**Combined notes from two workshops:**

* **Facilitating Discussion on Challenging Topics with presented by Dr. Sumun Pendakur, Associate Dean for diversity at Harvey Mudd College**
* **Faculty training with John Johnson, Ph.D., Astrophysicist from Harvard University**

Ground rules for discussion

1. Agree to make this room a "brave space."

Like it or not, the term "safe space" has taken on a negative connotation--it is associated with spaces in which dominant (usually liberal) viewpoints are the only ones that can be safely discussed while dissenting views are censored. We don’t need to create intellectually sterile environments that are devoid of dissent and where students won't run into viewpoints other than their own. We need spaces in which people are brave enough to talk about difficult subjects while being mindful of others, listening actively, thinking critically, taking on the perspectives of others, consciously questioning of one’s own beliefs and assumptions, and not automatically blaming and assigning negative intentions to others.

1. Make "I statements" not "you statements."

Avoid blanket statements about groups of people. Using "I statements" instead of "you statements" can help others not feel blamed, but keep in mind that "I statements" can still cause people to feel defensive. It has to do with the tone of voice and nuance in which things are said.

1. Know when to step forward or step backward. Share the air

If you sense yourself talking too much, pull back. If you haven’t been brave enough to speak, try taking a risk. In a group, you should plan to talk in proportion to your numbers.

1. “Modified Las Vegas”: What’s said here stays here, what’s learned here leaves here.

We will keep who said what in confidence when we leave this room, but what we learn we will share with others.

1. Say "Oops" and "Ouch."

Acknowledge when you’ve been hurt by something someone says. Take responsibility if you’ve said something that hurt someone. Recognize the difference between intent and impact.

1. Respect lived experience.

Lived experience is an important form of data. It takes courage to share. Dismissing it shuts people down.

1. Allow for others norms from students.

An alternative or additional strategy is to let students generate all of the ground rules for discussion. We suggest using these five norms at the start instead of taking suggestions from the beginning because it is more efficient, avoids awkward floundering, and sets the stage that the instructor is not going to let the conversation go out of control.

Here are some other ground rules that could be used, with caution:

* “be respectful/be civil” – This seems like a good norm, but it might be worthwhile to also spend time to tease out what it looks like. For some, “being respectful” means silencing yourself so as to preserve the dominant view. What does it sound like to disagree with someone conscientiously? Students might need some sentence frames for this.
* “no attacks” – Make sure to draw a distinction between personal attacks and challenges to an individual’s idea or belief or statement that makes that person feel uncomfortable. “You’re a jerk” and “Your ideas is worthless” vs “What you said made me feel angry” or “I find that idea to be heterosexist”.
* “avoid jargon” – This ensures that everyone understands what is being said and no one feel shut out from the conversation. But one of the course goals may be for them to become more comfortable using particular technical terms.
* Intent does NOT equal impact – This is a tricky ethical topic. The intention with which something is said or done rarely determines the meaning of a term or completely eliminates the harmful impact of an action.

Whatever norms you choose for your class, make sure to remind them about the norms and to reinforce them over time. Publicly call out students for doing a particularly good job at following one or more of the norms--this might also be a way to boost a student’s confidence.

Reading suggestion:  “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. Stylus Publishing, published in 2013, pages 135-150.