

Free Speech and Civility on Campus

Last November, the student publication *The Medium* published an issue which many in the University community found highly offensive for its racist content. Some students were outraged that the issue could be published and distributed on campus and further upset that their student fees helped to support such hate speech. According to University President Richard L. McCormick in his letter to the Rutgers Community: "The First Amendment protects the paper's right to exist, and the courts have consistently upheld the right to print hate speech. *The Medium's* funding comes from student fees allocated by Livingston and Rutgers College governing associations. While it is understandable that many students want to shut down the paper because of its content, to do so would clearly break the law." (President McCormick's letter to the Rutgers Community is available at www.president.rutgers.edu/letters.shtml.)

The controversy over *The Medium* highlights questions about the relationship between free speech and the University. The First Amendment is vital to protecting academic freedom and the ability of students and professors to explore and discuss any idea, even if others find it threatening or offensive. Unfortunately, there are times when free expression by some offends and even silences others. In some cases, hate speech may make the targets of that speech feel victimized; in other cases, people who disagree with what they see as a prevailing orthodoxy may feel unable, or too uncomfortable, to speak out.

Instructors have a responsibility to protect the rights of all students to express their ideas. This requires maintaining a civil classroom atmosphere, free from intimidation. Civility, however, does not mean we need to tiptoe around the issues or fear the expression of unpopular ideas. Instead, fostering a civil classroom environment should provide students with the opportunity to present ideas in a responsible fashion that encourages respectful discourse on the topic. Keep in mind that students who hold opinions that they fear will be unpopular may feel silenced. In the recent controversy, some students used the "Personals" section of *The Medium* to express extreme hostility under the cover of anonymity. If students feel free to speak honestly and openly about sensitive topics like race, it may help to avoid or minimize such virulent anonymous expressions. (continued on page 2)

Tax Workshop for Graduate Students

Do you have questions about your taxes? Get them answered at the Tax Workshop for Graduate Students. Learn timely tax information and where to look for tax savings. This workshop is especially important for graduate students holding fellowships and assistantships.

Brian Levine, MBA, CPA

**Wednesday, February 11
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

**Rutgers Student Center
Graduate Student Lounge
College Avenue Campus**

Reservations are not necessary, and refreshments will be provided. If you have any questions, contact Alex Bachmann at 732-932-7449 or abachman@rci.rutgers.edu.

The workshop will only address tax issues for U.S. CITIZENS AND PERMANENT RESIDENTS. The Center for International Faculty and Student Services will be offering free access to an online non-resident tax-filing program. Information on the program will be posted on the Center's website (www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cifss/) as soon as it is available.

Free Speech...

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Given the myriad issues addressed in the classroom, instructors may be able to anticipate that a particular class discussion will be controversial. Other times, controversial topics arise when a student makes a comment that treads on a sensitive area. In such cases, some instructors try to squelch the issue and return to more comfortable territory. Repressing a difficult topic, however, may leave the student who made the comment feeling silenced and the rest of the class feeling confused—they have just been sent the message that there is something wrong with discussing that topic or with the individual's comments but they may not know why. Students who are offended by another student's comment may also want a chance to respond. As educators dedicated to helping students consider ideas and new ways of looking at the world, we need to work to foster dialogue on difficult issues. The following suggestions may be helpful as you address challenging issues in your class.

Think in advance about your role as the instructor.

Some instructors prefer not to express their own viewpoints

in the classroom; they feel that to be a good teacher they must appear neutral, or they may feel that their own opinions are their private business and they don't want to share them. Other teachers feel uncomfortable or dishonest if they hide their opinions, or they believe that they can serve as an example to their students by modeling how to make a strong argument in a way that respects others and invites them to respond. Do whatever is most comfortable for you, as long as you make it clear to your students that all opinions are welcome and that their personal views, articulated in a responsible fashion, won't affect your evaluation of them.

Keep the discussion civil and productive.

- Establish ground rules for discussion. Make it clear that students must respect each other and refrain from personal attacks. Don't allow students to interrupt each other. Let students know that they shouldn't expect an individual to stand in for or represent an entire group. Ask students to avoid stereotyping people.
- Pose questions that are open-ended and invite a range of responses.
- If a student says something that you or other members of the class find offensive, don't ignore it and don't respond with an angry lecture. Instead, try to make it a productive part of

the conversation by moving attention away from the particular student who made the remark and making the comment a topic for general discussion. You can tell the students that a lot of people hold similar opinions, and ask them to think about *why* people might have such a point of view. Then, ask why others might disagree with or be upset by this view.

- While students may need the chance to air their feelings on a difficult subject, try to move them in the direction of making arguments based on some kind of evidence rather than just telling the class how they feel. Encourage students to make reference to reading materials, other people's ideas, or whatever else is appropriate.
- Ask students to respond to or build on the points made by other students. Try to make sure that students really listen to each other and attempt to understand each other's perspectives. You can set up a role playing exercise that asks students to argue for a position with which they disagree. Encourage students to ask each other questions.
- If the discussion does degenerate into a shouting match, call for a time out to give yourself a chance to regain control of the class. It may be helpful to have everyone in the class take out a sheet of paper and write down their feelings and opinions, to give students a chance to reflect on the discussion and to express any anger or frustration. You may want to speak to any students directly involved in an angry confrontation outside of class.

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Technology and the TA: Using Mailing Lists and Web Course Tools

The beginning of a new semester is an ideal time to take advantage of some of the instructional technologies that Rutgers provides. Two options to consider are setting up a mailing list for your course (a listserv) and posting class materials online using Web Course Tools (WebCT). Neither one requires much work, and if you use these two resources, not only can you enrich your students' learning experiences, you can also make yourself more attractive on the job market by demonstrating a proficiency in instructional technologies.

If you create a mailing list for your class, you can use it to email your students reminders, links to articles or web pages, questions you'd like students to consider as they read and prepare for the next class, or anything else that is relevant to your course. The list will allow you and your students to continue discussions outside of class, and your students can also share information with each other or materials that they've found online.

Setting up a list is an easy process, because Rutgers has an automated mailing list system, RAMS (Rutgers Automated Mass-mailing System), which will generate a mailing list for your course based on the class roster. To make a class email list, visit rams.rutgers.edu. RAMS creates the list using whatever

email addresses Rutgers has on record for your students, so your students will need to make sure that Rutgers has their correct email addresses. Let students know that you will be sending out a test message, and that if they don't receive it, they need to update their email address by going to student online services on the Rutgers website and clicking on "Student Online Directory Management."

When you create your mailing list, you can choose to make it an announcement-only list, which allows you to send messages to all of your students, or a discussion list, which allows them to post messages to the entire list as well. If you set up a discussion list, you have the option of setting up a moderated mailing list, in which case any attempt to post to the list will first be sent to you, the list moderator, to decide whether the message is appropriate for the list.

The two things you'll need to create a list using RAMS are an RCI account (to which all TAs are entitled) and roster privileges. Speak to your department secretary or chair about gaining access to rosters. If you teach recitations or labs for a multi-section course, speak to the professor in charge about course-wide and section-specific mailing lists. The person in charge of the course can set up the mailing lists so that each TA can manage/moderate the list for his or her

sections.

Another way to use instructional technologies to enhance a course is to put materials online so your students can access them over the Internet. Creating a website from scratch is a daunting project, but Web Course Tools allows you to set up a site for your class quickly and easily. WebCT is a course management software package which lets the instructor: post a syllabus, reading material, PowerPoint slides, pictures, and video or audio clips online; make a class calendar, with links to assignments and class materials; set up a discussion forum; and create online quizzes. You only need to use those parts of WebCT that are useful and appropriate for your class. You can start slowly, with just a syllabus.

To use WebCT, go to <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/webct/>. The site includes a link to the WebCT Designer's Manual, which explains how to use the software. As with RAMS, you need an RCI account and roster privileges to use WebCT.

Get In Touch!

TapOffice:

<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>

Graduate School – NB:

<http://gsnb.rutgers.edu>

TA Helpline: 932-11TA

TA
Helpline
Call
932-11TA
Monday-Friday
between
the hours
of
8:30 am - 4:30 pm

TAP Calendar

2/10	11:30 am-1:00 pm	Motivating Students in Large Lectures	CAC*
2/12	12:00-1:30 pm	CV/Resume Writing	BCC+
2/26	12:00-1:00 pm	Tips for Future Faculty	CAC*
3/01	4:00-6:00 pm	Women in Science: Balancing Work and Family	BCC*

*Call 732-932-7747 for information or to register.

+Call 732-445-6127 for information or to register.

Want to be a Movie Star?

Get your class videotaped!

<http://taproject.rutgers.edu>

Call 932-11TA for details

Sign up for the Peer Observation Program!

Having a class observed by a peer can be a great way to gain valuable feedback about your teaching. The Teaching Assistant Project offers the Peer Observation Program to any interested TA. You will be put in contact with a fellow graduate student teacher and provided with helpful materials for giving constructive criticism. For details, or to sign up, visit the website!

<http://taproject.rutgers.edu/pop/pop.html>

Teaching Assistant Project

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