

## The Rutgers DSW Program

**Module Title:** Teaching Touchy Topics: Boundaries, civility and learning

**Instructor:**

**Residency:** August 2018

**Date:**

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### **Module Description:**

Teaching in social work programs brings special challenges related to student self-disclosure, personal sensitivities, and the social work ethic of social justice. This module specifically addresses typical classes in social work curricula that promote boundary-dropping (classes on loss, trauma, and abuse) and those that promote controversy (gender, political, and racial discourses). Classroom management issues of promoting open learning-focused dialogue, maintaining safety (but not necessarily comfort), and managing “over-sharing” or boundary-issues will be the focus of the module’s class discussion- despite the dearth of literature in this area.

Class discussions in an age of political correctness, polarized political beliefs and mis-taking conflict for abuse will all be viewed as contextual issues (found in the readings) that frame some of these discussions. It is of note that the main focus is classroom management for teaching social work topics such as loss and intimate partner violence which tend to create the need for instructors to provide guidelines for staying focused on learning vs. self-disclosure; nevertheless, other touchy topics will be addressed as the class is interested and there is time.

### **Module Objectives:**

1. Consider how current political, educational and social contexts influence social work students’ experiences of class discussions and how that promotes or stifles learning.
2. Address classroom management issues in social work classes where students have personal experiences that are intensely affecting and are also at the heart of the topic of the class.
3. Develop guidelines for use in classes that allow free and open discussion for promotion of learning, but hold the line at over-self-disclosure, disrespectful interactions and/or such political correctness that learning is impaired.

### Required Readings:

1. Schulman, S. (2016). *Conflict is not abuse: Overstating harm, community responsibility, and the duty of repair*. Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press. (Chapters Intro and Ch 2)
2. Zimmerman, J. (2016). *Campus politics: What everyone needs to know*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Chs. 1 & 6)
3. Holley, L., & Steiner, S. (2005). Safe Space: Student perspectives on classroom environment. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 41(1), 49-64. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/stable/23044032>

### Recommended Readings:

1. Randall Kennedy- <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/opinion/black-tape-at-harvard-law.html>
2. Wermund, B. (2016, February 23). UH faculty suggest steering clear of some topics if students armed. *Houston Chronicle* (TX)