



Addressing Post-Election Needs for Support

Background:

Following the presidential election on November 3, we can anticipate the possibility of substantial distress among staff, students, and faculty, especially those who identify as BIPOC or LGBTQ+, and others vulnerable to varied injustices and their allies. Especially if the determination of outcomes is protracted and contentious, stress and distress may escalate. Also, other events, such as a possible Supreme Court decision on the fate of the Affordable Care Act and other cases to be heard, may have major impacts on our community.

The university needs to avoid alignment with any partisan position or group and to be a place in which diverse opinions are welcome. Normally, reactions to elections or other political developments would be left to private conversation or academic pursuits. But the level of distress that may develop amidst widely recognized deep divisions in our society may be particularly great. Also, given the unpredictability of events, different groups may experience particular distress.

Understandably, many of us already feel stretched to our limits. Nevertheless, supervisors, leaders of student groups, course instructors, department chairs and division heads, and other leaders can be helpful by creating opportunities for people to come together just to have an opportunity to share feelings and perhaps talk about things they can do to address their concerns. Addressing these anxieties, instead of ignoring the elephant in the room, can be a welcome relief in the days and weeks following November 3rd.

Key Observations: When distress is shared and substantial, facilitating a supportive discussion requires little more than arranging time and venue. Participants will find what they want to say and share with little prompting.

Suggestions

- Don't assume the opinions of people in attendance, especially political or spiritual views.
- In your department or unit, if there is a division of opinion, indicate the perspective of the meeting, e.g., "For those who are especially bothered by the outcome of the election / identify in this way, we'll plan an opportunity..."
- If you recognize that a group of staff, students, faculty, or combinations of these are feeling very stressed, use listservs or other channels to announce a drop-in Zoom opportunity (or other simple gathering) to get together and share feelings.
- You may want to co-facilitate or delegate the role to a trusted or natural leader of the group.
- For convenience, schedule perhaps as many as 2 hours. Consider also multiple time slots.
- Keep it very informal – videos optional.
- Encourage confidentiality – what's said in the meeting stays in the meeting; don't allow recording.
- If necessary, prompt discussion with simple questions or probes, e.g., "I know lots of us are deeply troubled..." "What are you all feeling?" "What concerns do you have, not only for yourselves but perhaps for your colleagues or families?"
- Depending on the group and perhaps how conversation emerges, you may want to set some ground rules – e.g., assume motivations of all are sincere, don't challenge or attack each other, give all a chance to speak and finish what they have to say.

Possible Problems

- To avoid Zoom bombing, use a password for your meeting or consider registration for the Zoom link.
- If an individual is greatly upset, consider using the chat function to offer to talk with them individually after the meeting or, if a natural link appears, suggest that one of the other group members talk with them separately.
- If a conflict emerges, you will need to step in to keep things from escalating and keep individuals from feeling especially hurt or attacked. Here are some suggested ways to step in:
 - If you haven't already, suggest some ground rules. If you have, re-visit the ground rules.
 - Suggest a cooling-off period for the whole group of a minute or so.
 - Ask someone who is not a party to the conflict to summarize in as neutral terms as possible what they see as the key concerns or differences that have emerged, or do this yourself.
 - If necessary, ask **both** conflicting groups just to listen for a few minutes and then come back to them to restate their concerns or feelings.
 - If necessary, you may need to ask someone to hold off on further comments or even to leave the meeting, but this is unlikely. Should it become necessary, tell them you will contact them afterward to hear them out and be sure to do so promptly.
- Know what resources are available for further support, for example,
 - Students: CAPS 24/7 is available at 919-966-3658
 - Faculty and Staff, and their family members: Employee Assistance Program's GuidanceResources Counselors is available 24/7 at 877-314-5841
 - Everyone: Well-Being Resources at this [link](#)