

What Do You Want to Say to Students?

Several faculty and staff members have asked advice regarding whether to say anything about the May 20th campus murder of LT Richard Collins, and if so, what to say. This is a personal decision that depends on many factors: for example, your own comfort level, the students and their experiences, the situation, and the context—which now includes the Charlottesville white supremacy rally. It's your decision; I offer some considerations and suggestions in case they are helpful.

Should I bring up LT Collins's murder?

Some concerns about initiating conversations about LT Collins's murder include that: it may start the class or the new academic year on an unnecessarily negative note; it may prompt a sense of fear that isn't warranted; students may not want to talk or hear about it; there may be questions regarding whether his murder was racially motivated; and especially among students new to campus, it may highlight an incident to which they feel no connection.

Reasons to consider mentioning it include:

- Some faculty, staff and students of color feel unsafe on campus following the murder; there is a heightened sense of not knowing who on campus might be capable of or motivated toward violence—regardless of whether the murder is prosecuted as a hate crime.
- Feelings of fear and distress can make it difficult for students to concentrate. It may aid their concentration and learning if you acknowledge concerns, express empathy, and offer resources.
- LT Collins's murder made the national news as a hate crime, so the likelihood that students would not know or wonder about it is relatively small. The Charlottesville white supremacy rally and violence also made national news, so incidents of racism and violence are prevalent topics of discussion.
- Silence is often interpreted as disinterest and/or not caring.

If I Bring Up LT Collins's Murder, What Should I Say?

Ultimately, this depends on context. At the start of a course, it may be valuable to offer a brief statement acknowledging that LT Collins's murder and the Charlottesville white supremacist rally have made some students, faculty and staff feel unsafe, express your concern for their welfare, and offer tangible support (where to go if they feel stressed, unsafe or want to report incidents). In one-on-one settings, it may be useful to ask how students are feeling and respond to where they are; acknowledge their feelings; offer emotional support if appropriate; and share resources for coping with stress.

What NOT to Say

1. **Statements about UMD or community values.** Making sweeping statements like "hate is not a UMD value" will ring hollow and come across as insensitive to students who have experienced behavior and comments such as those shared on #FearTheTurtle in the days after LT Collins's murder. (If you're not familiar with these experiences of UMD students of color, please see the attached brief summary.) You are not in a position to dictate what other people on campus value or the type of experiences students will have on campus. So instead, share your own values and aspirations as what students can expect from you—what is it that you value? What do you aspire to as a member of the University community?

2. **Euphemisms.** Avoid euphemisms such as “the unfortunate incident,” “the unpleasantness last spring,” or other vague terms when speaking about LT Collins’s murder. Vagueness can come across to students of color as trying to minimize or sidestep what happened. It was a murder; name it as such.
3. **“Balanced” statements.** Bringing up free speech rights or otherwise trying to “balance” what you say *in this context* may signal insensitivity and increase students’ stress. Note that abhorring racism, violence, and murder is not an inherently political or intellectual issue; these are tragedies that do not need “balanced” discussion. As an analogy: if a friend had a death in their family, you could express sadness and empathy without debating the circumstances (e.g., “Although I’m sorry that your family member died, other people may not feel that way or agree with me and it’s important to hear them out”). Trying to “balance” a statement of regret for LT Collins’s murder or the Charlottesville white supremacist rally by bringing up free speech conveys a similar level of insensitivity regarding how these incidents may be experienced.
4. **Statements about being “colorblind” or that race “does not matter.”** Although statements that “race does not matter” or that one “doesn’t see color” might seem like ideals to which American society should aspire, they frequently come across as insensitive. For example, such statements do not match the lived experiences of people of color and as such, can seem disingenuous or dismissive of those experiences and historical legacies of racism. Moreover, these statements imply that cultural differences associated with racial differences do not matter, which may feel insulting. And, it drastically oversimplifies the real and difficult work that needs to be done to bring about greater equity. Race does matter; refusing to recognize that stifles conversations.

Ideas for What You Could Say

Adapt to your experience for the start of classes or interacting informally with students:

- Before we begin, I want to acknowledge the murder of LT Richard Collins on our campus on May 20, 2017. His murder is a terrible tragedy and [\[add what you feel\]](#)
 - ✓ *Example:* I deeply regret the pain it has caused his family and friends, the Bowie State University community and members of our own campus.
 - ✓ *Example:* I am shocked and saddened by the needless loss of a promising life.
 - ✓ Other? [Describe your own feelings here.](#)
- I recognize that it has made many members of our campus community, especially students, faculty and staff of color, feel unsafe or uncomfortable. [\[What’s your reaction or commitment?\]](#)
 - ✓ *Example:* I care about your safety and stress levels, and will do what I can to make this class/office / space a safe one for all students.
- If you or someone you know feels unsafe, please know there are resources. [\[These can be distributed or mentioned see website below.\]](#)

Name	Phone Number	Website
University Counseling Center	301-314-7651	www.counseling.umd.edu
University Health Center and Mental Health Services	301-314-8180	www.health.umd.edu
University of Maryland Chaplains		Thestamp.umd.edu/memorial_chapel/chaplains
Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct	301-405-1142	www.ocrsm.umd.edu

For more detail on resources, go to: https://ocrsm.umd.edu/files/Hate_Bias_FAQs_final.pdf

Solutions in Action: Counteracting Divisiveness

What's Happening on Our Campus?

From #FearTheTurtle, May 22-25, 2017

#FearTheTurtle being the only black man on the floor of my freshman dorm gave a coward the courage to call me the n word through the walls
3:56 PM – 22 May 2017

1st time in I was called the N-word to my face was leaving La Plata Hall, freshman yr '89. On campus less than a week

24 May 2017

My freshman year at UMD my friends and I were turned away from some party because black girls weren't allowed in.

23 May 2017

my first week in college park a white kid told me at a party that obama was a monkey & that all black girls were ugly **#FearTheTurtle**

9:37 AM – 22 May 2017

#FearTheTurtle When we had a peaceful protest and administrators locked the door in our face.

22 May 2017

chalkings outside stamp on social justice day saying "deport dreamers" that students had to wash away. **#FearTheTurtle**

25 May 2017

When I got stopped and searched walking home because I "fit the description"
24 May 2017

UMD students constantly badmouth majority-minority Prince George's County as ghetto and dangerous. **#FearTheTurtle**

8:55 PM – 22 May 2017

The first time I ever been pepper sprayed was during a black Greek event **#FearTheTurtle**

24 May 2017

reading **#FearTheTurtle** tweets make me wanna transfer out **#umdreflects**

25 May 2017

Been at UMD for 16 wks (1 semester) and UMD has been in the news for hate/racial nonsense almost 25% of those weeks **#notnormal #UMDreflects**

25 May 2017

I remember being in a class w/all white students who didn't want to work w/me. As they worked in groups, I had to work alone.

23 May 2017

Black students repeatedly said that the campus racial climate was escalating to imminent violence, and a possible murder. **#FearTheTurtle**

24 May 2017

Reading these **#FearTheTurtle** tweets and it seems like the campus of UMD is the real life "Dear White People." Sad.

25 May 2017

Hearing a faculty member say that MD is a very inclusive community then being asked to confirm this. I just looked and laughed. **#FearTheTurtle**

24 May 2017

#FearTheTurtle walking back to my dorm, a white guy greeted his friend behind me by doing a nazi salute in front of me in my direction

24 May 2017

"Harmless" racist jokes that many thought would stay on YikYak manifested on our campus's sidewalks and bathroom stalls. **#FearTheTurtle**

22 May 2017

#FearTheTurtle my friend invited me to his frat's party. i show up at the house to be greeted by a big confederate flag in the front window

24 May 2017