

August 16, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

On Monday, August 14 a group of approximately one hundred staff, graduate students, faculty and administrators from across the University came together in front of the statue of Homer to reclaim the lawn. We intended to collectively think through what will be for many of us the most difficult teaching moment of our lives. This is not about institutional responses but is instead about pedagogical practice. This working document attempts to collate and curate ideas and actions from one very raw Monday morning. Though no single answer exists, it is imperative that we in our interactions with students fight the antimuslimism, antisemitism, racism, misogyny, bigotry, hostility to LGBTQ groups and assault on truth that visited our community.

This is not discipline or school specific. We trust also that those who interact with students will keep abreast of University-wide resources for supporting students. We recognize that graduate students will find teaching this semester uniquely challenging and that faculty and staff without tenure may feel particularly vulnerable.

Faculty stood on the lawn surrounding Homer and worked in four groups: (I) Concrete actions for the first day of class, (II) Writing and discussion prompts, (III) Why UVA and Charlottesville, and (IV) Resources. In the course of discussions faculty also articulated many concerns about the events of the weekend and about the ways we might as an institution relate to the community. While this particular curation focuses deliberately on issues of teaching and interacting with students more generally, it will also be crucial to teach tools of non-violent communication to all members of the university.

Reclaiming the lawn for pedagogy and discussion matters deeply. It's worth remembering that when Richard Spencer made his pilgrimage to the lawn on Friday night he came to a place where he felt at home intellectually. He majored in Music and English. He knows the power of linking apocalyptic narratives and racialized nationalism. If they declare this a culture war, we can fight back in the classroom.

This collective discussion began as a syllabus-planning workshop for the college civic and community engagement classes. It was loosely organized and curated by Bonnie Gordon (Music), Rose Cole (Curry), Katie Heimer (Office of the Dean of Students), and Katelyn Durkin (English). Special thanks to David Edmunds (Global Development Studies), Peter Bussigel (Interdisciplinary Arts), Katie Schetlick (Dance), and Aldona Dye (Music).

I. Concrete actions for the first day of class

How do we start teaching 11 days after terrorists with torches marched on the lawn? What are some specific strategies for opening classes while our students are grieving, struggling, and watching their campus erupt on the national news? Dean Baucom reminded us in his email from August 12 that, "The welcome and openness we extend to them, the care we show them in their individuality and boundless differences, the commitment we make to them that they can join us

in the fearless pursuit of knowledge and understanding in a profoundly inclusive community—all this will mark for them who we truly are, and who we are inviting them to join us in being.” How can we do this in classrooms?

For all classes:

1. **Acknowledge** the violence of August 12, even if you do not make your classroom a space for discussing that violence in detail. It’s not necessary for every class on grounds to address in depth the weekend attacks, but the consensus among scholars of pedagogy is that students do need to hear something and our own students told us this repeatedly in various documents during the academic year 2014-15. Recognize that some of your students may have witnessed or experienced that violence. Name it. Be gentle in tone and manner but name the hate that came to the University and city. Use the words white supremacy, racism, and Nazi.

2. **Realize** that students will come to class with very different degrees of knowledge and awareness regarding the events of August 11-12. Some will know very little about these events, some will have seen them on a news outlet, and some may have experienced them first-hand. Before raising these events as a topic that needs to be broached, give students a very brief description of those events.

3. **Show honesty and humility** about your experiences and knowledge. Honesty might mean saying “I’m not sure what to say about this, but I think it’s important to acknowledge because....” or “We are not going to have time to have in-depth conversations about this but here are some resources for students...”

4. **Prepare** or think about what you might want to say ahead of time. This situation in your class may well become very emotional. It is difficult to predict. Having your own thoughts prepared may help you handle moments of raw, unvarnished, feelings.

Prof. Bethany Teachman (Psychology) writes, “I plan simply to tell my students that I am disgusted by the vile acts of racism, violence, and hatred that have occurred in our community, and affirm that we are committed to fostering a community that celebrates and supports diversity, and where all members of the community feel safe and welcome. And I will tell them that I am always happy to meet with them if they want to talk about their experience, raise concerns or ideas, or need help accessing resources.”

5. Remember that even though the events were experienced by all, people from groups that were directly threatened by the Nazi thugs may respond very differently than those for whom the threat was less direct. For example, Black and Jewish people were direct targets and may have much more visceral reactions than others.

For more extensive discussions:

1. Listen to students, as in many cases they have a lot of direct experience and ideas. Allow them the chance to talk, but within parameters of good and respectful listening to each other.
2. Find ways to connect the events of the weekend to the subject matter of the course. How can expertise in your subject make a difference? How has your subject supported or challenged white supremacy and racism? Activism and anti-racism need not be limited to disciplines that deal with the subject directly.
3. Remember that students will come to class with various perspectives and emotions. Some of your students may have participated in counter protests, while some of your students may sympathize with Richard Spencer and Jason Kessler.
 - Remind students that a community of trust means listening to and respecting the experiences of their fellow students.
 - Don't force students to share if they are uncomfortable.
 - Encourage a wide range of opinions, but not an infinite range of opinions. Do not allow students to make statements that dehumanize other groups, and should that occur, do not let the statement stand without a firm challenge.
4. Consider starting with a text, performance, or image that opens up discussion. (See list below.)
 - Use reading materials to challenge hateful perspectives. This strategy helps counter the "indoctrinating professor" stereotype.
 - Encourage students to practice critical reading and thinking skills when encountering writing that challenges their beliefs.
 - Ask students to analyze an author's assumptions, evidence, and conclusions.
5. In smaller classes and discussion sections, ask students to reflect on their experience of the August 11-12 events with a free-writing exercise, and encourage them to share their writing if they feel comfortable doing so.
6. In larger classes and lectures, avoid generalizations and discuss your own response to the August 11-12 events. Invite your TAs to talk about their experiences in order to give students a variety of perspectives.

II. Writing and Discussion Prompts/Pedagogical Strategies

Dean Baucom said in his message from Sunday, August 12 that democracy "needs the open conversation we pursue on-Grounds and off. It needs the exchange of thought we share in community halls, synagogue basements, school boards and teach-ins. It needs the truth we bring to the lies of racism. It needs the courage of free thought in place of the cowardice of the closed mind." This can involve writing or discussion prompts and it can involve pedagogical strategies that model democratic practices and non-violent communication.

Writing and Discussion Prompts:

1. Ask students to help answer these questions: how can they imagine organizing a classroom to promote the rigorous exchange of ideas and to embody inclusivity and mutual respect?
2. How and why are universities at the center of national conversations about race, access, and freedom of speech? How does the Justice Department's recent decision to investigate and curb affirmative action policies relate to the white supremacists' decision to rally at UVA?
3. What does "honor" mean? Using Thomas Jefferson's dual legacy as slave owner and author of the Declaration of Independence as a starting point for discussion, how can we understand how political ideals like "civil society" and "community" have been used to create exclusive institutions? What should UVA be and do as a public institution?
4. What motivates political extremism? How do we effect change? What political actions seem most effective and why?
5. How were students active in rejecting the "Unite the Right" positions last weekend? What actions should we emulate? What worked, and what offers hope?
6. Map "America": draw a map of the U.S. on the board and invite students to go up and put a single word in a part of the map.

In addition to discussion, how can we model these practices in the structures of our courses? What is or is not included in our syllabi? What language are we using in our lectures? What values get modeled through class discussions and how are they facilitated?

1. Create rules of engagement: RTF (Respect, Tolerance, Fairness)
2. Ask students to write, talk, and think about personal bias and how it influences their ideas.
3. Invite students to write personally about their own relevant experiences. This can take many forms—experiences of encountering people from unfamiliar backgrounds, experiences of witnessing discrimination. One suggestion was "Where were you during the events of August 11-12? How did you learn about them? What did you think and feel?"
4. Help students see themselves as writers as well as readers of texts. Ask students to style their essays as op-eds or blog posts. (See the [Op-Ed Project](#) for suggestions.) Using articles from the *Cavalier Daily*, highlight the history of undergraduate critique of UVA. (See the list of resources for examples.)
5. Use a short text to frame discussion: ask students to "talk back" to the text, identify its underlying assumptions, and/or discuss how it has been interpreted. Ask students to be critical about language (e.g. Does an article use "Alt-right" or "white supremacy"?) See suggested readings at the end of this document.
6. Introduce and ask students to think about tools for nonviolent communication. In interpersonal communications. Would it be helpful to agree on guidelines for class discussion?

Other important classroom practices:

1. In small classrooms, ask students to address one another by name during discussion.
2. Ask students to identify logical fallacies, especially false equivalencies.
3. Be transparent about your pedagogical choices.
4. Historicize reading materials.
5. Shift the classroom spatially (walk to the lawn etc.)

III. Why UVA?

Our students will ask the question that the nation asks. Why UVA? Why Charlottesville?

1. Numerous resources exist on the history of UVA and on Charlottesville and they are listed below. Our students should all know that UVA was built by enslaved labor, that it had a thriving Eugenics program and that it had financial and other ties to the KKK. This is well documented. It is much harder to think about hidden complicity, collusion, and promotion of ideas that go against the purported ideals of the institution. To put this differently, UVA helped to construct the white supremacy that terrorized its students. Many students and faculty feel that Kessler and Spencer represent a bit of what UVA was and continues to be.
2. Faculty can acknowledge as much of the history of UVA/Virginia's history regarding bigotry as they feel comfortable with. It is also important to note that this is an issue everywhere. We are a part of a national problem. Finally, we should think carefully about how we can challenge inequalities in the way we run our classrooms: who speaks, how contributions are valued, and whom we read.
3. As we move forward, how can UVA be a part a good neighbor in the Charlottesville community? What can we do as individuals, as classes and departments, and as an institution to build better relations with Charlottesville communities? There is more of an imperative than ever to work directly with the community we live in; to think of global as local.
4. Faculty members discussed experiences of partnering with the International Rescue Committee, Virginia Organizing, Book Buddies and multiple other existing programs in the city. They also discussed the importance of civic involvement from faculty: city council, committees, PTOs, etc. We are members of this community and we need to show it. Faculty also named white supremacy as a reason staff often do not feel comfortable on campus. This group related the terrorist attack on the lawn to problems retaining minority faculty.
6. Many of the ideas have been circulating in various groups working on racial injustice and on civic engagement. Responsible civic engagement does not send students into the community to "help," nor does it use the community as a subject of study. A community-engaged curriculum refers to teaching, scholarship, and learning that connect faculty, students and community partners in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration.

7. How do we talk about the fascists and white supremacists who are here? This was not completely the work of outsiders.
8. To what extent and how can faculty and students embed themselves in the communities we work in, and take the lead of different community organizations in how we contribute to their work?
9. How can faculty act as bridges between student cohorts, generations, and communities to sustain long-term engagements?
10. Can faculty begin to learn from students who worked on the front lines the weekend of August 12 and who have led fights for living wage? What would facilitate this? We can invite representatives from students groups and those who have been working on white supremacy or who were active in the weekend of August 12 to visit our classrooms. We can adopt aspects of the syllabi produced by students in collaboration with community-based organizations. What else can we do?
11. It is not a coincidence that both organizers graduated from UVA. What makes that possible? How does this relate to issues of retaining minority faculty? How we support students of color, Jewish students, queer students and others targeted by hate groups? What risks do we as teachers need to take to move forward? How can we support each other as we take on the work of civic engagement more seriously and deeply? What do we need to ask of the administration in terms of recognition and support?

IV. Resources

What are some short readings we can use to talk with our students about the white supremacy, anti-Semitism, misogyny, and homophobia that the “Unite the Right” rally demonstrated and espoused? We hope to develop a list of Charlottesville-specific texts as well as readings that will help our students connect this weekend’s violence to broader contexts. We have across the University many faculty who write on issues that relate directly to the events of the weekend of August 12. The resources below deliberately do not require specific disciplinary chops and should be accessible to most UVA students.

Charlottesville-Specific Resources:

- [Charlottesville Syllabus](#) developed by Graduate Student Coalition for Liberation
- “Open Letter to UVA President Teresa Sullivan”
<http://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/essays/open-letter-uva-president-teresa-sullivan/>
- [“Tools of Displacement”](#) by Sophie Abramowitz, Eva Lattner, and Gillet Rosenblith for *Slate* (23 June 2017)
- [“Ideological Suppression Limits Freedom, Undermines Equality,”](#) *Cavalier Daily* by Bonnie Morgan.
- [Ethnic Concerns Committee Begins Long Walk Toward Rolling Back Racism,](#) *Cavalier Daily* by Mshyka Davis
- [“Charlottesville and the Efforts to Downplay Racism”](#) by Jia Tolentino
- [“What UVA Students Saw in Charlottesville”](#)

Broader Political Contexts:

- Foundational Enlightenment texts: *The Social Contract* by Jacque Rousseau, *Two Treatise of Government* by John Locke
- Mitch Landrieu's [Speech](#) on the Removal of Confederate Monuments in New Orleans
- ["Lipstick Fascism"](#) by Sam Miller
- [Julian Bond's papers](#) at the UVA Library
- ["The Cost of Balancing Academic and Racism"](#) by Adrienne Green
- "Antisemitism and The Deadly Charlottesville Protests" by Emma Green: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/nazis-racism-charlottesville/536928/>
- Alt Right: A Primer on the New White Supremacy <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/backgrounders/alt-right-a-primer-about-the-new-white-supremacy>
- "The alt right hates women as much as it hates people of color" by Matthew N. Lyone: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/02/alt-right-hates-women-non-white-trump-christian-right-abortion>

On Free Speech:

- First Amendment, U.S Constitution
- ["Free Speech on Grounds"](#) by Leslie Kendrick and other UVA resources on free speech
- ["Save Free Speech from Trolls"](#) by Lindy West
- ["Advice for My Conservative Students"](#) by Aaron Hanlon

Literature and Music:

- *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine
- *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin
- *To Pimp a Butterfly* by Kendrick Lamar
- *Lemonade* by Beyonce
- *A Seat at the Table* by Solange
- *The Roundhouse* by Louise Erlich
- Music by Public Enemy, Run the Jewels, and Janelle Monae

Pedagogical Resources:

- *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall B. Rosenberg
- *Changing the Conversation: The 17 Principles of Conflict Resolution* by Dana Caspersen
- [Ferguson syllabus](#)
- ["Ferguson in the Classroom: How One College Took Up Race and Policing This Semester"](#) by Err Whack
- ["Teaching Ferguson"](#) by Lisa Grace Lednicer
- Dr. Lisa Woolfork's [syllabus](#) for EMGT 1530: Race, Racism, Colony, and Nation
- Supporting students with PTSD: *Do we have a link for this? Something specific?*
- ["Resources for Educators to Use in the Wake of Charlottesville"](#) by Anya Kamenetz
- The Op-Ed project <https://www.theopedproject.org/>
- *Stop Talking: Indigenous Ways of Teaching and Learning and Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education* by Libby Roderick

- Landis, Kay (ed.) *Start Talking: A Handbook for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education*.
- [How to teach students about thorny issues](#)
- [Fostering open communication in a culturally diverse classroom](#)
- [How to handle conversations over crises and difficult topics](#)
- [“The Minutes Before Class”](#)
- Very comprehensive compilation of “Teaching Resources for Difficult Times”
<http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/teaching-resources-difficult-times>
- **Supporting students who may have experienced trauma**
- https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/article_21.pdf?sfvrsn=8&fref=gc
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/somatic-psychology/201208/students-ptsd?fref=gc>