Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education: Effectively Tackling the Tough Issues of our Times

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Goals

1) learn about programs and best practices for engaging difficult dialogues in university classrooms

2) engage in a brief difficult dialogue

3) explore steps for more effectively conducting difficult dialogues at your own institutions.
Listening Pairs:

Most Intractable Difficult Dialogue(s) on Your Campus?
Function of Listening Pairs

- All heard
- Equal time
- Organize thoughts
- Process emotions
- Time out
Guidelines for Dialogue
(p. 12 Start Talking)

• Participants establish expectations for discussion behavior
• Groups of 3-5 people list desirable/undesirable behaviors
• Participants share lists, achieve consensus, discuss sanctions
• Display/refer to code throughout dialogue
Difficult Dialogues Initiative
Ford Foundation, 2006-09

• Academic freedom
• Religious, cultural & political pluralism
• 26 US colleges & universities
• Fundamentalism & secularism
• **Racial & ethnic relations**
• The Middle East conflict
• **Religion & the university**
• Sexual orientation
• **Academic freedom**
• Curriculum development
• Pedagogical development
• Faculty development
• Student programs
• Interactive theater
Difficult Dialogues Programs

- University of Texas at Austin
- University of Alaska Anchorage/Alaska Pacific
- University of Missouri
- Yale University
- Emory University
- Barnard
- University of California Irvine
- University of Michigan
- Portland Community College
- Clark University
- More...
Portland Community College - Illumination Project
http://www.pcc.edu/resources/illumination/

- Interactive Social Justice Theater
- Student performances challenge oppressions
“Reacting to the Past” series -
The Struggle for Palestine
Transforming Community Project

- Creating a common record of race at Emory 1836-2011

- Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies Conference, 2011

University of Texas at Austin

Difficult Dialogues Courses

https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/humanitiesinstitute/programs/difficult-dialogues/About-the-Program.php

- HIV/AIDS
- Immigration and Community
- Human Rights
- Living with Dying
- Race through Performance
- Islam and Sexuality
- Business and Ethics
- Representing Africa
- Cultural Identities and Differences
- Framing Sustainability
Intergroup Dialogues

- Face-to-face meetings between members of two (or more) social groups that have a history of conflict or potential conflict.

- STRUCTURED, SUSTAINED, GRADED, DISTINCT format, BALANCED identities, CO-FACILITATED by undergraduates
In dialogue, participants explore:

- **Commonalities and differences within and between groups**
- **Differences in privilege and discrimination between groups**
- **Intergroup conflicts, and positive uses of conflict**
- **Possibilities for alliances and coalitions between groups, and other strategies for social justice**
Summer Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity in Detroit

National Intergroup Dialogue Summer Institute

June 19-22, 2017
LARA Method
- Listening
- Affirming
- Responding
- Adding Appreciative Inquiry
Start Talking: Engaging Controversy in the Classroom

Stop Talking: Alaska Native Ways of Teaching and Learning

Toxic Friday: Responding to Faculty-to-Faculty Bullying
Start Talking

• Faculty development intensives

• Books of the Year
  – Immigration and Cultural Assimilation
  – Religion and Society
  – Money and Morality
  – Climate Change in Alaska

• Handbook of Best Practices

Free online!

www.difficultdialogues.org
Stop Talking

- Faculty development
  - Indigenous Pedagogies
  - Difficult Dialogues
- E-Portfolios
- *Stop Talking: Indigenous Ways of Teaching and Learning & Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education*

Free online!

www.difficultdialogues.org
Book/video to Address Faculty Bullying in Higher Education

www.difficultdialoguesuuaa.org
Let’s Start Talking

Strategies and resources to advance the expansion of innovative approaches to civil discourse on controversial topics and complex social issues at the college level.
Strategy from Start Talking

Modular Debate
Modular Debate
(p. 243)

• Identify issue and frame proposition

• Identify constituencies with different positions

• Assign or select constituencies & have them Identify positions

• Conduct debate w/equal time for each constituency
“Safe spaces” endanger education.

Stakeholders? Positions?
General Principles Of Difficult Dialogues

• Discussion agreements
• All voices heard; equal time
• Attention to process as well as content
• Regular breaks to process
• Stories not information
• Circular/inclusive space
• Diverse leadership
Steps towards More Effective Difficult Dialogues at our Own Institutions?
To strengthen a democratically engaged society, we seek to advance innovative practices in higher education and the communities we serve which promote respectful, transformative dialogue on controversial topics and complex social issues, thereby reflecting a commitment to pluralism and academic freedom.
Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education National Conference

Changing Climate, Divide Landscapes: Strategies for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education

2nd Biennial Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education Conference

University of Michigan

October 23-25, 2016

www.difficultdialogues.org
RESOURCES

University of Michigan Program on Intergroup Relations [www.igr.umich.edu](http://www.igr.umich.edu)

UAA Difficult Dialogues website [www.difficultdialoguesuaa.org](http://www.difficultdialoguesuaa.org)


Stop Talking: Indigenous Pedagogies and Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education

Toxic Friday: Responding to Faculty Bullying in Higher Education
MORE RESOURCES

• Public Conversations Project (facilitation skills)
  – www.publicconversations.org

• Deliberative Democracy Consortium (policy)
  – www.deliberative-democracy.net

• Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms,
  – Brookfield and Presskill, Jossey Bass, 2005

  – idpconference@cornell.edu
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DIFFICULT DIALOGUES

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