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Teaching Sensitive Issues: Feminist Pedagogy and the  
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## Abstracts

# Teaching Sensitive Issues: Feminist Pedagogy and the Practice of Advocacy-Based Counseling

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In this paper, we discuss ways in which instructors can assist and empower students in crisis using the Advocacy-Based Counseling (ABC) perspective. This praxis, developed by battered women's advocates to inform their work with survivors of intimate partner violence, emphasizes the importance of listening to students, as well as identifying and addressing safety concerns. We also discuss the necessary limits of the instructor's role in these situations, and how to communicate those limits to students.

Our discussion begins with some of the reasons students are likely to have problems, covers some of the potential issues raised by teaching about social phenomena in the classroom, and expands to consider a range of sensitive issues. The pedagogy of violence is a useful starting point because of its unfortunate ubiquity. Just as violence respects few boundaries in the social world, instructors in different departments and disciplines are faced with the impacts of violence on their students. The prevalence of violence in society also means that in every class some of our students will be survivors (and perpe-

trators) of violence, for whom this material may elicit strong reactions. Furthermore, many of the teaching materials we and other instructors use in our courses are inherently emotive, and they often evoke a wide range of responses from students who may have limited personal experience with violence.

What are the most productive and sensitive ways to handle this classroom reality? How can we as instructors cultivate a supportive learning environment in which students feel comfortable discussing their reactions to violence in a manner appropriate to the classroom setting? How should this knowledge affect our course design, pedagogical approach, and interactions with students, both in groups and individually? To what extent can or should we modify the traditional instructor/student relationship to assist students in crisis—and what elements of that relationship should remain unchanged? We explore these questions through an examination of the Advocacy-Based Counseling (ABC) perspective, suggesting strategies that both instructors and administrators can use to better address these situations.