Getting Started with Trauma-Informed Pedagogy
A guide by the ACS Summer Working Group on Trauma-Informed Pedagogy [1]

Trauma-informed pedagogy is an approach in which instructors are both aware that the experience of trauma can interfere with students' academic success and able to create supportive classroom practices to help these students to be successful.

Traumatic experiences and chronic stress may disrupt students' executive functioning as well as their ability to feel connected to peers, instructors, and other campus staff who can provide needed support. In addition to students who have suffered a violent traumatic event, students from historically marginalized groups may feel a sense of not belonging in an academic environment, and some may experience racism, microaggressions, and identity-based personal attacks. Constantly living under chronic stress can damage the immune system, increase susceptibility to diseases, and adversely affect health. The aim of trauma-informed pedagogy is for educators to understand these constraints and to create environments that engender student trust, confidence, and a positive sense of well-being.

Some suggestions for how educators can begin to employ a trauma-informed approach:

- Learn about trauma and its effects on learning. Useful introductions include Imad; Verschelden, *Bandwidth Recovery*; Carello (first 10 minutes) and Todd
- Build stability and clarity into your class by making course materials as user-friendly as possible (e.g., Transparency in Learning and Teaching)
- Treat students as allies in the learning process and avoid deficit frames as explanations for student behavior or perceived shortcomings.
  - Instead of asking "what is *wrong* with this student?", ask "what has *happened to* this student?" (Carello)
- Plan ahead for difficult or sensitive discussions and course readings, especially those dealing with racism, sexual violence, and other identity-based forms of discrimination.
  - Consider how you will support these students and prevent or respond to harmful comments made by other students.
- Make one change to your course design to increase students' sense of connection, autonomy and voice. For instance, you might experiment with a flexible deadline policy; assign students to consistent small groups over the semester; try specifications grading or an "ungrading" practice on a single assignment; or allow students to choose between options to demonstrate learning in one unit, etc.
- Give students low-stakes opportunities to make and learn from mistakes.
- Learn more at our collection of resources online (hosting courtesy of Sewanee's duPont Library).