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FLASHPOINTS Vignettes

FLASHPOINTS

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FLASHPOINTS Vignettes Discussion Guide

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FLASHPOINT VIGNETTES

- **MISGENDERING**

Description: A professor (White, female) misgenders a student, and, when corrected, launches into a very elaborate apology which further embarrasses the student.

Discussion: What does misgendering mean? What might you do when you make a mistake? What are some strategies for learning and using students' personal pronouns in respectful ways.

- **DISABILITY ACCOMODATIONS**

Description: A professor (White, female) responds to two students, one who has an accommodation plan and one who does not but has a request for a modification. The professor is dismissive of the student's needs and tries to (gently) talk her out of implementing them.

Discussion: What does it mean to have a Disability Accommodation plan? Why is it important for teachers to be aware of students' plans? Why and how can teachers maintain privacy and confidentiality in responding to students' accommodations? What is the challenge of responding thoughtfully to students' requests for accommodations more inclusively?

- **LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (three versions)**

Description: A professor (White, male), overhears two students during a class break discussing the land acknowledgment they heard at the previous evening's basketball game. The students are

dismissive of what they heard and make derogatory remarks about the land acknowledgment. In version one, the professor addresses the students directly (privately) and asks them to see him after class. In version two, the professor asks the students what they know about land acknowledgements and engages them in a discussion. In version three, the professor begins class after the break by addressing the entire class and begins a discussion about land acknowledgments and their importance.

Discussion: What is a land acknowledgment and why are they made? How should students' misinformation or inappropriate comments be addressed – punitively, privately, or as a teachable moment for the whole class? What kinds of curriculum and pedagogical strategies go beyond simply acknowledging indigenous history?

- **SPRING BREAK**

Description: A professor (Black, male) tells students that he knows that they are all looking forward to Spring Break for some “rest and relaxation.” Each of eight students is shown with their internal dialogue explaining what Spring Break means for them. The students describe an assortment of life challenges and identities that will make Spring Break something **other** than restful or relaxing.

Discussion: What assumptions do faculty make about the lives and backgrounds of their students? How can assumptions about class and privilege be damaging to students' educational experiences? How can faculty organize classroom policies and practices that are more thoughtful regarding students' social identities and life situations?

- **CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS**

Description: A professor (White, female) asks students to share their final project plans. A Jewish student says he is going to focus on Israel as the ancestral homeland of the Jews. A Palestinian student challenges him and says that it is **their** land. A third student says that she is also Jewish but believes in Palestinian justice and doesn't like the proposed project either.

Discussion: What should faculty do when there are within-class frictions about controversial political topics? Should the conflict be responded to directly? Avoided? What is the role of faculty when there is conflict between students? Should faculty share their own feelings or attempt to remain "neutral"? How do we distinguish between "facts" and "opinions"? How should misinformation be challenge?

- **TRIGGER WARNINGS**

Description: A professor (Latino, male) remembers, belatedly, that he is supposed to provide a "trigger warning" for a film he is about to show that is about sexual violence/rape. He advises students that if any of them will find the topic difficult, they can leave class without penalty to their attendance points. One woman hesitates and then gathers her belongings and leaves. Two other women discuss the woman's departure and question what happened to her.

Discussion: What are trigger warnings (sometimes called Content Warnings)? Are they a good idea? Are they unnecessary at the college level? How and when should they be provided? How should faculty respond to students who are, in fact, unable to participate in some aspect of the curriculum?

- **IMMIGRATION**

Description: A professor (Latino, male) asks his class to discuss ways in which the topic of immigration might play out in the upcoming election. A variety of students voice their opinions about immigrants to the U.S. and their feelings about services and support immigrants receive.

Discussion: How can discussions that might elicit a range of opinions and questionable language be framed for a class? What is the professor's role in "managing" such a discussion? What should the faculty member do if they hear statements that are ill-informed or may be characterized as "hate speech"? What is the relationship between a professor's own identity and the topic of discussion/debate and should this be acknowledged or addressed?

- **WOMEN IN SCIENCE**

Description: A professor (White, male), tells a young Black woman that she's done well in the program and that he doesn't think she will have trouble getting an internship because many people are looking for "someone like her." The student looks distressed/confused and leaves. Later, she has coffee with a friend (White, female), who says that she thinks the professor's comment is positive because it means there are lots of "diversity hires."

Discussion: How is the professor's comment about "people like you" a racial microaggression when voiced to a young woman of color? What is meant by the term "diversity hire" and how is its

usage problematic and offensive? What does the interaction between the two young women tell us about misunderstanding and allyship?