



Avoiding/Confronting Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

The current violent international conflict in Israel and Gaza may cause your students to be concerned about their safety and that of family and community members. The global tensions may lead to increases in hate crimes against Jews and Muslims around the world ([Sasani, 2023](#)). The conflict could also trigger strong emotions and opinions, which may impact your students. This resource provides guidance about course discussions of the conflict and how to avoid (or confront) antisemitism and Islamophobia.

What are Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia?

Anti-Semitism is “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group” ([Britannica, 2023](#)).

Islamophobia is “fear, hatred, and discrimination against practitioners of Islam or the Islamic religion as a whole” ([Kulik, 2023](#)).

Guidance for Conversations

If these events are not directly related to the course content or your field of study, you will want to be familiar with the section on Instructional Roles in Penn State’s policy [AC64 Academic Freedom](#). But please be aware that the current conflict has had an impact on many students’ learning, and you will want to prepare how to respond if a [conflict or disruption arises](#).

If the events are related to the course or your field of study, and you are prepared to address them, consider whether you are prepared to address students’ emotions.

1. Preliminary considerations

- Be transparent about why class time is being used to discuss the current conflict.
- Help students understand why the conflict is relevant to the course.
- Recognize that your/students’ biases may appear in implicit or explicit ways.
- Consider positioning yourself as a learner rather than an expert.

2. Establish a respectful environment for discussion.

- Establish ground rules for course discussion ([Establish Guidelines for Interaction](#), CMU; [Ground Rules: Examples & Resources](#), UMBC; [Establishing Classroom Ground Rules](#), WUSL)
- Respond directly, in the moment, to disruptions and microaggressions (see [Taking ACTION on Disruptions or Microaggressions](#), [Navigating Disruptions](#)).

3. Avoid oversimplifications and overgeneralizations

- The Israel-Gaza Strip conflict is multi-layered with as historical, religious, political, and cultural aspects. Oversimplification of the conflict may lead to biases and stereotyping.
- State that the conversation is not intended to lead to a one-sided conclusion.

4. Use precise language that does not dehumanize people, for example:
 - Reference Israel rather than “Jews”
 - Do not conflate actions of the Israeli government or Hamas as if they represent all views in Israel or Gaza.

5. Center empathy and listen to people who have been affected by the conflict
 - The events could be traumatizing and painful to students in ways different from your own or unrecognized by you (see [Teaching During Times of Global Tensions: Violence in Gaza and Israel](#), [Trauma-informed Teaching Practices](#))
 - Listen to those who have personal and/or familial relationships associated with the region or the event.
 - Explicitly state concern for those who are affected and encourage students to contact you about their ability to perform course tasks. For example, share the following statement in class or in an announcement or craft your own: “I understand that the war between Hamas and Israel has caused pain, distress, and fear for some of you. Please reach out to me if the situation has disrupted your learning, so we can work together to keep your learning on track.”

6. Review media literacy strategies with students
 - Social media content based on misinformation can lead to biases and stereotypes ([Rhodes, 2022](#)). Remind students to critically evaluate information sources.
 - Evaluate digital content about social and political issues ([McGrew et al., 2017](#)) by:
 1. Asking who is behind the information presented
 2. Evaluating the evidence presented
 3. Investigating what other sources say

7. Connect students with resources to learn more about diversity and belonging (e.g., [Center for Spiritual and Ethical Development](#), [Community & Belonging](#)).

The above list is adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), [Supporting youth affected by the violence in Israel and Gaza](#).

