

Safe to Learn = Safe to Be Oneself



Unknown macro: 'space-breadcrumbs'

Why is this important?

Students need to feel safe in order to learn. Safe to make mistakes. Safe to ask questions. Safe to test out new ideas. Safe to be oneself. A student's sense of self is an amalgam of political, social, ethnic, sexual, gender, religious, and class identities. If any one of these identities is threatened, students may feel alienated, retreat into silence and shut down their learning process. Or worse, they may lash out in self-defense against you or other students.

All members of the Academy's diverse student body deserve respect for the many identities they bring to the classroom. Establishing true respect — not politically-correct artifice — promotes a productive, safe learning environment, builds community, and demonstrates high standards of professionalism.

Keep these things in mind:

An unsafe learning environment can include a pattern of any of these behaviors:

- Obscene or degrading language, images, or writing regarding sexual themes.
- Degrading language referring to a protected class: sexual orientation, age, gender, ethnicity, or religion.
- Forceful statements of political positions without consideration for opposing opinions.

As the instructor you hold a position of authority and students will take your lead as they test the appropriateness of their language and work. You are responsible for managing the balance between recognizing the potential for offense, and discussing topics and/or images that forward the goals of your course.

- Establish limits—not restrictions—on language or images that may threaten the various identities students bring with them to the classroom. Encourage students to consider the purpose of and audience for their assignments before they proceed with themes that may be considered objectionable in the classroom context.
- Clarify for yourself and your students to be sure any explicit material you use is germane to the topic of the class or assignment. If sexually explicit language is not relevant, you may unnecessarily 'exclude' students who find it objectionable. In which case, nothing is lost by using more tame examples, topics, or images.
- Explain to students that they will be graded on the strength of their participation and work and not their political opinions. Question your assumptions about the political, or social views of your students.
- Use your authority as the instructor to stop discussions, conversations, or presentations that may be alienating students. You may also choose to schedule follow-up conversations with student(s) to reiterate your intention to maintain a safe learning environment for all.

Learn more

- [Hostile learning environment: Professors should keep communications open](#)
- [Modeling Respect and Civility in the Classroom](#)
- [Dealing with Disruptive Students](#)
- [Online Teaching Challenges](#)
- [Professionalism & Classroom Management](#)
- [Pedagogy & Best Practices](#)