

### Survivor-Centered Lesson Planning Resources for *On the Wrong Side*

This resource is intended to give some ideas about exercises and discussion questions that are survivor-centered. For a discussion of trauma-informed pedagogy, see:

Bedera, Nicole. 2021. "Beyond Trigger Warnings: A Survivor-Centered Approach to Teaching on Sexual Violence and Avoiding Institutional Betrayal." *Teaching Sociology* 49(3): 267-277.

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#### How to Write Good Discussion Questions

Discussions about campus sexual violence and institutional betrayal are personal for many of our students. It is almost certain that there are survivors in your class. It is likely there are perpetrators too. In the past, I have taught classes where survivor *and* perpetrator of a specific sexual assault were both enrolled in the course. These discussions can be challenging, but there are a few guiding principles that can create a healthier learning environment:

- Assume all students have a personal stake in conversations about sexual violence. (Even the most disengaged students might be disassociating or regulating their emotions by selectively tuning out.)
- Do not ask students to share their personal experiences. Allow them to choose for themselves how much they want to disclose about their own sexual violence histories.
- Allow students to request accommodations in advance with a no-questions-asked policy (e.g., "I don't want to be paired up with so-and-so," "Can we not have any examples that focus on this specific scenario?")
- Plan more breaks than usual. Create natural moments for students to check in with you if issues arise.
- Use group work to allow students to choose who will be safe for them to have a discussion with. Be prepared to switch modalities (e.g., moving to written work) if an unsafe dynamic emerges.

There are a few guiding principles that can help you write survivor-centered discussion questions too:

- Treat sexual violence as a social problem that demands a solution. Think about individual-level solutions (e.g., how do we meet the needs of each survivor?) and structural solutions (e.g., how do we end violence forever?)

- Focus on institutions. Avoid discussion of what a specific person “should” have done and refocus on how institutions create the environment in which some decisions are easy and other decisions are hard. (To put it another way, a good discussion will focus on how institutions can serve individuals’ needs.)
- Identify underlying mechanisms. You want to help students explore why most students have nearly identical experiences, even though they are individually very different.
- Do not tolerate victim-blaming.
- Resist the temptation to focus on perpetrators.
- Resist the temptation to place more burdens on the shoulders of survivors.
- End on brainstorming solutions. Institutional betrayal is devastating, but institutional courage gives us reasons for hope. (See: [www.institutionalcourage.org](http://www.institutionalcourage.org).)

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### Activity: Critique Your School’s Title IX Approach

Ask students to articulate some of the primary issues described in the book (e.g., schools as total institutions, policies that are too vague and complex, orchestrated complexity as a justification for inaction). This will be a list of traits they can use to evaluate their school’s Title IX approach.

Break students into small groups and assign each one a different aspect of the school’s Title IX policy and/or website. Ask them to determine whether the materials provided to them have similar dysfunctions to Western University and share their findings with the larger group.

Be sure to focus on the overarching themes of institutional betrayal. For example, a school may do things slightly differently, but still have a policy that is too overwhelming to understand. Ask questions like:

- How does it *feel* to read these materials?
- What components of our school’s approach are exactly the same?
- What components are different? Do those differences have the same problems?
- Can you imagine a simple way to fix these problems and create a more supportive system for survivors?

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**Activity: Develop a Title IX Flowchart**

One of the primary issues in the book is that schools failed to provide adequate information to students for them to understand what would happen after they went to Title IX. Break students into groups to complete the following tasks:

- Read a specific section of the school's Title IX policy (i.e., one group focuses on reporting options, one group focuses on informal resolution, one group focuses on investigations, one group focuses on hearings, one group focuses on appeals)
- Identify contradictions or gaps in knowledge provided
- Develop a series of questions to ask the Title IX Coordinator to fill in those gaps

Then, come together as a class to design a flow chart that conveys the most crucial information in the least overwhelming manner. If someone can turn it into a handout, then students can use it to share information about Title IX with their peers!

*Note: Make sure to interpret policies as they are written. It can be tempting to try to fill in gaps with what feels reasonable to us, but our schools aren't always reasonable!*

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**Activity: Brainstorm Academic Accommodations**

Another big theme in the book is that professors failed to meet survivors' needs, leading to an unraveling of their academic lives. Break students into groups to discuss:

- Why do academic accommodations like extensions fail some students?
- What are some of the barriers students face in seeking more substantial accommodations?
- What kinds of accommodations would be more helpful?
- How can educators make it easy for students to seek more helpful interventions?

Then, come together as a class to develop materials for professors that want to make it easier for students to get the help they need. A resource guide educating professors about different academic accommodations could be useful. A syllabus statement professors can use to declare available academic accommodations may also be useful. Share what the students created with faculty groups and the Victim Advocacy Office to advocate for change!

*Note: Be prepared for students' ideas to challenge some of the norms in your own classroom. And be open to change yourself! If students are coming up with great ideas, then it makes sense to shift your own academic accommodation policies—even mid-term.*

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**Activity: Build a Resource Guide**

Break students into small groups and ask them to research community resources for sexual assault survivors. To complete the guide, they should track down the following information about all resources:

- Name
- Short description of services provided
- Physical address
- Phone number
- Website
- Is the organization on- or off-campus?
- Does the organization offer free or sliding scale services?
- Does the organization offer confidential services?
- Will the organization call the police against a survivor's will?

For a springboard, have students Google “[state] coalition against sexual assault” and “[state] don’t call the police.” A great resource guide will offer a mix of on- and off-campus services, as well as many free and confidential resources. Make the resource guide available to student groups and the Victim Advocacy Office to share it with students beyond the classroom! Short forms of these resource guides are also great for syllabus statements!

*Note: In a sexual violence context, confidential does not mean “private.” It is a legal specification about service providers who cannot be subpoenaed by a court of law. For example, a therapist is not confidential, but a community victim advocate is.*

(By the way, this is my favorite activity on the list. How beautiful to create something useful for students! Our schools may not be trustworthy, but a lot of other organizations are!)