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Connecting Ethics to FYS Class Participation

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Connecting Ethics to FYS Class Participation

The practice and the need it addresses

Exploring the UULO

One goal of UNLV's First-Year Seminars is that students are introduced to, and understand the purpose of, the University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs). This activity introduces students to **Citizenship and Ethics**, focusing especially on applying ethics in situations directly relevant to students' daily lives.

Developing Professionalism

This activity also engages students in considering their classroom behavior and developing professionalism. By linking participation and student action to ethics, students are encouraged to consider the manner in which their behaviors (texting, side chatter, late arrivals, etc.) could impact their classmates. This re-frames classroom management practices as being about **community**, rather than an individual instructor's idiosyncratic requests.

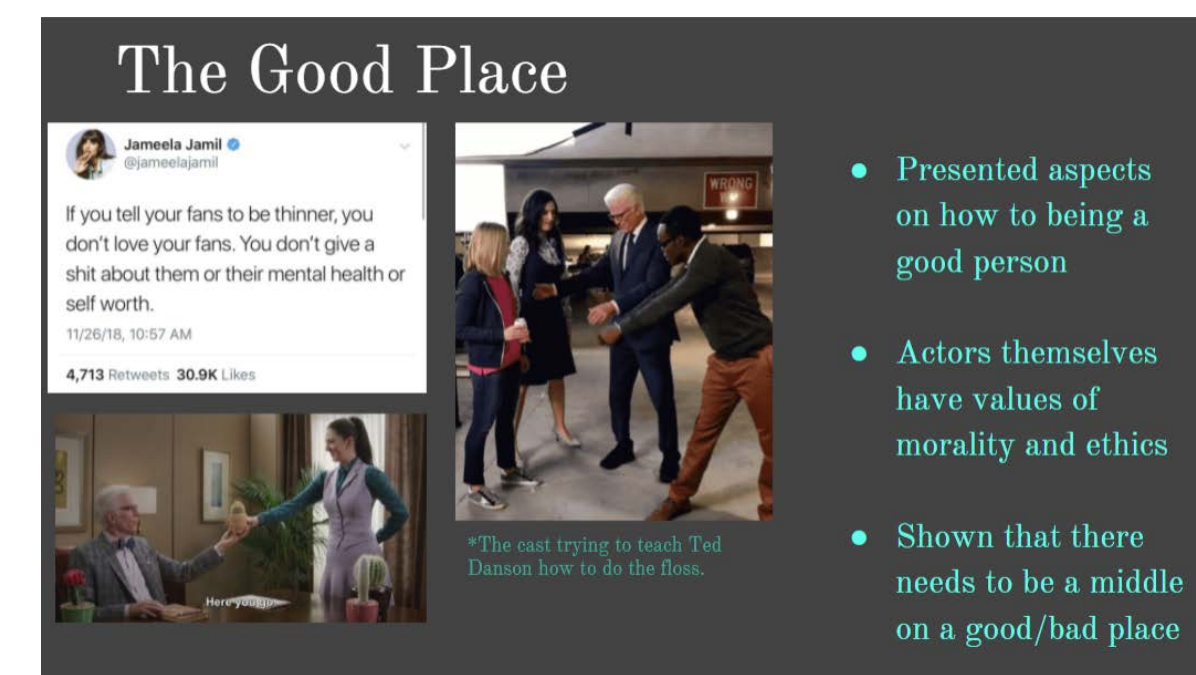
The Lesson Plan

- Brief (5-10 min) lecture defining ethics.
- Watch 20-min pilot episode of NBC's *The Good Place*.
- Discuss episode's take on ethics.
- Group work to set up class "point" system (see resources worksheet).
- Journal self-reflection on individual student's classroom ethics.

Evidence this practice benefits UNLV Students

Student Perspectives & Learning Outcomes Survey

Students frequently mention *The Good Place* and the lessons on ethics in their reflective final assignments:



Reflections evidence honest self-evaluation of their class professionalism:

"Overall, my classroom ethics are high. . . . I'm an active listener, but sometimes do not participate as much as I should."

"Concerning the class's ethics, I feel as if we can work on more class ethics [. . .] It's important to learn these skills and ethics now due to the fact that we are all going to be using them not only at UNLV, but also our future jobs & when communicating with others."

"I would say my behavior is average ethically. I don't do anything that would effect or harm others, but I don't really help anyone in class."

In the Vice Provost's Learning Outcomes Survey for Fall 2017 (first semester lesson plan was implemented), COLA 100E had the highest marks of any FYS for "Increase my understanding of ethics" at 4.05 (Overall Mean 3.76).

Resources and where to find them

Resources

Schur, M. (Writer), & Goddard, D. (Director). (19 September 2016) Pilot [Television Series Episode] In *The Good Place*. Los Angeles, CA: NBC.

For background on college students' moral development, see the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, James Rest, and Carol Gilligan. An overview is available in *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016, pp. 336-354).

Sample In-Class Worksheet

(Filled out in small groups)

COLA 100E: Ethics in the Classroom			
Good		Bad	
Action	Points	Action	Points

How other UNLV teachers might adopt this practice

Curriculum

Other UNLV instructors (especially working in FYS or general education classes) may consider:

- Reframing classroom behavior as an ethical decision, involving the impact of one's actions on others.
- Building in time for lessons and self-reflection on in-class professionalism.
- Creating space for discussion of varied perspectives and attitudes on classroom behavior (eating in class, arriving late, being on phones), i.e., via group work.
- Using engaging visual media like *The Good Place* to introduce complex concepts.
- Placement in the semester: I've had deeper self-reflection and more in-class references back to this lesson when teaching it toward the second half of the course, rather than in the second week. This is perhaps due to greater student comfort with one another and me.

Contact Information

For additional information on the activity, to share your own ethics lessons, or to brainstorm together, feel free to contact me at emily.shreve@unlv.edu.