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| UCL Arena Centre |

# A black header banner with the UCL letters coloured white. In the top left corner is UCL's slogan written in Title Case Teaching ‘difficult’ knowledge

*Helen Knowler, Associate Professor (Teaching), the Eugenics Legacy Education Project, offers thoughtful advice on how to help your students constructively tackle difficult or sensitive topics.*

April 2024

Our classrooms are increasingly places where burning issues from the wider world need to be acknowledged, challenged, tackled, accommodated, defused, referred elsewhere – it depends on a whole range of factors which is appropriate. The Provost recently launched the Disagreeing Well strategy to consider this but for many of us this is not a new challenge, and it can be a powerful opportunity, if done with care.

In my experience of working with marginalised students and now the Eugenics Legacy project, I've found you have to design sessions in such a way that they understand why these topics are meaningful, and provide plenty of guidance and guardrails for students to constructively tackle the aspects you want them to learn about. Explaining your rationale and method avoids many of the shocks they might otherwise get and struggle to respond to.

You also need to apply that management of their learning journey to your teaching design: it has to be aligned. For instance, setting up a debate about an already polarised issue could be disastrous: these topics are not about choosing a side or dying on a hill. It's about cultivating a broader understanding, whatever that means in your discipline. We have a duty here, not to safely evade sensitive topics, but to embody ways to face them honestly and rigorously.