

## Tips for teaching Sexual Citizens

**If you're considering adopting Sexual Citizens in a course with older high school students, college students, or graduate students, you already likely care about sexual assault. And because you care about it, you probably already know that some of your students will have experienced a sexual assault. Here are some things to think about:**

### **Syllabus Planning:**

- You may want to consider assigning the book somewhere in the middle of the semester -- after you've had a chance to get to know your students, and set a tone for the class, but not in the final week or two of the semester, when students tend to be wrung out and exhausted.

### **Before class:**

- Make sure to list the topic on the syllabus, if it contains a week to week preview, and give all students a heads up, a couple of weeks in advance. You don't want to catch anyone by surprise.
- Letting students know that a potentially upsetting topic is coming gives them a chance to prepare themselves. You can also circulate links to supportive resources; if your school doesn't have confidential support available for sexual assault survivors, provide the RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) phone number (800-865-HOPE, or [www.Rainn.org](http://www.Rainn.org) and [www.rainn.org/es](http://www.rainn.org/es)).
- Also let students know if you are a 'mandated reporter' – that is, if you are required by your institution to file a formal report with the title IX office if they share with you that they have experienced a sexual assault or another form of gender-based misconduct.

### **During class:**

Set some ground rules.

- *It can be useful to remind everyone that there are survivors in every room, virtual and real, and that everyone holds some of the pain related to sexual assault – because everyone, whether they know it or not, cares about someone who has been sexually assaulted. And, although they are much less likely to be aware of it, many students also know people who have assaulted other people.*

- *Remind people that you are not a clinician (unless you are), and that the focus is the book's content, and more broadly the social production of campus sexual assault, not revelation of personal experiences.* It can be useful to explain that it's not that you don't care about people's personal experiences, but that the classroom setting is not the best place to handle personal revelations – and that one person sharing their story can be hard for others to hear, or lead others to want to do the same. Set some guidelines for the conversation – and again, encourage people who have had experiences that they need help processing to get that help – just not in the classroom.

- *Consider providing an alternative to in-person class participation for students for whom the discussion or lecture feels like it is going to be too hard.* This needn't require revelation of being a survivor; a student could excuse themselves from the class for medical reasons without being specific as to what those are. It can be easier to get through a short writing assignment, done on one's own time, than to participate in a discussion.

- You may worry that this is going to lead to mass defections, but we have not found that to be the case. In the same way that you are choosing to teach about campus sexual assault because the topic is important – and, because it's a good case to think with in terms of gendered health inequalities, or intersectionality, or how social stratification operates – your students also want to learn about, and discuss these topics. You're just working to create a context in which everyone, survivors included, feels seen and supported, so that they can bring their A game to conversation.

### **In closing:**

- Acknowledge that it's hard to talk about these things, and affirm your students' courage in confronting a painful topic.
- Frame the conversation you've had in class as part of building a safer world – that making the changes we want to see necessarily begins with developing a collective understanding of the modifiable social roots of sexual assault.

### **After class:**

- It's never a bad idea to send around a list of your school's supportive resources afterwards. And again, if your school doesn't offer any, you can always make sure at least that students know about RAINN as a resource and including again the contact info above.

A reading we found helpful when thinking about this:

Scriver, Stacey, and Kieran Kennedy. 2016. Delivering education about sexual violence: reflections on the experience of teaching a sensitive topic in the social and health sciences. *Irish Educational Studies*, 35(2):195–211, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2016.1146158>