

A (Nonexhaustive) List of Behaviors that Can Negatively Affect Climate

Consider: *“Have I seen this behavior? What did it look or sound like? Has this behavior been directed at me? Have I myself engaged in this kind of behavior? Or not intervened when I did encounter it?”*

- Assuming that one’s personal beliefs or cultural practices are the norm
- Dismissing or misunderstanding the significance of another group’s beliefs or cultural practices
- Making uncritical cross-group comparisons that have the above effects
- Assuming a set of necessary characteristics for membership in an identity group
- Assuming an identity group is made up of individuals who all behave the same way and/or have the same belief system
- Ignoring the ways that identity (and the intersectionality of identities) affect people’s lived experiences
- Asserting false binaries/suggesting that simultaneous membership in two different identity groups is impossible
- Putting someone in the position of acting as a spokesperson for the experiences of a group of which they are, or are imagined to be, a member
- Signaling that an individual doesn’t belong in a space by limiting their participation or by normalizing their absence through limited representational choices
- Allowing marginalizing language or behavior to go unchallenged
- Expecting someone to educate you about their culture or their experiences of marginalization
- Expressing surprise when an individual doesn’t fulfill cultural stereotypes
- Dismissing the cognitive, emotional, and physical toll it takes on an individual to experience, engage with, or attempt to ignore cultural stereotypes or other marginalizing behaviors
- Dictating what is ‘appropriate’ for an individual to be offended by, angry about, scared of, etc.

Responding to Microaggressions in Instructional Spaces: Some Options
When a student's contribution devalues, marginalizes, or tokenizes others:

Strategies to Consider	<i>What specific language would you use if you pursued this strategy?</i>	<i>What are some potential challenges and benefits of this approach?</i>
Directly respond to student comment as problematic (e.g., identify specific words or phrases and then explain why you found them disrespectful or someone else might).		
Invite the student to clarify or further explain.		
Open up a critical conversation with the whole class.		
Follow up with specific students after class.		
Follow up with all students (via email, or in next class).		
Other strategy?		

Some language that might be helpful

These ideas come from conversations with U-M faculty about responding to student comments in class that might exclude, devalue, or marginalize other student or perspectives. Depending on what you're responding to, as well as how much time you want to spend, steps could include:

- Clarify: "I heard you say/suggest _____. Did I understand that correctly?"
- Validate the useful elements of a contribution: "Thank you for raising a common perspective..." "I can hear you're really grappling with this complex idea..." "You've raised an idea that's important for all of us to consider, and we'll do that — but first I briefly want to ..."
- Give the benefit of the doubt: "I doubt this is what you intended, but..." "You may not realize how this sounded..." "I hear that you're primarily making a joke, and yet..."
- Explain potential impacts of specific language: "The word X is a label that's often objected to by those it's used to describe because ..." "I could easily imagine that your use of that metaphor would feel like an insult to people who ..." "When I hear the phrase/word 'X,' it distracts me from the other points you're trying to make..."
- Acknowledge a range of possible perspectives: "Let's remember we may be talking about classmates when we say ..." "Not all of you will share this response, but there are good reasons that some people find it hard to keep listening after a classmate uses language like..." "I worry about the impact of those words on students who have an experience of..."
- Refer to the class discussion guidelines: "This is a good occasion to remind everyone to be careful how we use the word 'we.'" "Remember we talked in our guidelines discussion about taking care when generalizing about groups of people."
- Engage classmates: Use discussion ("Does anyone have a different way of explaining this?" "What questions or concerns do others want to share?") or writing ("I want to understand better the range of perspectives about this in the class; please take out a page and write a couple of sentences about...").
- Create a path forward: "As we continue on this topic, let's all remember not to generalize from our particular experience..." "I want to pause from our plan for 5 minutes to think a bit about the other issues that have been raised." "Keeping those commitments in mind, let's get back to the main topic at hand here."

Recognizing Microaggressions in Instruction: Some Options
*When a student identifies **your** choices or language as problematic*

Strategies to Consider	<i>What specific language would you use if you pursue this strategy?</i>	<i>What are some potential challenges and benefits of this approach?</i>
Validate the student's response (e.g., thank them, apologize for the problem they have identified, or recognize why the student might have responded as they did)		
Confirm that you understand the critique (e.g., restate in your own words, or invite the student to clarify or further explain).		
Explain your understanding of why what you said/shared was problematic and how you'll avoid it in future.		
Alternatively: Clarify a misunderstanding on the student's part. Use the opportunity to assess all students' understanding.		
Open up a critical conversation with the whole class.		
Follow up after class — with specific students or the whole group.		

Discussion Guidelines

- Respect others' rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. When you encounter beliefs or opinions that you find problematic, challenge or criticize the idea not the person.
- Recognize your own positionality and consider who may be excluded by the claims you make. For example, instead of saying, "That's an image of an ideal family," we could say, "That may be an image of an ideal family for many middle-class white heterosexuals."
- Do not ask that others speak for a group that you perceive them to represent.
- Emotion is often present in challenging conversations, but many people are unpracticed at engaging with emotion in academic or professional settings. When useful, name the emotions that become present for you during our conversation. Do not put yourself in the position of assessing the 'reasonableness' of other people's emotional responses.
- Recognize when you are making the choice to withdraw from the discussion or silence yourself and reflect on why you have made that choice. Consider the ways that sharing your perspective might enrich the conversation— even if it is uncomfortable for you to do so. Ask questions to explore areas of uncertainty or discomfort.
- Respect a person's right to decide if and how they will share their experiences or perspectives. If a person has shared something with you that you found particularly helpful or thought-provoking, ask their permission before sharing their comments with others.
- Be courteous. Whenever possible, refrain from interrupting or engaging in private conversation while others are speaking.
- Be aware of the fact that tone of voice and body language are powerful communicators.
- Be thoughtful about what your tone of voice and body language may communicate to others.
- Respectfully hold each other accountable for the above. Facilitators can only respond to statements that they hear.