

Shared Principles for Organizing Educational Events on Current Crisis in the Middle East

Division of Global Engagement, 8 November 2023

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Since early October, this group has met, at first to plan an education response to events in Israel-Palestine. We quickly realized our group, with participants from multiple perspectives and experiences of the conflict, needed a set of common principles and shared parameters for any events we as a group would organize or endorse.

The Division of Global Engagement will organize, endorse and promote campus educational events that apply these principles.

A. Purpose of this group:

- Gather concerned faculty (and grad students, staff) who are interested in planning and organize educational and caring responses to the current crisis in Israel-Palestine.
- This group serves as an organizing committee to plan one or more events.

B. Purpose of document:

1. Shared framework of common assumptions & goals that enable this group to organize and hold educational and caring responses for the campus community to the current crisis in Israel-Palestine.
2. Terms of participation to be given to presenters and invited guests.
3. Also may be used as framework for this group to support and promote other campus events.

C. Shared principles, approaches and objectives:

1. This group consists of colleagues with a wide variety of positions. We are not necessarily in full agreement on every aspect of the Israel-Palestine conflict. But we all agree we do not want to dehumanize either side and that we regret the loss of life on any side. We will open events with this point.
2. We believe that in times of global crisis, we as educators have a responsibility to provide learning opportunities, to share research-based information, to present the multiplicity and complexity of conflicting narratives and discourses, and to provide a safe space for respectful discussion and civil conversation to promote learning and model understanding and empathy.
3. Many students are confused, anxious, worried and in pain. For some of them, public educational events and fora represent an essential institutional response to the situation, and a form of care.
4. Many UO students have very little information about the current conflict or its roots and context. Students will benefit from reasonable, respectful, research-based educational fora.

5. We will avoid fora and events that “take sides.” To the extent possible we will create spaces which include a multiplicity of accounts, discourses and perspectives, promoting learning and understanding and preventing advocacy of one-sided positions.
6. We recognize that there is no single body of shared facts in this conflict, and that our most useful approach may be to present parallel competing accounts of facts (on contemporary events, contributing conditions and circumstances, historical context) rather than seeking to adjudicate a “most accurate” set of facts.
7. We are best served by teaching complexity, by helping students understand the multiplicity of contexts and perspectives, and by modeling how to hold complexity with curiosity and empathy.
8. Students and the campus community will benefit from fora and events that are more multi-modal than standard lecture-listen-ask-questions format. Theater, music, art, gathering contemplatively, for example, will prove very useful.
9. Advocacy of the eradication of “other sides,” positions of violent, harmful intolerance that exceed the limits of tolerant discourse, will be considered out of bounds in our fora and events. We will take necessary steps to set and enforce this boundary.
10. Because we wish to model constructive dialogue, we will vet presenters to avoid calls for the destruction of the Israeli people or state, or the destruction of the Palestinian people or state.
11. Given our commitment to academic freedom, we are cognizant of appropriate times, places and contexts for engagement with extreme positions (such as those described in the two points just above). Brief educational fora in the aftermath of recent violence and loss of life are not the best time, place and context. Full-term courses (such as Professor Diane Baxter’s Conflict Resolution 435/535, Israel and Palestine) offer better times, places and contexts.
12. We acknowledge that some students and campus community members may hold very strong positions on one or another side of the conflict, informed by personal pain, suffering and perhaps trauma. While educational fora may not be ideal venues for working through personal pain and trauma, we will do our best to create spaces of empathy for such positions while adhering to our other objectives (e.g., not taking sides, not permitting advocacy of eradication, etc.).
13. Open-microphone events are probably not productive in this time. Audience input will be curated. Questions can be written on cards, submitted to organizers, who then select for representativeness, educational value, avoidance of one-sidedness or intolerance.
14. Events will not be recorded without consent of all participants.
15. Views of presenters are not necessarily endorsed by this group.