

Tips about educating students about traumatic stress

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Undergraduate and Graduate Syllabi Informed Consent

- **Undergraduate syllabi:** It is likely that you will have strong feelings, values, and beliefs that will affect the way you interpret the scientific data. While diversity of opinion(s) is valued in the class, it is essential that students are able to accurately portray the current status of psychological research and theory, despite particular values about the curriculum. Second, given diversity of opinions and values, it is expected that all class members (including the professor) will treat one another with respect in all discussions and learn how to respectfully disagree and dialogue with one another. This is an essential skill necessary for scholarship to advance. Finally, although I encourage students to integrate personal experiences with research and theory, and emphasize this as an essential part of the learning process, I want to remind students that the classroom is not a substitution for psychotherapy. Students who are grappling with issues regarding course topics (e.g., personal experiences of sexual assault, health problems, sexuality) are encouraged to seek help at the XXXXX (Student counseling). Other facilities in the community include XXXX RAPE RESOURCE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCE < COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER. “
- **Graduate syllabi:** Some of the material we will cover in class may likely cause discomfort and anxiety. As psychologists in training, it is imperative that class members learn how to tolerate and work with intense affect, including your own. It is expected that students will struggle, learn, and seek help as needed. Students should carefully assess if they are currently able to face the emotional challenge of this material at the current time.

Tips on evocative films in undergraduate classes

- Announce in advance
- Give students opportunity to watch privately (in library) where they can start and stop
- Give students who need to leave a “cover story”
- Allow opportunities for processing film in written (possibly anonymous) formats as well as public formats

Framing classroom discussions for undergraduates

- Clarify role of teacher vs. therapist and explain issues of dual relationships
- Alerting people there are invisible survivors in the room – anonymous pre-survey, applying statistics to the numbers in the classroom
- Be aware of sexual violence on campus that may affect responses and be prepared to discuss this
- If focusing on interpersonal trauma in the classroom, it may be helpful to warn students that they may find that they may feel blamed or blame others and this is an automatic response to comprehending the high rates of violence and disaster. In particular focusing on the fact that men that they may feel blamed, responsible, even if that is not what class members or the teacher is saying. Preparing them for those reactions can help mitigate them
- Reminding students that if they feel helpless or blamed they may want to consider taking some pro-active stance

Classroom tips for undergraduates

- If experiential exercises are to be used, students need to be warned
- Follow up with students who drop the class to check on them
- Using anonymous and non-anonymous reaction papers to understand the class reactions. (Clarify if you will assess reaction papers on grammar or not ahead of time)

Running Labs for Graduate Students

- Lab manual has an introductory page on self-care, coping, resiliency, etc.
- Clarify expectations and types of feedback you will provide
- Warn students about vicarious traumatization and stress self-care
- In our labs, we read Campbell's book "Emotionally Involved"
- Periodically run discussion of self-care, reactions

Clinical Supervision

- Clarify role of gatekeeper, issues
- Tell students that I don't want to know about their personal issues but if I see therapeutic issues that need attention, I will alert them, ask them to consider. If they don't want to discuss that is fine but if after a few times or if dire issue (client is in jeopardy however, I might need to become more active

Newman, E. (1999). Ethical Issues in teaching about Violence against Women. *Women Studies Quarterly*, 27 (1-2), 197-202