

Exploring Practices in the Classroom
Module 8 : Responding to Students in Distress
Fall 2019 | Guest Instructor Taylor Tai

0. TEACHING PLAN SUMMARY

I taught this class session as a guest lecturer for “Exploring Practices in the Classroom” which is a Delta course for graduate students interested in improving their teaching skills.

Learning objectives for this session:

1. Share current teaching challenges.
2. Identify various stressors on students’ academic performance.
3. Recognize the impact of students personal crises on academic performance.
3. Develop dialogue techniques and course policies to address student concerns.

1. OPENING CHECK-INS (10 min)

1-2 people share a teaching challenge. The group brainstorms how to respond. The speaker gives a ~1 min overview of challenge(s) including who is involved, what theme is at play (class climate, student preparation, etc.), and what the group can help with. Others listen actively, then ask clarifying questions. Finally, others respond in line with the speaker’s “ask”.

2. BRAINSTORM COMMON STRESSORS FOR STUDENTS (10 min)

From the homework: Think back to when you were an undergraduate student. What were some of your sources of stress? How did they impact your academics, and how did you manage them? What is a time when someone from the outside (especially an instructor) might've labeled you as a "bad" student because they didn't know what you were going through?

Group brainstorming: Based on your homework and experience in the classroom, what are some common sources of stress for students? We will collect ideas on the (virtual) board.

3. WORKSHOP REAL-WORD SCENARIOS (30 min)

Form groups to read the following scenarios and answer the four prompts below. During the group share-out afterwards, a different person will answer each of the four prompts as we go down the list.

- A. What might your first “non-generous” reaction be to the student (e.g., annoyance, grade deduction, character judgement, etc.)?
- B. Which of the stressors we brainstormed together could be at play in this scenario? Give a more generous interpretation of the situation given the potential stressors at play.
- C. How could you respond supportively in the moment or follow up afterwards?
- D. Could this scenario have been addressed through proactive strategies before the issue arose, such as with language in your syllabus, course policies, etc.?

Scenario 1. Your student Sydney regularly arrives 5-10 minutes late to class. She is typically out of breath and apologizes repeatedly, hurrying to her seat. This becomes disruptive to your morning course announcements, and you worry that other students are frustrated. After a few weeks, you remind her that the course policy is to deduct participation points for tardiness. Sydney holds back tears while explaining how time management has been difficult for her lately, and says she understands that she will have to lose the points. She continues arriving late to class as the semester goes on.

Scenario 2. During group work time, you notice that Kay, one of your most talkative students, is withdrawn from their table's conversation. As the groups work together on the assigned problem set, you circulate to answer questions and check in. At Kay's table, the other group members give you a recap of where they're stuck, but Kay remains silent. You try to coax a response out of them by specifically asking what they thought about the challenge, but after giving a short answer, they return to checking their phone and ignoring the group.

Scenario 3. You receive an email from your student Brandon requesting a due date extension for the midterm paper. In the email, he mentions that he is dealing with some mental health challenges, but doesn't elaborate. You're unsure whether to grant him the extension, because the deadline to ask for an extension has passed and you haven't seen any obvious signs of distress from him in the classroom. You're worried about granting an unmerited extension.

→ **Large-group discussion.** What were some successful conversations/strategies? Where did you get stuck? Were there any situations that you were not sure how to navigate?

4: RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS IN DISTRESS (10 min)

Are there resources in your department or college that you could use to help students with concerns? Would you know what to do/who to talk to if a student came to you in crisis?

Additional resources:

- McBurney Disability Resource Center
- Gender and Sexuality Campus Center
- Multicultural Student Center
- Title IX Office
- Anonymous Bias Reporting
- Campus Food Shed
- Course instructor, department head, fellow TAs
- Others?