**“Making Discussions Safe” - Scenarios**

1. Jon is leading a discussion about religious pluralism in his section of a theology class. He starts by inviting general comments from the class about three models of Christianity presented in the lecture on the previous day: exclusivism (the belief that Christianity is the *only* true religion and that outside of Christianity, there is no salvation); inclusivism (the belief that while Christianity is the only true religion, practitioners of other religions are saved by the grace of Christ); and pluralism (the belief that all religions are equal).

Sheila, a generally quiet, unfailingly respectful student raises her hand. When called on, she quotes a passage from John in the Christian Bible, adding, “so it’s obvious from Scripture that salvation only comes through Christ.” As she continues, Mark interrupts her, saying “I can’t believe that anyone in this day and age could possibly believe that Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. are going to hell.” The exchange quickly becomes a shouting match involving almost the entire class.

Problem:

Solution:

Prevention:

2. In an Introductory Biology course, consisting of mostly freshmen, non-science majors, Robert is discussing the mechanisms of speciation as an explanatory framework for how evolution happens at the single species scale. Things seem to be going well at the beginning, but as Robert continues his discussion, posing more questions about the nature of evolution, students begin to stand-up and leave the room. Finally, when a pair of students seated next to each other gets up and starts to leave, he stops them to ask why they are leaving. One of them responds, “You just assume we believe in evolution? We don’t, so we’re leaving.”

Problem:

Solution:

Prevention:

3. Erica is leading a discussion on slavery in her course on Nineteenth Century America. The discussion is going well until one student, Matt, offers his commentary. “Slavery wasn’t all bad. Slaves received food, shelter, clothing, and good medical care and were protected by their owners. That’s better than what a lot of slaves had in Africa,” Matt explained. Matt’s comment is met with silence as some of his fellow students fidget and shift nervously in their chairs.

Problem:

Solution:

Prevention:

4. Mark is leading a discussion on a book of literature that contains a gay character. One student, Peter, angrily complains at the beginning of class. He explains that he does not want to read the book because it condones homosexuality and is offensive to his values. He requests that Mark arrange an alternate text for him to work on instead, and that he not be required to attend class the days that this particular book will be discussed. Soon, other students chime in, echoing similar concerns until a small handful students gang up on Mark, asking that they not be required to read such an offensive book.

Problem:

Solution:

Prevention:

5. Lu is leading a discussion on the Vietnam War in her History of U.S. Foreign Relations course. The conversation turns to the psychological toll of war on young soldiers. Lu tries to be sensitive to Kevin – the only student in the class who is known to be a recent war veteran – and his level of participation. During a lull in the conversation, Todd, another student, turns to Kevin and asks, “You’re a young vet, Kevin. How are you dealing with the trauma of war?”

Problem:

Solution:

Prevention: