



# Trauma Resources: Finishing the Semester

Over the next few days and weeks, UNLV experts will be collecting resources to help faculty, staff and students navigate their responses to the trauma of December 6, 2023. We will be sharing these resources<sup>1</sup> at different times throughout the response and recovery process so that you have access to the most relevant information at the appropriate time.

As you finish the semester, here are three priorities:

- Establish academic expectations
- Communicate in empathetic and clear ways
- Be aware of your own needs and responses

## Establish Academic Expectations

Students will have varying levels of concern about their academic progress and varying capacities to engage. Though we give exams and assign grades to meet a variety of requirements, keep in mind that the primary purpose of these activities is to document students' learning. Understand that however you decide to assign grades, within the [guidelines](#) provided by President Whitfield, will not produce a perfect outcome for every student. Let empathy and flexibility be your guides. Communicate with your Department Chair if you have special circumstances or questions about how your students' grades factor into their graduation or professional requirements.

For additional guidance, please consult the Michigan State University resource [“Teaching After Tragedy: Managing Academics.”](#)

Once you have determined how your class will finish this semester, it is important to communicate this information clearly and empathetically to students.

## Communicate in Empathetic, Affirming Ways

Traumatic events like campus violence disrupt our sense of physical safety and emotional security. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, [safety and transparency](#) are key aspects of trauma-informed practices. It is important to help individuals feel physically, mentally, and emotionally safe in their interactions and to provide a clear structure for next steps. How we communicate with students and colleagues is a critical component to re-establishing a sense of safety, security, and normalcy.

Here are some suggestions for how to communicate to students at this time:

- **Recognize the impact of the event on the UNLV community and as individuals:** As

<sup>1</sup>The resources shared here were developed by faculty and staff at [Michigan State University](#) and by UNLV faculty and staff with academic and professional expertise in trauma-informed care and teaching.

difficult, it is important to recognize that the UNLV community has experienced a tragedy. Ignoring the tragedy will not lessen the physical or psychological effects. A simple recognition that all UNLV community members have been affected regardless of their specific experience on December 6th can help students feel less alone and connected to others.

- **Offer a human connection:** Traumatic events can be isolating and make affected individuals feel like they are the only ones who are experiencing [post-traumatic symptoms](#). Check in with students, ask how they are feeling, share how you are feeling (if you feel comfortable doing so), or share a humorous video or meme.
- **Use affirming, positive language in emails:** People may experience heightened emotional sensitivity. Take extra care when writing emails to students (and colleagues) to use a [positive](#), encouraging tone in addition to the suggestions above.
- **Be clear and transparent:** Many people may have difficulty parsing complex or copious amounts of information, so convey important information in simple, easily understandable ways. Clearly identify any final exam/project requirements, deadlines, and grading criteria. Share this information with students in multiple ways (via email, as a WebCampus announcement, on WebCampus assignment prompts, etc.).
- **Share information about available resources:** Include information about campus and community resources available through [UNLV Strong](#). Students have already received this information through multiple channels, but they may be more likely to use these resources if referred to by a known, trusted faculty member.

## Be Aware of Your Own Needs

It is just as important that you take care of yourself during this difficult time. In addition to managing your own [post-traumatic event symptoms](#), take care to avoid [burnout and compassion fatigue](#). Unfortunately, no amount of time, energy, or action on your part will undo the tragedy of December 6th. Prioritize your own well-being by engaging in healthy coping strategies and self-care practices. Please reach out and make use of the resources that are available to faculty and staff through [UNLV Strong](#), particularly the [mental health resources](#). If you have thoughts of harming yourself, please seek help immediately by calling 988.

## Additional Resources

There are many excellent resources if you would like additional information about trauma-informed pedagogy or teaching after a crisis. We suggest the following:

- [“Processing Trauma in the Classroom and Beyond”](#) (UNLV Today, August 25 2021): Features local trauma-informed experts discussing the effects of the pandemic on students and faculty at UNLV.
- [Trauma-Informed Practices for Postsecondary Education](#) (Education Northwest): A comprehensive guide for incorporating trauma-informed practices into higher education.
- [Resources for Teaching After Crisis](#) (Michigan State University): A robust set of materials created and shared by MSU colleagues in response to a campus shooting in February 2023.



We are here to support you as you navigate this most difficult end-of-semester, and plan for what will certainly be a challenging spring semester. Virtual lab support will be available at [this link](#) in partnership with the Office of Online Education and Information Technology Tuesday, December 12th through Friday, December 15th daily from 10 a.m. -12 p.m. and 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. We will share additional resources to support our teaching and learning community in the coming days and weeks. In the meantime, please reach out if you need support or we can help you in any way. Together, we will face our collective heartbreak, find strength in one another, and work our way back to our core educational mission to educate and support our students.