

**Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility:  
A Handbook for Scholars and Teachers of the Middle East**

**A Project of the Taskforce on Middle East Anthropology**

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## Introduction

This handbook provides university teachers the tools to manage teaching and research confrontations that limit the range of academic discourse. It offers concrete suggestions both on how to respond to such attacks and how to help avoid them in the first place. Unlike productive scholarly debates, these attacks often exploit polarizing labels, employ a blacklist strategy, and use illegitimate or illegal means of gathering evidence. This handbook also addresses prickly pedagogical situations in which students may be engaged in larger campaigns against faculty or participating in class in a way that disrupts academic discussion.

The first edition of the handbook, published in 2006, was based on research undertaken by the Taskforce on Middle East Anthropology to understand available institutional resources, as well as on ethnographic interviews conducted with academics who have encountered obstacles in their teaching and scholarship. The handbook was revised in 2012 by a group of current graduate students and recent PhDs in Middle East Anthropology, at the behest of the original handbook committee. The revision evaluated the current atmosphere of academic freedom via a survey distributed to faculty and graduate students studying the Middle East, updated the document to reflect legal changes that impact the ability of academics to carry out their scholarship and teaching, reviewed major controversies over academic freedom since publication of the first edition, and updated links, citations, and contact information.

Higher education is an inherently challenging undertaking, by virtue of its mission to expand horizons and encourage critical thinking. In periods of political tension and conflict, some individuals and organizations may view critical inquiry and freedom of expression in the classroom as a threat to the political status quo and prevailing ideologies. Academic freedom has developed as a set of values and regulations to protect teachers — and knowledge production itself — in circumstances like these. Academic freedom can be defined as the right of scholars to have their ideas judged according to how well those ideas stand up to debate, rather than according to the power of the scholar herself or himself. As the American Association of University Professors declared in its influential 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure:

Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition. Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning (AAUP, 2006).

There have been many impingements on academic freedom in the United States both before and since this statement was issued. In 1903, a Trinity College (the predecessor to Duke University) professor almost lost his job because he wrote of improving race relations and praised African-American leaders like Booker T. Washington. His college protected him under the auspices of academic freedom. The beginning of the Cold War half a century ago witnessed Senator Joseph McCarthy's efforts to identify and root out people he deemed anti-American in the realms of entertainment, journalism, academe, publishing, and government. In the 1950s, the feared enemy

was the Soviet Union and Communism. Today, academic freedom battles are waged over many issues, including students' objections to course material that conflicts with their moral or religious beliefs, professors' support of affirmative action, courses on gender, and evolution/creationism controversies. Sometimes, threats to academic freedom overlap with threats to civil rights, as when a professor's sexuality was the basis for threats against that professor's ability to teach effectively (Rand, 2003). But some of the most pressing issues of academic freedom today revolve around teaching and research about Islam, the Arab world, and U.S. policy in the Middle East.

In the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> context, untrammelled and free public debate about the relationship between the United States and the Middle East should be a key component of a concerted effort to prevent the reoccurrence of horrific tragedies on U.S. soil, and to understand related cultural and political trends in the United States, the Middle East, and around the world. This open discussion is as necessary today as it was a decade ago, especially in light of the continued U.S. military presence in the Middle East and South Asia, and recent political and cultural developments in the area. Yet the period following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and during the so-called War on Terror witnessed escalating attempts to silence and marginalize university teachers who resisted or challenged narrow black and white thinking. The results of our 2012 survey suggest that this repressive atmosphere has been lightening somewhat in recent years, particularly after the election of President Barack Obama in the United States. However, reports of pressure and intimidation continue, with several survey respondents indicating that the Israel/Palestine conflict remains one of the most contentious issues of discussion. Some respondents wrote that even where formal support is shown for the tenets of academic freedom, there is a lack of interest in pursuing controversial topics on their campuses and in their professional organizations. Other respondents noted that the term "academic freedom" has itself become a tool to defend political posturing in the absence of serious scholarly evidence.

The political and psychological climate prevailing in the United States since the Al-Qa`ida attacks has often placed security concerns over and above commitments to civil rights. Although significant legal protections exist for academic freedom, institutions of higher learning have become ideological battlefields as conservative groups try to set precedents delimiting what can be taught, who can teach, and how subjects should be presented. In some instances, these groups have sought to influence hiring and tenure decisions. Often these attempts have been unsuccessful, as in the political pressure that temporarily jeopardized adjunct instructor Kristofer Petersen-Overton's appointment at Brooklyn College (Huffington Post, 2011) and the failed petition against Barnard College professor, Nadia Abu al-Haj's tenure (Gravois, 2007). But sometimes they have achieved their goal, as in the case of Norman Finkelstein's failed bid for tenure at DePaul University (Jaschik, 2007). These political pressures have also affected other realms of academic research and life. For example, our survey respondents reported that some funding sources have started to constrain where research can be done and how it is framed. The case of the Irvine 11 drew national attention to questions of freedom of expression on university campuses when eleven Muslim students were arrested for conspiring to interrupt, and later successfully interrupting, a speech by Israeli Ambassador to the United States at the UC Irvine campus (Cruz et al., 2011). These contests over academic freedom are playing out on new stages as well, as increasingly prevalent forms of social media like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube raise new questions about privacy and access to information. The case of U.S. historian William Cronon, whose University of Wisconsin email account was subject to disclosure under the state's Open Records Law in early 2011 after a politically controversial posting that he made

on a blog, is illustrative.<sup>1</sup>

One of the aims of this handbook is to equip scholars with the knowledge necessary to act effectively should they experience challenges to their freedom of expression. As many articles in the educational press have documented (see Appendix), assailments on academics continue to occur. Research conducted for this handbook reveals a disquieting pattern of interference with faculty members' syllabi, teaching methods, work with student organizations, and engagement with the media. This interference, felt most acutely by untenured and adjunct faculty, can come from many sources - department colleagues, university administrators, students, trustees, media pundits, organized campaigns by groups unrelated to the university, and local politicians. The revision committee further noted the continuation of a trend mentioned in the handbook's 2006 edition of increasingly vocal extra-academic organizations that seek to monitor the content of university courses and academic scholarship. Groups such as Students for Academic Freedom and Campus Watch pose not just ideological but also legal threats to academe's essential freedoms.

For university faculty, the current climate poses challenges to two interrelated requirements of their work: academic freedom and professional responsibility. These two pillars of academic vitality go hand in hand because academic freedom is an individual and institutional right that, like professional responsibility, promotes the public good. If you find your academic freedom and professional responsibility challenged, responding to this challenge will preserve not only your own interests, but also the right of other professors to teach, write, debate, and design curricula without fear of censure or censorship.

### Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is crucial to the capacity of institutions of higher education to explore new fields and offer challenging interpretations of historical, social, and political phenomena. Given that individual and institutional academic freedoms are not absolute, but contextual, and that students and teachers have complementary rights and duties, a wide variety of legal interpretations exist concerning the nature and limits of academic freedom. The U.S. Supreme Court recognizes a First Amendment right of institutional as well as individual academic freedom:

It is the business of a university to provide that atmosphere which is most conducive to speculation, experiment, and creation. It is an atmosphere in which there prevail “the four essential freedoms” of a university - to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study [stated by Justice Felix Frankfurter in *Sweezy v. New Hampshire* (354 U.S. 234 1957) and Justice Lewis Powell in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (438 U.S. 265 1978)].

In the current political climate, academics are working on a slippery legal slope. A recent “Legal Round-Up” by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) explores some of this terrain by examining troubling new legislative developments regarding academic freedom (Levinson and Westcott, 2010). Most notably, the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2006 ruling in *Garcetti*

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<sup>1</sup> For a longer account, see <http://scholarcitizen.williamcronon.net/2011/03/24/open-records-attack-on-academic-freedom/>

*v. Ceballos* (547 U.S. 410) clouded the clear protection of public employees under the so-called *Pickering-Connick* test. Though the court ruled that public employees speaking “pursuant to their official duties” are not speaking solely as private citizens, and therefore may not invoke First Amendment rights, the majority also issued a reservation that this “official duties” analysis may not apply to academic settings because “expression related to academic scholarship or classroom instruction implicates additional constitutional interests.” Nonetheless, the AAUP reports that “most courts faced with First Amendment claims by faculty members at public colleges and universities apply *Garcetti* as though the Supreme Court had never expressed that reservation” (ibid).

### Professional Responsibility

As teachers and professors, we have an obligation to fulfill our responsibilities in the classroom, in the wider university, and to the academe at large. Our professional responsibility as scholars and teachers demands that we impart to our students and colleagues our clearest understanding (based on the best research available, both our own and others) of the events and ideas central to our courses and research. To do less is to do a disservice to the profession. And yet, political pressure may lead professors to avoid asking the questions that are necessary to advance scholarship and knowledge, and instead to present "safe," rather than accurate, conclusions.

### Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook is best utilized *before* you encounter problems - and even before you walk into the classroom - so that you might avert damaging conflicts or have resources at the ready. However, it also offers concrete advice if you are in the middle of a crisis. The handbook presents a wide array of options of how to deal with issues of academic freedom. Different situations will call for different approaches. Among the institutional resources considered here are internal university structures, professional organizations, legal recourse, and media outlets. Also provided are pedagogical techniques for dealing with difficulties in the classroom and a useful bibliography of recent writings on academic freedom. The handbook is attuned most closely to academic freedom issues in the United States, but it may also be useful to scholars based elsewhere.

It should be clear from this handbook - as it was clear to us from our interviews with so many bold and resourceful academics - that the commitment to thoughtful, critical, and engaged teaching and scholarship that sometimes makes academics targets of attack also produces important skills that can help in a response. The original handbook was produced as a collaborative endeavor by members of the Taskforce on Middle East Anthropology, and the 2012 revision has continued this tradition. We have tried to learn from as many people as possible and to explore the diversity of tools available to assist academics in doing their jobs in sometimes difficult circumstances. The professional skills outlined in this handbook develop over time and through practice; this handbook is meant to facilitate that learning process, and to pool our collective experiences.

The Taskforce has created this handbook first as a practical tool for those who face, or could face, attacks for their work. Just as importantly, we also intend for it to encourage academics to be proactive in defending these core rights, rather than slip into self-censorship and thereby undermine the spirit of the university as we, and our students, have come to know it.

## University Resources

There are many formal and informal resources at colleges and universities that can assist faculty members who face attacks on their professional teaching and research responsibilities. Although seeking assistance from these university offices might seem like a natural first step, our interviews suggest that it is best to assess *ahead of time* which offices or people within your institution have the means and the commitment to assist faculty in such situations. There are examples of institutions that have given unconditional support when academic freedom is challenged, but these are in the minority. Many colleges and universities have failed to develop adequate procedures to protect their faculty in such situations. Hence you may find that some parts of your institution are supportive while others are not, especially when it comes to issues related to the Middle East and U.S. foreign policy. Getting a "read" on your institution in advance of any potential attack or controversy is important. If you determine that the general atmosphere is unsympathetic to targeted faculty, then you may want to consider drawing on the other resources in this handbook instead. This may help you preserve your relations within the institution in the long term. However, even if you do not draw on official university resources, it is generally good to keep relevant figures - like your department chair - abreast of major developments in the case of controversies, so they are aware of and come to trust your perspective.

When accessing institutional resources, it is important to remember that *institutions may need constant reminders that these are not isolated incidents but rather issues of academic freedom that affect the quality of education and research for everyone.*

There are several preliminary measures that you can take now to protect yourself in the event of an attack on your teaching or research.

- *Find allies.* Seek allies in your department, in other departments, and in the administration early on. Make academic freedom a part of your discussion with colleagues so you know where people stand on such issues. If you have been assigned a mentor, he/she may be able to provide advice on this matter, although we have found some evidence that administrators can use mentors to subtly curtail junior faculty members' academic freedom. Be aware of this possibility, but do not leap to conclusions about the motivations behind certain actions or comments. You may consider speaking to other academics at your institution, especially those working in the Middle East, to get advice on key figures with whom you might want to build alliances. It may be especially useful to build positive relationships with representatives to the faculty governing body (e.g., the faculty senate).

If you are in a contentious department, avoid getting involved with internal and institutional politics that could later undermine you. Instead, cultivate positive, collegial relationships with as many faculty members as possible. If you are perceived as an acolyte taking direction from one senior faculty member rather than another, their squabbles can infect your reputation and compromise your ability to flexibly and honestly call on otherwise natural allies if you are later faced with a crisis.



Also, it is extremely important to strengthen relationships with distinguished, tenured faculty, both within and outside your university. It is especially helpful to have external allies from a discipline *other* than Middle East Studies. These figures can emphasize the shared concern of academic freedom that is at stake even in controversies focused on Middle East scholars. Often these people can bring external pressure to bear on the university, a strategy that will be discussed later.

The importance of cultivating allies cannot be overemphasized, especially for junior faculty new to an institution.

- *Know your university policy and the national climate on academic freedom.* Know and keep a copy of your institution's policy on academic freedom. If your university does not have a policy in print, use the AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure (AAUP, 2006). Read the AAUP's monthly publication *Academe*, which regularly carries articles, analyses, case studies, and state-of-the-art legal updates on academic freedom<sup>2</sup>. As discussed in more detail in the pedagogy section, you might consider putting key sections of academic freedom documents into your syllabi.

You may encounter claims that you do not have a full right to free speech because you represent a university. This was an issue raised in the recent case against historian William Cronon for the commentary that he made on a personal blog. However, academic freedom codes, typical university practice, and legal analysis of free speech in the academe affirm your right to free speech, regardless of your university affiliation (Levinson and Westcott, 2010). University officials and administrators can be reminded of this fact by reference to the codes of academic freedom.

Another trend we have spotted is that some faculty who are critical of Israeli government policies are being accused of inciting "anti-Semitism" as a way to get around academic freedom guidelines, which obviously do not protect racist speech. Such accusations should be nipped in the bud by distinguishing between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism. Judith Butler's article in the *London Review of Books*, "No, It's Not Anti-Semitic," offers useful discussion of the distinction (Butler, 2003).

- *Prepare a paper (or digital) trail.* In extreme cases, or for particularly controversial classroom topics, you may wish to audiotape classroom sessions so that your words cannot later be twisted. Do be aware that you have to announce to the students that you are taping your lecture, and that some universities require you to obtain the students' permission before audio-taping. As noted elsewhere in the Handbook, it is crucial to write down comments or actions, implicit or explicit, that threaten academic freedom in the classroom.
- *Keep evidence of positive evaluations.* Keep your official end-of-course student evaluation results so that you might later provide evidence that most students are satisfied with the tenor of the course despite those few who complain.

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<sup>2</sup> Their online edition is at: <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/>.

- *Prepare for potentially controversial events.* If you are participating in an event that is likely to draw controversy, share a draft of your planned comments with a trusted and experienced colleague. You may want to consider taping the event or having a "witness" attend (ideally a senior administrator), so that later misrepresentations of the event can be countered. One of our interviewees said that a budding controversy was avoided because a top administrator had attended the event in question and saw nothing untoward. Some administrators said that they would appreciate being informed in advance if an event might cause controversy so that they can be prepared, and some professors recommended this approach. However, you should try to assess whether the administration wants to be prepared so that they can support the event or so that they can curtail or block the event.

In the event of an attack on your formal teaching activities, research, or public educational work, the following university resources may be accessed, depending on your preliminary read of the institution.

- *Call on allies.* You can motivate your network of allies in a number of ways, but you should remember that they will need motivating. Do not expect people to know automatically that you are in need of help, to jump to your defense, or even to know what to do to support you. In the normal course of events, an instructor would go to a chair with a problem and then perhaps to the dean. In most cases, both chairs and deans are supportive of their faculty and their right to teach methods and material as they see fit, as well as their right to free speech, research, publication, etc. Chairs and deans are used to dealing with complaints (especially from students) and can often diffuse them. You may consider asking your chairperson to speak with the persons attacking you (if inside the university), or their chairperson. These figures might be able to start a process of mediation. You can also ask your chairperson to advocate on your behalf with the administration, to remind them that this is an issue of academic freedom. However, unless your chair and/or dean is very supportive, it is also wise to contact other parties within the university so that others are made aware of what is going on.
- *Faculty governance.* You might consider bringing the issue before the faculty governing body, such as a faculty senate, an academic standards and policy committee, a formal employee grievance committee, or an honor council. Often faculty members are simply unaware that attacks to academic freedom are going on. When you make the case that if it can happen to you, then it can happen to them, they may be inclined to support you.
- *Letter campaign.* For more major breaches of your academic freedom, you or a close colleague can initiate a campaign to have letters of support written in your defense either to top administrators or (in spectacular cases) to the local media. These can be written by students, colleagues, and chairs of your department, and by your allies outside the university. Our research suggests that letters written by external allies and especially by heads of academic associations often carry the most weight and can help galvanize the administration to do the right thing. For example, after Kristofer Peterson-Overton's employment offer was rescinded by Brooklyn College over objections to his "anti-Israel" syllabus, his campaign for reappointment was successful

in large part because he and his allies were able to mobilize senior department members, gather letters of support from within and outside of the university, and publish some of these letters in the school's newsletter (Huffington Post, 2011).

- *Ombuds office.* The Ombuds office is a body within the institution that can provide neutral and confidential resolutions to problems, particularly for internal disputes among faculty and between faculty and their departments, the administration, or students. Usually the office can suggest the appropriate steps to be taken, assess the issue within the context of the institution and its history, and provide mediation services. They are particularly useful for the less empowered or connected within the university as they understand the power dynamics involved and act accordingly. Such mediation services may not go under the name "Ombuds" at every institution; they may be provided by an honor council, judicial council, office of college relations, or human resources office, instead.
- *Deans of students.* For classroom issues with students, consider having your chair speak to the student, or informing the Dean of Students, the chair of their department, or some other mediator. Some of our interviewees suggested, though, that when the attacks are very minor, or are completely outrageous, bringing the case before a third party only emboldens the student and gives credence to the attack. It is up to you to decide which classroom problems are best dealt with by you and when to bring in a third party. You might want to ask a senior colleague for advice. Oftentimes just talking with the student about the goals of university education can defuse some of the tension.
- *Public relations offices.* If you are attacked in the media, your institution may be willing to support you. Many institutions have an office of communications or some other public relations body. Such offices are dedicated to the preservation of the university. They discourage behavior that might jeopardize the university, its educational mission, or its reputation. Be aware that representatives of this office may determine that you (not the attackers) are doing the jeopardizing. In this situation, you may need to educate them about academic freedom and put them in touch with the AAUP or other relevant organizations. Remember that these offices are not staffed by academics, and many of the staff come from the business world, which has different standards. See if they have defended faculty members in the past. You can also speak with someone in that office to assess how they would respond in a potential or extant controversy. You might want to provide positive examples of how other universities have dealt with similar controversies in the public realm. If necessary, remind them to refer to the academic freedom code. In order to best make use of this resource, be sure your institution's public relations office knows who you are *before* trouble arises. As soon as you arrive on campus, offer your name as part of a speaker's bureau or as a contact for the media regarding your area of expertise. Personal relations count for a lot here. If you have a history of helping your institution's public relations office when a reporter calls, they are more likely to offer personal and extensive support if you are attacked in the press.
- *Legal affairs offices.* See the Legal Resources section of the handbook for information on university legal affairs offices.

## Professional Organizations

One young academic we interviewed, a professor who has been subjected to some fairly virulent attacks and who has gotten little support from her university, wondered what assistance she might be able to get from outside organizations like the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) or other professional organizations. Given how alone she felt “at home,” she wanted outside institutionalized support to bring pressure to bear on the university. Just how ready, though, are these professional associations - of which almost all of us are members - to offer help to academics struggling with attacks on their teaching and research?

Some professional organizations seem to be more attuned to issues of academic freedom than others. The Middle East Studies Association (MESA), for example, has a Committee on Academic Freedom, which monitors infringements on the academic freedom of scholars working in and on this region, documents these cases and, where it deems appropriate, takes specific actions. Our interviews suggested, though, that other professional organizations have not always been strong advocates in cases where academic freedom has been violated. While some interviewees reported only positive interactions with their professional organizations, others felt that these organizations were hesitant to get involved. Organizations without considerable experience defending academic freedom publicly may not have an established mechanism to respond, and may have differing levels of comfort with providing public support. In such cases, scholars facing threats may need to be more assertive in requesting assistance from these professional organizations.

Conversations with some of these organizations indicate that their most common response to academic freedom cases is to write a letter to the university in question. The American Academy of Religion (AAR) reported in 2006 that its procedure, when approached to deal with attacks on professors, is to forward the case to the board, which gathers as much information as possible about the situation. If the board believes a response is warranted, they write a letter to the university administration. A useful reference on this is the archive of intervention letters sent by the MESA Committee on Academic Freedom since 2001, which is published on the MESA website.<sup>3</sup> While the effectiveness of such letters is difficult to gauge, a few of our interviewees said that they do make a difference. If you choose to approach an organization for assistance, it is a good idea to discuss your issue in broader academic freedom terms rather than ones narrowly defined by geographic area.

If you are a member of multiple organizations, you will have to decide which one to approach for support. Many scholars who work on the Middle East belong to both the Middle East Studies Association and another discipline-based organization. Our research suggests that people facing challenges to their academic freedom related to their work on the Middle East are more likely to turn to support from MESA than from their disciplinary organizations. MESA indicated that the organization is willing to write letters in support of scholars facing challenges, irrespective of their official status as members of the organization. They also have representatives who oversee challenges to the academic freedom of scholars based in the US and in the MENA region. It is important to note, however, that there is a history of attacks launched at the organization itself. One of our interviewees therefore recommended

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/committees/academic-freedom/intervention/index.html>

contacting a disciplinary association as well as MESA. Even if this organization is limited in what it can do concretely to improve your situation, letting your colleagues in the broader academic community know what is going on may help build more general support for academics under attack.

In thinking about whether to approach professional organizations for assistance, you should keep their limitations in mind. They may not be able to invest a great deal in your case, but a letter from them can be one part of a wider strategy of reminding the university of its obligation to protect you and make it possible for you to do your job. As a member, it is certainly appropriate for you to seek their assistance. And even if you do not gain official support from the organization, a call on their help may garner support from fellow members on an individual basis.

If you want to get in touch with professional organizations for assistance, here is some contact information:

**American Anthropological Association (AAA):**

Damon Dozier  
Director of Public Affairs  
ddozier@aaanet.org. 703-528-1902, ext. 1163

**American Academy of Religion (AAR):**

Susan Snider  
Director of External Relations  
ssnider@aarweb.org. 404-727-4725

**American Association of University Professors (AAUP):**

Gregory F. Scholtz  
Associate Secretary and Director  
Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance  
gscholtz@aaup.org. 202-737-5900

**American Historical Association (AHA):**

Robert B. Townsend  
Deputy Director  
rtownsend@historians.org. 202-544-2422, ext. 118

**American Political Science Association (APSA):**

Elizabeth H. Super  
Associate Director, International Programs  
info@apsanet.org. 202-483-2512, ext. 0996

**Middle East Studies Association (MESA):**

Laurie Brand  
Chair  
Academic Freedom Committee  
brand@usc.edu. 520-621-5850

## Media Resources

The news media can be a resource during a crisis, but the media can also pull an issue out of your control, and some kinds of coverage may hurt as much as help. Whether you contact a journalist or a journalist contacts you, when dealing with members of the press, you must know what you want to achieve from a media contact and carefully set the terms of discussion.

Remember that the media are working under their own imperatives to find stories that they perceive will be gripping and accessible to their audiences, and thus their goals are often quite different from your own. Be aware that academic crises such as your own may not be considered “newsworthy.” In cases concerning academic freedom that have gained media attention, according to our research, journalists were sometimes more interested in the individual backgrounds of those involved than in the relevant issues.

If you know a journalist or media organization well and anticipate that they will be able to cover your issue fairly, or if you have experience dealing with the media, you may consider initiating contact with a journalist. This section will also be useful to you if you are contacted by a journalist and wish to create a media strategy. Even if you choose not to use the media to raise the profile of your case, you should anticipate whether the other side might be using news media, and be ready to respond accordingly.

Academic and educational media—including local and regional newsletters as well as national educational media like *Academe*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *Inside Higher Ed*—are most likely to be interested. Their coverage can rally the support of colleagues and an interested public. Local and regional media are more accessible than national media. Progressive and alternative media may also be interested in your story, especially outlets like *Democracy Now!* and Electronic Intifada, which cover academic controversies.

### Before a Crisis

If you already have established contact with local journalists, they may be more likely to hear you out during a crisis. While doing outreach to journalists is not for everyone, it can establish you as a trusted source, and it can help raise the local level of discussion on the Middle East. Being a media contact also helps you hone media skills when the stakes are not as urgent. Here are a few tips for such media work:

- *Make media contacts.* Cultivate relationships with television, radio, and newspaper journalists, including editorial writers. Not uncommonly, these fields overlap, so contacting key figures will have far-reaching effects. For instance, some newspaper columnists also appear on television and radio talk shows and can help to convey your message to multiple audiences. One seemingly insignificant talk show on local TV at 8 a.m. on Sunday morning will have thousands of regular viewers.
- *Find alternative and progressive voices.* It may be useful to do outreach with journalists known for their progressive stance or to those working for smaller, alternative media

outlets.

- *Contact journalists who don't agree with you.* Contact journalists who seem open to your views first, but then move on to journalists who take stances contrary to your own. You can also reach out to their editors. You may find that your social/intellectual capital as a scholar makes these journalists open to listening to you.
- *Commend journalists for good work.* Praising journalists when they do something well is a good way to start a relationship with a journalist. If you are interested in developing a relationship, commending a journalist for an article might make that journalist open to meeting in person and talking at greater length about wider issues. Especially if facing criticism on other fronts, an embattled journalist may take advantage of a meeting with you to cultivate approving voices and opinions.
- *Meet journalists in person.* Make every effort to set up an actual "sit-down" meeting with individual journalists and TV personalities. Try to meet with one of them at a time and consider bringing two or three faculty members. Frame these discussions as an opportunity for exchange from which both parties can benefit. Try also to invite these journalists to scholarly events on campus.

### **During a Crisis**

Journalists we spoke to said that they thought their organizations would be interested in stories of academics being harassed, especially if the incident in question was framed as an example of a broader phenomenon. Journalists are always looking for a story and a new angle. When you approach journalists, be prepared with both these elements.

If you would like media attention and are not already in contact with an appropriate journalist, try asking a trusted colleague to make the first call to a journalist. This colleague is not at the center of the crisis, and thus will seem more "neutral," but will still have the authority of a faculty member.

Whether you are the scholar in crisis or you are speaking in support of a colleague, to successfully deal with the media, you must prepare before you pick up the phone.

*To prepare a media strategy:*

- *Select a media organization and a journalist appropriate for the story.* Do research on journalists and media organizations, and select a journalist you think will be interested in your story and open to your perspectives.
- *Research journalists.* If a journalist is contacting you, learn out about their work before speaking. Read past articles and do internet research. Speak to colleagues familiar with the journalist.
- *Frame the story.* Think of how to frame the entire story in terms of a narrative and

values that will interest journalists and fit into public discussions. For example, you might say, "This strikes me as a real case of censorship, if nothing else."

- *Key data points.* In making this incident part of a larger narrative, offer three key data points. "This is one example, and it is especially worrisome because a similar incident is occurring in X other institution..." Or, "This is an escalating problem, as we can see from these other developments at the institution..." A reporter will be more likely to take this on if a) they don't have to start from the ground up, and b) if you, the source, understands what a story looks like.
- *Have sound bites ready.* Think preemptively about the questions the journalist will ask, and have pithy quotes and pieces of information prepared. Make sure the quotes are clear, not full of jargon, and speak directly to the narrative frame you have identified.
- *Anticipate.* Have a larger media strategy ready. Have op-ed articles, letters to the editor, and responses to backlash prepared. Gather a list of other people who would be willing to talk to the media or write letters on behalf of the issue. Make sure these people will appear credible to journalists. Talk to them about the angle you are trying to promote, and encourage them to stay "on message." Share with them the tips from this handbook.
- *Invite journalists to key events.* If you are having any events relevant to the case - speaking symposia, protests, workshops, etc. - invite the journalists to these activities. It is easier for journalists to cover events than issues. At these events, you might designate a few key (and prepared) people to speak to the press, and urge others to refer journalists to these people.

#### *Targeting editorials:*

- *Attract the attention of a columnist.* One option is to use the above tips to get the story to a sympathetic columnist. In op-eds, journalists can be less concerned about "balance" and might be able to take a stronger stance on your behalf.
- *Collect your own op-eds.* If you can get op-ed space in an educational publication or in a local or university paper, you might ask a prominent figure who supports you or your issue to author the piece. You can offer to help with the writing. Think carefully about who would be a prominent figure to publish the piece.

#### *During your conversation with a journalist:*

- *Be flexible.* Be sensitive to the schedule of the journalist. Try not to call on the day or the hour of their publication's deadline. Be open to calling back if you call at a busy time. Ask, "Is now a good time?" or "Can we set up a good time to talk?" This will give the journalist more time to listen to you.
- *Use the journalist as a resource.* If the journalist you contact says this is not her beat, or she is busy, say, "I understand. So, if you were in my shoes, who would you



consider calling for this kind of a story?"

- *Set the guidelines for your interaction.* Stay in control of how your words will be used. You can specify what statements you want quoted, and what you want "off the record." Off-the-record statements can be used as context, but will not be directly quoted or attributed to you. Making statements off-the-record can be a good way of giving journalists background information and your interpretation of a story.
- *Convey objectivity.* Especially if you are giving a journalist the first tip on a story, and you are posed as the "neutral" outsider, do not emphasize that you are affiliated with political organizations. Be honest about your identity, but focus on your credibility as an expert in your field.
- *Speak journalists' language.* Keep in mind a journalist's imperative for objectivity, and make yourself into an ideal source:
  - a) Try to show that you are trustworthy and unemotional.
  - b) Communicate that you understand the concerns of all parties.
  - c) Try not to use polarizing or overly ideological language.
  - d) Offer clear and simple pieces of information that can be verified.
  - e) If you are not involved in the conflict, you might be able to speak from both sides.
- *Use email when appropriate.* A journalist might ask you for an email if she is busy. Emails can help you to choose your words carefully.

*After you speak to a journalist:*

- *Make your own media archive.* Keep a copy of all media coverage of the issue, and evaluate how both you and the journalist handled the issue each time. Which sound bites worked? Which were unclear? Toward which points did the journalist gravitate? This will help you improve your media skills and choose the right journalist to contact in the future.
- *Give positive feedback.* Remember to praise journalists who cover your perspective well, whether or not they quoted you. This may lead to more productive conversations with this journalist in the future.
- *Invite journalists to follow-up events.*

## **Tips on Working with Different Kinds of Media**

When choosing a media outlet, consider its range and scope.

- *Student newspapers:* You might consider starting small, with an op-ed in the student newspaper. If possible, find a sympathetic editor. When that article comes out, be ready. Have supporters write letters to the editor in response to the op-ed, even before opposition letters arrive. If the opposite side mobilizes, they will be on the defensive.

It is also important to choose your venue carefully. Know about the profile of the newspaper you are contacting: Is it a top campus newspaper, read widely at the university? Do professors often publish in this paper? According to some people's experiences, deans and administrators may find it unprofessional for professors to approach student newspapers as an avenue for debate, because on some campuses they are a voice and venue of students, rather than professors.

- *Local newspapers:* Many local papers may not approach freedom of speech issues related to the Middle East if it seems to be a distant issue. You will need to find a way to express the issue's local relevance. Find a well-known local resident or organization—whether an ethnic association, religious organization, political group, or student group, who can help get the story in the media. Ask these groups about their own connections to the local media. For example, if there is a local progressive leader, call that person's office and say, "I'm just calling to let you know there's a worrisome situation of censorship starting to unfold, in case calls come your way. Would you put out a press release in support of academic freedom?" Ask this figure for advice about who else to contact, and what media might be useful.
- *Alternative/independent/activist media:* These venues might be easier to access, and they can help create a buzz that will move your issue into bigger media outlets. Such venues may also be more experienced in covering these kinds of issues. Of course, be aware of how stories move, and know that a quote given to an activist newspaper might be placed in different contexts and sound more inflammatory. Do not use jargon or polarizing terms when you are offering on-the-record quotes - and, again, be clear about when you are on or off the record!
- *Online media:* News websites, like Electronic Intifada, might be interested in covering your story. It also could be worth connecting with influential bloggers. Before contacting these sources, it is important to consider how it may be more difficult to control how information posted online is used and in what context.
- *National media:* Go national when there is a sustained slander campaign, especially at a large or nationally known university. Be ready for antagonistic national organizations to launch an opposing campaign.

## Legal Resources

Faculty members who are impugned for their work - either in press or in person - may wonder whether a legal response is warranted. In recent years, it is notable how few professors facing threats to academic freedom have chosen a legal route. There is, however, a clear legal and philosophical basis for academic freedom. The First Amendment states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." In a specifically academic context, the professional standard of academic freedom is defined by the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, which was developed by the AAUP and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. This foundational statement on academic freedom for faculty in U.S. higher education has been consistently endorsed by nearly 200 scholarly and professional organizations, and is incorporated into hundreds of college and university faculty handbooks.

According to the 1940 Statement,

Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties. . . Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter that has no relation to their subject. . . College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution... (AAUP, 2006)

The First Amendment safeguards freedom of expression from regulation by public institutions, including public colleges and universities. The AAUP's definition of academic freedom focuses on rights within the educational contexts of teaching, learning, and research both inside and outside of the classroom in private as well as at public institutions. Although the U.S. Supreme Court has consistently acknowledged academic freedom as a First Amendment right, the scope of the Amendment's right of academic freedom for university faculty remains unclear (e.g., *Garcetti v. Ceballos*, 547 U.S. 410, 2006), and is vulnerable to contest and challenge during periods of social and political tension and instability.

Scholars can pursue legal action against libelous claims and misuse of their writings, photographs, or other academic productions. For instance, Stanford University Professor Joel Beinin brought a lawsuit to defend his intellectual property rights to a photo of himself that appeared on the cover of a booklet entitled "Campus Support for Terrorism," published and distributed by conservative author David Horowitz. A number of professors have been attacked by conservative groups in recent years, but Beinin was the first to respond with legal action. His suit did not address libel or free speech issues, but rather the publisher's use of his photo without his permission. This is an example of the strategic decisions faculty can make when

determining whether to take a legal approach to a problem.

Here are some steps you should take before deciding to seek legal assistance:

- *Do research on your institution.* Map out the institutional and contextual "terrain" of your college or university by locating potential networks and alliances throughout the hierarchy of the university and beyond. Know any specific regulations regarding political activities at your institution. These regulations may vary according to the public/private, religious/secular nature of your institution. For example, they may stipulate that you disassociate yourself from the university in your political involvement by not using university resources or by stating that you do not represent your university.<sup>4</sup> Study the cases of other academics facing academic freedom threats and consider how other institutions have acted. Are faculty members in other departments also being subjected to implicit or explicit violations of their academic freedom of speech? If so, why? How have department chairs, deans, vice presidents, board of trustee members and alumni dealt with these pressures? If you are teaching in a small private college with clear denominational affiliations, ascertain whether or not particular perspectives, debates, and ideas are discouraged on your campus as a matter of principle. Keep in mind that internal contractual obligations may include institutional rules and regulations, letters of appointment, faculty handbooks, and, where applicable, collective bargaining agreements. Academic freedom rights are often explicitly incorporated into faculty handbooks, which are sometimes held to be legally binding contracts. See the handbook's University Resources section for more details on this matter.
- *Attentive observation.* Be aware of warning signs such as the establishment on campus of an activist group with an agenda detrimental to the integrity of research and education. Our research has found that some students surreptitiously record classes for the purposes of informing a third party. Find out what your state laws and university policy require in terms of consent. U.S. federal regulations and most states require only one party in a conversation to consent to recording, but in 12 states consent must be obtained from all parties.<sup>5</sup> Inform students, especially those from such organizations, about any requirements to obtain your permission.
- *Recordkeeping.* Keep a detailed daily log of all instances, verbal or non-verbal, of implicit or explicit harassment or targeting.
- *Collegiality.* Remain engaged, open, cordial, and calm during interactions with faculty, administrators, the press, alumni, and students. Be assertive without being offensive. Remember that freedom of expression entails responsible expression, in or outside of the classroom.
- *Openness.* If you see a legal problem on the horizon, it is best to keep your chair updated

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<sup>4</sup> For an example of guidelines on political activities, see Ohio State's "Political Activity Guidelines for Employees" (<http://legal.osu.edu/politicalactivity.php>).

<sup>5</sup> This issue is further clouded in that the requirement for consent holds only if there is a reasonable expectation of privacy, and no clear interpretation exists across states for whether classrooms or university campuses are public or private space.

on developments. For example, if a government agency seeks to interview you, inform your chair, or, if you have a strong relationship with him or her, your dean, so that they will not be surprised later, and so they know your perspective on events.

- *Legislative research.* Be aware of state and federal privacy laws and of what parts of your writing are protected by these laws. If you work for a state institution, for example, consider keeping separate email accounts for university-related business and personal comment and political engagement. Monitor and stay up-to-date with all relevant developments in legislation concerning academic freedom. Some groups are employing a two-prong approach: targeting specific professors or departments on one hand, while also lobbying for far-reaching changes at the national and state legislative levels on the other. Since determinations of academic freedom are subject to interpretation, and the current political atmosphere is one in which particular interpretations of legal precedent may prevail to the detriment of academics, to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Ideally, taking cases to court should be the last resort for faculty members facing threats to their academic freedom, and even their careers, after all other avenues (detailed elsewhere in this handbook) have failed. The costs of litigation are usually considerable, but exact fees are always worked out between the faculty member and the attorney. The amount of time for a case will depend on its complexity and how much time, energy, and money a faculty member wishes to put into litigation. Years, not months, is the invariable time frame.

If you decide to seek legal counsel there are a number of places to turn for guidance:

- *University legal affairs offices:* Your university's legal affairs office may offer you advice and/or representation. However, it will only represent you if your case has to do directly with your role in the university. Be aware that these offices are fundamentally concerned with protecting the university's legal interests, and they may not see your case as fitting easily within those interests. As Ohio State University's legal office puts it on their webpage, "Office of Legal Affairs attorneys provide legal advice and representation to faculty and staff in matters arising out of their university responsibilities. We cannot provide assistance to faculty and staff with respect to personal legal disputes or when their interests are adverse to those of the university."<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, this office may be a good place to start searching for representation or guidance. Some legal offices recommend that if you are being subpoenaed, you should notify your legal affairs office of this development. If your university does represent you, they may cover not only your legal fees but also the costs of any settlements.
- *Law clinics.* If your university has a law school, it may also have a law clinic that could handle your case.
- *AAUP:* Contact the American Association for University Professors' Legal Affairs office (Mr. Jon Knight, Liaison, [jknight@aaup.org](mailto:jknight@aaup.org)) and obtain the AAUP's recent publication, *Policy Documents and Reports*, also known as the Redbook. For information on how to purchase the Redbook, call Johns Hopkins University Press at (800) 537-5487. (The ISBN number is 0-9649548-3-4.) For advice and assistance, you can also contact the office of Academic Freedom and Tenure at the AAUP (Susan Smee at [ssmee@aaup.org](mailto:ssmee@aaup.org)).

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://legal.osu.edu/faculty.php>

or a local chapter of the AAUP. The AAUP maintains an updated list of attorneys and can refer you to appropriate lawyers on this list, as well as provide general guidance on what is involved in litigation.

- *Teachers' unions.* On those campuses where the faculty members are represented by a union, you can call upon union officials for assistance.
- *ACLU:* Another important resource for those seeking advice about, or assistance with, legal action is the American Civil Liberties Union.<sup>7</sup>
- *ADC:* Arab-American faculty members may wish to contact the Legal Affairs division of the Arab-American Anti-discrimination Council (ADC) in Washington, DC.<sup>8</sup>

Staff members at the AAUP, ACLU, your union, and/or the ADC can provide guidance on whether and how to retain legal counsel, where to find the appropriate lawyers, and what to expect if you choose a legal route.

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<sup>7</sup> See, <http://www.aclu.org/free-speech>.

<sup>8</sup> See, <http://www.adc.org/legal/>.

## Teaching the Middle East: Pedagogical Techniques

Recent threats to academic freedom have often rested on the largely erroneous claim that college classrooms are bastions of liberal bias where conservative students are denied their academic freedom. The AAUP notes, for example, that "self-identified 'conservatives' are calling for 'political diversity' in the classroom and for monitoring by students of teachers on college and university campuses for perceived 'liberal bias' in their classroom presentations" (AAUP, 2012). There are local and national organizations that now encourage (and sometimes pay) students to report on faculty members who include in their teaching non-conservative viewpoints, especially regarding the Middle East and U.S. foreign policy, but also regarding issues like affirmative action and Supreme Court appointments. Faculty members may also have their syllabi and teaching methods scrutinized by other faculty members, administrators, and trustees. Meanwhile, professors are increasingly encountering students who express their viewpoints in a hostile manner, sometimes targeting the teacher or other students in the class, and creating a repressive environment not conducive to the free exchange of ideas.

Our research has suggested that many (especially untenured) professors respond to these developments by avoiding teaching and discussion of controversial issues altogether, or by self-censoring their coverage of these issues in the classroom. Some professors reported that they feel like they are “walking on eggshells” or “walking in a mine-field” in their teaching and research on the region. Clearly, if we are to fulfill our educational mission to impart to our students the spirit of critical inquiry and the importance of reasoned argument and scholarship, avoidance and self-censorship are not sound pedagogical strategies.

At the same time, our research suggests that many professors working on the Middle East go to great lengths to actively foster a classroom environment that is open to discussing multiple points of view. The perception of this region as always being embroiled in controversy or conflict actually gives some professors greater latitude to explore “sensitive topics.” In addition, our research suggests that for some professors, being scholars of a region that is constantly in the news and the center of public attention leads to their expertise being valued more within their home institutions.

For many professors, the “Arab Spring” has become an excellent counter-argument to pervasive negative stereotypes about the Middle East. They report that student perceptions of the Middle East have improved as the uprisings have “humanized” Arabs. These events have led many of those who responded to our survey to revise – in some cases, create anew – their course syllabi, often relying heavily on online sources, including social media like Twitter, for up-to-date information and analysis on the unfolding events of the Arab Spring.

In this climate of both continuing challenges and new opportunities, how can we do the educational job that we are entrusted to do? We present here some concrete advice on how to prevent and manage threats to your classroom and pedagogical practice. This advice can be useful not only for classroom use, but also for mediation in public events, such as round tables and lecture series.

## Preparing To Teach: Before Entering the Classroom

- *Know your university's policies on academic freedom and on student conduct.* Find and keep a copy of your institution's policy on academic freedom. If your university does not have a policy in print, use the AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure (AAUP, 2006).
- *Find and keep a copy of your institution's code of student conduct.* This code of conduct might also be referred to as a "code of academic conduct" or an "academic honor code." In most cases it is meant to regulate students' behavior and student/professor interactions both inside and outside the classroom.
- *Draw up classroom guidelines.* It is extremely important that you set the proper tone for your classes at the beginning of each semester. Therefore, before you enter the classroom, consider drawing up specific guidelines for class participation and discussion, with the codes of conduct in mind. Our research strongly suggests that reminding students of what constitutes proper and productive classroom participation goes a long way towards avoiding unconstructive behavior later on. You can discuss what constitutes the constructive debating of ideas and remind them that this is how learning takes place. For suggestions on specific classroom guidelines see the "In the Classroom" section below.
- *Prepare preventative syllabi.* Consider articulating the standards for debate and academic freedom in your syllabi by making use of authoritative texts on these subjects. Such texts might include relevant sections of the academic freedom policy, statements on what constitutes academic dishonesty, sections of an academic honor code, and statements on how discussion will be run and the presentation of dissenting views handled. Our research suggests that it is constructive to clearly inform students of your expectations and the conventions of the system in which they are functioning. These guidelines, set in print, help students remember that the ideal college classroom is a place for respectful debates, disagreement, and controversy in relation to the topics of the class. You might also have students and instructors sign an agreement that all are bound by these policies as a prerequisite for participating in the class.
- *Class recordings.* Decide ahead of time how you will handle the issue of students' requests to record your classes. You may wish to make a general announcement about recording on the first day of class or on the syllabus. If you discover that your classes were recorded without your permission, you should have a prepared response. You should check with the regulations on recording at your institution (if they have any). Many universities require that a person obtain each student's permission in order to record. You should also check state regulations.<sup>9</sup>

If you know you will be teaching in a particularly hostile environment, or are teaching a particularly sensitive issue, you yourself might want to record your classes so that you have evidence of exactly what was said, in case of future problems. If accusers twist your words, a recording gives you the tools to set the facts straight. This can be helpful if you are

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on the issue of taping and potentially controversial events, see the Legal Resources section of this handbook.



accused of supporting terrorism or racism for example. If you do decide to record, be sure that you understand your institution's and state's guidelines about recording classes and obtain students' permission if necessary.

- *Classroom material selection.* Increasingly, students, other faculty members, and administrators are questioning the contents of our syllabi. You should be prepared ahead of time to answer questions about your choice of classroom materials, particularly if you are introducing any material that could be regarded as controversial. You may be called upon to defend why a reading is pedagogically useful and not propaganda.

When teaching controversial subjects, assess whether your attempts to introduce scholarly disagreement would be recognizable as such to the lay public. You may wish to consider including readings that would be more obviously understood by non-experts as representative of different viewpoints, and/or to highlight on the syllabus the fact that these are different viewpoints.

- *Review your online presence.* Before the semester begins, review your online presence with an eye to whether there is any information that you would rather the students in your class not see. If you anticipate potential problems, consider adjusting your privacy settings.

### **In the Classroom: Setting the Tone**

- The tone you set on the first day of class is extremely important. You should establish a safe and open atmosphere. Let students know that they are welcome to express their views, but that there are certain parameters that must be respected. Consider highlighting sections of the syllabus that deal with classroom conduct and explaining the institution's codes of student conduct and academic freedom.
- Make it clear that you welcome the free exchange of ideas as long as the rules of civility in the classroom are maintained. Specify exactly which sort of behaviors constitute civility and are acceptable and which are not. For example, asking a brief question during lecture is acceptable, whereas snickering or interrupting the professor by blurting out a nasty editorial comment is not. Politely disagreeing with or raising questions about points raised by the instructor or another student during discussion is acceptable, but denigrating others through personal remarks is not. Emphasize that students may disagree with each others' views only through solid scholarly argumentation and mutual respect, and that inflammatory language will not be tolerated. You should also be very specific about the actions you will take if these policies are broken. These actions can include extra assignments, dismissal of a particular student or class section, or notification of university authorities.
- Consider stressing to your students that one of your goals as an instructor is to teach them how to think, write, and speak in a scholarly manner. This necessarily involves disagreements and debates, but these must be backed up by solid argumentation and, where possible, reference to scholarly sources. Explain the difference between a scholarly argument and a personal opinion, and emphasize that all class contributions should be relevant to the course material. Consider defining for your students what "thinking critically" means and tell them that they are welcome to question each other and the professor in order to come up with better questions and answers to the problems being discussed. By inviting students to critique everything, you can avoid complaints of

indoctrination. Furthermore, this means that the professor does not have to do all the critiquing. If a student says something unreasonable, other students are trained to deal with the situation.

- You may have to remind students of these points throughout the semester.
- Be aware of the ways that certain topics could be construed as outside the purview of the class that you are teaching, and be ready to explain to students the topics' relevance to larger course themes.
- Off-the-cuff remarks or jokes can make classes interesting and can engage the creativity of you and your students. However, be aware that these remarks must also meet standards you have set regarding respectful and critical academic discussions.
- Be prepared to keep a record of every difficulty that might occur with particularly problematic students, in case you need to defend yourself later on.

### **Helpful Teaching Techniques**

- When teaching controversial subjects, it can be helpful to introduce the discussion by acknowledging that students may have widely divergent views of the subject and that it is important to respect others' opinions while debating them in a solid scholarly manner. When closing a discussion, you might consider encouraging students to continue exploring different opinions on the issue through constructive dialogue within and outside of class and through outside events on the topic.
- For lessons that will involve particularly unfamiliar or uncomfortable issues and ideas, consider strategies for introducing these topics with Socratic methods. For example, one professor noted in a survey response that past problems with students who have been unreceptive to new ideas has “led me to devise a number of problem-oriented lessons that lead students to make discoveries that are already widely held in the Middle East studies community.”
- Have students do small group discussions either in lieu of a larger class discussion, or before or after class discussion. This may take some of the pressure off of you, and can also be a good way of keeping students from one ideological "camp" from dominating discussion of the issue.
- Consider using formal debates, which are a good way to air multiple perspectives in the classroom, to ensure that one "side" does not dominate, and to teach students how to build constructive arguments. Set "ground rules" for the debate ahead of time, perhaps in consultation with the students. To reinforce the idea that learning is about good scholarly argumentation and not ideology, consider assigning students the perspective that they will argue from ahead of time so that they can prepare sound points. It can also be helpful to have students argue from a position contrary to the one that they personally hold.
- Use the tool of the "round," which involves posing a guiding question, then going around the room and giving each student a chance to speak without interruption, within a certain time limit. Then the floor can be opened up for general discussion. This approach vents as

many perspectives as possible while also ensuring that the discussion is not dominated by anyone.

- Give students a few moments to jot down their thoughts on a particular reading, question, or issue before sharing them. This technique can be used on its own preceding an open discussion or in combination with the "round" technique discussed above.

### **Handling “Hot Moments” in the Classroom**

- *Take a break.* Take a moment to collect your thoughts and breathe deeply, because you are not likely to respond in a pedagogically useful manner if your adrenaline is elevated. Give the class a brief break if possible. A pause sends the signal that you take the issue seriously, and will give students time to reflect on the issues raised. You might preface the brief pause by asking everyone to think for a moment about what just happened. If you find it impossible to collect your thoughts, tell the students that this is an important issue that you will bring back to discussion another day. This gives you ample time to prepare.
- *Do not ignore problems.* Do not ignore inappropriate comments or behavior, because this can send the message to other students that such comments are acceptable and could thereby increase student misbehavior and/or make other students feel unsafe. If the comment or behavior violates your rules of conduct, respond as you said you would at the beginning of the semester. At the same time, recognize that a potential for learning may exist in such situations. At your discretion, instead of pouncing on the student, put their comment in its larger context and ask other students for their views on it. (e.g., "Many people say such things. What might be the reasons that they do so? What are the possible critiques of such statements?")
- *Do not personalize remarks.* Try not to take remarks personally, even when they come as personal attacks. Such attacks are most likely made against you in your role as teacher or authority figure. Remember that both you and the group will be better served if you can keep some distance from the comments and find ways to use them to enhance student understanding.
- *Avoid attacking the offending student personally.* Although you may be tempted to harshly criticize a student who makes an offensive statement, this is not the best strategy. Doing so sends the message to other students that dissenting views will not be tolerated, and means that you will not be able to capitalize on the moment pedagogically.
- *Remember the other students.* You do not want to focus all of your energies on one or two disruptive students, because it will drain you and rob the other students of their education. Try to deal with the problem and move on.
- *Refocus discussion.* Always be sure to bring discussion back on track with reference to the topic/readings of the day, and (if necessary) with reference to the code of conduct. If you have lost control of the class, you can have the students briefly write down what the focus of the discussion should be and what was learned from the "hot moment," then go around the room and have them read their responses. This takes the pressure off of you and helps them learn to manage conflict.

- *Assign additional reading or writing.* You may consider assigning an additional reading or writing task that enables students to learn more about, and reflect on, the disagreement at hand.
- *Keep a record.* As mentioned above, it is wise to keep a written record of everything that occurred in the "hot moment" (including what you said and did) in case problems arise later on.

## **Sample Scenarios**

### **1. A student accuses you of bias in your teaching.**

Objections to the readings we assign, the terminology that we use, or the narratives we present to our students are a common occurrence while teaching. It is important to try and confront such accusations productively by turning them into teaching moments.

- Ask the student to clarify exactly what are the ways in which they think you, your terminology, or your readings are biased.
- Take the issue off yourself and put it on the table as a general topic of discussion. For example, if a student objects to your use of the term "occupation," ask the other students to draw on their course materials or other sources to discuss who uses this terminology and why, and who objects to it and why. Provide examples of alternative terminology (e.g. "disputed territories") and ask students to reflect on what political claims are contained in the use of particular language. If a student objects to a reading, ask students to discuss the perspectives contained in that reading, why the reading might be useful and what its limitations are.
- Do not shy away from defending your own choices in a non-confrontational, non-personalized manner. Some professors accomplish this by referring to their own expertise and training, which re-establishes them as an authority.
- If the student is especially disruptive or disrespectful, talk with them after class about their behavior. Make it clear that the issue is not a dissenting viewpoint or a difference in political opinion, but the way in which that viewpoint was expressed. Refer to existing guidelines for conduct in the classroom. Include a notation for yourself in your written record of classroom incidents.

### **2. A student makes an off-topic outburst in the middle of discussion or your lecture.**

- Acknowledge the student's concern and also point out that everyone in the room has individual responses and concerns.
- Decide whether you are ready and willing to engage with this topic now. If not, you might turn it into a writing assignment.

- Ask the other students if they would like to devote time to sharing views. If you do pursue a discussion, set a time frame. Alternatively, you could schedule a discussion for a later class and suggest ways that students could prepare for it.
- If a discussion seems inappropriate, or if other students resist having a discussion on the spot, point out the available forums on campus and encourage students to attend them, stay informed, and share their concerns.
- If you are unable to find a workable position in the moment, defer. Tell students that this is an important issue and that you will take it up at a later time. You then have time to plan strategies. This approach lets all the students in the room know that you take such occurrences seriously.

### **3. A student argues with you incessantly and when you attempt to deal with the behavior, s/he complains that you are silencing him or her.**

- If a student insists that you are not allowing them their opinion, when you disagree with or challenge a statement they have made, point out that you disagree because the statement does not correlate well with the session's material or because the student has not backed their statement up with reference to course materials. Then give them a chance to defend their statement in a scholarly manner.
- If the student begins to disrupt the discussion or the lecture, offer to talk privately after class or during office hours. If a student refuses to postpone a disagreement until after class or office hours and there is a danger that the class is becoming derailed, remain calm and consider giving the class a five minute break and speaking with the student in the hallway.
- Make apparent your willingness to discuss the issue calmly, but do not continue trying to reason with a student who is highly agitated. If you remain calm in the presence of the group, the student may soon become cooperative again. In an extreme case, you may have to ask the student to leave the classroom or even dismiss the section. Try to respond as calmly as possible and avoid escalating the incident.

### **4. A student makes a stereotypical remark about Arabs, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Republicans, women, etc.**

- Take the focus off the student who has made the offensive remark and reframe the topic for general discussion. Say something like: "Many people think this way. Why do they hold such views? What are their reasons?" and then, "Why do those who disagree hold other views?" This protects the student while also encouraging others who disagree to understand a view they dislike and then to argue their position later.
- Remind students of the code of student conduct and how it involves mutual respect. Remind them that it is their job to seek to understand each others' perspectives, as a prerequisite to understanding the subject at all. Ask them to listen carefully to other

points of view, to ask questions, and then to restate those contrasting points of view.

- Ask students to link the stereotyping of the particular group to stereotypes of other groups, helping them to see the broader picture.
- Ask students to write about the issue, either in class, giving a brief time for calm reflection before returning to discussion, or outside of class. You can ask them to do more research or reading on the subject and write a more balanced essay.
- Ask students to step back and reflect upon what they might learn from this moment. This can move the discussion to a level that helps everyone see what issues have been at stake and what the clash itself might mean.
- If the student persists in making offensive remarks, speak to them outside of class and tell them that their behavior is unacceptable. If necessary, notify a higher authority such as a chair or the dean of students.

### **Extreme Cases**

By following the advice above, you should be able to diffuse most classroom disputes. However, an extreme case may arise that you cannot handle on your own. If this happens and you have not been keeping a record of events, start keeping one immediately. If your attempts to deal with uncivil or disruptive students fail, consider having your chair speak to the student. Depending on your "read" of your institution (see "University Resources") you might consider informing the Dean of Students, the chair of their major department, or another mediator about the disruptive behavior. Asking a more senior colleague for advice can often be helpful. In very extreme cases you can consider filing a harassment or defamation lawsuit. For more information on this option, see the section of this handbook on Legal Resources.

## Appendix: Bibliographic Resources

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