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## EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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Dear Colleagues,

In recent weeks, ETSU facilities were, again, defaced with racist vandalism. In addition, in the last few days, I was shocked, horrified, and angered by the violent murder of George Floyd. These acts of racism are harmful to every member of the ETSU community and every citizen of the country. And yet, I also know that these acts of hatred and violence affect our colleagues of color more personally and poignantly. To our colleagues who are justifiably struggling to cope with the brutality and racism that persists in this country, please know that while we are not counselors, the faculty/staff in the Center for Teaching Excellence are here to listen and to offer solidarity.

If you are teaching this summer, I hope you will be aware that the proliferation of violence against Black people in this country, the cruel nature of the most recent attacks, and the isolation of the world's health crisis, will also mean that some of your students are going to be experiencing additional emotional, physical, and intellectual stress. Here are some ideas for processing these difficult and dehumanizing events with your students:

- **Acknowledge the recent acts of violence and their prevalence in recent history!** Remaining silent in your classes regarding these events ignores the reality of the experience your students are facing. It may feel awkward and you may not have the right language, but these tips from [Vanderbilt's Center for Teaching](#) and the [New York Times Learning Blog](#) can help.
- **Moment of silence** - Taking time to acknowledge hateful and tragic events and allow students to reflect in their own way is a small step you can take to indicate you care about these events and how each student may be affected.
- **Facilitate a Discussion** - Set ground rules for [difficult dialogues](#) and take time in class to discuss the events. You'll need to be sure you allow sufficient time to explore all of the topics that may come up in this kind of discussion and pre-plan strategies for managing "[hot moments](#)" should they emerge.
- **Assign relevant readings or ask students to complete an assignment** (ex. journal entry) that relates to the themes of the event.
- **Practice Empathy** - Brene Brown writes, "Rarely does an empathetic response begin with 'at least.'" As in, "at least they didn't tear the plaques down," or "at least they didn't protest the pep rally." "At least" is a phrase that invalidates a person's experience. Empathy requires perspective taking, avoiding judgement, recognizing emotion in others, and connecting to that emotion.
- **Notice, Ask, and Refer** - This advice from David Goobler's *The Missing Course*, challenges us to be aware when students seem out of sorts. If a student's physical appearance changes markedly, they suddenly start missing zoom sessions, or they fail to

complete assignments (when they once were punctual), that student may be in distress. Asking, "Is everything ok?", will signal that you care. It is important however, to avoid acting as an expert. Refer students to the Multicultural Center or the Counseling Center if they indicate they need some assistance.

Should you need additional mental health resources, please use the resources provided through the [Employee Assistance Program](#). Please also feel free to reach out if there is something I can do to support you during these times. Racism, in its most vile form of violence and murder and in its everyday iteration of verbal and non-verbal abuse, violates the university's values and disrupts our abilities to work, serve, and learn. As educators, it is our duty to do the difficult work to stand against racist actions, ideas, and policies.

Sincerely,

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