

What's All This About Trigger Warnings?

**The emerging campus free speech problem might
not be all that it seems.
It could be worse.**

**NATIONAL ■■■■■
COALITION ■■■■■
AGAINST ■■■■■
CENSORSHIP ■■■■■**

December 2015

INTRODUCTION

Why investigate ‘trigger warnings’?

Waves of media attention tell us that college students are demanding that professors provide so-called ‘trigger warnings’ to flag material that might cause distress or discomfort, or possibly trigger a panic attack in students with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As a cover story in *The Atlantic* put it, "A movement is arising, undirected and driven largely by students, to scrub campuses clean of words, ideas, and subjects that might cause discomfort or give offense."



A broad range of instructional materials, from a documentary about sexual assault to an historical account of slavery, could be considered 'triggering.' If professors steer clear of potentially controversial work, either out of concern for students' well-being or fear of getting in trouble with administrators, the free speech implications are enormous.

But how prevalent are these demands, and are college instructors really altering how they teach in response to pressure from students

or administrators? Is this evidence of resurgent 'political correctness,' a theme popular in media coverage that confirms a common but unflattering image of 'coddled' undergrads who recoil at anything that challenges their tender sensibilities? Or is something more complicated going on?

A national survey of college and university educators

To shed some light, the National Coalition Against Censorship approached the [Modern Language Association](#) and the [College Art Association](#)* this spring about conducting an online survey of their members. While not a scientific survey, the responses from over 800 members offer the most detailed information to date about experiences with, and attitudes about, trigger warnings and their implications for higher education.

The discussion of trigger warnings relies heavily on anecdotes that have been reported in the press. This survey widens the lens considerably. And thanks to the open-ended comments gathered along with the survey, it offered hundreds of instructors a chance to share information about what's actually going on in the classroom and what they think it means.

*In June 2015, CAA board president [DeWitt Godfrey](#) and executive director [Linda Downs](#) gave presentations about the survey at an AAUP conference. Read them at [collegeart.org](#)

What is a trigger warning?

For purposes of the survey, trigger warnings were defined as "written warnings to alert students in advance that material assigned in a course might be upsetting or offensive. Originally intended to warn students about graphic descriptions of sexual assault that it was thought might trigger post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in some students, more recently trigger warnings have come to encompass materials touching on a wide range of potentially sensitive subjects, including race, sexual orientation, disability, colonialism, torture, and other topics. In many cases, the request for trigger warnings comes from students themselves."

Key findings

1. While very few institutions have formal trigger warning policies, educators report a significant number of requests and complaints from students.

Although fewer than 1% of survey participants reported that their institution had adopted a policy on trigger warnings, 7.5% reported that students had initiated efforts to *require* trigger warnings on campus, twice as many (15%) reported that students had *requested* warnings in their courses, and 12% reported that students had complained about the absence of trigger warnings. Despite a media narrative of "political correctness," student requests concerned a diverse range of subjects from across the ideological spectrum.

2. Many—but not all—educators believe that trigger warnings have adverse effects on academic freedom and the learning environment.

While there were widespread expressions of concern and respect for students, nearly half of respondents (45%) think trigger warnings have or will have a negative effect on classroom dynamics and 62% think they have or will have a negative effect on academic freedom. A substantial minority (17%) view trigger warnings favorably. Others express

concern that they are not professionally qualified to assist those students who suffering from panic disorders or other medical conditions.

3. Many educators distinguish trigger warnings from the practice of informing students about course content.

Over half of those surveyed said that they had provided "warnings about course content," with 23% saying they had done so 'several times' or 'regularly.' However, many instructors draw a distinction between practice of flagging specific elements in any given assignment, which many respondents resist, and the practice of providing a detailed syllabus and course description, which many endorse.

4. Supporters and critics of trigger warnings alike are opposed to administrators requesting or requiring their use.

The survey revealed widespread agreement that the decision of whether or not to use warnings should be the exclusive prerogative of individual instructors and not influenced by department heads, deans, or administrators. Pressure from administrators is of particular concern to non-tenured and contingent faculty.

KEY FINDING

1. While very few institutions have formal trigger warning policies, educators report a significant number of requests and complaints from students about a wide range of subjects.

HOW MANY SCHOOLS have promulgated policies that require trigger warnings? The survey finds that formal university policies are extremely rare: Fewer than one percent of respondents say their institutions have them. This should not be surprising; the few attempts to draft trigger policies have attracted serious and well-deserved criticism.

But the anecdotal evidence does suggest that the trigger warning phenomenon is real, and that it is largely driven by students themselves. In a small but significant number of situations (7.5%), respondents reported that students had initiated efforts to *require* trigger warnings on their campus; twice as

many (15%) reported that students had *requested* trigger warnings in their courses. And 12% report that students had complained, either to the administrators or the instructor, about the absence of trigger warnings.

The demand for warnings, even though pressed by only a minority of students, may nonetheless affect the educational environment for a great many more students if instructors—many understandably nervous about job security—change how or what they teach as a result, if students themselves feel constrained about discussing topics that might be "triggering" to others, or if warnings operate to "shut down dialogue and shame participants in such a way that those participants actually leave the conversation."

According to some, trigger warnings reflect a "presumption that anything which might be offensive should be avoided or that anyone offended has the right to call off the line of discussion," or, as another phrased it, they force "teachers to change their teaching plans based on calculations about what topics might hurt students' feelings or make them feel 'unsafe'."

Student demands are plainly having the desired result: "After teaching a course for the first time, a student complained in the anonymous evaluation. Ever since, I verbally

"After teaching a course for the first time, a student complained in the anonymous evaluation. Ever since, I verbally include a trigger warning at the start of each semester."

include a trigger warning at the start of each semester." The effects can be more pronounced in some places than others: one instructor who adopted warnings for "sexual/homosexual content ... was [in] Tennessee, where I had newly arrived. I would not have done the same in California, but I knew that we have a lot of evangelical students here and wanted to avoid any complaints."

"In the last two years, I'd had students want pretty detailed and specific trigger warnings for, well, everything, which seems kind of stifling."

And the demand for warnings for more kinds of content has grown: As one instructor commented, "In the last two years, I'd had students want pretty detailed and specific trigger warnings for, well, everything, which seems kind of stifling." Another worries that "students will be claiming that any mention of a violent act or something against their beliefs is a 'trigger' and they will be demanding academic accommodations."

NOT JUST POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Media commentary often portrays the demand for trigger warnings as coming from politically left-leaning students who seek to limit discussions of offensive material—because they are either "coddled" and thin-skinned, or they want to chill speech in the name of "political correctness." As the

headline of a widely-read essay at Vox.com put it, "I'm a Liberal Professor, and My Liberal Students Terrify Me."

While this dynamic is certainly real, the survey paints a more complex picture. Many professors report offering warnings for the sake of conservative or religious students. "I used trigger warnings to warn about foul or sexual language, sexual content, or violence in order to allow our very conservative students to feel more in control of the material," wrote one instructor.

In fact, many respondents commented about warnings to address religious sensitivities. A respondent who teaches and holds an administrative post reports receiving "many complaints, some with parental involvement. These have mostly been religious objections." Others note specific "religious objections to nude models in studio courses" and to "homoerotic content in art history." Another explained that "the trigger warnings that I place in my general education Humanities course syllabus have to do with religious and moral content that might be offensive to persons who are zealous about their particular faith." Yet another observed that

"I used trigger warnings to warn about foul or sexual language, sexual content, or violence in order to allow our very conservative students to feel more in control of the material."

"the Bible ... is a topic that can offend both fundamentalists and those who are not comfortable with religion." There was even a "Rastafarian student [who] was very offended at my comparison of Akhenaten's Great Hymn to Psalm 104."

There are reported complaints about spiders, "images of childbirth," suicide in a ballet, indigenous artifacts, images of dead bodies, "fatphobia," bloody scenes in a *horror film* class, and more.

At the same time, many noted that "it is impossible to know what will trigger students." There are reported complaints about spiders, "images of childbirth," suicide in a ballet, indigenous artifacts, images of dead bodies, "fatphobia," bloody scenes in a *horror film* class, and more. One respondent observed, "I'm not sure you can teach American literature without issuing a blanket trigger warning for the entire semester."

NOT JUST ABOUT TRAUMA

While trigger warnings were once justified as a device to accommodate survivors of trauma or abuse, they have since been applied to a much broader range of situations. The

administrator who has received numerous complaints noted that "Some personal post-traumatic issues have come up, but less often." Many others observe that warnings are being requested for material that students find merely discomfiting, challenging, or offensive to their beliefs. In the words of one, "students who have NOT had significant traumatic experiences are using trigger warning requests to avoid engaging with uncomfortable course materials."

The survey revealed widespread agreement with the views of experts, such as Harvard psychologist Richard McNally, that students with panic disorders need professional help, which they feel unable to provide. McNally does not endorse the use of trigger warnings, however: "Trigger warnings are designed to help survivors avoid reminders of their trauma, thereby preventing emotional discomfort. Yet avoidance *reinforces* PTSD." According to McNally, "systematic exposure to triggers ... is the most effective means of overcoming the disorder."

"...students who have NOT had significant traumatic experiences are using trigger warning requests to avoid engaging with uncomfortable course materials."

KEY FINDING

2. Many—but not all—educators believe that trigger warnings have adverse effects on academic freedom and the learning environment.

EDUCATORS ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED about how trigger warnings will affect classroom dynamics and education. A significant number of respondents worry that warnings essentially invite students "to avoid engaging with uncomfortable course materials." Indeed, this is already the experience of some respondents, like one who reports that "students took the 'warning' as an excuse not to attend the class."

Nearly half of respondents (45 percent) think trigger warnings have or will have a negative effect on classroom dynamics. On the broader question of academic freedom, 62 percent think they have or will have a negative effect.

A CHILLING EFFECT

As one instructor explained it, "trigger warnings cover my ass, but they do seem to have a couple of adverse effects. First, they create an expectation that exchanges will likely be contentious rather than cooperative. Second, they seem to suppress free inquiry and speculative ('what if') discussions, primarily for students but also for me."

Labeling certain content as "taboo," some claim, inevitably chills discussion and debate. Many characterize the result as a "sanitized" education, which they believe does students a grave disservice: "The 'real' world does not come with trigger warnings."

Nearly half of respondents (45 percent) think trigger warnings have or will have a negative effect on classroom dynamics. On the broader question of academic freedom, 62 percent think they have or will have a negative effect.

There was widespread agreement among critics that warnings are "infantilizing." Many express the view that "[w]e should be treating our students as adults," and that "students should assume agency and talk to their professors about any personal needs." Others express concern that trigger warnings undermine education by focusing attention on personal reactions to course content instead of teaching students "to use analytical concepts in order to comprehend difficult social phenomena." The theme was echoed by many respondents who think warnings reinforce "students' tendency to make 'the

personal' the primary domain for understanding."

Still others worry that the use of warnings, with the implicit promise that students may "opt out" of engaging with certain material, reinforces the notion that "education is a consumer experience, and that the consumers (the students) get to decide whether they like the goods on offer."

The overarching concern expressed by critics of trigger warnings is that they will make it difficult or impossible to discuss "sensitive" topics. They fear that students, in their anxiety not to offend others, will simply decline to address certain issues or express certain opinions, especially if they're unpopular or controversial. As one put it:

This trend would have a chilling effect on the climate of inquiry, free speech, and intellectual exchange that should be the hallmark of college education. Real learning is hard and requires students to engage material that is difficult, new, or challenging—material that they may find discomfiting for any number of reasons. 'Trigger warnings' bespeak a kind of intellectual *in loco parentis* that could limit a student's opportunity for independent thinking and self-discovery.

Even the subject of trigger warnings itself has become fraught. As one professor put it, "It's hard to speak out against trigger warnings for fear of seeming not to care about one's students."

Many survey respondents worry "about creating an academic culture where classroom text choices or discussions are seen as sites where major psychological issues like PTSD are to be addressed."

They expressed the view that the classroom is not "a therapeutic environment," and that they are not qualified to provide counseling for troubled students:

I'm all for involving psychological counseling, when useful, but I didn't prepare myself to be a counselor, and that should not be my role in the classroom. . . . We should encourage our students to confront material that disturbs them and figure out exactly what they find disturbing and why . . . it should not be my job either to supply it or to censor my course materials on the basis of . . . sensitivities.

THE CASE FOR TRIGGER WARNINGS

However, a substantial minority of survey respondents—a little over 17%—believe that trigger warnings have or could have a *positive* effect on education and classroom dynamics. Indeed, some respondents embrace trigger warnings enthusiastically:

My use of trigger warnings has typically led to a positive outcome, meaning that it has resulted in a higher point of entry for students (and myself) into relevant debates—not only about the issues in question, but also about the appropriateness of the university classroom as a site of such debates. Such occasions have also enabled me effectively to "train" the students on how to engage in difficult debates with respect and sensitivity towards others.

Other supporters say the use of warnings can build trust and "create a positive classroom environment," show respect for the "individual needs of students," create a "safe space for dialogue," prepare students "to engage with

the material in meaningful ways," and prevent them from feeling "blindsided." "I feel like students have perhaps responded in intensely negative ways to certain material but have not been able to articulate their concerns... even discussing this topic empowers students."

However, a substantial minority of survey respondents—a little over 17%—believe that trigger warnings have or could have a *positive* effect on education and classroom dynamics.

A number express the view that "students appreciate the concern," that "the very act of respecting the students helps them to become open-minded," and that "when students know that you care about their well-being, they're willing to risk more, and thus they learn more." Others embrace warnings as "an acknowledgement and sensitivity to particular marginalities in the classroom."

Many instructors who use warnings do so out of concern for what they see as the larger questions at stake in higher education. Their responses are a useful reminder that, in certain respects, the push for trigger warnings comes from the laudable desire on the part of many students to be mindful of the experiences of others.

However, even instructors who are sympathetic to the idea of warnings express concern about their possible impact:

I began using trigger warnings in my syllabi 2 years ago, at the request of very thoughtful students. I was delighted to respond to this student request, and to do something that would create a positive classroom environment, and that would support students who are survivors of sexual assault and violence. That said, many of my colleagues are concerned about any kind of censorship in the classroom, and fear that this issue is a kind of Pandora's Box. While it is very important to respect survivors of sexual violence, might other students refuse to read or engage with material because it is uncomfortable or challenging? How can we teach such things as war, homophobia, racism, misogyny, homophobia, and violence if we cannot expect students to read such texts or material?

How can we educate students about such violence (and thus hope to end such violence) if students refuse to engage with it in the classroom? And what about students who might refuse material that is contrary to other belief systems? For example, might fundamentalist

students (of any religion or political philosophy) refuse to read books on sexuality, feminism, or women? In a word, trigger warnings feel like a reasonable issue in terms of supporting student survivors of sexual violence. But what about other kinds of censorship? And painfully, it is the very students who ask for trigger warnings (often open-minded, progressive, well-meaning, feminist students) who don't understand that their feminist request sounds like a conservative one for many progressive teachers.

WARNINGS CAN BE USED IN DIFFERENT WAYS

Some respondents who provide warnings do not allow students to “opt out” of material, while others invite students to do so. For example, "I've warned students that I was about to show them an upsetting or potentially offensive image, but I've never not shown it. Giving students the tools to prepare themselves to engage with potentially upsetting material, if they choose, is a good use of such warnings. Curtailing the use of

such material or allowing students to excuse themselves is not."

A number of other instructors report that they do invite or allow students to avoid content they find upsetting. For example, one reported that “I am always careful to select films that do not show too much violence and I tell students how long the scene is, what it entails, and that they should feel free to leave the classroom for a few minutes if the film proves too much for them.” Others elect to avoid certain kinds of content entirely, such as material that is “explicit in terms of sex and violence,” or “films with rapes in them.”

Some practices reflect the personal preference of the instructor, rather than fear that material will "trigger" an adverse reaction for students: for example, one respondent reports avoiding material "I wouldn't want to have seared into my own mind's eye" because "there are some things you just can't un-see."

"I am always careful to select films that do not show too much violence and I tell students how long the scene is, what it entails, and that they should feel free to leave the classroom for a few minutes if the film proves too much for them."

KEY FINDING

3. Many educators distinguish trigger warnings from the practice of informing students about course content.

WHEN ASKED if they had ever voluntarily provided trigger warnings, *more than half* of those surveyed have done so, with 23% saying they have offered them 'several times' or 'regularly.'

Many commented on the confusion between a 'trigger warning' and the common practice of explaining or describing a course and the material that will be covered in class.

Many instructors have pointed out—in the survey and elsewhere—that offering students information about course content, including that some materials may be challenging or disturbing, is not a "trigger warning." In their

Many instructors have pointed out—in the survey and elsewhere—that offering students information about course content, including that some materials may be challenging or disturbing, is not a "trigger warning."

view, it is not about avoiding content that might offend, but explaining what will be taught and what is required of students. You might call it full disclosure.

One respondent who teaches a course on global food, which for some is a "charged personal subject," reports that the syllabus describes the course in some detail and adds that it will "very directly" address difficult issues like famine, and food and gender," and that "students who have personal concerns might want to think carefully if this course is a good choice for them."

WARNING VERSUS INFORMING

Others provide detailed course descriptions out of consideration for student sensibilities, "to let students know ahead of time what sort of upsetting material they might encounter in a course where such material is not an expected component." Such respondents indicate their purpose is merely to inform students so they can decide not only whether to enroll, but also, if they do, what to expect. In a representative comment, one art history instructor reported informing students at the beginning of the semester that the class

covers a wide range of perspectives on the world... You are therefore certain to encounter ideas that conflict with your

values and worldview. Indeed, the art that we look at will sometimes contain messages about identity, religion, science, ethics, justice, equality, and other topics that contemporary people find naive or offensive.

This kind of course description addresses the concerns of many critics of trigger warnings, because it does not flag specific themes or passages, or prejudice how students receive the material. It has the advantage of alerting students to the presence of content which may be troubling for some, without what many respondents see as a significant downside:

I would be concerned that including trigger warnings about some material that I cover in my classes would signal to students that there is something "bad," "wrong," or "disturbing" (in a negative and problematic way) about the images and ideas we are discussing in class. In some cases suggesting this value judgment about the class material would undermine our study of it. . . .

I think that if I provide a trigger warning for one type of material that students may find upsetting, but not for another type of material, I'm sending too strong a message to students about what it's O for them to get upset about and what they're not allowed to find disturbing.

The statement on trigger warnings by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) emphasized this point, arguing that trigger warnings

signal an expected response to the content (e.g., dismay, distress, disapproval), and eliminate the element of surprise and spontaneity that can enrich the reading experience and provide critical insight.

A number of respondents elaborated on this idea: "What gets triggered are usually issues of race, violence, sexuality and gender. I feel that prefacing these topics or preemptively deciding they're sensitive issues furthers an idea that they're taboo."

The AAUP also pointed out that trigger warnings focusing on one element of a work can also have an effect of distorting the reader's understanding of the work as a whole: "If, for example, *The House of Mirth* or *Anna Karenina* carried a warning about suicide, students might overlook the other questions about wealth, love, deception, and existential anxiety that are what those books are actually about."

This concern was also expressed in a number of survey responses, including this one: "The few times I have said something in class, I have regretted doing so, as I felt afterwards that it had an effect on the way students' received the work."

INFORMING WITHOUT DISTORTING

KEY FINDING

4. Supporters and critics of trigger warnings alike are opposed to administrators requesting or requiring their use.

CONCERNS ABOUT academic freedom drive much of the commentary about trigger warnings, and many instructors are plainly alarmed at their potential impact. As several humanities professors wrote in a May 2014 essay for *Inside Higher Ed*, "We are currently watching our colleagues receive phone calls from deans and other college administrators investigating student complaints that they have included 'triggering' material in their courses, with or without warnings. We feel that this movement is already having a chilling effect on our teaching and pedagogy."

The author of the *Vox.com* essay told the same story: "I have intentionally adjusted my teaching materials as the political winds have shifted. . . . Most of my colleagues who still have jobs have done the same."

Many survey responses echoed these concerns. Respondents who disagree about the value of trigger warnings nonetheless agree about the potential for abuse and misuse by administrators. One instructor worried that they are "likely to be used by conservative university administrators . . . to censor content that they find inappropriate or offensive, regardless of the academic value of such content."

Another respondent expressed concern about administrators "interfering with course content and deciding what content should be labeled offensive."

Yet another pleaded not to "give the administrative bureaucracy any more excuses to fire people."

These concerns are particularly acute for untenured faculty: "Given the steady erosion of tenure and other job protections, I fear that a professor's unwillingness to comply with trigger warning policy/expectations—or honest mistakes with compliance—will lead to disciplinary measures or even firing."

The AAUP statement opposing trigger warnings made a similar point, arguing that issuing trigger warnings for controversial topics can mean that such topics

are likely to be marginalized if not avoided altogether by faculty who fear complaints for offending or discomforting some of their students. Although all faculty are affected by potential charges of this kind, non-tenured and contingent faculty are particularly at risk. In this way the demand for trigger warnings creates a repressive, "chilly climate" for critical thinking in the classroom.

It is not a stretch to speculate that, in the face of rising job insecurity in academic circles and the increasing view of higher education as a consumer commodity, instructors will steer clear of issues or materials that might cause controversy or attract complaints by students.

CONCLUSION & OBSERVATIONS

Widespread agreement

The survey responses display deep concern for students' well-being, and a widely shared desire to create a learning environment responsive to students' needs and respectful of their views and experiences. And they also suggest widespread agreement on several key points:

ACADEMIC FREEDOM. The decision whether or not to use warnings should be "left to professors' discretion" and not mandated by department heads, deans, or administrators.

INFORMED DECISIONS. It is good pedagogical practice to describe course content in some detail to allow students to make an informed choice regarding whether a particular course is suitable to their interests and personal circumstances.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION. Students with concerns about course content should discuss them with the instructor directly to determine whether or not the course is a suitable choice or can be adapted to mitigate concerns.

PROPER MEDICAL ATTENTION. Students with panic disorders or other medical conditions that affect their education should have access to appropriate treatment, guidance, and reasonable accommodation.

No crisis, but deep concern

The fact that few institutions have adopted formal policies requiring or recommending trigger warnings is encouraging. While it is difficult to substantiate the idea that there is currently a trigger warning 'crisis' on American campuses, the survey nonetheless indicates deep concern among faculty about where things may be heading. While this survey did not directly address student attitudes, it revealed a good deal about them.

Clarity regarding academic freedom and the goals of higher education

Perhaps reflecting this concern about the future of higher education, survey respondents and other commentators suggest a need for greater leadership and clarity with regard to the role of higher education and the importance of academic freedom. The University of Chicago convened a Committee on Freedom of Expression in 2014, which declared that "it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive."

It went on to state that

debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to

be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose.

In May 2015, Purdue became the first public university in the country to adopt the Chicago principles, stating that “it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.” And in September, the American University Faculty Senate adopted a Resolution on Freedom of Expression:

American University is committed to protecting and championing the right to freely communicate ideas — without censorship — and to study material as it is written, produced, or stated, even material that some members of our community may find disturbing or that provokes uncomfortable feelings. This freedom is an integral part of the learning experience and an obligation from which we cannot shrink.

As laws and individual sensitivities may seek to restrict, label, warn, or exclude specific content, the academy must stand firm as a place that is open to diverse ideas and free expression. These are standards and principles that American University will not compromise.

Faculty may advise students before exposing them to controversial readings and other materials that are part of their

curricula. However, the Faculty Senate does not endorse offering “trigger warnings” or otherwise labeling controversial material in such a way that students construe it as an option to “opt out” of engaging with texts or concepts, or otherwise not participating in intellectual inquiries.

Statements like these should help establish sensible guidelines that respect students’ concerns, promote their education, and protect academic freedom.

It is important to note, however, that professors are not and should not be above criticism. Like everyone else, they make mistakes. They may not always be adept at presenting challenging material; they may be tone deaf to certain legitimate concerns; they may be uninformed about certain issues; and they may do and say things that do not advance educational objectives. It is not unreasonable for students to expect teachers to be able to explain the reasons for the selection of material and to answer questions about its contemporary meaning and relevance.

Open minds, open dialogue

A meaningful education requires an open mind and an open dialogue. The debate over trigger warnings will serve a necessary and salutary purpose if it leads to greater self-awareness and opens up opportunities for deeper and more searching discussion about the many difficult issues that confront today’s students and the individual faculty members who hope to equip them to confront it.

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

Has your institution adopted a policy on trigger warnings?

(Answered: 808)

Yes	0.50%
No	64.98%
I don't know.	34.53%

If not required to do so by your institution, have you ever voluntarily provided warnings about course content?

(Answered: 734)

Yes, once or twice	34.06%
Yes, several times	11.44%
Yes, regularly	12.40%
No, never	42.10%

Have students in your classes ever requested that you provide trigger warnings?

(Answered: 737)

No, never	85.07%
Yes, once or twice	13.30%
Yes, several times	1.36%
Yes, regularly	0.27%

Are you aware of any student-initiated efforts at your institution to require trigger warnings?

(Answered: 736)

Yes	7.47%
No	92.53%

If you do not provide trigger warnings, have students in your classes ever complained—to you or to an administrator—about your failure to do so?

(Answered: 626)

No, never	88.18%
Yes, once or twice	11.02%
Yes, several times	0.64%
Yes, regularly	0.16%

What effect, if any, do you feel the use of trigger warnings has or would have on classroom dynamics?

(Answered: 712)

Positive	17.28%
Negative	45.22%
None	8.99%
I don't know.	28.51%

What effect, if any, do you feel the use of trigger warnings has or would have on academic freedom?

(Answered: 713)

Positive	6.87%
Negative	62.83%
None	11.50%
I don't know.	18.79%