

# Integrating current events into discussions

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

Considerations to effectively integrate current events into classroom discussions. Faculty may plan to discuss current events or integrate unplanned current events into the classroom to support student learning.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Review the following resource to consider planned or unplanned discussions based on current events. For assistance, contact CET.

### Considerations for integrating current events into course

Current events impact the lives of students and faculty directly and indirectly throughout the academic year. Providing opportunities for planned and unplanned discussions during a course can create an engaging, relevant, and constructive learning environment that helps students feel acknowledged. The following are some steps to take to integrate current events into a course followed by examples.

* Align discussion of current events with the learning objectives
* Review and/or create classroom discussion norms with students
* Plan for discussion time for current events as they relate to course content
* Allow for unplanned discussions to help students feel acknowledged by actively acknowledging the topic, allowing for discussion and closing the conversation.

### Initiate the discussion

Some examples of current events and possible opening statements to bring them into classroom discussions include:

1. Underrepresentation of certain groups in scientific fields.
   1. “How might the evolution of medicine in the US have been different if more women were involved in medical research and practice during the past two centuries?”
   2. “As sea levels rise, what are the possible advantages of having representatives of Indigenous Peoples involved in climate-change research?”
2. The debate about reparations in the US and around the world
   1. “What obligations do museums have to return objects that were taken from their countries of origin during colonial periods?”
   2. “US National Park land was once occupied by Native American nations. Should all or part of this public land be returned? If so, how?”
3. Comparison of vaccination demographics in the U.S. and throughout the world.
   1. “Discuss the ethical implications of a booster dose of the COVID 19 vaccine for elderly in the United States when millions haven’t received their first dose in countries with limited access to vaccines”
   2. “What do you think the role of religion plays in vaccine hesitancy?”
4. Implications of space exploration versus Earth exploration.
   1. “What is the economic impact of creating a new space station compared to leveraging the same amount of money to combat rising ocean temperatures?”
   2. “What are the likely effects of space rocket exhaust on atmospheric chemistry?”
5. Media representation of women who speak out against sexual violence.
   1. “How are women who speak out about sexual violence portrayed in the media? Share 2 examples and explain.”
   2. “If most people don’t watch the news, why does it matter how women are portrayed?”
   3. “Compare the dominant perspectives represented about the Bill Cosby trial in English-language and Spanish-language US media.”
6. Forest fires disproportionally impact communities of color.
   1. Which current federal policies and laws influence the different impact of forest fires on communities of color?
   2. “How could federal laws and policies be reformed to reduce the differential impact to reduce the disproportionate impact of forest fires on communities of color?”

### Actively moderate the discussion

* Frequently refer back to the conversation’s purpose and the course objectives.
* Prompt responses from students by asking them to play devil’s advocate to their own position.
* Reaffirm that there is no single “solution” or “right” answer/view to have.
* Acknowledge the difficulty behind discussing sensitive topics.
* Listen to understand, rather than react or respond.
* Ask students to expand upon and clarify their statements.
* Facilitate, rather than dictate.
* Redirect and reframe the conversation as needed.
* Use moments of conflict as opportunities to help students grow in their understanding of the issue and each other.
* Make all voices heard.
  + Consider “How much space am I allowing each voice to take up?”
  + Consider “How can I encourage participation from voices that haven’t contributed?”

### Synthesize and reflect on the discussion

* Summarize the major points made in the discussion.
* Encourage students to reflect on what they discussed and how it relates to the course learning objectives.
* Have students analyze and evaluate the why behind key discussion points (why some felt one way and others felt another).
* Clarify and synthesize without judgment.

### Suggested resources

[Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom](http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/hotmoments.html)

[Leading Classroom Discussions on Difficult Topics](http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/difficult-dialogues/)