

Guidelines for instructors: Responding to collective tragedies and hateful incidents

1.0 Introduction

UBC is a community representing many different cultures, nationalities, races, religions, genders, classes, physical and mental abilities, as well as other identifying characteristics, making it a vibrant and dynamic microcosm of the country and the world. This diversity also means that whenever there are public acts of harm, discrimination, or hate at local or global scales, there are likely impacted students in your class who deserve support, care and attention.

The purpose of this document is to offer general guidelines for responding to collective tragedies, hate crimes or identity-based discrimination and violence that impact specific groups within our community. While all members of the UBC community may follow the proceeding guidelines, the primary audience of this resource is intended to be instructors.

It is critical that all instructors consider some response. A study suggests that even a small humane acknowledgement of an event — such as a moment of silence or a sharing of resources — is helpful. A lack of response can be interpreted as apathy and lead to impacted students feeling invisible and unsupported. Especially for students with marginalized identities, the university's centralized response (e.g., the Provost or President's response) may feel more distant and less relevant than their instructors' response.

As individual courses at UBC differ in size, disciplinary context, demographics and other characteristics, it is important that the steps suggested in this resource be used as a framework to develop a context-specific process, rather than a fixed and complete checklist.

Broadly, during these events, the immediate goals of instructors should be to:

- Hold space in the class to acknowledge what happened.
- Convey care to the students who are most adversely affected.
- Communicate resources for mental health, overall well-being, and community-specific resources.

2.0 TIMEFRAME: Before an incident happens

Priority – Planning and building capacity as an instructor

It is likely that this resource will be referenced during or after an incident, and it is impossible for anyone to predict what can happen in the future. However, in a time of crisis, students expect their instructors to respond in a timely and effective manner. For that, instructors should be prepared with the necessary capacities – be it skills to facilitate emotional conversations, fluency in current social justice issues and discourse, or familiarity with available support and resources for targetted groups. These capacities cannot be formed overnight and require a continued investment of time and effort to be developed.

Besides reviewing this document, instructors can start building capacity by utilizing available resources and opportunities. See the Resources section below for a list of some of the suggested content.

3.0 TIMEFRAME: While the incident is unfolding

Priority – Safety and immediate care for the most impacted students

1. **Evaluate the likely socio-psychological impacts** of an event by putting it in context with multiple factors.

Some might be:

- The proximity of the incident,
- The similarity in demographic or other characteristics of the people impacted in the incident to your students,
- A pattern/repetition of similar events/violence, socio-historical context leading to the events, extent of harm to the community and the salience of the issue in the media and public sphere more generally.

It is important to note that because of social media and the wide range of different global news coverage options, the media profile of an event may differ dramatically across different news outlets.

2. **Identify who may be most impacted** by what is unfolding.

- Determine whether individual check-ins with affected students are appropriate. This may be particularly important for small classes with less diversity in which only a very small group of students are more greatly impacted by an event.
- Determine what support you can provide — such as extending a deadline for an assignment and allowing students to miss a class for self-care.

3. **Leave room for affected group members to exercise agency and prioritize their needs.** As you contemplate how to respond to the incident in your class, including whether and how to reach out to affected students individually, seek to understand and prioritize affected students' needs, including what role they may want to play in the class, if at all. Expect and accept the varying choices they make. Some of them may express an interest in leading a class discussion on the event, but others may expect their instructors to lead entirely. Some may request time to take care of themselves alone or with affinity groups, while others may not respond to your outreach. To connect and work with them in a good way in a time of crisis, building a good relationship beforehand is helpful and important.

4. **Identify who else may be impacted** within your class and what they may need, including drawing awareness to the event. Provide support and resources available.

5. **If you (as the instructor) are part of the group that is directly impacted:** These events can resurface personal traumatic events Seek support for yourself. For whatever action you decide to take for your students, ensure that you are not pushing yourself beyond capacity. You do not need to share more than you are comfortable with your students. In these scenarios, a brief email indicating solidarity and care for your students may suffice.

4.0 TIMEFRAME: In the immediate aftermath of an incident (hours to days)

Priority – Processing of thoughts and emotions. Support group belonging and a sense of safety

- 1. Communicate what has happened.** Acknowledge what has happened either in class or by email (if there is no class immediately after the incident) to show care to the entire class as soon as possible. Silence can make affected students feel invisible, and a lack of care from their instructors and peers, can lead them to feel a sense of isolation, apathy, and frustration.
 - **Prioritize care** instead of focusing on a response to the event (e.g., condemnation of a hate crime, scholarly analysis of the event). Even a brief message with a humane and genuine sense of care goes a long way.
 - **Provide** mental health resources and other available support (e.g., information about [affinity groups on campus](#)) for students who are more directly impacted as well as resources for other students on how to be an effective ally.
 - **Be specific** in communicating about what the event means to the class, and how you can offer care and support to those who are impacted by the event (e.g., give affected students permission to take time to take care of themselves without explanation, encourage other students to think about ways to support their impacted peers, etc.).
 - **Be timely** in your expression of care, which can be much more effective than an elaborate and fully-coordinated response after weeks of silence. At a class following the event, ensure that you are ready to provide opening remarks to the entire class acknowledging the event and the pain felt by students who belong to targeted groups.
- 2. Invite conversations.** Consider how to engage students in addressing the event in a meaningful way.
 - **Advise students of the topic**, the goals and the structure of the conversation ahead of time so students can choose whether and how they will participate.
 - Possible goals include showing care, processing together, strategizing responses, prioritizing actions. Trying to meet all of these goals can feel awkward, confusing, or frustrating. Thus, instructors should identify and communicate which of these goals will be met at a given class.
 - **Consider group configurations.** Students who are most impacted by the event may or may not want to engage in a large group discussion with their classmates. It can depend on their positionality and relationships with their peers and instructor.
 - **Respect self-selection.** Participation should be entirely voluntary as people have different ways and speeds of processing, which can impact the conversation, the relationships, and how people respond to such incidents. For some people, global events could re-surface past traumas that they may not want to process in groups.etc.).
 - **Invite questions or concerns** about the discussion in advance. Where possible, adjust the goals or format of the conversation in response to the concerns addressed, while continuing to centre the needs of those most impacted. If reconciliation is not possible, consider offering separate supplementary spaces.
 - **Close the conversation with a recognition of ongoing work ahead.** Whatever the goal you may set out for the conversation, acknowledge that the end of the discussion does not mean the end of injustice and its impact. For those affected by the event, it can be felt as disheartening or unethical when, after being invited to a deep and emotional conversation about a tragedy, to then notice everyone else going back to their routine life as if nothing had happened. Consider holding some time during the conversation to explore how the class may want to continue to engage with the topic or set up a follow-up conversation if appropriate.

5.0 TIMEFRAME: Aftermath (days to weeks)

Consider providing ongoing support. People process global events differently over time, and sometimes the news coverage or social media related to events can exacerbate their emotional impacts. Public attention to an event may fade out after some time, but those who are impacted by the event can continue to feel the impact long after it. Therefore, it is important to think about ongoing care for affected students. You may consider working with your department to coordinate support/resources to specific student groups.

6.0 TIMEFRAME: Follow-up (months to years)

- 1. Reflect on your response and revise your future behaviour.** Reflect on what worked and what could be improved, and lessons you have learned from the process. Explore what you would do differently when another incident happens in the future.
- 2. Update your course.** Consider how you may be able to make your course more relevant to the current social context (e.g., integrate more racialized scholars' works into course readings).
- 3. Participate in a more long-term, systemic change.** These incidents can prompt long-term actions in your department, the university, or even in your discipline, in order to address the systemic issue at institutional and structural levels that gave rise to the event (e.g., systemic racism, misogyny, etc.). Consider how you may be able to contribute to these long-term, systemic change processes from your social and professional locations.
- 4. Engage in ongoing learning.** Consider what capacity you need to further develop in order to respond to a future event in a more effective way, and seek to utilize available learning opportunities and resources. Also, reading novels and memoirs, and listening to diverse podcasts can be a great way to learn more about the experiences that you have not lived, and better understand the complex impacts of different types of global events on people of varying identities.

Resources

UBC resources

- [Summary of different affinity groups on campus.](#)
- [Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology \(CTLT\)](#)
- [CTLT Indigenous Initiatives](#)
- [Inclusive Teaching @ UBC](#)
 - [Resources for Faculty](#)
 - [Resources for UBC Students](#)
- [Indigenous Residential School History and Dialogue Centre](#)
 - [Teaching and Learning Resources](#)
- [Indigenous Portal \(Vancouver campus\)](#)
- [Indigenous Engagement \(Okanagan campus\)](#)
- [Equity & Inclusion Office](#) and list of community [affinity groups](#)
- [Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence at UBC](#)
- [Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office](#)
- [UBC Wellbeing](#)
- [Supporting Students in Distress](#)
- [Helping Faculty and Staff in Distress](#)
- [Counselling Services](#) (UBC Student Services)

Other resources

- [Indian Residential School Survivors Society](#)
- [Healing in Colour](#) (a list of therapists for BIPOC communities)
- [Responding to Hate Crimes: A Community Resource Manual](#) (National Center for Transgender Equality)
- [Rapid Incidence Response Toolkit: Responding to Violence in LGBTQ and HIV Affected Communities](#) (NYC Anti-Violence Project)



Reference

Huston, T. A., & DiPietro, M. (2007). In the eye of the storm: Students' perceptions of helpful faculty actions following a collective tragedy. In D. R. Robertson & L. B. . Nilson (Eds.), *To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional, and Organizational Development* (Vol. 25, pp. 207-223). Anker.

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