

ACKNOWLEDGING THE CURRENT RACIAL CRISIS IN THE CLASSROOM

[Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#) | [BruinX](#)

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INTRODUCTION

As seasoned instructors, we may feel comfortable teaching hard material we are expert in. But how do we go about responding to the extraordinary racial crisis wracking our nation (June 1, 2020, #GeorgeFloyd)? Do we stay awkwardly silent and stick to the assigned material, especially if we aren't experts on racial justice? Or do we take the risk and engage?

Our advice: Engage. Students are deeply affected by current events and appreciate knowing that faculty recognize this simple fact. Faculty acknowledgement at the beginning of class is a small, but meaningful, way to signal compassion and empathy. Here are some suggestions.

GUIDANCE

1. ACKNOWLEDGE CURRENT EVENTS

Simply acknowledge, at the beginning of class, that we're going through extraordinary times and that some of us are suffering deeply. Here is some sample text, crowdsourced from experts including [Equity Advisors](#):

- “I realize that with everything that is currently happening in the country, it is hard to focus on coursework. Thank you for coming to class.”
- “I understand that people have strong feelings about what's going on across the country, and it is difficult to continue with business as usual.”
- “I am hurting and upset with everything that is happening in the country, and I am sure a lot of you are as well.”
- “I want to acknowledge the difficulty I am having in processing the series of recent racist events in the country, and I want to create a space for comments and dialogue before we delve into our studies”
- “Let's have a moment of silence to remember and honor the lives we have lost. [After a minute...] We live in an incredibly difficult and painful moment. We acknowledge the fear and uncertainty that you are feeling. Know that I am here for anyone who needs to be heard and who needs time to process all what is happening now. To our Black community: We see you. We appreciate you. We stand with you.”

If none of this sounds right to you, crib from the [message sent out by Campus Leadership](#) (May 30, 2020) to the entire community--including staff, students, and faculty. Mention that you read the message; point out a sentence or phrase you like; then explain how and why it resonated.

That's it.

2. BE KIND, BE FLEXIBLE

Even if what's going on does not impact **you** deeply, please know that for **many students**, it's intensely personal and deeply disturbing. They may benefit from a little more kindness and flexibility on assignments or deadlines. So, if you can provide a little wiggle room on alternative options and deadlines and can do so transparently and consistently, please consider doing so. Being a bit more flexible at this moment will not undermine your pedagogical mission. It may, however, provide real relief to those most in need.

Also, remember that the Academic Senate provided [valuable guidance](#) in the context of COVID-19 challenges, including guidelines for formal disability accommodations, required under law and policy. For more specific information, please consult the experts at the [Center for Accessible Education](#), and your local dean or administrator who handles these matters.

Here's sample text:

- “I know that the current events hit very close to home for some of us. I want to be flexible where I can on the assignments. If you need this, please send me an email/reach out after class/contact me to talk things through.”

3. POINT STUDENTS TO CAMPUS RESOURCES

Consider sharing these resources with students:

- UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services ([CAPS](#)). Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: (310) 825-0768
- [UCLA Student Legal Services](#). Call at (310)-825-9894 or email slegal@saonet.ucla.edu
- Case Management Services and Crisis Response Team (CRT): Faculty can refer students and students can refer a peer that may be in distress <https://www.studentincrisis.ucla.edu/> or crteam@ucla.edu
- UCLA's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): [Resources for Racial Trauma](#)

4. NEVER STOP LEARNING

Below are some related resources that might be helpful.

- UCLA EDI: [Resources for inclusive Pedagogy](#)
- UCLA EDI: [Free Speech on Campus](#)
- UCLA EDI: [EDI During the time of COVID-19](#)
- UCLA EDI: [general Guidance page](#)
- Harvard: [Navigating Difficult Moments in the Classroom](#)
- [UC Regents Principles Against Intolerance](#)
- [UCLA Policies and Code of Conduct](#)