

Scenario #1 [Student Leadership; Student Body; Newspaper; Professor (faculty or staff professor)]

Student writes blog post that offends.

A sophomore, writing on her own blog unaffiliated with the college, writes, “sex and gender are biological facts, not choices; you cannot change from being a man to a woman or vice versa.” Other students see the blog post and start circulating screenshots of the post, which the student then takes down. Student Congress discusses the blog post at its next meeting, attended by over 100 students, and by a vote of 17 to 3 passes a resolution condemning the post as transphobic and hateful. The Anchor student newspaper reports on the blog post and the Student Congress vote. The story is picked up on social media, some calling this an instance of “cancel culture” and others condemning the student and her views, saying the college should do more to discipline her. Meanwhile, a transgender student who shares a discussion section in a course with the blog post author asks the professor to move the author to another discussion section, saying it is not possible to feel safe in a room with a transphobic student.

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Scenario #2 [Students; Faculty; Administrators]

Student capstone project sparks controversy.

For his senior capstone project, a theater arts major proposes directing Joshua Schmidt’s Adding Machine: A Musical, an award-winning adaptation of the Elmer Rice 1923 play of the same name. The play and musical are critical of capitalism and racism, and portray characters who make racist comments. The student’s proposal is approved by his advisor. The student recruits students to perform, and the musical goes into production; the performance is scheduled, with a panel to follow immediately after the performance with student actors, the student director, and a professor from the English department about the musical and its content. The musical and panel are advertised on campus with a warning: “This musical portrays racism and white supremacy.” A week before the performance, the dean of students contacts the senior’s advisor, asking about the content of the musical, as some students have reported discomfort with “a racist musical being allowed on campus.” The advisor outlines the plan for a panel discussion after the play and invites the dean to attend a rehearsal later that day, which she does. At the end of the rehearsal, the dean states that she is concerned about the potential impact of the play on students from marginalized communities and will deliberate with others on the leadership team. Overnight, the student newspaper publishes an article titled, “Racist Musical is Senior’s Capstone.” The article is widely shared on social media with calls for the performance to be canceled and criticism of the student’s advisor for approving the capstone project.

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Scenario #3 [Students; Staff; Alumni; Community Members; Administrators; Trustees; Donors; Government Officials]

Student athletes and assistant coach staff member take a knee.

At a One Big Weekend football game, the stadium stands are full, with alumni, students, faculty, staff, town residents, as well as several trustees. During the national anthem, several players lock arms and take a knee. They are joined by an assistant coach. As they do, some in the audience hiss and boo. Even as the game is underway, the college starts to receive angry phone calls and email messages from alumni and others, including a message from a local major donor addressed to the school's president, calling the protesting players unpatriotic and demanding that the players be disciplined. On social media, images of the players and assistant coach start trending, with some posts decrying the protest and others praising it. The state senator whose district includes the college tweets, "Students and coach disrespect the flag while taxpayers foot the bill for their education and salary—disgraceful." Social media posts indicate students are planning to gather and kneel in the main quad the next afternoon. A trustee in attendance at the game receives email messages from classmates, including one who has given a major gift and has the capacity to give another, asking whether the college will discipline the players and assistant coach.

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Scenario #4 [Students; Staff; Parents]

First-year student hangs flag in dorm room to objections of suitemate.

During move-in, a matriculating student hangs an Israeli flag in her room while a suitemate looks on. The suitemate seeks out the resident advisor who is overseeing the move-in and complains that an Israeli flag is a symbol of Zionism and racism, and requests that the RA tell the student to remove the flag. The RA asks the student who has hung the flag about it. The student says it is a symbol of her Jewish faith, and that she plans to keep the flag displayed despite being aware that others are talking about it. The RA tells the student who complained that the suitemate may choose what to display in her own room. The complaining student goes to the Office of Residential Life and Housing and demands that the student with the Israeli flag be moved to another suite. *Suppose that the Office of Residential Life and Housing handbook includes guidance that "residence halls are homes for students, and students should choose decorations that support an inclusive residential community for all." Meanwhile, the student who hung the flag has spoken to her parents, and her parents call to complain that their daughter is being made to feel unwelcome.

**Note: This doesn't represent actual Hope College policy language.*

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Scenario #5 [Students; Faculty; Administrators]

Faculty member reads racial epithet aloud in class.

A faculty member in a political science course assigned the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail. During the class meeting, the professor reads parts of the letter aloud, including a section that includes a racial epithet. A student immediately objects, and other students join in supporting the student's objections. The professor defends himself, saying that the epithet was in Dr. King's writing, not his own word choice. The professor tries to resume the discussion, but several students say the conversation cannot continue until the professor apologizes, which he refuses to do, repeating that the epithet is not his own. When some students reply that the discussion cannot continue without an apology, the professor resolves the situation by ending the class meeting 15 minutes early. The next scheduled class meeting is two days hence. Later that day, several students from the class, including the student who made the initial objection, visit the dean's office. They demand that if the professor does not apologize, he must be replaced for the remainder of the semester. Meanwhile, students start sharing social media posts about the incident, and the office of Public Affairs and Marketing receives a call from a local television station, asking for comment.

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Scenario #6 [Students; Staff; Administrators, Parents]

Professor declines to write a letter of recommendation.

A staff member who regularly teaches an FYS class is approached by a student at the end of a class meeting to ask if the professor would write a letter of recommendation for a summer internship. The student has been an active participant in class discussions and has performed well on assignments and tests. The professor readily agrees and asks the student to send information about how to submit the letter. When the professor receives an email message from the student with the information, the professor sees that the student is applying for an internship with a pro-life organization. The professor responds that she would gladly write a letter of recommendation for an internship with another organization, but she will not support an application for an internship at an "anti-woman organization." The student forwards the professor's email message to the department chair, alleging that she is being discriminated against. When the department chair asks the professor for her side of the story, the professor responds that her academic freedom allows her not to write a letter of recommendation to an organization she deeply opposes. Meanwhile, the student's father contacts the dean of students, saying that their daughter is being discriminated against because of the family's Christian faith. Alternative scenario: The student is applying for an internship at Planned Parenthood and the faculty member, after initially agreeing to write the letter, says that she is pro-life and declines to write the letter of recommendation on religious and academic freedom grounds.

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Scenario #7 [Students; Faculty; Staff]

Speaker invitation leads to controversy.

A faculty member in the philosophy department invites a bioethicist to address the students in her course, “Contemporary Moral Issues,” one of several invited speakers over the term. The bioethicist has published articles arguing that it is ethical for a woman to abort a fetus diagnosed with a birth defect and to practice infanticide on infants with birth defects. Students from Hope Advocates for Invisible Conditions (HAIC), a registered student organization, visit the office of Student Development and insist the invitation to the bioethicist must be rescinded, saying it creates a hostile environment for disabled students, potentially including students in the class. The students say that if the invitation is not revoked, they may need to take further steps, without being specific about what those may be. A member of HAIC publishes an op-ed in the student newspaper, writing, “It shouldn’t be acceptable to invite to campus someone who would have exterminated me.” The professor says that she understands that the bioethicist is controversial, but it is up to her to set the syllabus and invite speakers. She notes that the bioethicist has published his views in peer-reviewed academic journals.

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Scenario #8 [Students; Faculty; Administrators; Donors]

Faculty social media post.

An untenured but full-time faculty member, who is assistant director of the college’s honors program, posted on her personal Twitter account—not affiliated with the college—the following: “My campus is open and classes being held on #Juneteenth but closed on #July4. Celebrating #WhitePrivilege and no regard for Black faculty/students/staff.” The tweet leads to many retweets and replies, many agreeing with the professor and others calling her unpatriotic. The story is picked up by the local news, and the higher education press contacts the college for comment. A major donor writes an email message to the provost: “A professor who disrespects the Founders should not be on the staff of the school’s honors program.” A Change.org petition calling on the college to make Juneteenth a school holiday quickly garners hundreds of signatures from students as well as faculty. Alternative scenario: The professor’s tweet does not mention the college, but states: “I will celebrate #Juneteenth but not #July4. Juneteenth = Freedom/July4 = WhitePrivilege,” but otherwise the events unfold as described.

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Scenario #9 [Students; Faculty]

Faculty public commentary.

A faculty member publishes an article in a general audience magazine about childhood outcomes, including high school diploma attainment, school suspensions, juvenile arrests, and teenage pregnancies. In the findings section, the author writes: “Single-parent households are correlated with adverse childhood outcomes. Therefore, public policy should aim to encourage household formation prior to pregnancy.” On X (formerly Twitter), scholars from other institutions criticize the article for promoting a traditional family structure, alleging that this promotes bias against single-parent households, and some call for the professor’s censure by his professional association. Students hear of the controversy through social media and demand that the faculty member not be allowed to teach classes on this topic.

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Scenario #10 [Students; Faculty; Staff]

Faculty research.

A faculty member publishes an article in a peer-reviewed journal, arguing that data suggests race-conscious admissions harm students by placing them in academic settings where they do not have the background to succeed. The article concludes: “Universities’ admissions policies must be neutral to race and ethnicity and evaluate candidates on their individual merits.” Students read the article and lead a social media campaign criticizing the professor and the college. They argue that the faculty member is biased against minoritized students and cannot be trusted to assess them fairly. They demand that the faculty member be removed from the graduate admissions committee and that students not be required to take classes with the faculty member. However, the faculty member is a regular instructor for one of the required classes for the major.

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