



Navigating Difficult Conversations: Students' Reactions to Controversial Topics in Journalism and Mass Communication Courses

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Abstract

Through in-depth interviews, this study explores students' reactions to teaching styles and methods used when discussing controversial topics in journalism and mass communication courses, including gender, race, politics, sexuality, sexism, and class. Specifically, what does this classroom engagement look like and what are the current struggles for students in exploring and addressing these topics in their journalism, public relations, and media studies courses? This research explored how students feel about the inclusion of these topics in their courses, and identified barriers to successful classroom dialogue, including peer influence, perceptions of majority beliefs, power dynamics between professors and students, and classroom management. This research proposes a set of best practices for teaching controversial topics in journalism and media studies courses, including the incorporation of structured and active learning practices, empathic teaching strategies, clearly established classroom guidelines, and the ability to address harmful stereotypes and uncomfortable dialogue in classroom discussions.

Introduction

Through the years, allegations that colleges and universities are indoctrinating students on controversial topics such as gender, race and sexuality have come from multiple channels, including government representatives, popular media outlets, and social media. Popular press articles suggest that while college campuses "are one of the few spaces capable of encouraging civil disagreement," they are becoming "partisan islands" awash in liberal bias (Shields, 2017, para 1). In contrast to popular press coverage, academic survey research suggests that in college classes where controversial topics are discussed, liberal and conservative students describe instructors that encourage partici-

pation from both sides and want to learn from different perspectives (Larson *et al.*, 2020). This suggests that mainstream coverage of faculty-indoctrination efforts do not fully reflect the pedagogical experiences of students.

Through in-depth interviews, this study explores students' reactions to teaching styles used when discussing controversial topics in journalism and media studies courses in a large southeastern university located in an area where there has been increased visibility and focus on how these topics are introduced in the classrooms and if they should be included in the college curriculum. This research examines student-learning and engagement to explore how to

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foster meaningful dialogue when dealing with topics related to gender, race, politics, sexuality, sexism, and class. Considering progressive activism and increasing skepticism from media and lawmakers, the purpose of this study is to explore student's perceptions of how controversial topics have been addressed in their courses and their reactions to these experiences. The following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: What topics do students identify as controversial and how do they feel about the inclusion of these topics in their journalism and mass communication courses?

RQ2: What factors affect how controversial topics are received and experienced by students in their journalism and mass communication courses?

RQ3: How do students feel instructors do when introducing controversial topics in their journalism and mass communication courses?

This research identifies barriers that students and professors face when covering controversial topics in college courses and allows for the development of a set of best practices for teaching controversial topics.

Literature Review

Factors Affecting Teaching Controversial Topics

In teaching controversial topics, research suggests that the social identities of professors, such as the race, gender, sexuality, and class, affect both the learning and teaching experience (Rainey *et al.*, 2018). Early research in this area focused on the impact teachers' own personal backgrounds have on their education and training (Thomas, 1995), the experiences of historically marginalized teachers in the classroom (Casey, 1993; Ghuman, 1995; Vargas, 2002; Bhopal, 2002), academic career paths based on social location (Gallardo, 2021), and the teaching evaluations professors receive from their students (Reid, 2010; Baslo *et al.*, 2013). The role of social location on the knowledge prioritized in the classroom has also been explored (Vargas, 2002). Recently, scholars have shifted their focus to the influence of instructor race, gender identity, and rank, as well as students' backgrounds, on the freedom with which educators feel they can address controversial topics in their courses (Peuchaud, 2018).

Diversity in front of the classroom has been established as an important goal, but one that has not made substantive progress, and continues to face criticism, especially in tenured positions and at the highest ranks

of the academic hierarchy. A diverse faculty – in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion – contributes to the experiences of students in the classroom. A diverse faculty forces students to think in new ways about who produces knowledge, and encourages a move toward perspectives that are inclusive of many different voices (Gasman, 2016).

Social location has been studied in relation to student response to controversial topics. Bhopal (2002) suggests that “whilst most students (regardless of their racial background) welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues around race, racism and oppression, for some this was often seen as a painful experience and based on past (negative) experiences” (p. 117). Levels of political engagement and party affiliation have also been explored in relation to the classroom experience of controversial topics. One study found that 62% of students who identified as conservative often felt silenced, compared with 53% of moderate and liberal students who also reported discomfort in sharing beliefs about controversial topics (Schmidt, 2018). Conservative students were far less likely to major in the humanities and social sciences than their liberal peers and are less likely to take courses where these topics are discussed (Porter & Umbach, 2006).

Congruence with professors' beliefs is also an influencing variable in the classroom, defined as the degree to which students perceive their party attachment and ideological stance is congruent with their instructor (Henson, 2007). In contrast, Hedley and Markowitz (2001) suggest that students may be more resistant to controversial information when it is perceived as challenging a norm/other dichotomy in which they are morally invested. Resistance increases when differing viewpoints are presented as morally based with one side as superior to all others. A national sample of 800 undergraduates found that more than half reported that they often felt intimidated by their peers on campus (Larson *et al.*, 2020). The classroom dynamic has also been studied in relation to controversial topics in college courses.

The Spiral of Silence theory has been applied to the college classroom, suggesting that students who feel their views differ from the majority are less likely to speak up and express a conflicting viewpoint. Noelle-Neumann (1977) suggests that at the core of the Spiral of Silence “as social beings, most people are afraid of becoming isolated from their environment. They would like to be popular and respected,” (p. 145). Additionally, the lack of a sense of belonging can un-

dermine academic performance (Walton & Cohen, 2007). In addition to perceived viewpoints of the group affecting students' willingness to share, peer influence has also been found to affect group disclosures.

Social Impact Theory focuses on how various social responses are affected by people within the group. The theory is characterized by social impact, or the effect of a group of people on an individual, is determined by that group's strength and immediacy (Latané, 1981). Students will experience more social impact in situations where they place a higher status on the other individuals, where the influence is immediate, and the group is larger. Group expectation is a powerful force that dictates student's reactions in the classroom.

Resistance to controversial content takes many forms. Hedley and Markowitz (2001) suggest students who resist discussions that critically examine social life sometimes do so because "they (1) tend towards reductionism in moral analysis and (2) misconstrue empirical and theoretical information provided in class as moral argument" (p. 1). Fear of retaliation for expressing controversial viewpoints has also been explored in the literature. Larson et al. (2020) suggest that students reported that they worry less about censure from faculty than from peers.

Methods for Incorporating Controversial Topics in the College Classroom

Incorporating critical pedagogy into college courses is driven by a desire to raise the consciousness of journalism and media studies students and to highlight oppressive practices in modern society. Freire (1974) positions critical pedagogy as the core of social justice teaching, which can lead to a critical reflection of the world around us and a desire to change aspects of society that are unjust. Critical consciousness is synonymous with critical literacy and has been identified as an important educational goal for students in journalism and media studies majors and in their subsequent professions as journalism and media practitioners (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Journalism education has been identified as vital to the development of world views that are sensitive to diverse communities and include an awareness of existing power structures. This worldview is fostered and supported by curriculum that is informed by media activism, public journalism, and critical service learning (Clark, 2013). Incorporating teaching strategies that highlight and critique current professional practices empower fu-

ture journalism and media practitioners to develop the skills they need to contribute in meaningful ways to our evolving media landscape.

Incorporating controversial topics in the college classroom can be a scary endeavor, one fraught with emotion and even resistance after past negative experiences. Research suggests that covering controversial topics in college classrooms can result in unintended outcomes (Saunders & Kardia, 2011). People in positions of privilege often feel defensive and tense when faced with controversial topics, while people of historically marginalized groups struggle with feelings of frustration, anger, and hurt. Both can be roadblocks to constructive conversations (Kim & Del Prado, 2019). Research suggests that effective methods of teaching resistant students involve two elements: "(1) defining for them what a norm/other dichotomy is while acknowledging that all of us sometimes reason in terms of norm/other dichotomies and (2) providing students with in-class and extra-class exercises that encourage students to recognize and sociologically explain their dichotomous moral beliefs" (Hedley & Markowitz, 2001, p. 195).

Two prominent paradigms have been established to teach controversial topics in the classroom: Liberation Pedagogy and Civic Humanism. Liberation Pedagogy's goal is to guide students in their development of a critical consciousness and focuses on student's experiences, histories, and the problems they bring to the classroom. For students to reach a new understanding of their place in the world, i.e., a new consciousness (Freire, 1970), students must be central to the learning experience rather than passive participants. Civic Humanism gives students the tools they need to prepare for the responsibilities of active citizenship, focusing on the role teaching plays in the development of moral virtues and a sense of social responsibility (Bok, 2008). Both paradigms require the participation of students in conversations that are often uncomfortable.

Method

This qualitative study addresses issues of gender, race, sexuality, class, and politics through in-depth interviews. Participants included twenty undergraduate students from a large southeastern university who were majoring in journalism, mass communication, or public relations, and were juniors or seniors. Ten students identified as male, nine identified as female, and one student chose not to disclose. The partici-

pants included 9 white students, 7 Black students, 3 Latinx students, and 1 Asian American student. The sample size was small but diverse and adds to the pedagogical understandings about the intersections of teaching styles and classroom culture as they relate to controversial topics. Students' perceptions of their journalism, public relations, and media studies courses were explored through their self-reported preferences for instructional style, perceptions regarding how their instructors handle the incorporation and management of controversial topics, and the importance students placed on the topics to their post-secondary learning experience.

Face-to-face in-depth interviews with 1-3 students per group took place over a two-week period. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions developed to identify and then assess their views of learning about controversial topics in their journalism and mass communication courses. The semi-structured interviews started with open-ended questions and then moved to more specific probes based on their responses. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach. Grounded theory, as described by Strauss and Corbin, (1998) is "theory derived from the data, systematically gathered, and analyzed through the research process" (p. 12). The emerging theory is grounded in the experiences and views of the participants and speaks to the engagement and experiences of students in their courses. This study utilized "pattern theory" where the emphasis is on finding "interconnected set of concepts and relationships" (Neuman, 1991, p. 38). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe "pattern theories" as an explanation that materializes during naturalistic or qualitative research.

The study received approval from the IRB. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and participation was voluntary. All identifying information from the transcripts was removed and names were changed for anonymity. The research data was stored on a password-protected computer and saved in a password-protected file. The qualitative methodology contributes to an in-depth and more holistic understanding of the participants' lived experiences and was an appropriate choice for a preliminary assessment of how controversial topics in mass communication and journalism courses are experienced by students. This approach adds to the growing body of research that addresses if controversial topics

should be included in college courses and how to foster meaningful dialogue when including them.

Analysis

The interviews produced a compelling conversation about the inclusion of controversial topics in college classes. The analysis section focuses on three dominant themes: (1) Students' definitions of controversial topics and their importance; (2) The impact of perceived political beliefs and social location; and (3) The impact of classroom culture and interpersonal dynamics.

Defining Controversial Topics:

The first research question asks: What topics do students identify as controversial and how do they feel about the inclusion of these topics in their journalism and mass communication courses? According to the Yale Center for Teaching and Learning, controversial topics can be defined in the following way:

Topics typically become controversial when students have competing values and interests; when they strongly disagree about statements, assertions, or actions; when the subject touches on some particular sensitivity (e.g. political or religious); or when they arouse an emotional reaction. (Para 2).

This first theme that emerged from the interviews focused on the topics that were identified by students as controversial and their reasoning for this categorization. After introductions, students were asked to define what they considered controversial topics. Responses ranged from the general sentiment that anything political was controversial, to specific topic areas such as religion, gender, race, and sexuality, to more specific examples related to topics, such as "gay marriage," "LGBTQIA+ rights," "transgender athletes," "critical race theory," "abortion," "sexual harassment," the "Me-Too movement," "feminism," "gender identity," "immigration," "guns," and "racism." One student explained: "Anything that makes people uncomfortable in class," is controversial, while another said: "It's the stuff that people feel strongly about." According to Kim and Del Prado (2019) "in the current volatile political climate, any conversation on culture and diversity is potentially loaded, if not explosive" (p. 5). One participant supported this assertion: "You just know when the professor starts talking about something like Black Lives Matter or transgender rights there's going to be a reaction. I always look around

the room and wonder who is going to get upset.” Participants connected controversial topics to feelings of unease, anger, and reactivity.

Participants expressed mixed-feelings about the incorporation of controversial topics in their courses. One student explained: “We never talked about this stuff in high school, so it’s nice to have real conversations.” Another participant agreed, “not everyone has access to a place like that where they can ask their questions in a judgment-free zone, and that’s important.” Other students agreed that certain topics were important, but were more limiting in what they felt should be included, “There are certain topics that go against my religious beliefs and I don’t think they should be pushed at me.” Students’ political beliefs influenced their support of controversial topics in the classroom, with more conservative students pushing back against the inclusion of controversial topics and students who identified as liberal supporting their inclusion. Students also addressed the importance of these topics in their future professions in journalism, media careers, and public relations. One participant asked, “How can I do my job if I’m not aware of the issues and be able to talk about them?” Another pointed out, “Most of us are already content creators, so we have a responsibility to know what’s going on in the world, even if it’s not something we agree with.”

Several students discussed the media’s role in defining controversial topics, with one participant commenting, “Whatever people are mad about at the time is what ends up in our discussions. You see it in the news, in your social media feeds, so people bring it up. The news drives it, even if it isn’t news.” Another student expressed a similar sentiment, “Someone is just mad. It’s the soap box topics.” Another linked cancel culture to controversial topics, “It’s whatever people are being cancelled over.” The agenda set by the news media, social media, and by local, national, and world events influences topics that make their way to the classroom, which has been identified as a beneficial strategy to promote student engagement in college courses (Meibert *et al.*, 2020). Discussing real-world events and issues provide frequent opportunities to leverage student engagement and growth, but also has the potential to create an environment that is uncomfortable if not handled through a thoughtfully managed and structured classroom environment.

The Impact of Perceived Political Beliefs and Social Location

The second research question asked: What factors affect how controversial topics are received and experienced by students in their journalism and mass communication courses? Two clear themes emerged: the influence of professor and student’s perceived political beliefs and their social location.

Participants repeatedly addressed their professor’s personal political beliefs as a factor that influenced their experience with controversial topics, and focused heavily on if these beliefs should be hidden or transparent. Most participants felt professors should not openly communicate political positions or beliefs, even though they felt their professor’s political beliefs were transparent. As one student put it, “It comes out. Eventually you know which way they lean. If it’s not obvious on day one, it doesn’t take long for a comment to slip. Something always gives it away.” Another explained, “Professors are easy to read, just how they talk about the topics, you know, you can usually just tell.”

Perceived political beliefs influenced how students felt about the discussion of controversial topics. Specifically, participants discussed the fear of negative repercussions when expressing conflicting beliefs from professors:

If I know a professor feels strongly about a certain issue and I don’t agree, then I won’t say much. I would hope that it wouldn’t impact how they grade my work, but I just don’t want to take that chance. It’s not worth it.

Another explained, “With some professors, I’m quiet if I think my beliefs are different from theirs.” When asked which professors illicit this response, the student responded, “the ones that are very strong in their opinions, and who rant about topics.” The words “rant,” “go on and on,” “go off,” and “drone on,” were used to describe classroom situations where students felt the professor expressed strong opinions in a way that shut down the potential for discussion or dissent.

Participants also associated professor’s social identity markers as clear signs of their political beliefs, with one student responding to the question: Do your professors express their political beliefs in class? with “Yes, she was a gay liberal whose girlfriend was transgender. That says it all.” Another student responded, “They don’t have to tell you, most of the time you can figure it out just by looking at them.” Other students projected the liberal bias associated with college

campuses and academia onto their professors, with comments such as “they are professors, of course they are liberal,” “not many of my professors are conservative, maybe some of the white men, but even they are probably more liberal.” When participants described a model of neutrality in their courses, where professors did not disclose their own personal position or preferences and gave equal treatment to each side of a controversial issue (Markie, 1994), they felt this was disingenuous. Heuser (2023) argued that neutrality is better understood as “a toxic form of indifference to the lived realities of our citizens” (para 4). In contrast to the model of neutrality that students criticized, an advocacy model has been identified as one that teaches students how to commit to a belief that is driven by intellect and rationale thought (Bock & Giebel, 2021). Proponents for the advocacy model argue that clear support for a side fosters student learning and engagement. In addressing professor neutrality versus advocacy, the students identified the tight rope that professors must manage to avoid being seen as “ranting,” while also supporting engagement through an advocacy model, with each side seemingly in contrast with the other.

Participants also discussed the role peers play in moderating their contributions in class, supporting the Spiral of Silence theory: “I have beliefs about abortion, but I’m guessing that I’m probably in the minority with how I feel. I just wouldn’t want to get into it with people in my classes.” Controversial topics elicited this response, but students felt more comfortable expressing opinions related to topics they deemed safe or if they felt they were in the majority opinion, one participant explained: “If it’s a conversation about race or politics then I’m not saying a lot, but if it’s something about, let’s say, the best show on Netflix or the best YouTube channel, then I’ll argue that.” These findings supported the belief that students across political perspectives engage in some form of classroom self-censorship. Despite descriptions of mishaps in the handling of uncomfortable situations and the acknowledgement of self-censorship, almost all of the participants expressed the belief that controversial topics are an important part of their journalism and communication courses because the ability to talk about controversial issues is an important life and career skill. The management of the topics and the classroom culture were both vital to the successful incorporation of controversial topics.

Classroom Culture and Interpersonal Dynamics

Classroom culture was a dominant theme that emerged in the small group interviews. This theme explores how professors introduce and manage controversial topics, the variables that influence how controversial topics are covered, and identifies successful and problematic methods for dealing with controversial topics. Additionally, this theme focuses on professor personality and the tone of the classroom. Participants repeatedly discussed their comfort or discomfort in discussing controversial topics, and what practices helped ensure a positive outcome. Students’ comfort in discussing controversial topics focused on two areas: the classroom culture and the ways in which professors incorporated and managed the topics.

Participants discussed peer interactions as well as the role of the professor in mediating discussions. The students’ discussion of peer responses to controversial topics followed Saunders and Kardia’s (2011) research findings on unintended outcomes of covering controversial topics. Students described altercations in their courses between fellow students and between students and professors. One participant described an uncomfortable situation where a student and professor were “yelling at each other, cutting each other off, and basically just going off the rails.” Another student described an incident when two students were going back and forth about racism, until a third student told one of them to “Just shut up. No one wants to hear what you think.” When asked if the professor stepped in to mediate the conflict or address the conflict, the student shook her head and said, “I don’t think he knew what to do. He just pretended like it didn’t happen. It was really strange. These students were yelling at each other, and he just kept on teaching.”

In addition to heated-conflict, students also described silence as an issue when professors brought up controversial topics, with only one or two students, usually the same students, willing to express opinions related to the topics. One student described a recent journalism class when someone brought up news coverage of transgender athletes,

A student in the class mentioned some articles that had recently come out about transgender athletes, and the class response was crickets. Complete silence. And there was a transgender student in there. The worst part is everyone looked over there, like they were the only one who could respond. So, no one responded. And they didn’t either. It was uncomfortable.

This speaks to the pressure that students from under-represented groups feel to represent or speak for all members of that group. It also speaks to a classroom culture that is dominated by one or two voices, often the same people each class, and often students who come from positions of privilege. Karp and Yoels (1976) identified this as the “consolidation of responsibility,” which refers to a classroom where the voices of a few dominate conversations, while most students passively observe or occasionally participate.

Participants focused on the importance of hearing from their fellow students and expressed a desire to learn from backgrounds and experiences that were different from their own. One participant explained, “I wish more people would share in class. I learn more when I hear people’s stories, what they’ve been through, and how they experience something.” Another agreed, stating, “Some classes just have a good feel and lots of students talk. Those are the classes that I get the most out of.” When asked what leads to the “good feel,” the student described a class culture of cohesion that started with the professor’s teaching style and the activities incorporated into the class, and hinged on buy-in from the students.

Finally, participants described examples of false stereotypes, assumptions, and expressions of offensive statements that occurred in their courses with the professors either handling them well through exploration and a growth mindset or handling them poorly, which felt like an endorsement or a missed opportunity to educate. One student described a class experience where a student referred to a Black man from a news article as colored, “You could just feel the room shift. It was shocking. And it’s not like he said it meanly, it was awful, but he said it like it was normal. Oh, it was so bad.” When asked how the professor responded, the student recounted: “something along the lines of, it’s not really socially acceptable to use that term anymore,” and then class continued. The student described the uncomfortable situation as an example of avoidance, or a missed opportunity to address something that was offensive. This aligns with what Davis (2018) described when addressing difficult subjects, “there is no such thing as a difficult dialogue without feelings of fragility that prompt individuals to retreat from confrontation in hopes of maintaining comfort” (p. x).

Discussion

Including controversial topics in the college classroom challenges students to think critically about their own

beliefs and values and helps prepare students, who have often come from homogeneous backgrounds, for the diverse journalism and media careers most of these students will enter. It also gives students the skills and confidence to develop and learn how to express opinions publicly, which is a common requirement of jobs in the media industry, journalism, and public relations.

Based on the themes that emerged from the small group interviews, professors and the classroom culture they foster, play a crucial role in the success of difficult conversations. To foster student participation in these discussions, professors should incorporate active learning, an approach to instruction in which all students are given open spaces to engage in the learning process. Active learning stands in contrast to traditional modes of instruction in which students are passive recipients of knowledge from an expert. This includes adopting multiple perspectives on each topic of the course rather than focusing solely on a single perspective, and adopting a procedural neutrality teaching model where professors disclose their perspective while also providing a full and fair account of other perspectives and sides (Bomstad, 1995). Professors should structure courses to engage and incorporate student experiences whenever possible, as students expressed the most growth and acceptance from their peers’ disclosures. Additionally, empathic teaching strategies are beneficial for all students, and especially those from marginalized backgrounds, who have faced a wide range of social, cultural, and political barriers (Dolby, 2012).

Professional development that addresses concrete practices for reducing student–teacher power imbalances should be offered to both early and late-career faculty. The student–teacher power dynamic is already steeply imbalanced, especially in cases where the instructor may be from a majority background, leading to barriers to student empowerment (Arif *et al.*, 2021). It is important to include materials, readings and screenings that address underrepresented groups’ experiences in ways that do not trivialize or marginalize these groups’ experiences. Acknowledging privilege, and more importantly identifying unknown privilege, allows for a space in which constructive conversations can thrive. Instructors should be clear about their approach to free expression and their desire to embrace multiple perspectives, so that students feel comfortable expressing opinions that might differ from their professors and peers, without fear of repercussions.

When introducing controversial topics, it is important to incorporate strategies that provide structure for discussions and give students a space where they feel comfortable in expressing their own ideas, while also fostering their ability to listen and learn from others. Fostering a commitment to a growth mindset, perspective-taking, and exploring a wide range of topics, theories, approaches, and ideas should be a pedagogical priority for professional development initiatives. Professors must also be prepared to address harmful stereotypes and challenge students' assumptions, specifically those that might be offensive to others in the class. It can be a difficult task to reconcile the tension between challenging offensive speech and not suppressing free speech, but it is an important balance to reach. Role playing scenarios can help instill confidence in both early and late-career professors who have varying levels of comfort and skill-sets to address changing classroom culture.

Establishing agreed upon guidelines early in the course is an important element of productive class discussions when addressing topics that are considered controversial. To avoid an echo chamber effect in our higher education classrooms, educators need to prioritize students' voices, and let them drive the conversations, promoting and encouraging the sharing of diverse perspectives. Bok (2022) suggests "In recent decades, cognitive psychologists have cast new light on human development and given colleges new possibilities for helping students acquire skills and qualities that will enhance their lives and increase their contributions to society" (122). The courses in our higher education journalism and mass communication departments must function as both liberation pedagogy and civic humanism, preparing students to consciously engage as journalism and media professionals in a diverse and complicated world.

Limitations and Future Research

Although participants' responses seemed open and easily expressed, the researcher's role as a professor in the students' program may have affected their comfort in disclosing. The number of participants, while appropriate for qualitative methodology, may have also limited perspectives and experiences. The geographic region where the study took place was one where heated public debate had surfaced and was covered extensively in the local and national news. This coverage had the potential to influence students' perceptions of the topics and their feelings on their inclusion

in college courses, and these experiences might be different for students at other universities in different regions.

Future research should include students from other geographic regions and from both large and small journalism and mass communication programs. Future research should also explore professors' experiences with controversial topics and should inform best practices and professional development initiatives. It is important to explore the challenges professors face when introducing controversial topics and managing heated conversations. It is also important to identify professional barriers, especially in light of the current cultural climate and increasing pressures of academia, including the number of adjunct and part-time teachers, the heavy teaching loads of lecturers, and the pressures of tenure track positions. This study and future research are increasingly important in the current political landscape and help support professors in their pedagogical goals of developing tolerant, reflective, and engaged students who will be our next generation of journalism and media practitioners.

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