

These syllabi statements were shared by professors at Whitman College. They address the issue of difficult conversations in the classroom.

Example 1

The topics that we're covering in this class are often difficult, not just intellectually but emotionally. While I expect there to be rigorous discussion and even disagreement in the course of our class discussions, I ask that you engage in discussion with care and empathy for the other members in the classroom. Aim to disagree without becoming disagreeable. In this class we will not shy away from the uncomfortable. Critically examining and assessing our most basic assumptions and values is not just one of the tasks of philosophy but is an activity vital to living an authentic life. I urge you to have the courage to the uncomfortable in this class. In exchange for your courage, I will work to ensure a classroom environment that supports your taking these intellectual and emotional risks.

Example 2

The academic model requires ongoing dialogue. It's how we spark ideas, develop questions, generate work, and find encouragement. Learning depends upon finding insights and answers beyond your first superficial reactions, and extended discussion with others is a particularly trusty route to discovering and articulating those deeper resonances. Thus the success of this course requires each student's active intellectual investment in classmates, as demonstrated by thoughtful participation in the classroom and beyond its walls (or in virtual space), even when those conversations are sometimes difficult or emotionally fraught. Being fully present, physically and mentally, throughout the term is necessary for this class.

Example 3

A goal of this class is for you to develop your skills engaging in emotionally difficult conversations. As such, I will encourage us, in this class, to read material and engage in conversations that may make you feel uncomfortable. I encourage you to think carefully about how you will navigate those difficult conversations. If you ever feel the need during a class discussion to step outside, you may do so without any academic penalty. However, in that circumstance I encourage you to come and talk with me to discuss the situation.