The following scenarios describe situations that impede student learning and that make teaching difficult. Read the scenarios and discuss your answers to the following questions with others at your table.

- How do these situations influence the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical aspects of classroom climate listed above?
- In what ways have you experienced similar situations as a learner?
- What might these situations look like in your own classroom?
- How might you respond to this behavior from students in your classroom?

1. One student jumps to your mind as being difficult to deal with during class discussions. Pete always knows the answer to your questions, is first to raise his hand with a comment or personal experience, and seems to dominate small-group work. You have noticed other students in the class roll their eyes or “zone out” when Pete starts talking and you suspect that other students do not want to work with Pete because he is so overbearing with his viewpoints. Despite this behavior, Pete often makes valid points and is highly engaged with the material; in fact, he is one of the highest-achieving students in the course.

2. You are teaching a class to second- and third-year students where controversial subjects are often discussed. The night before, students read a summary of recent legislation that will end deportation of illegal immigrants who came to the United States in childhood. You have asked the class to come prepared to discuss the impact of this legislation on higher education. At the beginning of class, Tina Thwarter blurts out, “My dad says President Obama was just throwing his weight around when he passed this law, and there isn’t really anything to discuss about illegal immigrants living here. They should all be shipped back to where they came from.”
3. When you first met with Dawn at mid-semester to discuss her performance in the course, she did not understand why she was doing so poorly in your class. She said she is a smart student who “doesn't get bad grades.” She also asked why her current grade in the class is a C-. “Why isn’t my course grade higher? I have to get a B in this course to maintain my GPA. Is it because you don’t like me?” Last week, the paper she submitted for the final assignment in the class (worth 25% of her final grade) was different. This paper was written well, with no grammar or spelling mistakes and a stronger grasp of course concepts than Dawn demonstrated in her earlier work. You did not accuse her of plagiarizing, but did ask some questions about where she found her sources for the paper. This morning, your supervising faculty member forwarded an email from Dawn and asked to meet with you. Dawn has complained to your supervisor that she suspects you do not like her because she is an African American female and you are a Caucasian male.

4. Today in your office hours, a student came in with questions about what was covered in class. This student was upset, on the verge of tears throughout the meeting, and reported feeling frustrated. “I'm just not good at this stuff. I never have been, and probably never will be. I really am just trying to get through this class because it doesn’t have anything to do with what I want to do after I graduate.” You were surprised that she was so confused and upset, because in your opinion the source of the confusion was a basic idea in your field. As the conversation continued, the student revealed that she was sexually assaulted at a party two weeks ago, and that since then she has been having a difficult time keeping up with her schoolwork. She admitted that you were the first person she had told about the situation outside of her roommate.

5. When you arrived for class today, the students in your class were huddled around copies of the Indiana Daily Student newspaper. The front-page story was about a junior who was killed in an incident over the weekend of the Little 500 bike race. One of your students was crying while two others tried to comfort her. She suddenly stood up and ran out of the classroom, leaving her backpack and other personal materials behind. After the door closed, one of the remaining students explained that the student who was killed lived on this woman’s dorm floor. You went into the hall but did not see the student anywhere, so you returned to the room to start class. The rest of the students were present but appeared very upset.

6. As an international student and non-native English speaker, you have had a difficult transition to graduate school in the U.S. You have found it challenging to acclimate to the academic demands, the American culture, and in particular the differences in classroom teaching style. One of your undergraduates, Lisa, has not made it any easier. Lisa has behaved disrespectfully towards you all semester. She arrives five minutes late to most class sessions and shows little awareness that it is disruptive. During class, she frequently gets up to throw things away, goes in the hall to take phone calls, sends/receives text messages during class, and carries on conversations with other students while you are talking. On more than one occasion she has interrupted your lecture to say in an accusatory, loud voice, ”What? I didn’t understand that.” Now a fellow AI, Michael, has informed you that Lisa has asked to meet with him to explain the material, because Lisa “just can’t understand” you.