



THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

Fostering Students' Free Expression

How colleges can support and encourage
tough conversations



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By J. BRIAN CHARLES

AMNA KHALID teaches the global history of free expression at Carleton College. An expert on repressive regimes, Khalid guides her students through the shifting parameters of free speech at different times and under different governments.

Khalid wants her students to stretch the limits of free expression and better understand both its power and the responsibility that comes with wielding it. In the spring of 2023, she gave them a tough question during class: Should trans athletes be permitted to participate in women’s sports? She believed there was room to explore the tensions between ideals of fairness and belonging, on the one hand, and equity and inclusion on the other.

But as soon as she broached the subject, Khalid could feel the energy in the room shift. She could see that many of the students were reluctant to participate. She posed another question:

“How many people at this point feel like their body has tensed up because I brought up this topic?” she asked. More than 90 percent of the class raised their hands, she says.

The mere mention of the subject made them anxious.

“What I hear from my students is that there are topics you can’t bring up,” says Khalid, explaining that students had previously expressed fears of talking in class when the discussion turned to race, class, or sexuality. “There are things they want to say in class,” Khalid says, but they are often afraid to express certain viewpoints.

In Khalid’s estimate, Carleton should be the perfect backdrop for robust debate and conversation about the issues that animate contemporary politics and culture. About a third of the students at the small liberal-arts



65%

of undergraduates said their campus climate prevents some people from expressing their beliefs because others might find it offensive.

59%

of undergraduates believed colleges should allow students to be exposed to differing opinions even if those opinions are offensive or biased.

Source: "College Student Views on Free Expression and Campus Speech 2022," Knight Foundation-Ipsos

college in Northfield, Minn., are American students of color, and 11 percent are international. For more than two decades, the college has had a gender-and-sexuality center to support LGBTQ students. Such a diverse environment, according to Khalid, is ripe for discussions about politically and socially sensitive topics, conversations she believes not only should happen but must happen, if colleges are to live up to their mission.

"These rough and difficult conversations are what is necessary," Khalid says.

Unfortunately, they don't seem to be happening. She and faculty and leaders at colleges across the country describe an atmosphere of conformity, driven by students' fears of being banished from the social circles vital to the life of undergraduates. A [2022 survey](#) by Heterodox Academy found that the majority of students who are

timid when it comes to sharing opinions in class said they were worried about the reactions they might get from their peers.

In a Knight-Ipsos poll published in 2022, almost two-thirds (65 percent) of undergraduate students said their campus climate prevented some people from expressing their beliefs because those ideas might be deemed offensive. Still, a solid majority (59 percent) believed colleges should allow students to be exposed to differing opinions and ideas even if those expressions are offensive or biased.

And Khalid sees the pressure to conform coming from a place she never expected.

"I am very used to these ideas from the right. I am used to the authoritarian state," says Khalid, who grew up under a series of military dictatorships in Pakistan. "But I am shocked to see this from the left, and it is deeply disturbing."

How Does the Public See Free Expression?

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

People should feel comfortable expressing views others may disagree with.

Strongly agree	53%
Somewhat agree	35%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don't know/no opinion	6%

People should speak with care when expressing their personal views so everyone feels included.

Strongly agree	30%
Somewhat agree	37%
Somewhat disagree	15%
Strongly disagree	8%
Don't know/no opinion	9%

It is important for people to hear a diversity of political opinions and viewpoints.

Strongly agree	51%
Somewhat agree	33%
Somewhat disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don't know/no opinion	8%

“What I hear from my students is that there are topics you can’t bring up.”

It strikes her as at odds with the classical liberalism that has been central to Western higher education, and life, since the Enlightenment. And it comes at a time when higher education has been broadsided with accusations that campuses are turning into indoctrination camps. That perception alone can do damage, cornering administrations and making it difficult for college leaders to chart a clear path forward.

A SHUTTERED MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS?

When you stand in the cereal aisle at your local supermarket, colorful images of rabbits, leprechauns, and toucans vie for your attention. Walk a few more feet, and you find less-adorned boxes that highlight the ingredients and fiber content — an obvious play to an older crowd battling midsection bulge and rising cholesterol levels.

Americans have long held that our intel-

lectual environs work like that cereal aisle: a landscape of competing sales pitches where informed citizens can assess and select from a broad spectrum of opinions and ideologies.

But in recent years, the idea of an intellectual marketplace has been contested. Conservatives, along with many moderates, and even some progressives, argue that colleges have all but regulated the market of ideas into nonexistence as they have caved in to political correctness. Ideas that oppose the liberal consensus are not debated as much as they are quashed, these critics argue.

“The question we wrestle with is no longer, ‘Is it interesting?’ The question is, ‘Does it promote social justice or not? Is it morally acceptable? Is it politically OK?’” says Ian Buruma, a professor of human rights and journalism at Bard College.

Meanwhile, those on the left argue that ideas shouldn’t be commodified in a market, and put up for debates that resemble sporting events rather than places where people can learn. This competitive marketplace, they say, has always privileged a certain subset of the population.

At the same time, progressives accuse the academy of acquiescing to conservatives and not effectively examining traditions rooted in patriarchy, sexism, and

Some opinions and ideas are too provocative to be discussed openly.

Strongly agree	18%
Somewhat agree	34%
Somewhat disagree	20%
Strongly disagree	17%
Don’t know/no opinion	11%

It is important education institutions create environments where a diversity of viewpoints are expressed.

Strongly agree	52%
Somewhat agree	31%
Somewhat disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don’t know/no opinion	8%

racism. As the country shifts demographically — and with it, the makeup of student bodies shifts too — progressives argue that the discourse must shift to accommodate viewpoints shaped more by personal experience and identity than by white, male-centric Western traditions.

Inside college classrooms, this deep disagreement has led to an intellectual stalemate of sorts. Neither side seems willing to budge. And what has developed almost everywhere, except on social media, is a reluctance to engage politically.

“Politics no longer comes up casually,” says Jennifer Ruth, a professor of film at Portland State University and the co-author, with Michael Bérubé, of *It’s Not Free Speech: Race, Democracy, and the Future of Academic Freedom*. She believes the topic rarely surfaces inside the classroom out of fear that people might say something offensive and face backlash.

BEHIND THE STALEMATE

What happened? Musa al-Gharbi, a sociologist at Stony Brook University, has been studying the conflicts occurring on campuses for years. He ties the current moment to the aftermath of the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, the financial crisis that coincided with that, and a rise in right-wing white supremacy. Movements like the Tea Party seized on the financial

crisis to begin attacking colleges and the news media as out-of-touch intellectual elites. Conversely, progressives began to talk about the country in terms of its deep systemic inequalities. They focused much of their attention on how people’s identities left them marginalized.

“After 2010 there seems to be a shift in how people think and talk about a range of issues, particularly race, gender, and inequality,” says al-Gharbi, whose forthcoming book *We Have Never Been Woke: Social Justice Discourse, Inequality, and the Rise of a New Elite* argues that the shift has actually helped perpetuate social inequalities.

Conversations on those subjects in a college class or on a campus have become litmus tests of people’s broader politics, al-Gharbi explains. If, for example, someone doesn’t agree with all of a particular side’s arguments on the economy or health care, they can easily be dismissed for having the wrong politics. And that has chilled political conversations between people with different points of view.

Several camps have emerged. One, ostensibly liberal, defends free speech as the bedrock of a healthy democracy. College, in the eyes of those adhering to classical liberalism, is the very place for students to sharpen and test their ideas on politics, race, class, and gender by engaging with people with whom they disagree. An

In your opinion, how important or unimportant is it that colleges and universities teach the following to students?

The ability to converse with people you disagree with	Think independently	The ability to confidently share your opinion with people you disagree with
Very important	Very important	Very important
Somewhat important	Somewhat important	Somewhat important
Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat unimportant
Very unimportant	Very unimportant	Very unimportant
Don’t know/no opinion	Don’t know/no opinion	Don’t know/no opinion

opposing camp of people who describe themselves as progressive cautions that free speech can easily be weaponized by political forces seeking to harm traditionally marginalized groups. Meanwhile, conservatives argue that their viewpoints are missing from higher ed.

People have become cloistered in their own affinity groups, and their political views have become articles of faith, Buruma says, something fundamental to their personal identity rather than something to which they ascribe.

“Belief is not the same thing as holding an intellectual position,” he says. “Too many ideological positions have become a matter of faith to be defended against heretics instead of discussed.” That makes disagreements more contentious.

“The people who challenge them are not seen as people who have different views. They are seen as blasphemous.”

Jennifer Ruth used to count herself among the classical liberals of the world. She believed in the concept of a marketplace of ideas and in unbridled free speech, which she saw as a great equalizer.

“Being able to say things that pissed people off has benefited women and minorities” she says.

Ruth now believes her earlier position was naïve. “Classic liberal arguments about free speech never really worked,” she says.

“Belief is not the same thing as holding an intellectual position. Too many ideological positions have become a matter of faith to be defended against heretics instead of discussed.”

For one, classical liberalism often assumes the speakers have an equivalent level of social standing and equal platforms from which to argue. That has never been the case, and is especially true when you consider the relative privilege afforded to cisgender, white males when they engage in the conversation or debate. Complicating matters even further is capitalism. A major media platform has a broader reach than an individual voice. Fox Media or CNN, for example, are like Post or General Mills in the supermarket, taking up much of the real estate.

Ruth points to a long history of colleges

In your opinion, how would you rate how colleges and universities are doing generally at teaching the following to students? (continues on next page)

The ability to work with a diverse range of people

Very important	62%
Somewhat important	23%
Somewhat unimportant	3%
Very unimportant	4%
Don't know/no opinion	8%

The ability to converse with people you disagree with

Excellent	14%
Good	31%
Fair	21%
Poor	19%
Don't know/no opinion	15%

Think independently

Excellent	22%
Good	32%
Fair	16%
Poor	16%
Don't know/no opinion	13%

not only centering the positions of those men, but also allowing them to fire off toxic opinions to the detriment of others.

Even framing the problem as a lack of “viewpoint diversity” has become code, Ruth and others say. Stacy Hawkins, vice dean and professor of law at Rutgers University Law School who focuses on law and diversity, says conservatives “try to reframe the debate in terms that seem legitimate but are fundamentally different from the conversation the rest of us are having.”

“Classic liberal arguments about free speech never really worked.”

This, Hawkins believes, is intentional and orchestrated. The goal is to move the conversation away from the real diversity issue in academe, which is its lack of racial diversity, and “undermine the efforts to recognize some people have been historically excluded from some places,” she says.

As Ruth’s and Hawkins’s remarks indicate, the discussion about discourse and

viewpoints has become difficult to unthread from questions of identity. Khalid describes hearing students express reluctance to talk about topics they are not personally affected by — race, for example. These students, most of them white, worry that they don’t have the standing to participate in discussions that touch on the pain and suffering of another person, specifically a person of color. They don’t have the same everyday experience.

“I am not denying the value of lived experience,” Khalid says, “but it has come to dominate.”

Her point is well received even by critics like Ruth, who sees “rigid” identity politics as a hindrance to healthy conversations about politically sensitive issues.

“Identity does matter,” she says. Still, Ruth insists “we can’t turn identity into the same kind of bundle that social media turns politics into.”

AN ESSENTIAL MISSION

While campus discourse continues to boil over at times, higher ed faces a challenge. In a 2021 [poll](#) of adults done on behalf of the Bipartisan Policy Center, 83 percent agreed with the statement “It is important education institutions create environments where a diversity of viewpoints are expressed.” But in the same poll, only

In your opinion, how would you rate how colleges and universities are doing generally at teaching the following to students? (continued)

The ability to confidently share your opinion with people you disagree with

Excellent	14%
Good	32%
Fair	21%
Poor	17%
Don't know/no opinion	16%

The ability to work with a diverse range of people

Excellent	21%
Good	34%
Fair	18%
Poor	13%
Don't know/no opinion	14%

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Colleges and universities should be able to restrict words and language they deem harmful to students.

Strongly agree	22%
Somewhat agree	28%
Somewhat disagree	17%
Strongly disagree	20%
Don't know/no opinion	13%

20 percent of respondents said they trusted colleges and universities “a lot” to “have an environment where people feel comfortable expressing their beliefs, thoughts, ideas, and emotions about different issues.”

To build trust in higher ed — to demonstrate that investing the time and money is worth it not only to earn a degree but also to grow intellectually — colleges must ensure that students are exposed to views and ideas that challenge convention and their own thinking.

In this report, you’ll learn about academics who are working toward that. They are creating an environment that encourages students to share different points of view, and training faculty members to handle difficult conversations. You’ll read about policies that have worked to enable controversial speakers to visit campuses without incident.

And you’ll hear some good news: Many students are themselves taking steps to foster open dialogue outside of class.

BridgeUSA, for example, is a student organization that gives college and high-school students of varying political, racial, and cultural backgrounds an opportunity to meet and discuss tough topics together. They hold debate-like events on campus, except no one keeps score. The idea is to break down the ideological silos that have calcified in recent years.

Later in these pages, you’ll read about David Olshinski, a self-described conservative who served as president of the BridgeUSA chapter at North Carolina State University. He found that the experience opened his eyes to different perspectives. Talking openly about political differences, he believes, can help bind a democracy plagued by partisan gridlock. But it also makes the college experience more meaningful.

“I think people who go to college should be intellectually curious,” Olshinski says. “If people can talk to each other respectfully, it changes your whole life.”

Some ideas are hateful and should not be discussed on a college campus.

Strongly agree	21%
Somewhat agree	29%
Somewhat disagree	20%
Strongly disagree	16%
Don’t know/no opinion	13%

It is essential that colleges and universities foster environments where there is a diversity of viewpoints.

Strongly agree	51%
Somewhat agree	32%
Somewhat disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don’t know/no opinion	9%

Note: Survey was of 2,199 adults, November 16-19, 2021.

Source: Morning Consult National Tracking Poll for the Bipartisan Policy Center

TAKEAWAYS

An environment in which people feel heard and respected and that models healthy debate can encourage students to share their opinions.

In a climate of political polarization, instructors have an opportunity to introduce students, who have seen the divides firsthand, to new ways of thinking.

Meaningful class discussions, in which students don't feel like they must self-censor, are the result of relationship-building work done upfront.

Administrative support is necessary to shape a culture across campus.

The Classroom

STUDENTS often don't feel comfortable sharing their opinions in class. That's a challenge faced head-on by five professors who teach courses where the goal is to discuss and debate hot topics. They believe being able to see why others might have a different perspective is an essential part of being a citizen.

Read how these professors have shaped a classroom environment that encourages meaningful dialogue, and what support professors need — from their administration and in the form of training — to do this work.



Insights From Professors Who Teach Divisive Topics

By **BETH MCMURTRIE**

IT'S ONE THING to stumble into a controversial topic in class. A student says something provocative about policing and suddenly the professor has a potentially heated discussion on her hands.

It's another challenge entirely to build a course that leans into those discussions, one that covers polarizing issues such as gun control, transgender rights, and abortion. But a number of professors have done just that.

- At Sarah Lawrence College, Samuel Abrams, a professor of political science, has taught a course that focuses on how our country has been shaped by these differences, “American Ideologies and American Dreams.” He has designed another one, focused more specifically on [polarization](#), to be taught in the fall of 2023.

THINGS TO KNOW

Instructors should be explicit about the danger of the “certainty trap”: feeling absolutely sure that one’s views are correct.

Modeling healthy debate can encourage students to feel comfortable sharing their opinions in class.

Students need to be able to distinguish between values and absolute truths, understanding that allowing room for doubt is not the same as moral relativism.

An early discussion of logical fallacies can prepare students for better conversations later on.

- At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ilana Redstone, an associate professor of sociology, teaches courses that focus on social problems like racial and gender inequality, and the value of viewpoint diversity.
- In the Claremont Colleges consortium, students can enroll in “The University Blacklist,” a course taught by two professors — one conservative and one liberal — to discuss the writings of some of today’s most controversial thinkers.
- At Indiana University at South Bend, Elizabeth A. Bennion, a political-science professor, has taught “Controversies in U.S. Politics” as part of the general-education curriculum, where she helped students learn how to deliberate more effectively. In the summer of 2023, she taught an online asynchronous course that digs into hot-button issues in U.S. politics.

While each course is unique, the professors share a number of beliefs that propelled them to dive directly into these fraught topics. To be educated and informed citizens, they argue, students should understand why reasonable people could so firmly disagree on, say, gun control or transgender rights. They want students to examine their own biases and presuppositions, which can be hard to do in an era where fewer people live or work in ideologically diverse areas. They believe students should read original works from authors with whom they may disagree, rather than hear about them secondhand. And they want students to practice deliberative argumentation so they can engage with people who think differently rather than shut them out.

Each of these professors has been teaching about ideological differences for several years. *The Chronicle* featured them in a [2019 article](#) that focused on what and how they teach. We caught up with them in 2023, looking for insights into how they and their students have changed. We won-

dered whether the pandemic, social-justice movements spurred by the murder of George Floyd, and continued political polarization had shifted students’ views or how the professors teach. Here are some of their insights:

STUDENTS ARE OPEN TO NEW IDEAS IF YOU SHOW YOU CARE

Abrams, the Sarah Lawrence professor, sees a generational shift happening. He believes that today’s students are less likely to gravitate toward identity politics and are fed up with political parties, but are also deeply curious and want to understand what is happening to our society.

Because students are searching for answers, instructors have a prime opportunity to encourage them to open their minds to new ways of thinking.

Abrams attributes the shift to several forces. The pandemic made students feel more isolated and more vulnerable. Unending political turmoil has left them frustrated and ready for something different.

Because students are searching for answers, Abrams says, instructors have a prime opportunity to encourage them to open their minds to new ways of thinking.

“They haven’t lived in a world where it hasn’t been messy, and they’re trying to figure out who they are, what they care about,” he says.

Sarah Lawrence is a progressive campus, but Abrams’s students today, compared

A 'Polarization' Reading List

In the fall of 2023, Samuel Abrams will teach a new course at Sarah Lawrence College: “[Polarization](#).” “To many politicians, pundits, and others alike, the social and political scene in the United States in the 21st century appears to be one of turmoil, disagreement, division, and instability,” he writes in the course description. “This seminar will explore the puzzle of how to move on from this divided state.”

Abrams put together this reading list to stimulate discussion and debate. The books he chose are not intended to be the “end all” on any topic or represent all possible views, he says. He will also work to weave the readings together and provide context. (Students will become familiar with all of them, he says, but will read about two-thirds of those on this list.) — Beth McMurtrie

- *The Island at the Center of the World*, by Russell Shorto
- *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation*, by Imani Perry
- *The Overlooked Americans: The Resilience of Our Rural Towns and What It Means for Our Country*, by Elizabeth Currid-Halkett
- *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, by J.D. Vance
- *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*, by Eric Klinenberg
- *Poverty, by America*, by Matthew Desmond
- *The Point of No Return: American Democracy at the Crossroads*, by Thomas Byrne Edsall
- *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era*, by Gary Gerstle
- *Political Rumors: Why We Accept Misinformation and How to Fight It*, by Adam J. Berinsky
- *Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know*, by Nolan McCarty
- *The Other Divide: Polarization and Disengagement in American Politics*, by Yanna Krupnikov and John Barry Ryan
- *Why We're Polarized*, by Ezra Klein
- *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, by Jonathan Haidt
- *20 Myths About Religion and Politics in America*, by Ryan P. Burge
- *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It*, by Richard V. Reeves

with those of just a few years ago, are much less inclined to label themselves, he says. Not only do they reject identity politics, they reject mainstream politics as well. They are fed up with both the Republican and Democratic parties. That marks a significant shift from how millennials viewed the world.

“Gen Z-ers are very different,” says Abrams. “They recognize the value of identity, but they’re not obsessed with it.”

In the spring of 2020, Abrams invited Arthur Brooks, a conservative thinker and former head of the American Enterprise Institute, to meet virtually with his class. Students were respectful yet willing to confront Brooks’s ideas. “Instead of attacking him, they challenged him as hard as they could,” Abrams said. “It was the fastest hour and a half of class I ever had. They wanted to understand the difference. Seeing that was thrilling.”

“Gen Z-ers are very different. They recognize the value of identity, but they’re not obsessed with it.”

Many Gen Z-ers have also been in therapy, he notes, to process feelings of isolation and loneliness. “They talk to me about this in office hours. They often say there’s this ache, this hole, they don’t feel like they have anyone to turn to.” Abrams has found that he can tap into that need for connection in his classroom, where he asks questions that get at what it means to be an American today. His classroom, he says, is also a place where students can ask questions they may be afraid to raise elsewhere on campus, for fear of not being considered progressive enough. “You can say, Hey we’re in this together. Let’s figure this out. Let’s talk.”

When classes went online in the spring of 2020, and everyone was isolated, that became an opportunity for professors and students to share parts of their lives as they bonded over this strange new reality, he notes. But there’s no reason why that openness can’t — or shouldn’t — continue now that everyone is back together.

Abrams says it is important for professors who want to teach a similarly challenging course to be open with their students about their own lives, and willing to take the time needed to create a classroom in which people feel listened to and respected. “You have to put the time in,” he says. “To do it is exhausting. That’s the issue. It takes a lot of time. You have to work with them. You may have to meet with students way out of class time. You have to onboard all students, hear them, respect them, and value what they’re saying. If that doesn’t happen, it’s a challenge.”

PROFESSORS SHOULD CONSTRUCTIVELY CHALLENGE STUDENTS’ BELIEFS

Redstone, the University of Illinois sociologist, teaches two courses that focus on contentious topics: “Social Problems” and “Bigots and Snowflakes: Living in a World Where Everyone Else Is Wrong.” Her goal in these courses has always been to get her students to consider viewpoints across the political spectrum. In past years she has had students read and watch a range of material, from Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “The Case for Reparations” to Jordan Peterson’s “Politically Incorrect Professor” videos.

Redstone’s thinking on how to teach students to consider other points of view has evolved since 2019. She uses the phrase “certainty trap” to describe how we get stuck when we believe we are absolutely right and our opponents are entirely wrong. It drives our sense of righteous indignation. While that might feel satisfying in the moment — and who doesn’t want to feel right? — it short-circuits the possibility of engaging with others who think differently.



TED SCHURTER FOR THE CHRONICLE

Ilana Redstone teaches courses at the U. of Illinois that focus on social problems like racial and gender inequality, and the value of viewpoint diversity.

While the ways in which she explores this theory with students are a work in progress, says Redstone, she has been more explicit in recent years about the danger of feeling absolutely certain in one's own views. There are ways to get around the certainty trap, she tells students. "The first way is just to recognize the fundamental uncertainty of the world, the limitations of what we know about identity, about racism, about inequality, about gender and biology," she says. "And that room for doubt opens up a different kind of conversation."

Redstone stresses that allowing room for doubt is not the same as adopting moral relativism, the idea that there are no rules for determining right or wrong. People can and should still have beliefs and values, she tells her students, but they need to distinguish between values and absolute truths.

And that brings her to her second point: "Be very clear in what your principles are," she says. "And understand that none are exempt from criticism or examination or questioning."

As an example, Redstone turns to the immigration debate. To determine whether a particular policy is good or bad is meaningless, she says, without articulating the values that underlie that determination. When it comes to immigration, for example, do you value border security above all? Or are you more concerned with humanitarian needs? Those values will then shape what you consider to be right or wrong policies. And that paves the way for a more productive conversation with someone who does not share your values, as opposed to, say, simply feeling indignant or outraged by someone advocating a policy you consider to be dangerous.

Redstone spoke a lot to students in the

fall of 2022 about the certainty trap and says they responded well to the idea. Partly, she thinks, people are just tired of being mad all the time. “I’m not telling them they’re wrong. I’m not telling them they’re too thin skinned,” she says of her students. “I’m just saying, If you feel this indignation, it’s coming from somewhere and you need to pay attention to it.”

“Be very clear in what your principles are. And understand that none are exempt from criticism or examination or questioning.”

She says professors can apply this technique in their own classroom through lessons large and small. Last fall, in her “Social Problems” class, a student of Mexican descent was talking about how she had gone to Target over the weekend and was really annoyed by the way the store had commercialized the Day of the Dead, which is celebrated throughout Latin America, with cheap plastic trinkets.

Redstone used the moment as an opportunity to dig into the student’s irritation. What if, she asked, one customer who had never heard of the holiday learned a tiny bit about it from the display? What if 100 customers did? Would that give the display any value?

The point wasn’t to change the student’s mind, Redstone says. She could still think it’s wrong. She just needed to consider the question. “There’s a world in which someone could come in and say, Oh, there’s more of a benefit than a cost because of the exposure,” she says. “There’s a world where someone could make that argument.”

A more direct example came through a reading students did in class: “Harrison

Bergeron,” by Kurt Vonnegut. The short story presents a dystopia in which equality is socially engineered to the extreme. A smarter-than-average citizen is forced to wear a transmitter that regularly interrupts his thoughts. An attractive woman is forced to wear a mask.

The question they initially discussed was: How much inequality can we tolerate? But to give specificity to the discussion, they shifted to one that explored the principles — or values — that the story violates that makes the scene such a dystopia. One principle might be: I fundamentally believe that people should be allowed to pursue their human potential to its fullest. “There’s a precision without judgment in that statement,” says Redstone, “that’s clearer, and can be engaged with, more than: That sounds like a socialist nightmare.”

MODELING DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT IS CRUCIAL

Students often don’t feel comfortable sharing their opinions in class, even when the goal is to discuss and debate hot topics. That’s one reason Jon Shields and Phil Zuckerman co-teach “The University Blacklist.”

Shields, a professor of government at Claremont McKenna College, came up with the idea for the course. He’s conservative. Zuckerman, a professor of sociology and secular studies at neighboring Pitzer College, is liberal. The course, which has been offered to students from across the Claremont Colleges consortium since 2018, is structured so that during the first of two sessions each week, the two professors debate each other on a given topic.

“I have strong opinions myself. I’m not a detached observer,” Zuckerman notes. “As an instructor, that’s why having a conservative colleague keeps me in check.”

The goal is to model healthy debate and encourage students to feel comfortable sharing their views. When it comes time for class discussion, Zuckerman sees his role as helping students find common ground. “I try to get conservative students to expand and explain and respect. I try to get progressive students to learn, to listen and

'The University Blacklist' Reading List

Students in the Claremont Colleges consortium can enroll in "The University Blacklist," a course taught by two professors — one conservative, one liberal — to discuss the writings of some of today's most-controversial thinkers. "By exploring such cases specifically within the university context, this course explores contemporary contention over free speech, including its definition and proper scope on college campuses," the syllabus states. "It also reflects on the purpose of the university in a liberal democracy."

The course is taught by Jon Shields, a professor of government at Claremont McKenna College, and Phil Zuckerman, a professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College. In addition to including the work of provocateurs, they lay the groundwork for discussion and debate by asking students to read texts that provide a more-analytical way of talking about speech.

— Beth McMurtrie

- *It's Not Free Speech: Race, Democracy, and the Future of Academic Freedom*, by Michael Bérubé and Jennifer Ruth
- *Infidel*, by Ayaan Hirsi Ali
- *Dangerous*, by Milo Yiannopoulos
- *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*, by Abigail Shrier
- *The War on Cops: How the New Attack on Law and Order Makes Everyone Less Safe*, by Heather Mac Donald
- *False Alarm: How Climate Change Panic Costs Us Trillions, Hurts the Poor, and Fails to Fix the Planet*, by Bjorn Lomborg
- *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth*, by Jonathan Rauch

not jump to conclusions," he says. "And that's the big challenge."

Zuckerman and Shields haven't found that their students' ideologies have shifted much in recent years, but they have changed their syllabus somewhat to better lay the groundwork for discussion. Students now read *It's Not Free Speech*, by Michael Bérubé and Jennifer Ruth, and *The Constitution of Knowledge*, by Jonathan Rauch. Both provide "a more analytical way of talking about speech and what's allowed or not allowed," says Zuckerman.

"I have strong opinions myself. I'm not a detached observer. As an instructor, that's why having a conservative colleague keeps me in check."

Shields created the course after students at Claremont McKenna disrupted a talk by Heather Mac Donald, a conservative political commentator, in 2017. Zuckerman says he was motivated by a generational divide over free-speech issues. [Surveys](#) have shown that older generations are more absolutist in their support of free speech while younger generations are more likely to support restrictions on speech that they deem hateful. That latter instinct can be frustrating to professors like Zuckerman, who came of age when free speech was seen as a way to protect the rights of minorities and the powerless.

"Those of us on the left," says Zuckerman, "are wagging our fingers, saying, Don't you understand that free speech protects you?"



Jon Shields (left) and Phil Zuckerman co-teach “The University Blacklist.”

CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

Zuckerman says he brings up this point repeatedly in class. Before students discuss a new author, they vote — with eyes closed — on whether that person should be given a platform. Then they vote again after two hours of debate and discussion. While the responses have varied, Zuckerman says that by the end of the semester some students will change their minds in favor of allowing a platform. Rather than being damaged by the readings, they better understood how their ideological opponents were thinking.

Zuckerman says that he encourages professors in the humanities and social

sciences to include oppositional viewpoints in their syllabus, or invite in speakers with whom they disagree. If it’s an option, he says, they should also consider team-teaching.

He wishes every class that had an element of debate or disagreement were team taught. “It forces you to treat the other person with respect,” Zuckerman says. “It forces you to argue in good faith, and it forces you to actually acknowledge that the other person, you think you may know where they’re coming from, but you’re also wrong. That always happens to me. I think I know where the right wing is coming

Online Resources for Students and Faculty Members

As more students take classes online, it's crucial to know the kinds of training available to them and to professors to develop skills for engaging in difficult conversations – even when it's through a screen. Elizabeth A. Bennion, a political-science professor at Indiana University at South Bend, has compiled a list of such resources, in part because she has been teaching online courses for several years.

"We have to think about how to reach [online students] as they become part of the college population," she notes. "We can't simply say, You don't need to learn these basic skills for democratic dialogue."

The following are several of Bennion's go-to resources. She points out that they can be used in in-person courses as well. They may be particularly valuable for faculty members who don't have the time or training to develop resources on their own.

National Issues Forums Institute offers free and low-cost guides and videos to help instructors start discussions with their students. Local and regional issue guides cover such topics as how to

respond to the war in Ukraine and free-speech controversies on campus. On-demand webinars provide advice on how to moderate deliberative forums on topics such as policing.

Unify America offers the **Unify Challenge**, a one-on-one "guided video conversation" between two people who may think or vote differently from each other. If a professor wants to assign participation for credit, these challenges can be structured so that the instructor is able to see which students participated and how many questions they answered (actual responses remain confidential).

The Constructive Dialogue Institute offers instructors the Perspectives curriculum, which includes six online lessons plus peer-to-peer discussion guides and a learner dashboard. According to the institute, the program "distills rigorous behavioral-science research into practical skills that help improve students' communication, sense of belonging, and openness to diverse perspectives."
– Beth McMurtrie

from, but when my conservative colleague articulates it, he's coming from a different angle, and I have to think, Oh, that's how he's thinking."

STUDENTS NEED TOOLS TO RESPOND TO POLITICAL POLARIZATION

Bennion, the Indiana University at South Bend political-science professor, has long been teaching students about civic engagement. She has noticed that more students are now saying that political polarization has harmed their personal relationships.

In the summer of 2023, Bennion taught an online, asynchronous course on U.S. politics, and this point came up almost

immediately among her students. "Almost every single one noted how politics has caused rifts in their family."

As a result, her students say, they try to avoid discussing politics at all. Her goal is to give them constructive ways to change those damaging dynamics.

The first thing she does in class is let students know they're not alone in facing this challenge. Then she provides the framework for productive discussion.

For one, she discusses how her marriage is "bipartisan." While she doesn't reveal who believes what, sharing that fact lets students know that having a functioning relationship with someone whose views are different from your own is possible. Canceling each other out at the polls may

not feel great, she says, “But you share a commitment to the democratic process, and if you find some things that you do agree with, and the fundamental values you have in common, you can have very productive conversations.”

She also asks her students to watch a TED Talk in which two women discuss how they have navigated their close friendship despite holding very different political views. “That is so important because it reminds us that there are so many other things about people,” says Bennion. “That doesn’t mean that the right answer is the mushy middle: Everyone has to be moderate, you can’t have any opinions, you can’t really disagree, you have to be OK with everything they say or you can’t be friends. No, it means trying to understand where they’re coming from and being able to have productive conversations. ... You’re able to hear what the other person is saying and still be able to fight for what you believe in.”

Until she took on more administrative responsibilities, Bennion taught “Controversies in U.S. Politics” as part of her university’s general-education curriculum. Before diving into the controversies, she would spend a few weeks helping students understand and identify logical fallacies like ad hominem attacks, circular reasoning, and faulty analogies. That prepared them for more productive dialogue later on.

In her summer class, Bennion focuses more on the shared experiences her students have had with polarization to allow them to get comfortable. She combines

that with structured assignments, in which students must cite sources when making an argument in response to a prompt such as: “Should there be a federal law making abortion accessible, or should it be decided by states, and why?”

Students grow to trust that “my peers are not going to attack me and engage in ad hominem attacks.”

Bennion has found that her students in the online discussion forums are willing to share their beliefs and keep their minds open to other points of view as they read what their classmates post. “When they are able to practice doing this, they can establish that trust,” she says. Students grow to trust that “my peers are not going to attack me and engage in ad hominem attacks.”

“I also think young people are a lot more willing to have these conversations than people give them credit for,” Bennion continues. “They are ready to try something and to be a little bit vulnerable and to learn. That is what I find with my students; they are not so jaded that they have given up. And that’s exciting.”

Supporting Faculty Members Who Facilitate Tough Conversations

By BECKIE SUPIANO

SAMUEL MURRAY'S COURSES are supposed to run on discussion: He teaches philosophy at a liberal-arts college, where his classes have 20 or so students. So when Murray started out as an assistant professor at Providence College this past year and found his students almost universally unwilling to talk about the material — issues like the Black Lives Matter movement, abortion, and voting rights — it presented a significant problem.

He felt frustrated. One purpose of philosophy courses is for students to develop their critical-reasoning and argumentation skills, Murray says. They were never going to develop those skills by just watching the professor “kind of perform a debate,” he says. They needed to practice.

THINGS TO KNOW

Large shares of students self-censor in class, most often to avoid the judgment of their peers.

Students welcome ground rules about how to engage in class discussion.

Instructors must be prepared for students to challenge them.

Professors and administrators can work to shape a campus culture that makes expectations clear for all students.

Since Murray was new, he wasn't sure what was behind students' reticence. When he gave them an anonymous survey, students, regardless of their political leanings or religious identity (Providence is a Catholic college), acknowledged they were holding back. A fraction feared retaliation from professors, but the prevailing sentiment was that speaking up in class wasn't worth the social risk: that students might reveal their ignorance, or alienate their classmates, and that they wouldn't change anyone's mind anyhow.

"Everybody feels like they're kind of in an oppressed group," Murray says. He ran the survey findings past a colleague in political science, with whom they resonated. This problem wasn't contained to Murray's courses: Indeed his findings reflect national trends. [Surveys have found](#) that large shares of students self-censor in class, and that the leading reason that they do so is to avoid the judgment of their peers.

No two college classes are exactly the same; even when a professor teaches the same course semester after semester, each group of students is new. And there's no way to neatly summarize the country's 14 million or so undergraduates. That said, professors and the people who support them suggest that running an effective class discussion on a divisive topic has lately grown more difficult. They offer a variety of explanations, and there's unlikely to be one single cause. Several years of students' education — the social component of it, especially — was disrupted by the pandemic, and attendance and class participation remain significant concerns. Today's student bodies are more diverse, upping the odds that someone in a classroom has a personal stake in any issue. Students worry they'll say the wrong thing, and that a single comment will determine their reputation on campus — or follow them around on the internet, forever. They inhabit the same polarized, outrage-fueled climate as the rest of us.

But the classroom situation isn't just about students. Professors are often min-

58.5%

of students reported being reluctant to discuss at least one of five controversial topics — politics, religion, sexual orientation, race, and gender — asked about in 2022, in a Heterodox Academy report.

Note: This report surveyed 1,564 full-time college students.

Source: "Understanding Campus Expression Across Higher Ed," Heterodox Academy, 2023

Who Is Self-Censoring?

20%

of students reported in a FIRE survey that they either "fairly often" or "very often" felt they couldn't express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond.

22% of male students and 18% of female students felt this way.

Along party lines, the differences are clear: 14% of liberal students, 21% of moderate students, and 33% of conservative students reported feeling this way.

The report defined **self-censorship** as "the act of refraining from sharing certain views because you fear social (e.g., exclusion from social events), professional (e.g., losing a job or promotion), legal (e.g., prosecution or fine), or violent (e.g., assault) consequences, whether in person or remotely (e.g., by phone or online), whether the feared consequences come from state or non-state sources."

Note: This report surveyed, via College Pulse, 55,102 students enrolled in four-year degree programs at 254 colleges and universities.

Source: "2024 College Free Speech Rankings: What Is the State of Free Speech on America's College Campuses?" The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, 2023

Nicholas Longo, a professor of global studies, co-directs the Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy Lab at Providence College.



PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

imally prepared for or supported in their teaching. They're exhausted from several difficult years. A growing number are trying out inclusive-teaching practices that evidence suggests support learning, but talking about students' identities can make professors more vulnerable to criticism from their students — and, potentially, intrusion from their state government.

“What can you do? Here's the great news: a lot.”

A problem this multifaceted and slippery to define is unlikely to have one simple solution. “What can you do?” asks Allison Briscoe-Smith, a senior fellow at the Uni-

versity of California at Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. “Here's the great news: a lot.” There are tons of resources out there to help faculty members effectively facilitate discussion, she says, like the free, online “Bridging Differences” course she co-teaches through the center and online training offered through the nonprofit Constructive Dialogue Institute.

Here's what has made a difference for Murray. As it happened, he was part of an interdisciplinary faculty-learning community through the college's [Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy Lab](#), or DID Lab, which he joined in a desire to improve faculty culture on his politically divided campus. But it turned out that the group's monthly meetings also helped Murray in the classroom.

Murray took away two main insights. Having meaningful class discussions, he

learned, hinged on doing more relationship-building work upfront in class. That, he says, is something early-career instructors like him are often uncomfortable doing, in part because it can seem at odds with the need to cover all of the necessary content. But more-seasoned instructors in the learning community, he says, told the group that as they've gained experience, they've focused less and less on course content and more and more on community. The other takeaway was that students are receptive to, and maybe even hungry for, ground rules about how to engage in class discussion.

Murray incorporated these lessons into his spring-semester courses, and found they did seem to make students more comfortable, and more willing to talk. Things were not perfect — some teaching moments were challenging — but there was progress.

PREPARING FOR PUSHBACK

Students may be hesitant to have a contentious discussion with their classmates, but some of them seem plenty comfortable challenging their professors. And professors may not be ready for that: Most receive very little preparation for teaching at all, let alone for how to teach in “classrooms that are more and more becoming contentious spaces,” says Nicholas Longo, a professor of global studies who co-directs the DID Lab. This shift, as Longo sees it, is driven by students' changing expectations. Today's students, he says, want professors to focus on their learning, not on instruction.

This idea tracks with the general thinking that, in college, students advance from consumers of knowledge to creators of knowledge — a learning environment that can be thrilling. But this student mentality also can cause friction, with some students taking actions, like calling professors out or recording them in class, that Longo says would have been unimaginable to him as an undergrad.

That context can put professors on their

back foot, says Bruce Lenthall, executive director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Pennsylvania. “I have had faculty come to me who are experienced, talented instructors who say: I'm scared of talking about things that I used to be very comfortable talking about in the class,” says Lenthall, also an adjunct associate professor of history. The reason professors give for their fear, he says: “I don't know how it's going to unfold in the classroom.”

Most professors receive very little preparation for teaching at all, let alone for how to teach in “classrooms that are more and more becoming contentious spaces.”

“This is a lot harder than it used to be,” Lenthall says, though, “I don't want to pretend that this was ever easy.”

Lenthall offers some examples of what has changed. Teaching about gender, for instance, becomes more complex when politicized transgender issues are included. Some professors who teach about transgressive topics face pushback from students who argue that this content should not be studied at all. These challenges, Lenthall adds, aren't confined to the humanities. As more professors use inclusive-teaching methods, a computer scientist might feel a responsibility to address the history of the field and where it has been inclusive or exclusive — but not know how to do so without alienating students.

Certainly there have been other mo-

A Primer for Classroom Discussions

MANY STUDENTS are nervous about sharing their views on a sensitive topic in class. Some students are disrespectful, or disruptive. One of the best ways professors can increase the chances that a class discussion of a divisive issue is successful is to prepare students well.

Sarah Ropp, dialogue director of the SNF Paideia Program at the University of Pennsylvania, has created a tool to help — a dialogue primer that could be used on the first day of class or ahead of a particularly challenging discussion.

The program, which is funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, provides courses, workshops, and other programming meant to give students “the knowledge, skills, and ethical frameworks necessary to be informed, engaged, and effective community members, and to lead fulfilling and integrated personal, professional, and civic lives.”

While Paideia offers courses focused squarely on this project, the dialogue

primer could be used to guide just about any classroom conversation.

The primer was initially developed to be used in a session at new-student orientation, Ropp said. “It is not discipline-specific,” she said, “it presumes no particular level of experience with conversations in the classroom.” The primer was well received, Ropp said, and the program has used it in other workshops with students and shared it with faculty members who’ve adapted it for their own purposes.

It begins with a checklist of more than a dozen possible reasons students might feel anxious about speaking up in class, including “I have minority/unpopular beliefs or opinions and fear judgment,” “I have experienced trauma (in any form) and worry that my trauma will be activated by what happens in class,” and “I can’t hide my reactions when people say stuff I think is ignorant or wrong. I’m afraid I’ll come across as arrogant or rude.” Students are invited to indicate which responses apply to them, amending as needed, and are told no one will see what they mark down. Then they’re asked to describe where they think these feelings come from.

This process can serve to name and normalize students’ feelings — and also spark awareness that their classmates may be wrestling with things that they haven’t thought about before.

Next comes a list of strategies for “taking space (for yourself)” and “making space (for others),” and then a set of scripts offering ways to put them into practice. “I” statements are encouraged.

Ropp has also created a facilitation guide for professors who want to use the primer. There are many ways in which they could go about that, she said — anything from using it as the basis of an entire 90-minute class to simply handing it out. It’s “an accordion kind of resource,” Ropp said. The primer is meant to prepare students for dialogue, but it’s also something a class could have dialogue around.

— *Beckie Supiano*



KETTERICK WADDELL

Sarah Ropp teaches “Good Talk,” a course about dialogue across difference in theory and practice, as part of the SNF Paideia Program at the U. of Pennsylvania in the fall of 2022.

Strategies to Share With Students

TAKING SPACE (FOR YOURSELF)

- Jot down some notes for what you'd like to say before raising your hand.
- Let the professor know that speaking up can be challenging for you. Ask if they'd be willing to let you know ahead of time when they will call on you. Or ask them to make sure to call on you, if you know you won't raise your hand.
- Set a goal for yourself, e.g., "I'm going to ask at least one question and make one comment today in class." Reward yourself for doing it!
- Take deep, centering breaths. Say an affirmation to yourself (e.g., "I deserve to be here") and then speak up.
- Remember that others feel the same as you do, and you can help them feel braver by modeling courage.

MAKING SPACE (FOR OTHERS)

- Put three scraps of paper in front of you on the desk. These are your tickets to speak, and when they're up, they're up.
- Practice just listening without preparing a response. If you have trouble focusing under these conditions, try drawing or manipulating something with your hands so you can listen.
- Redirect your urge to participate into observation and reflection. What patterns do you notice about those who speak up first and who talk most? Whose voices are not being heard?
- Resist the urge to fill silence. Take deep breaths. Let it be.
- Ask questions as much as, or more than, you make comments.
- Remember that others struggle with the same concerns, and you can help them by modeling self-awareness and self-control.

Source: "Classroom Discussions: A Primer for Participating in Dialogue," by Sarah Ropp. SNF Paideia Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

ments in time when students have wanted to shape what's taught in college and how, Lenthall says. "But for the generation of faculty that I talk to, I think it feels new and different."

And just think about what those professors have been dealing with these past few years, says Ryan A. Miller, an associate professor of higher education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. They've been teaching through the pandemic, a racial and social-justice reckoning, and resistance to that reckoning. It's been a difficult time for faculty members in general, "and all of these issues are multiplied" for those with fewer protections, he adds: grad students, adjuncts, the untenured, women, professors of color, LGBTQ professors. "I don't know how else to describe it," he said, "other than this perfect storm."

One strand of Miller's scholarship focuses on how professors handle controversial topics in required diversity courses, with implications he thinks are broadly applicable: "If you can do it well in one of those courses" — which enroll students from all majors and delve into race and gender — "you can probably pick up some strategies that are going to be helpful in other courses and other disciplines as well."

Individual instructors, Miller says, can do some self-work before trying to facilitate such a discussion. It can help students, he says, when professors are willing to be vulnerable, to share something of themselves and their own struggles and shortcomings — though he adds that some professors have more freedom to do so than others because of their identities and employment status. It also helps to connect a course's curriculum to students' lived experiences. And, yes, to do some table setting. On the first day of his own classes, Miller says, he likes to tell students: "I don't want us to all agree."

"I say, you know, we are going to use evidence, and we are going to support our arguments," he says, "but I think I am doing something wrong as the instructor if we have this nice, polite conversation and

Why Do Students Self-Censor?

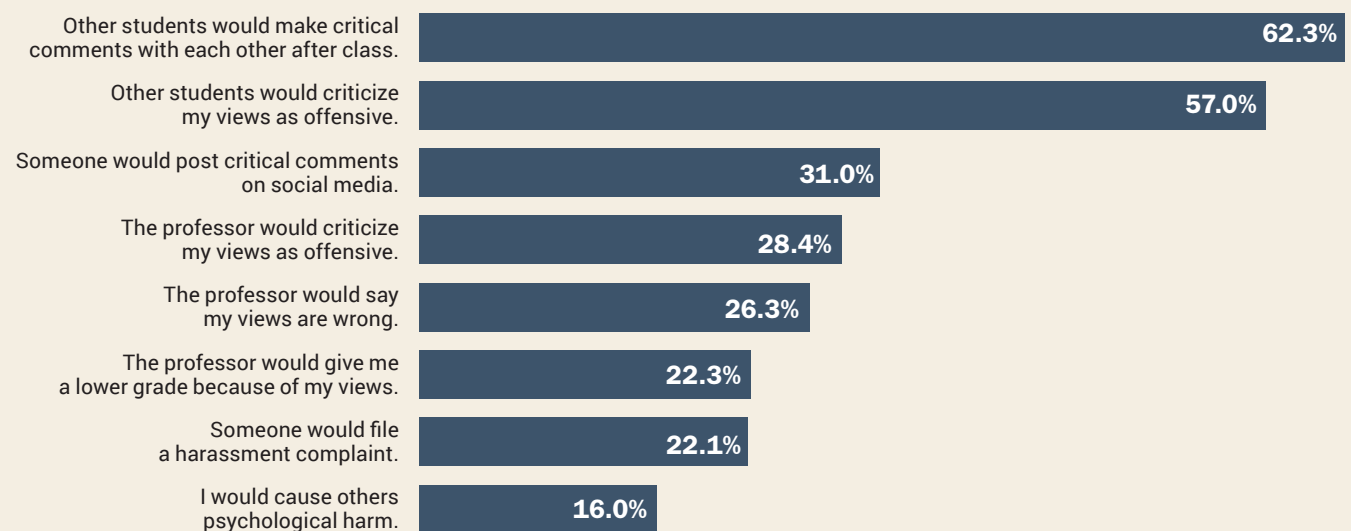
Fear of Peer Response

62.3% of students surveyed by Heterodox Academy said the top reason that they were reluctant to share their beliefs in class was that “other students would make critical comments with each other after class.”

There appears to be a mismatch in what students fear from their peers’ reactions, and in how students say they’d react. When asked what they would do if another student expressed a different viewpoint, the top response, chosen by 66.3% of students, was “I would ask questions to better understand.”

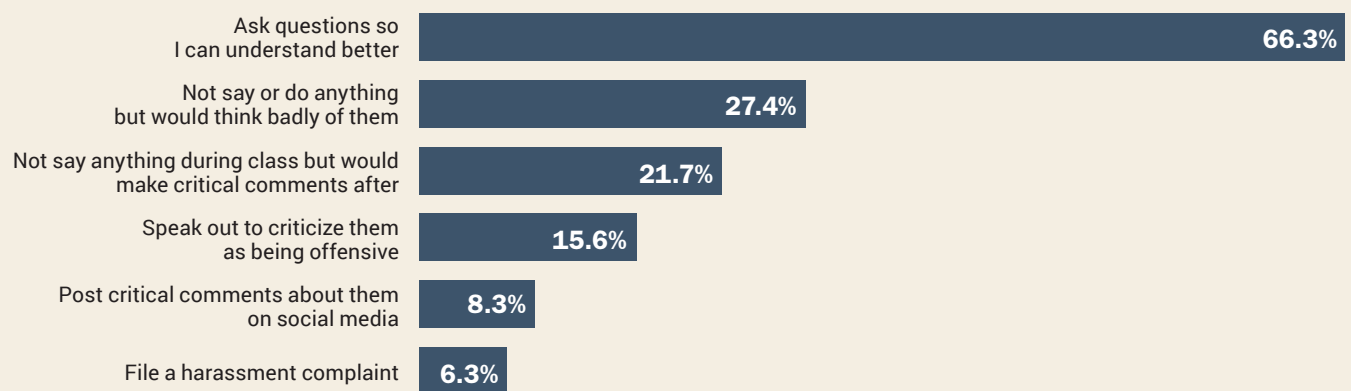
Reasons for Reluctance

Students chose their concerns for why they are reluctant to share their views in class.



Reaction and Response

Students chose what they would do if a student shared a differing viewpoint in class.



Note: This report surveyed 1,564 full-time college students.
Source: “Understanding Campus Expression Across Higher Ed,” Heterodox Academy, 2023

A Closed-Off Campus Climate

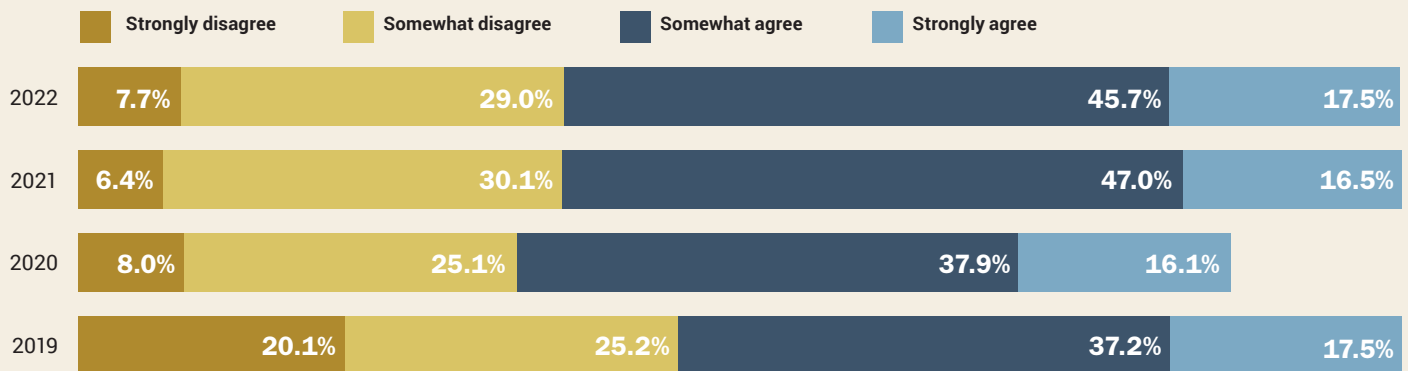
61.0%

of students surveyed by Heterodox Academy said their university “frequently” or “very frequently” encourages students to consider a wider variety of viewpoints.

But, the report says, “sustained culture change takes time”: 63.2% of students said the campus climate prevents openly expressing what they believe.

How Students See the Campus Climate

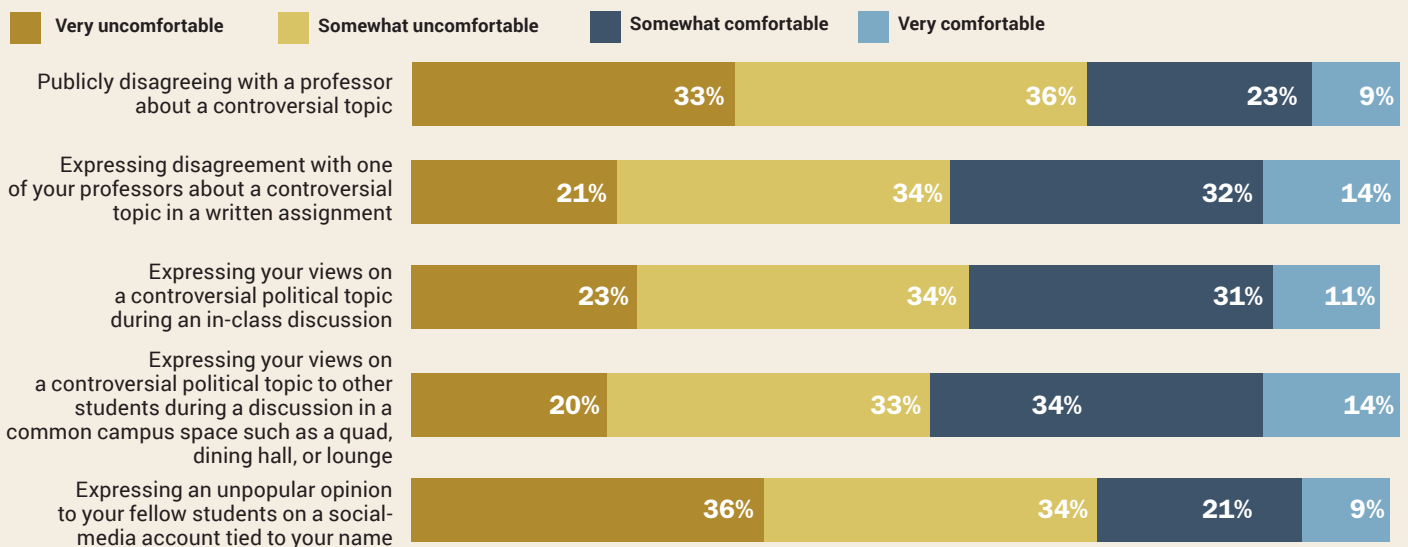
Heterodox Academy asked students: Does the climate on campus prevent people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive?



Note: Numbers do not add up to 100 percent due to some participants skipping the question in 2020 and due to rounding in 2022.
Source: “Understanding Campus Expression Across Higher Ed,” Heterodox Academy, 2023

Expressing Their Views

A survey by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, via College Pulse, asked students: How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus?



Note: Numbers do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. This report surveyed, via College Pulse, 55,102 students enrolled in four-year degree programs at 254 colleges and universities.
Source: “2024 College Free Speech Rankings: What Is the State of Free Speech on America’s College Campuses?” The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, 2023

we never surface any of this disagreement.” Instructors, he says, can state explicitly that conflict is not always bad.

Professors can learn to be good facilitators of classroom discussion, Miller says, and can empower students to be good facilitators, too. And colleges, for their part, can do more to recognize and reward good teaching.

CREATING A CAMPUS CULTURE

One factor among many shaping students’ expectations: their own previous educational experience, says Katie McGee, executive director of student conduct and academic integrity at the University of Texas at Austin. Public schools typically follow a research-based model for building a schoolwide culture, and have done so for decades, says McGee, who previously worked for Louisiana’s state department of education. Individual teachers’ classroom cultures are nested into something that applies to students across the board. Expectations are clear for everyone.

“All of a sudden, they get to college, and they’ve had 12 years of this expectation-setting, and faculty don’t typically do that,” McGee says. Even if they did, their classroom culture might not have an overarching college culture to connect with.

And that’s not the only way adjusting from school to college is challenging — or how college instruction is being pushed to change. Students are also used to being more engaged in their own learning than they get to be in a traditionally run lecture, and they’re not used to their performance in a course hinging on a handful of high-stakes exams. “I’m sure it’s confusing for our students,” McGee says, “and then frustrating for our faculty, that this is the model and the dominant pedagogy structure that they’ve used for decades that was successful” — but that does not fit the way today’s students expect education to work.

“Your everyday faculty member is already juggling so many balls, between their own research, classroom instruction,

grading — and they’re probably sitting on several doctoral committees at a Research 1 institution,” McGee says. They can’t be expected to tackle these complex, changing classroom dynamics on their own. The situation calls for administrative support.

McGee thinks the answer is for academic-affairs and student-affairs departments to collaborate more closely. She is helping lead several working groups trying to build a more consistent culture on her own campus. That’s no easy task in higher ed: Universities are big and decentralized, and academic freedom means there’s not an awful lot professors have to do in class. So the groups are working on optional supports, like offering model syllabus language that professors can use to set the terms of engagement for class discussions.

Shifting the culture of a campus is far from easy. McGee compares making change to “plowing concrete.”

“I really feel strongly it’s forcing more engagement across academic- and student-affairs lanes to have those conversations,” McGee says, “because in our silos we’re never going to get that change to stick. You might have one success here or there, but it will always be episodic until you codify it.”

ADDRESSING ALIENATION

Once in a while, conditions allow one success to turn into something bigger. Jackie Justice is a professor of English and humanities at Mid Michigan College, a two-year public institution with two campuses. Even before the disruption of the pandemic and the divisiveness of the 2016 election, Justice worried about disconnection. “We have whole classrooms of students who, for many years now, have been lonely, in a room of students who feel the same way,” she says. She wanted students to talk to each other, and to do so knowing that “everyone had a voice in the room as long as they weren’t hateful.”

Justice started to research how to help her students and came across the Greater

Good Science Center, which focuses on translating scientific findings that support well-being. She took its “Bridging Differences” course, and participated in a related community of practice. Then Justice brought what she learned back into her existing courses — and a new one she was designing focused on compassion.

“We have whole classrooms of students who, for many years now, have been lonely, in a room of students who feel the same way.”

Justice has shared some short videos from the program with students in her sections of a required first-year composition course, using them as a springboard to talk about active listening. “I realize that this sounds like it’s off topic, that we’re not talking about English composition,” she says, “but English composition is critical thinking, and critical thinking is understanding the feeling parts of what

makes an idea a whole. So we go in with the idea that we’re feeling people who think, rather than thinking people who feel.”

After talking about active listening and nonviolent communication, Justice eased her students in with discussions of some innocuous topics — and drew their attention to the emotions that discussion can evoke — before delving into more-divisive issues like race and politics. Laying that groundwork made a difference, she says: Students took more ownership of class discussion, “because they didn’t feel like they were attacked, and they didn’t feel like they had to defend who they were. Everybody had a voice, and every voice was heard.”

The college’s vice president for academics asked Justice to expand on this work by running a training for faculty members at Welcome Back Day, which she did this past year. She then went on to run “Bridging Differences” training sessions on campus, and plans to host an event to bring faculty members and administrators together to better understand each other. Eventually, the plan is to take this approach beyond the campus, having students hold difficult conversations in the surrounding community.

After all, the way students engage with one another in a discussion matters, but it’s not the end goal. The classroom is meant to prepare them for what comes next — and, ideally, to prepare them to help shape what that will be.

To Fight Political Polarization on Campus, Build Community

BY MIKE MAGEE

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, American higher education is in crisis. I am thinking not of the tenuous economics of the college business model nor of the fleeting value proposition of this or that undergraduate degree, but rather of the corrosive effect of political polarization on the intellectual and social life of our campuses.

Minerva University, where I am president, is in some respects unlike any other American university. Our students come to us from over 100 countries. Only about 12 percent are U.S. citizens, and the majority receive financial aid. Because of this, we've created an educational experience and curriculum designed to weave a global and diverse population into a tightknit community. There are lessons from our first decade that may be valuable to other institutions where students struggle to overcome social and cultural barriers and bridge differences.

Our students hail from nations torn asunder in recent history by the Cold War in Southeast Asia and Latin America. They come from Ukraine and Russia, India and Pakistan, China and Taiwan. They are Israeli and Palestinian. The histories of Seoul and Berlin run through the veins of our community. Violent internal conflicts

in Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, and Myanmar are a terrifyingly concrete reality for some of our students and their families.

The first practical lesson of our efforts is placing intercultural understanding at the heart of everything we do. Students begin their undergraduate journey in San Francisco, where our university is based, before traveling with a cohort of 200 others to live and study in cities around the world. At the start of each stay, they attend an in-depth seminar to learn about local values, communication styles, workplace culture, customs, and manners. It helps our students ensure they are mindful and respectful inhabitants of their new home and brings broader awareness of the cultural differences that exist within our student body.

Civil discourse is another one of our key values. We've worked hard to instill the idea that each of us has a responsibility to see, to hear, and to attempt to understand our classmates, roommates, pupils, and friends. Students take four classes during their first year designed to build habits for interacting effectively. They learn how to negotiate, mediate, and resolve ethical dilemmas. Those skills are then built into our grading rubric. Class participation is

graded on a scale of one to five based on students' abilities to make connections in conversation with others and recognize how their backgrounds affect their interpretation of the material at hand.

Our next lesson: proximity matters. Our students live together in close quarters across every conceivable line of difference during their entire time at Minerva. Residence life exists in the context of the overall values and mission of the university and it is a learning environment every bit as vital as the classroom. Each week, select students organize a gathering to share the food and culture of their home countries with the rest of their cohort. From teaching Samba to making dumplings, these events help students learn more about their friends and peers as well as the world at large. I recently spoke with one of our alumni from Pakistan who described for me the profound and transformative experience of rooming with one of our students from India, who became her best friend. These opportunities allow students to authentically engage with peers from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds with the goal of producing radical empathy and understanding as well as lifelong connections.

And beyond the residence halls, the city they are in is their campus. Anyone who has lived abroad knows that navigating a new city and learning a new language can complicate even the simplest of daily tasks. Our students don't just make this transition once, but every couple of months. The productive struggle this involves is by design.

Another integral component is our pedagogy. Whatever your major, there is only one kind of class: a small seminar of roughly 20 students. Our professors are limited to speaking for less than 10 minutes of a 90-minute class. For the rest of the session, students are responsible for listening and interacting, and are graded on how well they share their own perspectives and seek out those of their classmates. Institutions with much-larger classes could attempt to replicate this model by breaking students into groups and encouraging instructors to

shift from a mindset of talking to students to one of facilitating conversations between students.

That pedagogy and the diversity of our student body also provide ample opportunities to develop a nuanced understanding of some of the world's most complex issues. Imagine how this might play out in a course about constitutional law with classmates from Iran, Denmark, and Brazil, or in a class on climate change with students from Korea, Ukraine, and South Africa. Learning is enhanced because students are able to share their perspectives on the cultural and economic contexts that underlie our most-pressing problems.

These opportunities allow students to authentically engage with peers from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

Leaders of today's colleges have an obligation to provide inspiration, ethical guidance, and above all, structure to young people hungry for community in an increasingly calamitous and alienating world. We must help them understand not only the sorrow but the joy experienced by people not like themselves. That understanding won't come from treating cultural education as an add-on or something that would be nice to have. Instead, it needs to be central to everything we do. Increased political polarization is a blight on American campuses, but we have the tools to stop the damage and forge stronger connections between students than ever before.

Mike Magee is president of Minerva University.

TAKEAWAYS

Orientation and residence life are ripe settings to train students on engaging with different viewpoints.

Some student free-speech groups have faced backlash on their campuses.

Students are founding groups to try to start discussions on divisive topics, and more colleges are bringing in outside groups to train students to have such conversations.

Campus-speaker policies aren't one size fits all, but they can account for as many potential outcomes as possible.

Campus and Community

A NONCOMPETITIVE DEBATE appended to first-year orientation. A reflection on the importance of free speech from the college president in the first days of the semester. Ground rules for discussion set by restorative practices after a conflict with hallmates. Orientation and residence life are prime settings for colleges to educate new students on engaging with people who have different backgrounds and viewpoints.

And that early norm-setting can be crucial preparation for the viewpoints they'll later encounter on campus, whether in bipartisan student groups, in debate clubs, during facilitated conversations among those with differing perspectives, or from guest speakers.



Fostering Civil Discourse in Orientation and Residence Life

By KATE HIDALGO BELLOWS

BRIDGET TURNER KELLY came to the University of Tennessee at Knoxville as a freshman from Massachusetts, where she was raised in a “very liberal, Jewish, predominantly white town,” though Kelly herself is Black. Her roommate was white, from Tennessee, and raised in a rural, conservative area.

Despite those differences in background, Kelly and her roommate forged a friendship that has lasted to this day.

“But we probably would never have met,” Kelly said, “if it wasn’t for being put together in that residence hall back in the ’90s.”

Society today is more polarized than when she grew up, says Kelly, an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland at College Park. People watch news shows that reflect their opinions. They live in neighborhoods and attend schools with people who look like them. They generally avoid engaging with those they disagree with unless they have to.

THINGS TO KNOW

Noncompetitive debates, on topics that are controversial but not so divisive students are afraid to speak, can model healthy disagreement at orientation.

Restorative practices set ground rules for a discussion, and seek to create understanding after a conflict.

Resident advisers can set expectations at the beginning of the year with community-standards exercises.

The practices used to mediate conflict in residence halls can build a “toolkit” for engaging in difficult conversations in future relationships.



DENISON U.

Denison's Lisska Center for Intellectual Engagement and the nonprofit group Braver Angels sponsored a new element of first-year orientation: noncompetitive debates.

College, Kelly says, seems to be one of the few remaining spaces where people from all walks of life are thrown together and expected to work through their differences.

Often, those expectations are first introduced to students at orientation and then put to the test in residence halls, which, unlike classes and clubs, incoming students usually don't get to pick.

"Orientation is all about having a community and a group of people who have been quite literally far apart, from different geographic regions, all over the world, coming together for their first year on a college campus, having to figure out how to live together," Kelly says.

Thus, orientation and residence life are ripe settings for colleges to train new students on engaging with different viewpoints. Here, we look at some of the efforts

colleges are making in their new-student programming to promote civil discourse.

ORIENTATION, WITH A SIDE OF HEALTHY DEBATE

In the fall of 2022, Denison University, in Ohio, added noncompetitive debates to its first-year orientation. In each of three auditoriums, upperclassmen and faculty members argued about whether Denison, a private institution, should restrict campus speech. Then they encouraged members of the incoming class of 2026 to jump in.

The debates were organized by Denison's Lisska Center for Intellectual Engagement and the nonprofit group Braver Angels, which focuses on political depolarization. The College Debates and Discourse Alliance — a partnership among Braver An-

Dos and Don'ts of Civil Discourse

THE CHRONICLE asked the experts consulted for this piece to suggest some dos and don'ts for encouraging civil discourse on campus. Here is what they had to say.

In organized debates, DON'T pick topics that most students agree on. DO choose topics that students are split on and that are relevant to them.

In the spring of 2021, the College Debates and Discourse Alliance was preparing to hold a Zoom debate for students at Allegany College of Maryland and Frostburg State University. The topic was: "Is health care a basic human right?" In polling before the debate, though, most people said they agreed that it was. So organizers changed the topic to: "Should the government provide health care for all of its citizens?"

"Don't shy away from topics that you think are too tough."

"You want to choose topics that are going to be very debatable, that invite a lot of diversity of opinion," says Doug Sprei, director of the College Debates and Discourse Alliance. "Don't shy away from topics that you think are too tough."

DO have faculty and staff ambassadors lead the way.

Sprei says it is important to have faculty and staff members who are dedicated to the cause. That's important not just philosophically, but also to make sure campus spaces will be reserved for events, he says. And, of course, there need to be students who are passionate about civil discourse, too.

"Together, the faculty and a couple of students become a little nucleus of a planning team and conceive a debate together," he says.

DO get buy-in.

Bridget Turner Kelly, an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland at College Park and an expert on intergroup dialogue, says it's important to show students the value of civil-discourse skills. Kelly says her university has been able to do that with its "civic focus" as a public land-grant institution, which obligates it to prepare students with the skills necessary for civil life.

In residential settings, DO pay attention to physical presentation.

Ayush Nigam, a resident adviser at the University of Maryland at Baltimore County, says he learned this tip during training: When an RA is mediating a conflict between residents, it helps to stand in the middle. That way, it doesn't look like the RA is taking sides.

Additionally, Nigam says, the RA should get on students' level. "Never be above their eye level," he says. "It puts you in a position of power."

DON'T wait until something happens to train on civil discourse.

Part of why it is so important to teach these skills at matriculation is so that when something does happen that divides the campus, students already know how to speak civilly about it, says James P. Barber, senior associate dean of academic programs at the College of William & Mary. It is harder to train students after the fact.

"You have to be intentional in building a curriculum that teaches these skills to students who haven't yet been exposed to them," Barber says.

— *Kate Hidalgo Bellows*

gels, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), and BridgeUSA, a network of student groups — has put on more than 180 campus and classroom debates since it began in 2018.

Denison's was the first of those debates to involve an entire incoming class of college students, organizers say.

"Denison has really broken some fresh ground in this initiative," says Doug Sprei, director of the College Debates and Discourse Alliance. "They're signaling to freshmen almost the moment they step on campus that this university is a bastion of freedom of expression" and viewpoint diversity, in and out of the classroom.

Organizers of the Denison event concede they were worried first-year students would be afraid to participate. Instead, "we had way more hands than you could possibly call on," says Adam Davis, director of the Lisska Center and a professor of history.

"Very quickly, it was first-years just standing up, giving extemporaneous, impromptu, four-minute speeches and also asking questions," Davis says.

The debates seem to have paid off for students, too. In a Lisska Center survey administered to students after the orientation debates, 80 percent of respondents said the debate they attended caused them to re-evaluate their opinion even if it did not change their mind. Ninety-three percent of participants said the debate was a good introduction to "dialogue across difference" at Denison. And 75 percent of survey-takers said they had a greater respect for people with different beliefs from them after the debate.

Robert Neithart, a sophomore at Denison, was particularly affected by the experience that fall. Going in, he hadn't made up his mind on that year's topic, free speech.

But he left with a "more developed understanding" of both sides.

"It brings the entire class together, and it shows them what civil discourse and healthy disagreement should look like on a

campus," Neithart says, "which is valuable because they're going to be going into that life in the next week."

The College Debates and Discourse Alliance is now studying Denison and nine other institutions to evaluate the impact of Braver Angels debates. [The two-year-long research project](#), led by Lindsay Hoffman, an associate professor of communications at the University of Delaware, received a \$1.26-million grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

Neithart and Davis are both working on the research project as fellows.

Sprei, who is also vice president for multimedia and campus partnerships at ACTA, says a number of institutions contacted his team about holding orientation debates after hearing about Denison's experience.

For the topic of the next orientation debate, organizers are considering choosing artificial intelligence and its potential for harm.

That topic, Neithart says, strikes the balance between being controversial enough that students are interested in it, but not so divisive that students are afraid to say anything.

"The bar of understanding needed to participate in an AI debate is lower, I feel, because a lot of students are going to be talking about ChatGPT and its use in academics," Neithart says.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN RESIDENCE HALLS

Think about the peer conversations you remember best from college. Were they inside the classroom or outside of it? How many of them happened late at night, under the fluorescent lights of a dorm lounge?

"The residence hall is often a type of learning laboratory for students," says James P. Barber, senior associate dean of academic programs at the College of William & Mary. "As I think about these conversations that students have with people who hold different views, those conversations

happen in the hallways, with new roommates or hallmates. They happen late at night as students are processing the news of the day” and what they learned in class.

But, of course, late-night dorm chats can quickly turn into heated debates and awkward mornings-after. Without civil dialogue, those tensions can sour important peer relationships.

“The residence hall is often a type of learning laboratory for students.”

John Fox, director of residential life at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, says that while most residential conflicts come down to different styles of living, they also sometimes arise from disagreements in viewpoint.

“Where we see them the most,” Fox says, “is when something has happened, like there was something written somewhere, like a racist term, or there was an image posted that created some kind of response or offense for a student or a group of students.”

In 2017, [swastikas were found](#) in several academic and residential buildings on the UMBC campus. Ultimately, the police were not able to identify any perpetrators. But students were hurt and concerned.

Enter [restorative practices](#), which Fox defines as “democratic dialogue” among members of a community that takes place after a harm has occurred. Restorative practices seek to create understanding and resolve conflict.

By setting ground rules for discussion, restorative practices create “a level of safety in that hopefully people who are nervous to engage in a conversation feel that they can be a little vulnerable, [that] they can be honest and genuine, and that no one is going to attack them or marginal-

ize them in some way in the course of the conversation,” Fox says.

After the swastikas were found, trained staff facilitators assembled a group of students to discuss the incidents. The restorative circle supported people who were negatively affected and informed those who weren’t aware of the incidents.

Fox says the circle helped send the message that such behavior was not welcome in dorms, and that residence-life staff wanted students’ help in discouraging and reporting “any kind of behavior that’s going to be very unwelcoming and discriminatory to a group of students.”

Restorative techniques are also incorporated into more mundane parts of residential life. For example, resident advisers use them to set hall expectations at the beginning of the year, Fox says.

“We do a community-standards exercise where they talk about everything from how do we want to engage with one another, from what does respect look like, to how do I confront my neighbors or others on the floor with things like noise,” Fox says, “all kinds of things that will come up when people live in close proximity.”

Ayush Nigam, a senior and resident adviser at UMBC, says he has used restorative techniques to mediate roommate conflicts.

His junior year, he had a suite of four residents, one of whom felt excluded by the rest. He met with each individually, then as a group, to discuss the situation. In the circle, the suitemates passed around a talking piece to take turns speaking.

“We had to make everyone understand each other’s perspective,” Nigam says. “After that, it lightened the emotions and also increased their skills in mediating situations.”

During the coronavirus pandemic, Fox says, there was not as much demand in dorms for restorative practices. He says that was because there was a lower density of students in dorms, fewer incidents were reported, and the focus was on keeping students safe. Residence life is now working to rejuvenate the program.

Fox hopes that restorative practices help residential students build a “toolkit” for engaging in difficult conversations that they can use in future relationships.

“As students are learning and developing, they should be questioning their beliefs.”

“Students spend a small percentage of their time in the classroom, and then most of the rest of the time is with us or other places on campus,” Fox says. “The way I see our role is that as students are learning and developing, they should be questioning their beliefs. They should be learning with others through dialogue and discussion.”

FROM THE LECTURE HALL TO THE DORM ROOM

Princeton University in the fall of 2022 introduced a new orientation event, in which the president, Christopher L. Eisgruber, and two student speakers reflected on the importance of free expression on campus.

Eisgruber, in his [speech](#), explained what the university’s commitment to free expression meant for students. In 2015, Princeton became the first institution to follow the University of Chicago’s [principles of free expression](#), which provide broad freedoms for campus speech.

“It means that you have the right to make arguments and statements that are discomforting to others — including to me,” he said. “It also means that all students should expect that during their time at Princeton they will encounter some arguments and statements that are discomforting to them.”

Eisgruber usually addresses the class for the first time at opening exercises, a few days after orientation. He told *The Chronicle* he decided to speak at orientation in 2022 because, as free-speech issues continued to come up, it made sense to communicate with students from the very beginning about the university’s principles and their connection to learning and civil discourse.

After the orientation event, first-year students went back to their residential colleges and joined their residential-advisee groups, or “zee groups,” to discuss the session.

Resident advisers are trained over the summer to lead that discussion, and discussions around other topics, Eisgruber says. “Part of what we try to do in all of our classes is model what it is to have civil discussions. That’s part of what we’re doing throughout all this.”

Some people want the university to have orientation sessions that instill a particular view of free speech in students, Eisgruber says. Instead, the advisee-group discussions allow students to share what they like and dislike about the university’s free-speech policy — which itself is civil discourse.

In fact, the orientation session received a mixed reaction from students. While some [celebrated](#) the university priming students on free-speech issues, others [questioned](#) whether the session was a good use of their time and pointed out that one of the student speakers came from an organization that has hosted conservative events. “Will Princeton protect progressive speech, too?” asked an [opinion](#) published in *The Daily Princetonian* after orientation.

Eleanor Clemans-Cope, a sophomore and the author of that *Daily Princetonian* opinion, says that, yes, on an individual level, Princeton students and everyone else can do a better job of hearing out other opinions. But on an institutional level, Clemans-Cope says, Princeton has “extremely strong” free-speech protections.

“They should not be so concerned about what their policies are and rather should be helping students to interact more and share ideas more,” Clemans-Cope says. “Really they have bigger problems to deal with on a policy level.”

Clemans-Cope would like to see more orientation programming introduce students to how Princeton is dealing with issues at the forefront of students’ minds, like mental health, academic rigor, climate change, and racial justice.

“There’s things that we talk about that are not solely about free speech that I would have enjoyed knowing about as a freshman coming in,” she says.

Eisgruber says he welcomes the discourse.

“Students are certainly free to exercise

their speech rights to have speech about this issue,” he says. “It’s productive.”

The format for the next orientation session on free expression will be a conversation between Eisgruber and Anthony Romero, a Princeton alumnus and executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, with the floor open for student questions.

Romero is the first openly gay man and first Latino to lead the ACLU.

“He can talk to students in a way that I think is really important, where I think he can speak from a place of authenticity about understanding, for example, the real harm that hate speech does,” Eisgruber says, “but also having an ironclad commitment to the idea that we’re going to put up with offensive speech.”

Student Groups That Want to Start Dialogue

By KATHERINE MANGAN

MIKE PENCE, the former vice president, was scheduled to talk about free speech at the University of Virginia in April 2022, and the battle lines were drawn.

In the campus newspaper, the [editorial board](#) argued that the university shouldn't be giving a platform to "hateful rhetoric" that amounts to violence against gay and Black people, as well as immigrants. Meanwhile, those who were cheering on Pence's deliberately provocative speech, titled "How to Save America From the Woke Left" and hosted by the campus chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, saw cancel culture on full display.

For Ailsa Bryan, who was a freshman at the time, "the level of aggressiveness in the discourse was upsetting to see." In discussions about free speech, as with so many other polarizing topics, she says, "It seemed like a never-ending cycle of arguing. No one was trying to find a middle ground."

Bryan, whose majors included a program in political policy, philosophy, and law, decided to do something about it. She founded

THINGS TO KNOW

Student groups are pushing back on the notion that campuses today are trapped in ideological echo chambers.

Religious identity is a component of diversity that's too often left out of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, some experts argue.

Moderators who plan and practice tend to lead more productive discussions.

Many students are skeptical about viewpoint-diversity efforts, as they associate them with conservative politicians.



Mike Pence, the former vice president, delivers a speech titled “How to Save America From the Woke Left” at the U. of Virginia.

DAN ADDISON, U. OF VIRGINIA

a student organization, [Middle Grounds](#), that encourages students to talk about political issues in ways that avoid polarization and seek common goals. She’s especially interested in recruiting students who, like herself, are interested in politics but don’t identify as either Republicans or Democrats.

This fall, the group plans to sponsor or co-sponsor a series of events, including a workshop presented by a bipartisan advocacy group called [No Labels](#) on how to talk about politics without ruining a friendship. The group is also co-sponsoring a talk by

a world debating champion, Bo Seo, who’s written a [book](#) about how to argue persuasively while listening to and respecting the other person.

Another plan in the works is a tradition sidelined by the pandemic — a kickball game between the University Democrats and College Republicans. Middle Grounds is also resurrecting a podcast this fall called *Bipodisan* to unpack the 2024 presidential election and other topics likely to stir up heated debates.

Across the country, in debate clubs, community-service groups, Greek orga-

In discussions about free speech, as with so many other polarizing topics, “it seemed like a never-ending cycle of arguing. No one was trying to find a middle ground.”

nizations, and political clubs, students are trying out different ways to bridge their differences and talk about topics that can be sensitive and divisive. Many push back on the notion that college students today are trapped in ideological echo chambers. Students, they say, are more open-minded than skeptics credit them for. Still, in a nation that's highly polarized, and at a time when college diversity goals are being threatened, it isn't always easy to sit down and really listen to the other side.

One of the regular contributors to UVA's *Bipodisan* podcast, when it was run by faculty members, was Mary Kate Cary, an adjunct professor of politics who co-chairs the Heterodox 'Hoos Campus Community, Virginia's partnership with the [Heterodox Academy](#). UVA is one of 36 campuses where groups of faculty and staff members and students are working in [formal partnerships](#) with the nonprofit advocacy group to promote viewpoint diversity and constructive disagreement. Listening to the other side, Cary says, "makes your argument stronger and often makes for more robust discussion that doesn't involve name calling or inflammatory rhetoric."

Jered Cooper, a senior at Virginia who [won a campus speech contest](#) last year about the importance of free speech, learned about the fledgling Middle Grounds group at a campus activity fair. "Are you the radical centrists?" he jokingly asked Bryan. Other student groups, he says, tended "to fall on one side of the divide or the other." This one sounded refreshing, so he joined.

"We come together every few weeks to talk about important issues — usually controversial," Cooper says. "But we never leave enemies. We have vigorous debates, but no one ever shuts someone down or makes them feel small or irrelevant."

Which is not to say the group has been universally embraced. Bryan says that even though Middle Grounds takes pains to present sensitive issues from different perspectives, it "absolutely has faced a



DREW PRECIOUS

Jered Cooper, a senior at the U. of Virginia, presents the speech that won a campus contest on the importance of free speech. Cooper is a member of the student group Middle Grounds.

backlash for providing a platform for ideas people don't necessarily agree with."

BRIDGING POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVIDES

On other campuses, similar backlashes have threatened the viability of student free-speech groups. In October 2021, Michael Reed-Price, then a first-year law student at Emory University, was dismayed by the furor that erupted when a professor in a torts class, Alexander Volokh, uttered a homophobic slur when quoting the respondents in a Supreme Court case involving anti-gay protests at funerals of American soldiers. Students who were offended by

Volokh's mention of the slur issued a list of demands that included disciplining faculty members who use or repeat slurs in the classroom.

Reed-Price and three classmates, who thought the professor's language wasn't unreasonable given the context of the case they were studying, decided the law school should have a free-speech club. They applied to the Student Bar Association for formal recognition of the Emory Free Speech Forum, which would allow them to reserve campus space and apply for funding.

The application was denied twice. The student association objected to the speakers the group wanted to host and thought it was too similar to existing student groups.

"Due to the nature of this group we are concerned with the lack of mechanisms in place to ensure respectful discourse

and engagement," said the initial letter from the association, which was obtained by *The Chronicle*. "Without safeguards in place, such as a moderator or mediator, these discussions will likely give rise to a precarious environment — one where the conversation might very easily devolve." The letter added that it is "disingenuous to suggest that certain topics of discussion you considered, such as race and gender, can be pondered and debated in a relaxed atmosphere when these issues directly affect and harm your peers' lives in demonstrable and quantitative ways." Leaders of Emory's Student Bar Association did not respond to requests for comment.

The letter reflected the reticence some students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, feel about engaging in unrefereed discussions with peers who



A Bridging the Gap event brings together students and faculty members from John Brown U. and Philander Smith College.

TRISHA POSEY

might say things that are insensitive or even inflammatory. To help keep such conversations civil, a growing number of colleges are bringing in outside groups like [Braver Angels](#), the [Constructive Dialogue Institute](#), and [Bridging the Gap](#), a program of Interfaith America, to train students how to conduct and participate in productive discussions about sensitive topics.

Others argue that while such efforts are helpful, students should be trusted to tackle difficult issues without the guardrails. “The rejection of the Free Speech Forum,” says Reed-Price, “is the exact reason it needs to exist.”

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, or FIRE, [told](#) Emory’s administration that the Student Bar Association was engaging in viewpoint discrimination by rejecting the club. The Free Speech Forum was eventually able to get its charter last year.

One of its first sessions, on defunding police forces, featured a debate-style discussion between two Emory law professors with opposing views. The professors provided legitimacy “to people who think we’re a crazy right-wing group,” says Reed-Price, adding that, personally, he’s a Democrat who worked as a paid field organizer for the Biden campaign between college and law school.

At the University at Buffalo, a group that has brought conservative speakers to campus was “derecognized” in the spring of 2023 by the university’s student government, which passed a new rule banning clubs affiliated with outside organizations.

The group in question, the campus chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, which is affiliated with the nationwide Young America’s Foundation, [filed](#) a federal lawsuit, claiming it was being targeted and censored for its views. Protests had recently erupted over the group’s decision to bring a controversial conservative pundit to campus. Leaders of the university’s Student Association, a student-run nonprofit that houses student government and clubs, did not respond to a request for comment.

Caleb Dalton, a lawyer who is representing the Young Americans for Freedom, said that the Student Association later dropped the policy on outside affiliations but that its policies still unfairly restrict the conservative group’s activities and ability to bring in speakers. Even though Young Americans for Freedom is now recognized by the Student Association, it can’t sign contracts — the university gives the Student Association the authority to do that on behalf of campus groups.

“Religion for many people is foundational. It’s so essential in how people see their identities.”

If politics is one area some students steer clear of when they sense views might clash, religion is another. [Interfaith America](#), and its founder, Eboo Patel, want to change that. He [argues](#) that religious identity is an important component of diversity that’s too often left out of colleges’ diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Rebecca Russo is senior director of higher education strategy for Interfaith America. “Religion for many people is foundational. It’s so essential in how people see their identities,” she says. “If we want to understand how people feel about abortion, for instance, religion plays an important role.”

Interfaith America uses an approach it calls [Bridging the Gap](#) to teach skills for listening, understanding, and seeking common ground. It brings students together — sometimes two colleges with different missions or ideological backgrounds, and sometimes within a single campus.

The program, which has grown to 50 campuses, started with a partnership between two small colleges in the rural



Linn-Benton Community College's Civil Discourse Program has a table at a local farmers' market where members strike up conversations with people they don't know.

THOMAS PATTERSON FOR THE CHRONICLE

Midwest — Spring Arbor University, an evangelical Christian university in Michigan, and Oberlin College, a progressive liberal-arts college in Ohio. Students lived together on the Spring Arbor campus, visited the Oberlin campus, and toured a correctional facility while they brainstormed ways that would appeal to both Democrats and Republicans to improve the criminal-justice system. Among the ideas they came up with were improving channels for incarcerated people to communicate with corrections officials and providing better staffing and support for overworked officers who were under pressure to provide more programming in their facilities.

Tina Grace was hired to coordinate the program after graduating in 2020 from Spring Arbor. The January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald J. Trump happened

just as students from five Midwestern colleges were meeting in a Zoom session to talk about bridging ideological divides.

Grace and the other program leaders jumped into a group chat to decide whether to cancel the session but decided that continuing it, while somewhat risky, could be an ideal opportunity to test their commitment to tackling polarizing topics.

“One student had a relative who was there, and they didn’t necessarily explicitly agree with the way things were handled, but they tried to express that viewpoint of why someone would be down there,” says Grace. “Another student broke down and said: ‘This is so scary. What next?’” The facilitators did their best to keep the students who were horrified by what had happened from grilling the few conservative students who spoke up. Later that evening, in a subsequent Zoom call, the students were asked

how they felt as they saw the images and the news from the Capitol, and what they meant for the work of bridging divides. By focusing on how they were feeling, rather than who was to blame, the organizers hoped to reinforce the importance of listening, especially when emotions are raw.

STAYING CIVIL AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The University of Alabama's [Cross-roads Civic Engagement Center](#) also offers training and [tips](#) that help student leaders representing a range of groups — under-represented minorities, people who identify as LGBTQ, and fraternity and sorority members — lead civil [conversations](#) about difficult topics.

Tips include being comfortable with silence and honoring periods of quiet reflection, and encouraging people to say “oops” or “ouch” if they missed the mark with a point they were trying to make or were hurt by someone's comment and want to explain why.

Moderators who plan and practice tend to lead more productive discussions, says Lane Busby McLelland, the center's executive director. “This stuff doesn't just happen,” says McLelland, who has a master of divinity degree and has worked in a variety of roles in religion and ethics. “These spaces have to be created. You can't just say, ‘Let's sit down and talk.’”

One university that has created spaces specifically for people from different religious identities to feel welcome is Georgetown, a Catholic, Jesuit university that welcomes people of all (or no) religious backgrounds. Its residential [living-learning communities](#) include one that celebrates and explores Jewish culture, and another that supports “Muslims and non-Muslims who want to be steadfast in prayer and their commitment to campus building and cooperation.”

The Campus Ministry Student Forum brings together leaders of Georgetown's student faith communities for group

activities including interreligious dialogues, community-service projects, and social-justice advocacy.

Building relationships both within and outside of one's traditions is particularly important at a time when the nation is so divided and people are coming out of pandemic lockdowns, says the Rev. Gregory A. Schenden, director of campus ministry.

At Linn-Benton Community College, an institution in Albany, Ore., that straddles a strongly progressive and a deeply conservative county, Cheyanne Rider developed a more-nuanced understanding of fraught issues by participating in the college's [Civil Discourse Program](#).

“This stuff doesn't just happen. These spaces have to be created. You can't just say, ‘Let's sit down and talk.’”

One feature had students breaking into teams of three and developing opinion pieces either for or against a topic like banning TikTok or opening safe-use drug centers. Each student would choose a few points that supported the topic. Then they'd polish and consolidate their arguments into a single paper. After that, each team would critique and polish the opposing team's paper. Both op-eds would be published side by side in the [student newspaper](#).

“We want the other side's piece to be sound because it's still a reflection on the Civil Discourse Program,” Rider says. When confronted with arguments that at first might hurt or offend, “it's better to understand where people are coming from,” she adds. “Even if you don't agree, it helps

Types of Bridge-Building Conversations

ONE OF THE FIRST QUESTIONS that staff members at the University of Alabama's [Crossroads Civic Engagement Center](#) might ask a student group seeking tips for a bridge-building conversation is what kind of format they're interested in: a debate, discussion, or dialogue.

Each of those formats, detailed in a [chart](#) on the center's website, has its own goals and likely outcomes that students might not have considered when they waded into weighty topics like gun ownership, abortion, or immigration. A conversation can quickly go off the rails if someone, armed with solid facts and figures, tries to win points in a discussion while a classmate is just trying to understand why the speaker feels so passionately about her argument.

The center provides an array of [tips](#) for

student leaders from groups including fraternities and sororities, as well as LGBT and other minority-serving clubs, to help them lead discussions about difficult topics in ways that are respectful and productive. The tips include a list of "group norms" to set before a dialogue, including "challenge yourself to say what you really mean" and "be comfortable with silence."

Lane Busby McLelland, the center's executive director, describes the difference between a debate and a dialogue; the first can feel like a "pro-con, either-or, winner-loser" kind of interaction that students might be less likely to join in if they don't feel they have enough facts. In a dialogue, she says, students might listen more and be open to persuasion, or at least to understanding where the other person is coming from. In between is an analytical discussion — the kind of academic analysis that takes place in a seminar that rarely gets very personal.

The three approaches, the civic-engagement center says, might be described as competitive, conceptual, or collaborative. Each has its place on a college campus, but knowing what you're aiming for once conversations start flowing and tempers start rising is important. Here's how the program describes them:

In a **debate**, people tend to listen to each other to form counterarguments.

In a **discussion**, say in class, participants focus on a problem they're trying to solve and listen to each other to piece together a cogent argument.

In a **dialogue**, the goal is to listen without judgment and to try to understand the other person's thinking. As Preston McGee, a recent graduate, explains in a [video resource from the center about the types of discourse](#), "the goal is not to win, or to resolve, but to understand. It's about relationships, first and foremost."

— Katherine Mangan



CROSSROADS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CENTER

Participants in the U. of Alabama's Campus Dialogues series, which ran until 2020, discuss the topic of the day. The series was part of the university's Crossroads Civic Engagement Center.

A conversation can quickly go off the rails if someone, armed with solid facts and figures, tries to win points in a discussion while a classmate is just trying to understand why the speaker feels so passionately about her argument.

humanize them. It's all too common for people to write off those they disagree with as silly and ill informed."

Each week, the Civil Discourse Program has a table at a local farmers' market where members strike up conversations with people they don't know. The idea is to encourage people to talk about issues they come at from different perspectives.

Sometimes they agree to disagree, but occasionally, students are swayed by a compelling argument. In a debate on campus over a mandatory Covid-vaccination policy for public colleges, Rider says her "gut reaction was to say, 'Of course we should have it,' but the other side really had solid facts and information." The state had a mask mandate at the time, and few people were back on campus anyway. That made the case less compelling to force people "to put something in their body they didn't want in their body," Rider says. "I asked to switch to the other side" and argue that shots should be strongly encouraged, rather than required.

Ten students at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte are training this summer to lead discussions on social and political issues during the coming academic year. The students, who are called Charlotte Conversationalists, are enrolled in a curriculum designed by the [Constructive Dialogue Institute](#). They'll lead two to four discussions over the coming academic year in residence halls and libraries.

Matthew R. Metzgar, a clinical professor of economics who's been active in faculty efforts to promote free speech and viewpoint diversity, is one of the faculty leaders of the conversationalist group. He says the natural starting point was to get the university's Republican and Democratic student groups together. But, as on other campuses, participation in student clubs and activities has waned, especially since the pandemic. Even in the classroom, students don't seem to be engaged, he says.

"I've been teaching a lot of years, and sometime around 2015 and 2016, all of a sudden in class on any semi-controversial topic, students would clam up," he says. "If anything would come up with race or gender and I'd ask for comments ... nothing — crickets." Colleagues told him they were experiencing the same.

Many students are skeptical about free-speech and viewpoint-diversity efforts on their campuses because they associate them with conservative politicians, like Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, who argue that colleges' focus on diversity is part of an effort by liberals to indoctrinate students. DeSantis has gone beyond complaining about these issues, leading a successful effort to ban diversity programs in public colleges and intimidating professors into dropping discussions of such topics in the classroom.

Megan Bahr, a recent graduate of Gateway Technical College and a current student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, says free speech and DEI efforts can co-exist. Students should feel free, she says, to talk about issues that might make someone else uncomfortable if they do it with respect and an open mind.

"You don't have to be an expert or a full-out ally," says Bahr, whose campus leadership positions have included being a peer advocate for a multicultural program. At Parkside, she holds a fellowship sponsored by the Andrew Goodman Foundation that trains students how to promote civic engagement and civil discourse. "All you need to do is respect the other person. Seems like such an easy ask, but in today's climate, that's not always what we get."

College, she says, "is all about opening ourselves to new opportunities and learning about different points of view. When we enter the work force, we won't be able to pick and choose who we work with. We'll have to get along with everyone."



(From left) Zachary Gallarneau, Matt Burchett, and Lor Duncan at the first-anniversary Prism's charter approval.

COURTESY OF ZACHARY GALLARNEAU

This Student Group Welcomes LGBTQ Students at Its Christian Campus

BY HELEN HUISKES

ZACHARY GALLARNEAU set his sights on Baylor University during his freshman year of high school. Coming from a family of Texas Tech University graduates in Lubbock, Tex., though, he saw the private Baptist campus in Waco as a pipe dream.

But a combination of scholarships added

up to a full ride, and Gallarneau headed to Baylor in the fall of 2019. A Covid-truncated freshman year didn't deter him from getting involved on campus the next summer, and while preparing to be a freshman-orientation leader, he attended a student-leadership seminar led by Daniel Haddad, associate director for orientation programs.

“That class was really about living your wholeheartedness and authenticity, and trying to encourage people to be who they are,” says Gallarneau. He came out as gay in the class that summer.

Baylor, one of the most prominent Christian colleges, has stayed theologically moderate regarding sexuality. In 2017, the university changed its Code of Conduct so that it no longer banned “homosexual acts.” But its [Statement on Human Sexuality](#), issued in the first weeks of Gallarneau’s freshman year, upholds the university’s alignment with the mainstream Protestant Christian view: “Fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman” is the “biblical norm” for sexuality, and Baylor students are expected not to “participate in advocacy groups which promote understandings of sexuality that are contrary to biblical teaching.”

Although the expectations are temperate compared with other Christian colleges’ views on the issue — which often explicitly prohibit same-sex dating — Gallarneau says the statement still shook him as a new gay student at Baylor.

“That was kind of scary to me because I didn’t really know if I belonged or where I belonged on campus because of that,” says Gallarneau, who has been out to his family since October 2017.

As Christian institutions attempt to reconcile traditional views on sexuality with social concerns about inclusivity, LGBTQ students on faith-based campuses have fought for the spotlight. LGBTQ student groups are [increasingly seeking recognition and official status](#). Lawsuits and petitions have been filed, and protests staged, against faith-based colleges that have limited or refused formal recognition of these groups. Few Christian colleges have officially recognized LGBTQ student groups outside of spiritual-life offices or counseling centers. Some that have tried to recognize such groups, like Samford University, in Alabama, in 2017, faced [denominational backlash](#).

But in the fall of 2021, Haddad gave

Gallarneau an invitation. The Board of Regents was beginning a series of “listening sessions” with students to gauge interest in an official LGBTQ student group. For more than a decade, an unofficial group, Gamma Alpha Upsilon, had petitioned for official status and held protests around campus. But that fall, GAU said it would end its campaign as the university announced the possibility of granting recognition to another group instead. Gallarneau attended three of the Board’s six sessions where, with about 20 other students, he answered questions about what the LGBTQ community at Baylor needed in order to feel welcome.

He had distinguished himself as a potential leader for the group, and so he and three other students worked with the student-life office to draft bylaws and an application for official status. They worded the bylaws and the application carefully, to achieve the students’ goals while aligning with the university’s official convictions, Gallarneau says.

“We had to be a little bit careful about how we worded some things, because we know that it’s kind of two different worlds colliding,” he says. “Even though we’re all students at Baylor and all want the same thing for Baylor.”

The group, named Prism, was officially chartered in April 2022. It met some resistance on campus and in the news media, but Maggie Cielez, a junior who has been involved with Student Government, says that Prism’s arrival on campus was not as tumultuous as it seemed.

Kevin Villegas, assistant dean of intercultural engagement, signed on as the group’s adviser when he joined Baylor’s student-life office in August of that year. It was especially clear what the group was not: It wasn’t primarily focused on spiritual formation or on advocacy.

“It’s not meant to be an advocacy type of organization,” says Jason Cook, Baylor’s vice president for marketing and communications. “That’s really the only guideline that gives structure to the group. It’s a care, support-type community group.”

Mark Yarhouse, a professor of psychology at Wheaton College, in Illinois, consults Christian colleges on how to support LGBTQ students. He says that choosing what an LGBTQ student group is actually about can be difficult on a Christian campus where, like anywhere else, students are not monolithic. Even within LGBTQ communities at Christian colleges, there is political tension, as students take different stances on their sexuality and their faith. Some may have even chosen a conservative Christian college because of its traditional views, while others may understand the college's position but hope for change anyway. Yarhouse says those differences could cause several LGBTQ groups to crop up on a campus.

"Typically, students who are more liberal are uncomfortable being in the same support group of students who are more conservative and vice versa," he says. "It's not as easy as just saying, 'Do you have a support group, yes or no?'"

Yarhouse says the Baylor group could be a model for other Christian colleges that want to support LGBTQ students while staying true to its traditional convictions. Prism focuses on education and care for its members, and provides a safe place for members to discuss personal tensions about their sexual and gender identities.

Throughout the 2022-23 academic year, Prism held weekly meetings, hosted a handful of faculty members to build relationships with students, and held games and activities to educate people about LGBTQ terminology. At one event, they talked about the different colors on pride flags and tie-dyed T-shirts. At a members-only meeting, students shared more-personal stories about being LGBTQ at Baylor. They also had a mixer with a so-

rarity, Alpha Delta Pi, and their first event open to the public in April, to celebrate the club's first birthday.

"It's been so sweet seeing some of the people that just come in, and they're just happy to be safe," says Gallarneau of Prism's events. "And they don't have to go back to their dorm and be alone or be quiet or have friends that they can't really talk about anything in common with."

Cielesz, who is not a member of Prism, says that Prism has had a small, quiet presence on campus in its first year. But she wants the group to have a bigger spotlight, because she sees it as important to starting conversations on campus.

"If I wasn't involved in Student Government, I could easily not even know that they existed on campus," she says. "So I would argue that it needs to be brought more to the forefront."

Gamma Alpha Upsilon still had an activist presence on campus last year. As an unofficial group, Gamma has more freedom to openly advocate for progressive views on LGBTQ issues.

As Gallarneau sees it, the very fact that Prism is allowed to exist is a statement of support from the administration for LGBTQ students.

"We have our charter, you know, and Baylor has told us that we're meant to be here in some way," he says. His advice to students at other Christian campuses seeking to start a group like Prism? Believe in yourself. He says he now feels like he belongs at Baylor, because his name is in the book of charters as one of Prism's first co-presidents.

"Once I started figuring out that this might be the reason that I was meant to be here at campus, nothing held me back," Gallarneau says. "And we were able to get everything done that we wanted to do."

Conversations on Hotly Debated Topics – Made Cooler by Ground Rules

IN 2016, as the country braced for one of the most polarizing presidential elections of all time, students on many college campuses recognized the growing chasm between peers of different political opinions. That divide seems only to have grown.

“We exist in echo chambers. I am a liberal student, and a lot of students I know are unwilling to listen to people they disagree with,” says Jahnavi Kirkire, who is double-majoring in government and politics and in international relations and public policy at the University of Maryland at College Park. “They assume that person is wrong and therefore they don’t need to listen to them.”

Kirkire is a member of BridgeUSA, a group formed that election year by students at the Universities of California at Berkeley, Colorado at Boulder, and Notre Dame, according to BridgeUSA’s website. Since its founding, the organization has spread to more than 50 college campuses, as well as two dozen high schools.

Members recognize the vital importance of campus discourse and want to preserve what they see as crucial to a college education.

“People who go to college should be intellectually curious,” says David Olshinski, who served as president of BridgeUSA’s chapter at North Carolina State University during the 2022-23 academic year. “If people can talk to each other respectfully, it changes your whole life.”

The group holds campus conversations on controversial topics and requires participants to abide by some basic ground rules.

“We have four norms of discussion,” Kirkire explains. “Everyone must listen to listen and not listen to respond. No interruptions, no side conversations. Address the statement and not the person. Participants must only represent themselves and not the whole group.”

Those principles were put to the test at N.C. State in the spring of 2023, when Olshinski, then a senior majoring in



BRIDGENCSU

Students participate in the N.C. State U. chapter of BridgeUSA’s “political speed-dating,” a series of three-minute conversations where they discuss subjects such as gun rights/gun control, abortion, and free speech.

political science, held a conversation about abortion. The conversation was well attended by students and the campus clergy. Olshinski, a self-described conservative, found himself moved by some of the abortion-rights personal testimonies. And as hot as talk about abortion can run, the conversation was civil. One reason, according to Olshinski, was that the debate was not recorded. There was no video or audio.

“My thought process is, if people think something they say can be put out there and come back to hurt them, then people won’t talk,” he says. He believes the four guidelines and the decision to not record kept the conversation honest and lowered participants’ stress.

Olshinski graduated in the spring and is heading off to law school. He has moved into a national position with BridgeUSA, and hopes the group can continue to grow. Its leaders envision an entire generation learning how to talk about controversial topics without disagreements turning into confrontations.

“I hope people will understand over time,” Olshinski says, that “it’s OK to talk about politics.” — J. Brian Charles

THINGS TO KNOW

Before an invitation is extended to a potential speaker, meet with key campus leaders to gauge support.

Ask what the speaker's intentions are and what the college stands to gain.

Consider what format will make the most of the campus visit: speakers should be open to creating opportunities for interaction.

A policy on speakers can't cover every circumstance, but it can anticipate as many as possible.

Success Strategies for Guest-Speaker Visits

By MEGAN ZAHNEIS

SCHOLARS in Colgate University's linguistics program wanted to bring John H. McWhorter to campus for a talk. It would be a tricky proposition, they knew: McWhorter, an associate professor at Columbia University, was well situated to deliver a lecture on how dialects are their own fully fledged linguistic systems. But McWhorter, who is Black, has also espoused views — notably in his 2021 book *Woke Racism*, which argues that some antiracist schools of thought have been taken too far — that the Colgate faculty members knew would be unpopular among many on their campus.

There were other complications. Joining the linguistics program in sponsoring McWhorter's visit would be Colgate's Center for Freedom and Western Civilization, which was interested in the societal implications of the talk on dialects. The center had been involved in bringing other controversial speakers to campus, including for an event where both the speaker and students' attitudes during a Q&A turned hostile.

But that didn't mean McWhorter's name should be crossed off the



JUSTIN SULLIVAN, GETTYIMAGES

Protesters shout at each other as they support or demonstrate against a planned appearance by Milo Yiannopoulos at the U. of California at Berkeley in 2017.

list of possible guest speakers. Spencer D. Kelly, a professor and co-director of Colgate's Center for Language and Brain, and his colleagues were adamant about that. Instead, they decided, they'd take deliberate steps, some of them unusual, to ensure both the Colgate community and McWhorter himself were primed for a successful event.

Anticipating how a given speaker might be received — and writing policies on free expression that dictate how to handle controversial guests — is imperfect processes and can't account for every possibility that the intersection of intellectual

discussion, deeply held beliefs, and human emotion presents. So there's no watertight way of bringing a speaker to campus. But McWhorter's November 2022 visit to Colgate provides one model of how campuses can prepare for a controversial speaker's arrival and how a universitywide policy on free expression can pave the way.

STARTING WITH CONVERSATION

At Colgate, [the process began](#) long before the university extended an invitation to McWhorter. Kelly and others met with the provost, chief diversity officer, and a mem-

ber of the Faculty Diversity Council, not to ask permission to invite McWhorter but to gauge whether they'd have support from key leaders in doing so and whether they'd missed any major considerations in their early planning. The meetings acted as both a sounding board for the faculty group's own ideas and a service to the speaker — “a courtesy, really, to let them know what they're getting into,” as Kelly puts it.

They couldn't promise the visit would be successful or eliminate every objection to it. But with key leaders apprised of the possible benefits and drawbacks, Kelly and his colleagues were able to extend their invitation with more confidence. “You don't try to say, ‘Oh, don't worry about it. The president supports this,’” Kelly says. “I've heard people say really casual things to speakers that they have no right to really say; they can't guarantee anything.”

A meeting with Colgate's Intergroup Dialogue Council helped smooth over tensions from the earlier speaker visit that had gone sideways, and it led to a conversation with McWhorter that confirmed his desire to conduct his own visit differently. Meeting with the council also gave Kelly and his colleagues ideas about whom to invite to a campuswide event leading up to McWhorter's arrival. That event, based on an existing Colgate structure called a “speakeasy,” brought together students and faculty members who the organizers knew supported McWhorter's talk, and others who opposed it. “It was an acknowledgment and validation that people are upset with McWhorter's views,” Kelly says, and a chance for everyone involved to air their opinions.

Kelly's group knew enough of the 30 people invited to count on their being able to converse civilly. Though Kelly says it was a resounding success — with all of the attendees staying past the allotted two hours to continue talking — the speakeasy, which was scheduled about six weeks before McWhorter's talk, also built in another fail-safe for the planners: If it didn't go well, they'd need to plan more extensively for

the real event, perhaps making allowances for a counterprotest.

In the end, McWhorter's visit went swimmingly, with students lining up after his talk to ask questions. (McWhorter confirmed in an email to *The Chronicle* that his interactions during the visit were “all quite respectful.”) While all that preparation paid off, none of it was required by any formal policy or speaker-invitation checklist at Colgate. Kelly is well aware of the volume of work it added to his and his colleagues' plates, but he said it was worthwhile in service of a larger process — one that establishes ground rules and good faith, entertains diverse views, and promotes academic community.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Regardless of an institution's specific processes for speaker invitations, Kelly and other experts said leaders should answer a basic set of questions before bringing a potentially controversial guest to campus.

What are the speaker's intentions? The ideal campus speaker has a genuine interest in educating and engaging with their audience. But some guests might not fit that criterion; one example Kelly cited was Milo Yiannopoulos, the right-wing provocateur who in the mid-2010s toured campuses across the nation. Several of Yiannopoulos's scheduled appearances were canceled, including a last-minute decision at the University of California at Berkeley after student protests turned violent. So, Kelly says, it's important to engage in “a little bit of a negotiation on both sides: What do you want to give? What kind of talk do you want to get?”

What's in it for you? Some guests — particularly mainstays on the speaker circuit — have a clear motive for a visit. “They typically make some money out of that by selling their merchandise or advertising their podcast or ... selling their book,” says Sigal R. Ben-Porath, a professor of educa-

tion at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Cancel Wars: How Universities Can Foster Free Speech, Promote Inclusion, and Renew Democracy*. “What is remaining for you on campus? What did you gain?”

Can you get the same material online?

Since the pandemic made virtual presentations more commonplace, it’s especially worth asking what value a speaker can bring face-to-face — or, as Jana Sawicki puts it, “Is this person someone who anybody could watch give the same speech online?” Sawicki, a professor in the philosophy department at Williams College, in Massachusetts, says in many cases, faculty members who want students to engage with a prominent figure’s ideas can screen a TED Talk or lecture on YouTube.

What format will you use? To get the most value from a campus visit — and from the honorarium you might be paying to make it possible — “you really want to create all kinds of opportunities for interaction” and ensure you’re not just giving the speaker a platform, says Sawicki, chair of a committee that in 2019 [proposed recommendations](#) for a new speaker policy at Williams.

Guests should also be open to building “dialogic moments,” like Q&A sessions and small-group discussions, into their appearances, says Sarah S. Stroup, a professor of political science at Middlebury College who directs its Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation. A speaker willing to do so, Stroup says, is probably also committed to making the visit constructive. (For more, see Page 62.)

Is this the best speaker to bring in?

At Colgate, Kelly says, faculty members identified several scholars who could have delivered a talk about the linguistics topics they were interested in, none of whom were as well-known — or as controversial — as McWhorter. They drew up a cost-benefit analysis for each speaker, ultimately deciding that McWhorter’s

prominence outweighed concerns about some of his views.

You shouldn’t bring in a speaker solely because they’re famous, Kelly says, but it matters when you’re trying to draw an audience. Speakers appear almost every night at Colgate, and rather than require students to attend for class credit, Kelly prefers to “bring someone in that students want to see.” McWhorter fit that bill and would also attract faculty members, alumni, and other community members.

It’s important to engage in “a little bit of a negotiation on both sides: What do you want to give? What kind of talk do you want to get?”

Ultimately, says Sawicki, event planners should be able to answer questions about the educational aim of inviting a particular speaker, the visit’s relevance, and how the event will unfold. Those may seem like elementary questions, but all of the experts *The Chronicle* spoke to say they can get lost in the shuffle.

That’s why Middlebury now requires that an event-request form be submitted ahead of every outside-speaker visit. The form isn’t so much about creating an approval process as about incorporating more intention into the planning, says Stroup, the political-science professor. The questions a form asks — about whether the speaker’s visit is tied to a class or organization, whether there are safety concerns, and what other events, like a dinner, might accompany the customary 90-minute talk — could even serve as a proxy for training on how to host a guest speaker — train-

What Makes a Productive Campus-Speaker Event? (Intentional) Audience Participation.



TODD BALFOUR, MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

DeRay McKesson, an author and organizer, speaks before a capacity crowd at Middlebury College.

TO MAKE THE MOST of a speaker's time on campus, and to ensure their visit is fostering conversation that extends beyond the time they're in front of an audience, Middlebury College has experimented with a different format for events. The structure centers on a surprising rule of thumb: A speaker should

formally address an audience for less than half of the allotted time.

So, if a guest delivers a talk for only 30 minutes of a planned 90-minute event, how should the rest of the time be filled? Middlebury's [Engaged Listening Project](#) proposes that organizers devote 15 minutes to a welcome and small-group introductions, five minutes to introducing

the speaker and ground rules for the event, and 20 minutes each for small-group discussion of the speaker's talk and Q&A.

It's easy to imagine [criticisms of that format](#), says Sarah S. Stroup, a professor of political science at Middlebury and founding faculty co-director of the Engaged Listening Project, which was formed in the wake of the political scientist Charles Murray's [controversial 2017 visit](#) to the Vermont campus. Some speakers worry they won't have enough time in their formal talk to convey the complexity of their subjects. Another concern for event organizers is practical: If an increase in disruption during speaker events created the need for a new format, why would that new format make even more space for audience participation?

To those concerns, Stroup has two responses. First, she calls for trust in the audience: "If we treat our students and community members as showing up in good faith to talk about difficult subjects, they meet the challenge." She also believes building in such "dialogic moments" helps audience members learn the material better, a goal speakers should share.

In fact, Stroup says, many speakers who have used the Middlebury format have found it invigorating, saying it makes for a more-engaged audience and helps speakers to sharpen their own ideas. "You

have to make choices about what it is that you're going to prioritize," Stroup says. "If one of the choices you make is that 'I'm going to hit my high points, but then leave space for the folks in the room to think about what matters to them,' it can generate a much more robust Q&A."

"You have to make choices about what it is that you're going to prioritize."

Though there's no formal post-event evaluation of the format at Middlebury, Stroup says a primary benefit is the potential it opens for the conversation to stretch days and even weeks after an on-campus talk. "We've invited you to have a few moments of dialog with your neighbor during this event. Please keep talking on the way out the door; if you see the person on campus next week, continue the conversation," Stroup says Middlebury event organizers tell attendees. "We don't want these outside-speaker visits to be stand-alones. In an ideal world, they are meaningful contributions from outside experts to ongoing conversations about important topics." — Megan Zahneis

Balancing Listening and Dialogue

For events that encourage active listening, audience engagement, and dialogue, here's how Middlebury recommends allotting time for visiting speakers.

Event length	Welcome and small-group introductions	Introduce speaker and rules	Presentation	Small-group discussions	Q&A
60 minutes	n/a	5 minutes	25 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes
75 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	30 minutes	15 minutes	20 minutes
90 minutes	15 minutes	5 minutes	30 minutes	20 minutes	20 minutes

Source: Engaged Listening Project, Middlebury College

ing Stroup says she never got as a faculty member.

Ben-Porath advocates for tying speakers' visits to "reflective spaces" — classes, clubs, or other structures that ensure the conversation continues. "Speakers are typically useless," she says. "The way to make them a good educational device is to make events that are productive and worthwhile for a campus, including worth the headache that they might cause you" — whether that headache comes in the form of student protests, campus discord, security or even legal costs, or simply the logistical hassles of organizing a large-scale event. "Otherwise, most of what you get is either a very limited engagement or a brawl, neither of which have educational value," Ben-Porath says.

DEVELOPING A POLICY

A campus policy on speakers could be designed to help answer those questions. Anyone sitting down to draft such a policy must recognize that it will necessarily be incomplete — it's impossible in a campuswide document to control for the unique mixture of student and faculty sentiment, speaker personalities, and current events that accompany each case.

Ben-Porath puts it simply: "The policy is not going to fix the whole thing for you." She advises that policies be elastic enough to allow for context-specific discernment and for revision when need be. They should also account for what's not written in them, she says; a circumstance not covered in a speaker policy is always bound to arise.

That doesn't mean the effort is futile. In fact, Ben-Porath thinks it's necessary to have a policy, as both a point of reference for planning and an educational device on campus. It's also an exercise in checks and balances, ensuring a campus doesn't have to "rely completely on the judgment of whoever might have the power to make decisions at any certain moment," she says.

Howard Gillman, chancellor of the University of California at Irvine and a noted

First Amendment scholar, agrees. A policy should "try to anticipate as many circumstances as possible so that no one thinks you're only making that decision because that person is controversial," he says — an especially important consideration for public institutions like his own.

A policy should "try to anticipate as many circumstances as possible so that no one thinks you're only making that decision because that person is controversial."

"Institutions have proven themselves at much higher risk if they fail to develop relatively well-thought-out policies than if they just assume, 'Well, there's no way to anticipate everything, so we're just going to wing it,'" Gillman says. That liability became clear when speakers like Yiannopoulos were making the rounds ahead of the 2016 presidential election. Some campuses allowed a controversial speaker only if another person who opposed the speaker's views spoke at the same event, which led to a host of lawsuits, Gillman says.

In the following years, Gillman revisited many of UC Irvine's policies, which now make up one of higher ed's most-detailed prescriptions for dealing with campus speakers. Irvine's [general free-speech policy](#) details how speech restrictions vary based on location, with more latitude given in an outdoor public area than in, say, a dorm. The [major-events policy](#) dictates the procedures organizers must follow in the weeks leading up to an event

and what security precautions might be taken (including a “risk grid” that considers factors like the time and location of an event, whether food and alcohol are being served, whether a public figure will appear, and how an event is marketed). A [third policy](#) lays out what constitutes disruption (holding an 8.5-by-11-inch piece of paper in front of one’s body is “likely not,” while blocking others’ view of a speaker or trying to prevent a speaker from being heard probably is) and how the university should respond.

At the same time, speaker policies aren’t one size fits all; what works at an institution like Stanford University or UC Irvine may not succeed at Williams or Colgate. Ben-Porath says campuses that are better known or near a big city are more commonly visited by outside speakers, while rural campuses she works with are sometimes more concerned with uninvited speakers, such as street preachers. Gauging how a speaker might be received, adds Kelly, the professor at Colgate, is also likely to be more difficult on a larger campus than on a small, community-based one like his own. And some leaders choose to outline a general stance on freedom of expression, rather than setting hard-and-fast rules for speaker visits.

Some institutions have endorsed the [Chicago Statement](#), the principles adopted by the University of Chicago that many have considered a gold standard since their introduction in 2015. According to the [Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression](#), more than 100 institutions have adopted a form of those principles, which hold 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.”

Some groups, like committees led by Kelly and Sawicki at Colgate and Williams, respectively, have found the Chicago Statement inadequate. Sawicki says it’s missing “an element of sensitivity to what’s happening to particular students

in an increasingly diverse environment in academia.” Instead, both professors’ committees recommended what Kelly calls a “counterweight” to the Chicago Statement’s marketplace-of-ideas approach, which takes into account how speech affects marginalized populations in particular.

But the Chicago Statement’s popularity and its clear-cut nature can make opposing it “a little bit of an uphill battle,” Stroup says. “What I’m suggesting isn’t a pithy, packaged alternative. It’s not a menu of commitments or principles that are a ready, preset model.” Instead, Stroup’s recommendation stems from lots of talking — “50 one-on-one conversations with people,” as she puts it, “to understand where they are coming from.”

“These moments of controversies are the symptom rather than the cause.”

No matter what a campus’s approach is, Ben-Porath says, leaders would do well to have guidelines on who can invite a speaker and under what circumstances. It’s advice that more and more colleges are taking, says Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill, director of the Bipartisan Policy Center’s Campus Free Expression Project. That trend began around 2015 with the Chicago Statement’s introduction, says Pfeffer Merrill, who advised in the creation of a 2021 [report](#) that suggests how parties, from presidents and trustees to faculty and student-affairs office members, should approach free expression.

Political rhetoric — and accompanying on-campus events — surrounding the 2016 presidential election reinforced

the need to re-examine speaker policies, Stroup says. In the run-up to Donald Trump's election, it became clear that "the media landscape and our public officials often model a very binary, black-and-white, us-versus-them dynamic," she says. "Those public models are our students' point of reference."

Those students, Stroup adds, increasingly come to college with drastically different life experiences, as institutions work to diversify their student bodies and combat a demographic cliff. "These moments of controversies are the symptom rather than the cause," she says. "Underlying all of this is that we have students who come from many different parts of the country and the world whose reference points are different."

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESS

So how do campuses draft their own policy or prepare for an upcoming speaker visit? Here are some suggestions.

Make the work public. If you're assembling a committee to review or adopt a free-expression policy, make sure it represents as many campus constituencies as possible, Sawicki advises. Not only does that ensure you're representing a wide range of views, but it legitimizes your committee's work, showing that you're interested in hearing what people think and insulating you from criticism.

Being caught in a speaker controversy without an "anchor" that outlines how your institution will deal with it is the worst-case scenario.

Plan ahead for individual events. Make sure they appear on campus event calendars well ahead of time and consider holding a preview event like Colgate's "speak-easy." Both will give you a sense of possible opposition on the day of the actual talk.

Try a tabletop exercise. Say a faculty member invites a bioethicist who has written that it's ethical for women to abort fetuses diagnosed with birth defects to speak to their class and students from your campus's disability-advocacy club protest, calling for the invitation to be rescinded. That's one of the scenarios put forth in the Bipartisan Policy Center task force's report; tabletop exercises can help bring such hypothetical scenarios to life.

Avoid approval policies or speaker-review boards. Pfeffer Merrill, of the Bipartisan Policy Center, says a better approach is to give the groups — whether academic departments or student organizations — the latitude to issue their own invitations and think carefully about which speakers will add value to campus discourse.

Give students options. Pfeffer Merrill recommends providing "a lot of clarity" about how students can disagree with a guest speaker without employing a heckler's veto. Can they use a megaphone? Bring a sign to an event? How large can that sign be? What are the guidelines for holding counterprotests?

Customize for your campus. Ben-Po-rath likes the policies UC Irvine, Williams, and Middlebury have because each operates "at the correct level of detail," striking a balance between simply stating support for free expression and prescribing overly minute details. That level of detail varies by campus — for instance, UC Irvine's policy is more exhaustive than the smaller campuses' — and should account for an institution's location, history, and public

How Free Are Free-Speech Zones?

FREE-SPEECH ZONES have been one mechanism through which colleges have tried to mitigate speaker-related conflict. Applying not to invited speakers but to students and community members who want to protest or share their beliefs, free-speech zones are designated areas on campus where people are ostensibly free to express their First Amendment rights without fear of reprisal.

Oftentimes, free-speech zones are in small, remote locations and are only in effect for certain hours of the day or must be reserved far in advance, say critics who argue their existence actually chills free expression. “The whole point of getting out and protesting is to be heard,” says Laura Beltz, director of policy reform at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expres-

sion. “If you’re cordoned off into a particular area, or if the rules are so restrictive that you’re discouraged from protesting at all, that means that you cannot be heard.”

FIRE, Beltz says, has brought a dozen lawsuits against institutions since 2003, arguing that their free-speech-zone policies were unconstitutional. The prevalence of free-speech zones has decreased significantly since the organization began tracking them; in 2013, a survey found that about 16 percent of institutions had a free-speech-zone policy, but in 2022, that number had **dropped** to 5.2 percent.

That’s partially because FIRE isn’t alone in taking aim at free-speech zones: In 2022, Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican of Georgia, banned them at his state’s public colleges, making the Peach State the 22nd to do so, according to FIRE. — Megan Zahneis



A sign on the Georgia State U. campus denotes a free-speech zone. In 2022, such zones were banned at Georgia's public colleges.

ROSS WILLIAMS, GEORGIA RECORDER

or private standing, and whether it is affiliated with a particular religion or other group.

Don't try to solve the problems of the past. While a speaker visit gone wrong can be a valuable impetus to revisit your campus's approach, you shouldn't try to design a policy that focuses on that specific incident. "A policy at its best is reflective of the broader norms and practices that you want to see on your campus," Ben-Porath says.

But the most important advice of all, says Gillman, at UC Irvine, is to be prepared. Being caught in a speaker controversy without an "anchor" that outlines how

your institution will deal with it — in a content-neutral and impartial manner — is the worst-case scenario.

A degree of unpredictability is inevitable, and "it's in the job description that you're always anticipating the next thing," he says. But leaders have seen enough case studies, from Charles Murray's 2017 visit to Middlebury to the free-speech fracas that unfolded at Stanford Law School in the spring of 2023, to recognize the need for action. "Everyone by now has been warned about major events. Everybody has been warned about disruption," Gillman says. "It should be relatively a matter of just realizing, 'If you've been warned, you should really work on this.'"

How to Model Free Speech for Students

BY PATRICIA MCGUIRE

TEACHING STUDENTS to express themselves clearly and persuasively should be one of the core outcomes of a college education. Too often, however, our pedagogy on free speech seems woefully inadequate as campuses wrestle with fallout from confrontations on the quad, heckling that shuts down speakers, and rules banning certain forms of speech. Notorious cases like last semester's [incident](#) at Stanford Law School, in which student hecklers prevented a federal appeals-court judge from speaking, demonstrate that we are not doing enough to teach students how to exercise their free-speech rights effectively. Debating Judge Kyle Duncan would have been far better than shouting him down.

Modeling examples of compelling speech can be good pedagogy, but higher education imposes paradoxical rules about who may speak. We claim to promote freedom of speech, but some of the best practitioners of effective speech — college presidents — are told to remain silent on the most important issues of the day lest we chill, if not intimidate completely, the free-speech rights of our students and faculty. This line of thinking infantilizes both presidents and our constituents, and debilitates the ability of the academy to respond to the crises we must face together. We need student voices to be loud and courageous in the contemporary debates about their education; if we expect them to learn how to advocate before governors and legislatures, we should not assume that students

are too fragile to hear the president's voice as well.

Higher education is under severe assault as politicians attempt to rewrite curricula, repress historical and scientific facts, exclude undocumented students, censor faculties and librarians, abolish tenure, marginalize LGBTQ students, and ban programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Supreme Court's decision on affirmative action has left many students of color wondering if there is any place left for them in higher education.

Presidents betray their responsibilities when they remain silent in the face of these grave threats to our students, faculties, and the very purpose of our work in higher education. Presidents must exercise their freedom of speech — prudently, but purposefully as advocates for our students and stewards of our mission. Presidential voices can be even stronger when they join in solidarity with students who have so much to lose in the current dystopian struggle for control of our intellectual enterprise.

As a president who does not hesitate to speak out on issues that concern our community at Trinity, I try to keep several points in mind as I craft my texts: the relevance of the topic to our campus constituents, the different points of view on the issue, and how to give student perspectives a space for expression.

Trinity students are activists on many issues for which they have a great deal of personal experience, from gun control to immigration policy to Black Lives Matter to women's rights and protection for LGBTQ

persons. When I speak out on these issues, our students tell me that they feel affirmed. I encourage them to share comments on my blogs, and I invite their own essays for publication. Sometimes the students will ask me to address a topic publicly because they feel it's important for Trinity's leader to take a position. Trinity students never hesitate to raise problems, to disagree with me, and to point out where I'm flat-out wrong. For me, part of modeling good free speech is also modeling how to accept the criticism that comes with it.

I've also learned that I have to be sure to respect how students want to express themselves since their styles will be different from mine.

I learned that lesson early in my presidency. In January 1991, when the first Gulf War broke out after Iraq invaded Kuwait, our campus community gathered to discuss the war and possible responses; the faculty and staff reminisced about our Vietnam War protests while the students looked on, increasingly bored with the baby-boomer tales of the 1960s. As I gave my own little speech about how we should rally to protest war and work for peace, a student stood up and asked for my permission to set up a table in the lobby to collect signatures on an antiwar petition.

I replied, impatiently, "Why are you asking my permission? You should just do it!"

The student drew herself up righteously and retorted, "We're not hippies like you were. We want to do this the right way!"

Her lesson was humbling: Don't tell students how to speak; they must be able to choose their own styles and methods of advocacy.

I've also learned that encouraging students to exercise their right to speak can have a boomerang effect; as we help students to discover their voices, we should not be surprised when those voices create consequences for us. I learned that lesson in my advocacy for our undocumented students, known as Dreamers, many of whom have private scholarships. One of the donors asked to meet with the scholarship recipients; he happened to be an executive with Amazon.

During the meeting with our Dreamers, the donor called on a student who proceeded to read a statement against Amazon's alleged technological cooperation with federal immigration authorities to facilitate deportations. The other students looked aghast, but our benefactor thanked the student for her comments and responded to the issues she had raised. At the end of the meeting, I reminded the students that speaking out for causes we believe in is a hallmark of a Trinity education.

But the protest was far from over. The student who spoke out had also invited some anti-Amazon grass-roots protesters, and as I escorted our guest to his car, an angry group of people surrounded us, chanting in protest. Our benefactor listened calmly as the protesters shouted at him while holding up cellphones to record the moment. After a few minutes, I told them that we had heard their message, and now it was time for them to leave; the crowd broke up. Our guest departed the campus without further incident.

Afterward, some of the Dreamers came to me, afraid that the benefactor would withdraw his support for their scholarships. I had already spoken with our donor, and he assured me that the scholarships were secure — even for the student who had challenged him. Especially for her.

When we teach students to raise their voices, we have to be willing to live with the noise. We talk a lot in higher education today about making students feel safe, and safety is an important objective to make learning possible. But real higher learning cannot occur in comfort; our work requires us to make students feel uncomfortable and uncertain and, yes, even angry. Our responsibility is to teach our students how to channel their passions, their demands, their anger, and their sense of purpose into persuasive expression that leads to action. When we teach our students how to exercise their freedom of speech well, we are teaching them how to be leaders for social change.

Patricia McGuire is president of Trinity Washington University.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

GROUPS AND PROGRAMS

Heterodox Academy

Braver Angels

Constructive Dialogue Institute

BridgeUSA

The National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, at the University of California

The Program on Intergroup Relations, at the University of Michigan

The Engaged Listening Project, at Middlebury College

TOOLKITS AND GUIDES

“Bridging Differences Playbook,” from the Greater Good Science Center

“Practicing Democracy: A Toolkit for Educating Civic Professionals,” from Campus Compact

The University of Alabama’s [Resource Library](#) of digital civic-engagement tools

The University of Maryland-Baltimore County’s [Restorative Practices](#) for residential life

“Princeton Principles for a Campus Culture of Free Inquiry,” from Princeton University

REPORTS AND PAPERS

“Campus Free Expression: A New Roadmap,” by the Bipartisan Policy Center

“Resolving Conflict on Campus: A Case Study on Free Speech and Controversial Speakers,” by T. Benson Clayton and J. Huff in the *Journal of Dispute Resolution*

“The First Amendment and the Inclusive Campus: Effective Strategies for Leaders in Student Affairs,” by NaspA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

“2024 College Free Speech Rankings: What Is the State of Free Speech on America’s College Campuses?” by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression and College Pulse

“Understanding Campus Expression Across Higher Ed,” by Heterodox Academy

BOOKS

Why We’re Polarized, by Ezra Klein

The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization, by Peter T. Coleman

Creating Space for Democracy: A Primer on Dialogue and Deliberation in Higher Education, edited by Timothy J. Shaffer and Nicholas V. Longo

Cancel Wars: How Universities Can Foster Free Speech, Promote Inclusion, and Renew Democracy, by Sigal R. Ben-Porath

ARTICLES

“On Free Speech,” by Christopher L. Eisgruber in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*

“Does Princeton Protect Progressive Speech, Too?” by Eleanor Clemans-Cope in *The Daily Princetonian*

“Braver Angels: Campus Free Speech Debates Encourage Open Minds,” by Tom Reed in *Denison Magazine*

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