the issue:** Students may benefit from context on the event aside from the flood they may experience on social media.
  - **Offer course flexibility measures:** Flexibility to attend to immediate wellness, what to do if ability to participate is impeded beyond those measures.
  - **Share campus resources:** [OU Counseling Center](#), plus others the university may recommend based on the circumstance (see [list of Student Support Services in OU Faculty Handbook](#)).
4. **For open discussions, set parameters.**
  - Emphasize a time for listening rather than debate.
  - [Review concrete guidance](#) such as using “lines for emotional debriefing” and “facilitating a way to help those most affected” (St. John's, n.d.).

## Questions

Let's share concrete examples and practical approaches to the suggested actions above, along with your additional questions.

1. How do you decide when and how to address a local or global issue in class?
2. What do you do when the issue seems to interfere with class plans, in both productive and unproductive ways?
3. How do you respond in individual tragedy, for yourself and for your students?

## References and Resources

- [Teaching Through Tragedy and Conflict](#): CETL Teaching Tip
- [Responding to Tragedy: Teaching in This Moment](#): CETL Teaching Tip
- Huston, T. A., & DiPietro, M. (2007). [In the Eye of the Storm: Students' Perceptions of Helpful Faculty Actions Following a Collective Tragedy](#). *To Improve the Academy*, 25.
- [When Tragedy Occurs in the Campus Community: Advice for Faculty and Staff](#)
- [Resources in the Face of Tragedy, Conflict, and Critical Incidents](#) (POD Network of Educational Development)

## Engaging in Difficult Conversations/with Difficult Content

- [Structuring Classroom Discussions about the 2020 Election](#) (U-M CRLT)
- [Arguments That Harm — and Why We Need Them](#) (Barnes, 2018, Chronicle of Higher Education)