

Framework for Establishing a Safe Learning/Working Environment in the Field

Background: Here is a suggested framework for an early discussion to have with any group you're working with in the field for an extended period of time. As a teacher, I put this resource in the student reader, but much more importantly, I use it as a guide to have an early discussion (day 1 or 2) about creating a safe learning/working environment in our group. This often takes me 1-2 hours to discuss with a group of 30. The point of taking this time is not just to tell my group about it, but also to get their buy-in. Getting buy-in means asking for their input and then listening to it and adding it in to your agreed-upon framework for your group. *I find this discussion to be one of the most important things you can do to head off the many challenges that can arise when a group works and lives together for an extended time.* By no means, however, will it prevent any and all problems from arising! First you need to establish your positive working environment (as early as you can!), but then you need to maintain it for the rest of the time you're with your group. This means that, depending on your group and how well your first communicated your expectations, you will likely have to revisit these agreements throughout your time with your group.

Introduction to Creating a Safe Learning/Working Environment

Our group experience is likely different than many groups you have worked with in non-field settings: 1) This experience takes place in remote field settings, often far from important resources such as emergency medical services. 2) We live together in close quarters, can't get away from each other, and are separated from our broader support communities. For these reasons, it is necessary to create an environment that is both safe and supportive. The safe learning environment we create here will help you develop the skills to support similar professional work environments in your future.

Unlike the group experiences you have when you're not in the field, there are additional risks associated with our group. Any group that works in remote field conditions must understand and anticipate these risks and act appropriately to reduce the likelihood of accidents. Nearly all accidents are predictable and often result from a combination of challenging conditions, inadequate preparation, and poor communication. This is why it's so important to be prepared for the environments we're going to; it's also why we need to focus on creating an environment that allows us all to effectively communicate, cooperate, problem-solve, and support one another.

In addition to avoiding accidents, there are many more benefits to building and maintaining a safe, supportive community. Your own learning goals will be magnified when we actively work to support each other. The community we co-create here can also contribute to both your personal and professional network that you build throughout your life.

Safe Learning Environment Guidelines.

Here are some things you can expect from us- the leaders of this experience:

- You can expect us to instruct and safely manage this experience! And you can also expect us to respect you for who you are, to support you both physically and emotionally, to give and receive constructive feedback, and ultimately to provide a safe learning/working environment for you and the group as a whole.

Here are some things that we (the leaders) expect from everyone (all participants and all leaders):

- To participate fully. This means things like be on time, get out of bed, speak up in discussions, listen in discussions, take part in activities. Be willing to learn and engage at all times, even when you're tired, when you're in the van, early in the morning, late at night, etc.
- To practice proactive self-care (physically and emotionally), and to check in with the instructors about any concerns you may have. Do this in a timely manner and don't wait until an instructor approaches you to ask how you're doing.
- To respect one another, and work together as a team. You don't have to love everyone, but you do have to work together effectively.
- To give and receive constructive feedback, even if it might mean feeling uncomfortable. One example might be asking one of your cook group members to get up a little earlier to help more with breakfast.
- To follow the instructors' lead and follow the non-negotiables, which are outlined below.
- To teach and learn from one another. Take pride and put positive energy into what you bring to the group: your presentations, food, field guides, etc. Support others in what they bring to the group.
- To take initiative to try new things. Try taking on leadership positions and try supporting your fellow peers in leadership positions.
- To be willing to sacrifice some personal goals for the sake of the group. For instance, you may need to speed up/slow down when out walking, you may need to turn around on a hike before reaching your destination in order to get back on time, you may need speak up more, listen more, modify your level of sarcasm/joking to fit with the norms of the group, etc.

- To use technology with consideration. The places we visit rarely have cell phone service, but we will ask you to minimize use of your devices. As a group, we will strive to find a healthy balance between communicating with your community outside this group and developing connections with the people here.
- To respect the land we visit and travel through, and the people we interact with officially and unofficially, being mindful of our impact as a large group and a representation of our organization.
- To treat all course gear with care and consideration: our books, maps, observation equipment, are meant to be shared with each other and with future groups to come. Please return items promptly and ensure their availability and usability for future students.

Here are some non-negotiables & rules:

- Personal physical safety: students will never hike/wander alone for long distances, rock climb (including bouldering or scrambling on steep rocks), swim alone, or put themselves in high-risk situations. You must wear a seatbelt in our vehicles.
- Smoking is not allowed at the places that we visit. This includes tobacco and marijuana.
- Students will not bring or use drugs (including marijuana) on course. Not only are drugs illegal, and unsafe, they can interfere with your ability to learn and provide a safe environment for peers. In addition, getting caught can jeopardize the future of this course, and the instructor's jobs. "Party talk," the glorification of past experiences involving alcohol or drugs, is also not welcome on course. It can be triggering and alienating to others.
- We have zero tolerance for sexual assault, sexual harassment, and general harassment. Sexual Harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, unwelcome requests for sexual favors, and other unwelcome verbal, nonverbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:
 - a person's submission to such conduct is implicitly or explicitly made the basis for employment decisions, academic evaluation, grades or advancement, or other decisions affecting participation in a University program. This is called quid pro quo.
 - such conduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive that it unreasonably denies, adversely limits, or interferes with a person's participation in or benefit from the education, employment or other programs and services of the University and creates an environment that a reasonable person would find to be intimidating or offensive. This is called a hostile environment.Harassment also includes offensive remarks about a person's gender, physical appearance, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or other identity traits.

Harassment on course is extremely damaging to a positive learning experience, and as university employees, instructors are mandated to report harassment.

- We ask that each of you proactively work to avoid these situations. This can come from taking 2 deliberate actions:
 - Practice Affirmative Consent, which is getting ongoing explicit, informed, and voluntary agreement among all involved individuals to participate in any sexual act/advancement and any interaction in general
 - Speak up, set personal boundaries, and don't exclusively rely on non-verbal cues to communicate that you are uncomfortable with someone else's behavior.

Other considerations:

- Exclusive relationships (including romantic ones and close friendships) can be harmful to the unity of a group. Take deliberate action to be inclusive of everyone. Make it a goal to get out of your bubble and connect with everyone throughout a course.
 - We prefer that you refrain from sexual intimacy while we are in the field. Our experience is that Intimate relationships that we've seen develop within field groups like this are often unsuccessful. Consider waiting until you're back in our broader society to pursue intimate relationship with one another.
- Alcohol is allowed but in moderation, only by those 21 years or older of age. This means only beer/wine/cider (no hard alcohol, including hard alcohol "coolers"), limited to 1 - 2 drinks *outside of class/work time* (after dinner if no other classes are planned in the evening). This is a huge privilege - do not abuse it!
- Swimming is allowed at times and places that are designated by the instructors. Swimming is never allowed in swift water or in unsupervised settings. General rules include no diving head first or jumping off high objects.
- We ask that everyone adhere to typical cultural norms by wearing a swimsuit at all times when swimming, just as you would at any normal public swimming area.
- Be mindful and moderate the jokes you tell, your level of sarcasm, and remarks you might make that could be interpreted as insulting to individuals or groups of people (including political groups), whether or not they are represented on this course.
- Minimize swearing while on course. While this may or may not be offensive to others, it is also good practice for working in future professional environments.
- In the vans, drivers have the ultimate say over use of the car stereo. We encourage everyone to engage with each other in the vans. At times, we may have assigned "van activities" and ask that everyone participate.

- When in the field away from the vans, we avoid pre-recorded amplified music. We'll make our own music instead!

Discussion: What else do you think is important to create and maintain a safe learning environment?

[Take time here to have your group brainstorm what's important to them to maintain a safe learning/working environment. Consider having them discuss this in smaller groups and then sharing the results of their discussion. Listen to all their responses. Write them down, acknowledge them for contributing, address any concerns that come up]

Final note: As the leader team, we are ultimately responsible for maintaining a safe learning environment for everyone out here. If your actions aren't supporting that ultimate goal, we will request and work with you to change your behavior. If we can't arrive at a solution that is within the bounds of this safe learning environment, we will remove you from the group.