

*Joint Statement by the Academic Freedom Subcommittee (AFS) and Professional Development Subcommittee (PDS) Concerning Teaching Sensitive Material*

The following is a Best Practices statement regarding teaching sensitive material developed by AFS and PDS, with input from CAPS and DSS, and intended for our fellow faculty. This statement is based on related studies conducted by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), regarding trigger warnings. The full text of the AAUP report is available here: <https://www.aaup.org/report/trigger-warnings>

Associated Students expressed concern over graphic or sensitive course content that has the potential to elicit overwhelming feelings of anxiety, stress, trauma, and/or grief.

Neither the Professional Development Subcommittee (PDS) nor the Academic Freedom Subcommittee (AFS) advocates for the removal of sensitive content. We do believe providing context with any assignment can be part of an effective teaching pedagogy, however it is entirely up to the instructor to determine the most effective pedagogical approach, as well as whether, how and when to provide such context.

Some discomfort is inevitable in classrooms when the goal is to expose students to new ideas; to have them question beliefs they have taken for granted; to grapple with ethical problems they have never considered; and, more generally, to expand their horizons contributing to an informed and democratic society. In addition, as professors, we have the academic freedom to include whatever course content we deem necessary to address our course standards.

As two University Faculty Committees, we listened to the students who are advocating for their needs and attempted to find an equitable solution for both students and faculty. We also fully considered the importance of upholding our individual and collective academic freedom as faculty. Exposure to certain graphic images/discussions can elicit reactions associated with trauma; however, the classroom is not the appropriate venue to treat PTSD or trauma, both of which may require professional treatment.

A student who is reporting a diagnosis of PTSD or reporting that they have experienced trauma should be referred to Disability Services for Students (DSS) if they would like class accommodations, and/or to Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) if a psychological treatment consultation is desired. Professors are encouraged to help guide students to these available resources. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the DSS office works with students and faculty members to provide accommodations to ensure equal access, while maintaining the academic integrity of the course. Referrals should be made and accommodations addressed without affecting other students' exposure to material that has educational value.

Faculty who are interested in learning practices that support the teaching of sensitive material may wish to contact the Center for Teaching & Educational Technology (CTET)

which offers customized workshops for departments and schools, in addition to free, confidential, non-evaluative consultations for individual faculty. It is important to note, however, that such workshops and consultations are not mandatory and it is the individual faculty member's decision to participate in such workshops.