sometime soon?” Did the note leave room for interpretation? Could the student be idealizing the relationship with her teacher? Could the letter be a hoax? If Inmiddle chooses minimal or no intervention, a student may be harmed. If he acts on the basis of incomplete information, his colleague could be unfairly harmed.

Assuming the note contained explicit detail that left little room for doubt, many would argue that this case depends on whether the identified faculty member is currently evaluating the student or may evaluate the student in the future. Others would argue that the current status of the professional relationship does not matter because once the power differential between an instructor and student has been established, it is always present. But, regardless of one’s position on whether it is ever permissible for an instructor to date a student, Inmiddle may not be able to determine if the student is being harmed by this relationship.

If the content of the note leaves ample room for multiple interpretations, as seems to be the case here, Inmiddle might approach the recipient and cautiously attempt some informal inquiry. Such a solution might be necessary if Inmiddle’s institution has no guidelines for reporting cases of suspected sexual harassment. Even the most productive response, however, may be altered by variables such as the relationship between Inmiddle and his colleague, the relative ranks of the two, and whether they have a close or distant relationship. Inmiddle should consult a trusted advisor before proceeding. (See also 14-6 and 14-7.)

Discussion Questions

1. If Inmiddle decides to report his knowledge to the appropriate university official, is he obligated to let the instructor and student know of his intentions? What are the pros and cons of making either choice?

2. Suppose Inmiddle learns of this affair during a meeting with the student. The student believes she is the victim of sexual harassment, but wants Inmiddle to keep their conversation confidential. Some professional organizations (e.g., the American Psychological Association) have ethics codes that prohibit violation of confidentiality in most circumstances regardless of local institutional policy. What options does Inmiddle have for dealing with this apparent conflict of interest?

3. What would you have done if the note was delivered to your mailbox?

Political and Public Statements

How do we negotiate the boundaries of our influence over students when the focal topic is socially or politically charged? Media saturation makes controversial issues and conflicting interpretations impossible to avoid on a college or university campus. Educators are often admonished, however, to remain objective and to avoid taking advantage of our opportunity to unduly persuade our students in matters unrelated to pedagogy. Defining the line between fostering civility and the right to free speech has been sorely tested in the academy, but not fully resolved.

The cases in this chapter examine the possible impact of one’s political or religious views on everyday interactions with students, both in and out of the classroom. Examples include race, abortion, free speech, and hot-button campus issues. The significance of our influential role requires sensitivity to what students think about us and how they incorporate our beliefs and values into their own.

Case 21-1. Politics in the Classroom

Professor Partisan is very active in politics and her political party. She observes that many of her students, however, hold political ideals very different from hers. She uses her classroom pulpit to interject her views into the discussions at hand by, for example, telling accounts of the negative impact that results when other ideologies have prevailed. In addition, during political campaigns she wears buttons while teaching class and puts posters favoring her candidates in the classroom where she teaches. Outside of the classroom, she tries to persuade students to vote as she will. Students begin to grumble that Partisan’s political views cloud her presentation of relevant course material.
Being active in political affairs outside of one's responsibilities as a faculty member is both acceptable and an inalienable right. On the other hand, partisan politicking in the classroom or otherwise while on the job is inappropriate, and may violate school policy.

To a limited degree Partisan's enthusiasm for proselytizing among students is understandable. The facts are that students do differ from us in many ways, and many are uninformed. Part of our calling may be to help them change certain attitudes, at least regarding their understanding of the subject matter we are teaching. However, instructors should avoid steering students towards their personal agendas, and Partisan's use of her authority to attempt to convert students to her political values goes way out of bounds.

That said, do instructors have any latitude in giving straightforward and honest answers to questions concerning their personal beliefs? It can be difficult to eschew political values and implications entirely when helping students understand certain subjects. With some courses or topics it is all but impossible to avoid politically sensitive issues or questions. So, what criteria should be used to cope with this unsettled situation? Our view is to accept that political values are inevitably implicated in at least some of what we tell students, and it is better to acknowledge this fact whenever it seems appropriate than to believe (or at least claim) that we always remain impartial. We should also acknowledge, whenever appropriate, the legitimacy of holding views other than our own. Furthermore, our actions as instructors should never involve coercion (e.g., grading essays based entirely on the their adherence to the instructor's political views). However, it is not always clear how persuasive various actions (e.g., wearing a button) are for some students. Our built-in authority over students gives our actions the potential to be more coercive than we realize.

Instructors should include enough information and context to allow students to distinguish a instructor's personal, partisan ideology from "regular" course content. Students should also understand that they are free to accept or reject the former as a qualitatively different kind of information from that making up the substantive area of knowledge they are studying. In the end we are most successful when we help provide the groundwork for students to make their own informed judgments and choices. (See also 21-5 and 21-6.)

Discussion Questions

1. What if the instructor's agenda is simply to increase students' political participation in a nonpartisan way? Examples might include encouraging students to vote and providing information about how to register, or encouraging their involvement in campaigns that have widespread, nonpartisan support (e.g., campaigns to neuter pets, cease smoking, or drug abuse). Would apathetic students or those wanting to remain entirely outside the system have any legitimate complaint regarding undue coercion?

2. What if Partisan never openly spoke of her political stance on issues, but wore buttons or ribbons almost every day that identified her political alignments, including those that are openly controversial? Is that more acceptable than how she was portrayed in the vignette? Why or why not?

3. Is it unethical for an organized group of faculty to underwrite and sign their names to an ad in the student newspaper endorsing a sensitive position that has divided support at best (e.g., a petition against the U.S. stand on military tribunals)? How about the local newspaper?

4. Is it ethical to hold students accountable on exams for material that was identified as personal opinion?

Case 21-2. Religion in the Classroom

A student, Peter Pious, frequently cites Biblical passages and other religious texts to support (or refute) positions taken by himself, the instructor, and fellow students. He also makes liberal use of such sources on essay exams. When the instructor offers Peter feedback that this kind of evidence is not germane to the course, Peter protests that his spirituality is so central to how he experiences everything that he cannot simply turn it off and be expected to think, integrate material, and make original contributions to the class. Peter further notes that the course syllabus invites students to "think for themselves" and "share personal views" on the material.

In spite of the instructor's continued admonishments, Peter persists. Other students are complaining that his behavior is making them uncomfortable and wasting class time. The instructor decides to inform Peter that from now on he will be recorded as absent from any class when his contributions to discussions are explicitly religious, and that any exam answers that include religious arguments will receive no credit.
How do we deal with students who insist on approaching our course strictly on their own terms? How do we grade and explain our grades to students whose religious or other deeply held values lead them to very different conclusions from those reached by the instructor or a discipline? Peter cannot be faulted for his deep commitment to a set of personal beliefs. His primary responsibility as a student, however, is to meet the expectations of the course. It is helpful if the course syllabus and early explanations are clear about what is considered relevant. In addition, students' grades should be based on objective indicators of performance.

On essay exams, students should be allowed some latitude, albeit with the risk they will be judged to have come up short if they omit substantive ideas or data simply because they clash with their personal beliefs. If Peter learns to couch his views in more secular terms, his ideas may serve to invigorate class discussions by the insights they offer while avoiding overtones that could distract or repel others.

We do not, however, agree with this instructor's handling of Peter's stubbornness. For purposes of classroom management, the instructor may need to arrive at a special understanding with Peter about what is appropriate for his in-class contributions. However, evaluations of Peter's academic performance (attendance and exam scores) are a different matter. When Peter is present he should not be marked absent, no matter the nature of his "contributions." Similarly, his exam responses must be graded fairly on the basis of how well they addressed the questions, with appropriate credit given for whatever relevant material Peter includes.

As noted with respect to several other cases, imparting new values is a big—if often unstated—part of what we do as college-level instructors. Part of our mission may be to show sensitivity when we help students learn to recognize the difference between their beliefs and empirical data, historical research, or other perspectives and interpretations. In this way we help them expand their critical thinking abilities without denigrating their personal values. As difficult a task as that may be, that mission is impossible to achieve if we, ourselves, cannot serve as models for our students. (See also 2-10.)

Discussion Questions

1. What if Peter does not directly espouse his strong religious views until the very end of the course, such as on the final exam or the term project? Is the instructor justified in failing him for the exam (and perhaps the course)? Or, could an Incomplete (with arrangements to be made later) be justified in such an unexpected case?

2. What if the perspective to which a student like Peter is strongly committed happens to correspond closely the instructor's personal views? Can instructors recognize the possible bias and still remain objective when it comes to grading such students?

3. Most campus policies allow for a student to be removed if consistent behavior substantially disrupts the learning process. Does Peter meet this criterion?

4. Is it a mistake for an instructor to encourage in the syllabus speaking out and thinking for oneself? (After all, Peter ultimately used these statements to his own advantage and caused problems for everyone else.)

5. What would you do if Peter Pious was your student?

Case 21-3. Hot Topics in the Classroom

Professor Oneside discusses abortion in his Social Issues class as a decision that should be left up to the woman. He takes an empirical approach to this controversy, using a number of data-based research studies to support his point of view. Several students protest that he does not give equal time to the arguments on the other side and is, therefore, misusing his power to shape student attitudes.

Presenting highly controversial issues in class, even when the issue is a legitimate aspect of the course topic, can be tricky for several reasons. The instructor may have well-formed opinions about these issues that are different from those held by many students. Instructors can also hold a substantial influence over students, and part of an instructor's job involves helping students learn to appreciate the relevance of empirical evidence and alternative scholarly interpretations in understanding complex issues. However, when personally held core values are also at stake, the place of empirical data is more complex.

Rather than arguing only one side of an important controversy, as in the present case, an instructor should outline all the important sides (including any relevant data) and let the students participate fully in a critical discussion of the issue. Oneside may voice his opinion that his side of the abortion debate has more empirical support, and he should document this assertion on the basis of scientifically and professionally derived information. For a course like this, it may be appropriate to mention in the syllabus (and reiterate in class) that the instructor has well-
formed opinions on some of the issues to be presented. He might add and
that students may disagree strongly with the instructor without risk of
ridicule or censure, and that they are encouraged to discuss issues with
him outside class. If Oneside cannot offer students who disagree with him a
genuine, nonpunitive forum, then ethical problems exist. (See also 21-8.)

Discussion Questions

1. What if the students seeking equal time belong to extremist hate groups?
Is an instructor obligated to attempt to present their ideology and purpose in
a constructive manner by attempting to enumerate their “good” points?

2. How critical is it for an instructor to present minority viewpoints on issues
when the majority view is widely endorsed among experts in the instructor’s
field and also has widespread public support?

Case 21-4. Campus Political Organizations

Professor Staunch is an avid opponent of capital
punishment. He has organized a group of students on
campus with similar beliefs. He leads the group at
meetings and has organized trips to large rallies.
Staunch often makes a point of telling all of his students
who come to see him before or after class, or during
office hours, about upcoming events. Students who do
not share his beliefs feel threatened if they express their
true feelings. Some complain that they feel pressured
to express support for statements that do not reflect their
belief in capital punishment.

Although there is usually no problem with organizing or leading an
appropriately registered campus group (even a controversial one), power
differences between students and faculty and the risk of misusing the trust
and influence we enjoy require scrupulous sensitivity to the distinction
between personal and professional activity. Thus, once instructors are
involved in a controversial cause they should go out of their way to separate
this involvement from their role in the classroom. If questions directly
relevant to the focal issue come up in class, for example, the instructor
should either decline to comment in that context or scrupulously
acknowledge all other sides of the issue.

Discussion Questions

1. What if Staunch never mentions capital punishment in his classes, but
students who are active in support of the death penalty must take his class? These
students are personally known to Staunch because they openly face off from time
to time. What precautions should Staunch take to maintain his objectivity when
evaluating these students?

2. What if the issue is somewhat less polarizing (e.g., welfare reform), and Staunch
considers it directly relevant to his course (e.g., a social work course lecture on the
history of welfare policy)? Would his recruitment of students in an activist activity be
ethically justified?

3. What if an issue is widely popular, such as the sharp rise in patriotism
after September 11, 2001? Is it ethically acceptable to encourage patriotic activity
during class time? If so, in what ways?

Case 21-5. Controversial Speakers

In announcing the visit of a Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard
to campus, Professor Screech encourages the students
to show up and “boo the man down.”

In our view, Screech’s encouragement to deny the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) or
any other group its right to free speech is unethical, whether delivered in
the classroom or elsewhere. Most instructors want students to think for
themselves. Whether a presentation is benign or grotesque, it is
inappropriate to tell students whom they should or should not hear unless
the speaker’s presentation is directly related to the course.

We are not suggesting that Screech must ignore the occasion of an
official KKK visit, because encouraging students to attend such an event
is appropriate, or even desirable, as a device to further their educational
experience. Screech may also express his own laudatory or condemnatory
opinions about the group or its message as long as these personal views
are identified as such. Spending too much time in a class unrelated to the
topic, however, would be inappropriate. Finally, Screech could promote
competing ideas by participating in a peaceful protest (noncoercively and
outside class) or by arranging for an opposing speaker to come to campus.

Postsecondary institutions are uniquely suited to the exercise of free
speech, and there is nothing like an odious guest speaker to remind us of
this fact. Furthermore, ethical principles obligate instructors to respect
others’ rights to hold attitudes or opinions differing from their own. Instructors should be visible models of this principle rather than misusing the influence they have over students.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Should limits on free speech exist on a college or university campus?

2. Should extremely controversial speakers ever be invited to campus in the first place?

3. Given his obligation to serve as a role model for students, is it ethically questionable for an instructor to participate in disruptive confrontations or civil disobedience, even as a private citizen at an off-campus location?

4. It is a common and accepted practice for instructors to require students to attend campus-wide events when the topic is directly related to the course. Are there types of on-campus events or speakers that would be unethical to require of every student in the class? For example, should an orthodox Jewish student enrolled in a religion class be required to go to an evangelical Christian church service and marked down if she refuses?

**Case 21-6. Political Display in the Office**

Professor Political has slogans and posters on his outside office door and inside office walls that leave no doubt about how he feels on various contemporary issues. Topics include animal rights, nuclear power, capital punishment, women’s rights, and various partisan political personalities. Political does not mention any of his causes in class, nor does he talk to students about his beliefs unless he is asked.

Although under most conditions Political’s behavior would be protected under a First Amendment right to free speech, several points are worth consideration. First, because institutional (college or university) property is involved, Political would be wise to investigate whether policy statements exist relevant to his poster passion. In state-supported schools, legal risks may be incurred. There may also be some meaningful distinction between Political’s personal office area and the space he shares with others (e.g., the hallway, classrooms, or lobby area).

Legal or policy issues aside, there are subtle ethical risks in trumpeting beliefs on the walls and doors of our offices. A major concern is the possibility that students and others will confuse Political’s personal views with his professional opinions as a faculty member. We want students to take seriously what we say, and yet we also expect them to distinguish the information conveyed in our teaching from those that express only our personal beliefs. However, when in doubt, it is our responsibility to clarify the boundaries dividing our professional roles or positions and our private views. Displaying partisan statements reflecting one’s personal beliefs on school property makes these beliefs public, and students, parents, and other visitors will readily view an instructor’s office and decor as official trappings of his or her position as a faculty member and, perhaps, representative of a professional discipline.

Given the substantial differences in power and authority between faculty and students, adverse effects can occur even when views (political or otherwise) are clearly understood to be the instructor’s own. For example, a tasteless display (e.g., a blood-drenched pictorial poster for a slasher movie) could be offensive or intimidating enough as to prevent a student in being comfortable in the instructor’s office, or even from seeking assistance in the first place. Also of concern would be less blatant material which might have a differentially negative effect on certain others (e.g., partisan materials concerning far left or far right political orientations). Considering the complexity here, the more traditional among us would be likely to opt for official neutrality on partisan political issues. (See also 21-1.)

**Discussion Questions**

1. Suppose Political has colleagues with views opposed to his who push the envelope with their own partisan displays. Does this give Political somewhat more latitude to respond in kind than he otherwise would have?

2. Several faculty members in many departments have a sign that says “SAFE” on their door to indicate that the instructor does not discriminate against lesbians and gay men and is open to discussing educational issues with gay and lesbian students. Might this be intimidating to those who hold antihomosexual views, or does this otherwise pose ethical problems? Should we care?

3. A Caucasian instructor’s spouse is Asian, and a wedding photo of them is prominent among the instructor’s personal office decorations. Another is in a committed gay relationship and displays a photograph of the two with their arms around each other. Should it matter to these instructors that their photos might offend a student who is uncomfortable about interracial marriage or a homosexual lifestyle? What if a student was so upset that she refuses to come into the office? Is that just her problem?
4. What are the limits of personal photographs or other displays in our own offices? Should there be any?

5. A colleague we know who teaches human anatomy has human brains in jars in his office. He argues that this is the only safe place to keep them. Many students, however, will not enter his office. Because this colleague is limiting the contact students are having with him, is he unethical? Or, is the problem with the squeamish students?

**Case 21-7. Self-Presentation Off Campus**

The Independent Star, a local newspaper, carries a flaming guest editorial lambasting the governor’s state budget plan. The editorial is signed by Professor Hotpen, a political science instructor, and includes her title and affiliation. Some colleagues are upset because they do not agree with Hotpen’s analysis. Others are upset because they do not wish to offend the governor lest he further cut the state-supported university’s budget.

Any articulate and well-informed citizen, whether a college faculty member or not, performs a valuable public service by contributing to reasoned public debate. When imparting personal opinions in a public forum, however, faculty must attempt to assure that the public does not assume institutional sponsorship or endorsement of the position expressed. Hotpen could have avoided misinterpretation by omitting her university position after her name.

Often enough, however, what one does and where one does it is revealed anyway. Occupational status is easily obtained information that others often want to know in order to assess the credibility of the source. If faculty members wish to express opinions publicly, they should explicitly communicate to their audiences that the opinions are their own, that they are not acting as representatives of the college or university, and that their opinions do not necessarily correspond to those held by the university administration, other faculty members, and staff.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What if an editorial or other public comment is so extreme that it embarrasses almost everyone on campus. What appropriate responses are available to Hotpen’s colleagues?

2. College and university faculty members are often called by media journalists or reporters to comment on various issues in the news. The inclusion of the caveats (i.e., “This is my own opinion that does not necessarily represent those held by other members of the college”) is not under the instructor’s control. In such cases, should instructors be especially cautious about what they say when it is clear that their affiliation will be identified? Would any institutional mandate be cautious about curtailing free speech?

**Case 21-8. The Bully Pulpit**

Professor Tickoff bursts into class one day waving the campus newspaper, obviously upset about something. When the class starts, Tickoff shouts out, “Did you see today’s paper? Look at this! They’re buying out the contract of a lousy coach and paying him a fortune! They pay off somebody who does an inferior job, but tell me they can’t even afford a basic computer for this classroom. If they won’t support me, why should I support them? What the...” Tickoff continues a tirade that lasts for most of the class period. Several members of the class are troubled because there is an exam scheduled very soon on difficult material that was supposed to be discussed that day.

We believe that a college education is more than just what goes on in the classroom. Students are usually unaware of the big picture of an institution’s finances and agendas and could benefit from an open, frank, and fair discussion to put the situation into perspective. It might be all right if Tickoff wanted to very briefly discuss the buyout of the coach, pointing out the difficulties with financial policies as he sees them, thus helping the class to understand the overall picture of campus commitments. To shortchange his students by teaching very little during the class period, however, is an abrogation of Tickoff’s responsibilities and unfair to the students.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What if the foregoing issue is reasonably relevant to the content of the course, such as one on educational administration or a physical education course on coaching? Does this change the acceptability of Tickoff spending considerable time on a specific event?
2. What if a critical event occurred that has nothing to do with the course, but everyone is talking about it. An example would be the days following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Would it be all right to spend a full class period on that subject? Why and why not?

Responsibilities to the Institution

This chapter looks at the sometimes hazy boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable use of campus resources. Most decisions as to what is acceptable and what is not are more difficult to make than they might seem at first blush. For example, most instructors take work home, and some do much of their grading and scholarly activities away from their busy offices to avoid disruptions. However, how many institutional supplies or equipment are too many to end up on the instructor's home desk? Questionable use of job-related resources and related workplace integrity issues are the themes found in this chapter.

Case 22-1. Royalty Producing Work

Professor Goodwords is writing a textbook. He asks the department secretary to proofread the manuscript, add changes and corrections to the file, and otherwise help with the development of the book during regular business hours.

No single and simple answer would cover the resolution of this situation in all circumstances. Generally, allocating resources to help produce royalty-producing work should not supersede routine departmental service. For example, if Professor Goodword's book is getting attention ahead of exam typing or assistance with a manuscript submitted to a non-compensated scholarly journal, there is an ethical problem because a personal enterprise is interfering with other normal campus activities.

The type of project probably makes a difference. Some works for which the instructor may receive some form of compensation also benefit the institution.