



TALE Teaching Tip:

Addressing Fears and Angst on Day One: The Transition back to Face-to-face Instruction

“I am afraid that because we are all coming back to campus everyone will simply think things are back to normal...and that we are all OK...because many of us are not.”

~Anonymous BU Student, 2021

The following is provided by the McDowell Institute through TALE as a general guide to help faculty address the understandable fears and associated angst with students as we transition back towards more traditional face-to-face instruction on campus.

Acknowledge the range of emotions that students, faculty, and staff are experiencing

One of the most helpful things that others can do when we are fearful or anxious about a situation is to have others validate our perspective and associated feelings. While this may not, by itself, help us to find the resolve to navigate the immediate obstacles in front of us... it does set the stage for the development of resilience to meet the challenge. The reality is each of your students... just as each of us as faculty ... have experienced the pandemic through our own personal prism. The start of the fall 21 semester should NOT be viewed as business as usual pre-pandemic.

Acknowledge this reality in your communications with your students to normalize conversations about their experiences. Here is some food for thought in this regard:

- Consider an initial e-mail correspondence with students reassuring them that you are aware of both the excitement and angst they may be experiencing.
- Consider incorporating on BOLT this same type of information.
- Build into your opening class session your thoughts on this matter as well as plan opportunities for students to share their thoughts and experiences.

Engage students in the creation of a “Comfort Agreement”

Establishing clear performance expectations is not a new concept by any means given the old adage of “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” However, transitioning back to face-to-face instruction, given the vast range of recent personal experiences, is unique. Use the current state of affairs as an opportunity to engage your students on the first day in reflecting upon what they hope this course experience will be for them along with helping them to identify, and where feasible, label their fears or concerns. Consider using a **think-pair-share** approach or small group discussion and provide focus questions to organize their interactions with one another. Follow this activity with some degree of large group debriefing making a list of the range of responses. This type of reflective/interactive activity sets the stage for you to establish a Comfort Agreement. Here is some guidance as to how to approach development of your comfort agreement(s):

1. Making reference to the recently completed reflective/interactive activity, draw attention to commonly shared and unique fears and concerns.
2. Introduce the goal of creating a Comfort Agreement, a set of agreed upon norms for how we all communicate with, and care for, one another. Create a safe space that ensures everyone may freely share their thoughts and feelings germane to the course.
3. Establish your preferred method to document/compile the language for norms that emerge through this exercise. This can be done through large group discussion, you can replicate the structure used with the previous reflective activity, or use virtual means (e.g., Padlet) to compile the language that you can wordsmith prior to the next class.
4. Once you create the Comfort Agreement, post it prominently on BOLT as well as periodically re-focus student attention to these agreed upon norms. You are encouraged to provide these reminders proactively to the greatest extent feasible.



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Suggestions on what might be included in a Comfort Agreement:

- Respect – Give undivided attention to the person who has the floor (permission to speak).
 - Right to pass – It is always okay to pass (meaning “I’d rather not” or “I don’t want to respond”).
 - Nonjudgmental listening – We can disagree with another person’s point of view without putting that person down.
 - Have a good time – It is helpful to have fun while learning. Creating a safe space is about coming together as a class, being mutually supportive, and collectively growing.
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Communicate and facilitate access to student support

Educators develop trust with their students by showing that we care about them, first and foremost, as a person. This is important as 1) it helps to build rapport which is positively correlated with student achievement and retention, and 2) we become part of a safety net to notice and support students experiencing challenges sooner rather than later.

Incorporate the following statement in your course syllabi and BOLT Content

BU HEALTH AND WELLNESS INFORMATION

Bloomsburg University cares about your personal health and well-being. Experiencing difficulties associated with your health and well-being can promote an unhealthy level of stress which can adversely affect many facets of your life, such as your relationships, self-care, learning and academic success. Throughout your time at BU you or someone you know may experience a range of stressful situations... some of which may even create impediments to your success. Stressful circumstances such as illness, strained relationships, trauma, anxiety, alcohol or drug problems, and feeling down or depressed should not be ignored. The Student Counseling Center, as well as the Student Health Center, are available to help you navigate these difficult situations in order to help mitigate their impact.

To learn about or access the free, confidential mental health services available on campus simply call 570-389-4255 or visit the website <https://intranet.bloomu.edu/counseling>. To learn about or access the services of the BU Health Center call 570-389-4451 or visit the website <https://intranet.bloomu.edu/health>.

Help is available...please reach out as needed.

Develop your awareness of the warning signs of mental health challenges, so you may readily share resources with students (e.g., consider completion of suicide prevention training such as [Mental Health First Aid](#) or [Question – Persuade -Refer](#)).

Expand your mental health literacy skills by exploring the following resources:

TALE Teaching Tip: [Increasing Resilience and Grit within the Student Population](#)

[McDowell Institute](#)

[NIMH](#)

[SAMHSA](#)

[HESPC](#)

[Trauma Informed Teaching and Learning \(Janice Carello Blog\)](#)