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**PROMOTING CIVIL DISCOURSE IN THE HONORS FORUM THROUGH
ARGUMENT MAPPING AND SYSTEMATIC EMPATHY**

A dissertation submitted to
Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in
Leadership Studies
by
Sean Michael Cassidy
Approved by
Dr. Ronald Childress, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Chris Sochor
Dr. Yvonne Skoretz

Marshall University
May 2024

Approval of Dissertation

We, the faculty supervising the work of **Sean Michael Cassidy**, affirm that the dissertation, *Promoting Civil Discourse in the Honors Forum Through Argument Mapping and Systematic Empathy*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the EdD Program in Leadership Studies and the College of Education and Professional Development. The work also conforms to the requirements and formatting guidelines of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.


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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredible wife, Jennifer, and our remarkable daughters, Caitlin and Olivia. These extraordinary women are the bedrock of my life, bringing joy, laughter, and inspiration to each day.

Witnessing Caitlin and Olivia develop into bright, ambitious, tenacious, and compassionate young women, driven by a passion for knowledge and a commitment to serving others, energized me to pursue a doctoral degree and made me believe I could complete it.

I am deeply grateful to my wife, Jennifer, whose unwavering support, kindness, and sacrifice have been the cornerstone of this endeavor. Her patience and encouragement sustained me through the challenges, making the completion of this project possible. I could not have done it without her. I am incredibly thankful for her support, for bringing so much love into my life, and for being such an amazing and strong mother to Caitlin and Olivia.

Acknowledgments

Completing a dissertation is an exciting and long journey that often features twists and turns and sometimes unfolds over a long period of time. In my case, the foundation of this project and its focus on discourse and active citizenship emerged decades ago. As a child, my parents read widely about current events, were deeply interested in politics, and enjoyed spirited conversations about pressing social issues. The environment they created encouraged me to develop a similar passion for civic engagement, a curiosity about the world around me, and a desire to work in education to contribute to a more just and humane society.

My professional career and work with the University Scholars Program and University Honors Program at North Carolina State University have surrounded me with wonderful colleagues, ambitious students, and initiatives consistent with the values I learned as a child. My work has allowed me to develop programming and coursework that encourages students to discuss enduring ideas and contemporary issues and become active, informed, and engaged citizens committed to serving and shaping their communities. It has also allowed me to introduce students to initiatives that spur their imaginations, challenge them, expand their sense of what is possible, and help them become adventurers. My colleagues are smart, witty, creative, talented, and thoughtful. They are tireless and fearless teachers and administrators deeply committed to mentoring and supporting our students. Working with them has been nothing short of amazing. I am thankful for all the support they have provided me throughout my career and during this project.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 precipitated a period of reflection and reassessment. During this period, I drew inspiration from my daughters. Observing my older daughter as she began graduate school and my younger daughter as she applied to colleges

catalyzed my desire to return to school. Fortuitously, my search for a doctoral program led me to the Ed.D. in Leadership Studies Program at Marshall University. The program's structure, faculty, and students were a perfect match for me and my interests. From my first inquiry about the program until I completed my dissertation, every person I interacted with at Marshall was exceptional. A series of fortunate and pleasant events marked my time at Marshall and my preparation for my dissertation. The courses were fascinating, and they effectively prepared me for this project. Once the project began, I was lucky to have Dr. Ron Childress as my dissertation chair. He was thoughtful, methodical, hard-working, and highly skilled throughout the process. He always responded quickly to my questions and concerns as my dissertation idea became an actual project. He had a gift for providing just the right balance of encouragement and expectation, and he kept the project moving when I was sluggish or stuck. Dr. Chris Sochor and Dr. Yvonne Skoretz also provided critical guidance, thoughtful feedback, and encouragement throughout the project.

Several of my colleagues at NC State directly contributed to the project's success. As I was considering a project designed to promote civil discourse in our Honors Forum, I learned that a faculty member who teaches courses in our program was interested in developing critical thinking skills among students. He was also familiar with and committed to an online program we ultimately used to promote civil discourse and critical thinking in the Honors Forum. Dr. Gary Comstock's expertise, guidance, and passion for teaching were vital to launching and sustaining this project. My colleagues Ken Johnson and Daniel Gruehn assisted with and improved the project's design, delivered the Honors Forum's content, and managed the data associated with the project. I am grateful to all of them.

Finally, I want to thank my daughter, Caitlin, for her support and insights throughout this project. During the writing process, Caitlin reviewed countless drafts, made suggestions to improve the project, and met with me regularly to discuss my progress. I cherish the time we spent discussing this project and will remember it fondly forever.

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact that co-curricular programming delivered by the University Honors Program (UHP) at North Carolina State University through the Honors Forum course had on first-year students' self-reported knowledge of civil discourse, their assessment of its importance and impact, and their evaluation of their commitment to the skills and values related to it. The Honors Forum is designed to help students develop a broad worldview by exposing them to lectures by scholars and public figures, panel discussions about contemporary societal debates, peer-facilitated discussions about books, films, and current events, and conversations with faculty and UHP graduates. This project randomly assigned incoming students to one of two groups. The control group experienced the Honors Forum as it has traditionally been offered. The treatment group completed a modified version of the course that included a program called *How We Argue*. The program taught argument mapping and systematic empathy to help students develop the skills to analyze arguments and discuss challenging issues constructively.

Students in both sections of the course completed pretest and posttest surveys. The instruments included demographic questions and statements across five categories: Knowledge, Importance, Skills, Values, and Impact. The category scores were summed to produce a Total score. Statistical tests conducted at the end of the semester focused on assessing how participation in the Honors Forum affected student perceptions of civil discourse and determining if there were differences between the treatment and control groups. The analysis of the treatment group detected higher scores and statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest scores for all categories and the Total score. For the control group, the posttest scores were higher for the Total score and all categories. In addition, statistically

significant differences were detected for the Total score and all categories except the Impact category. Comparisons of the posttest scores for the treatment group and control group detected higher scores for the treatment group in all categories and for the Total score. Statistically significant differences were detected for the Total score, Knowledge category, and Impact category. Analysis of the mean difference scores detected higher scores for the treatment group for the Total score and in all categories except for the Importance category. Statistically significant differences were detected for the Total score, Knowledge category, and Skills category. The project results suggest that the standard version of the Honors Forum and the treatment version of the course positively affect student perceptions of civil discourse. The results also suggest that the treatment version of the course is more impactful than the standard version.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Concerns about polarization, the controversies it generates, and its negative impact on the health of our democracy are common today. Investigations of the sources of our polarization have highlighted a range of factors, including the end of the Cold War, increasing religious and ethnic diversity, the rise of identity politics, weakening political parties and institutions, and social media (Blankenhorn, 2020). These factors are promoting sorting, othering, and siloing across the country. Many Americans are sorting by getting together in groups of like-minded people, othering by pushing against those who seem opposed to them, and siloing by emphasizing their groups and stories to such an extent that they cannot or will not hear anything else (Guzman, 2022). Edsall (2023a) warned that the result is a society marked by affective polarization: a dangerous combination of aversion, moralization, and intensely felt divisions threatening democratic norms and procedures.

The processes Guzman described and the dangerous combination outlined by Edsall are visible in polling data. Recent polling conducted by the Pew Research Center (2022) found that Republicans and Democrats hold unfavorable opinions about the opposing political party and negative feelings about the individuals within those parties. Increasingly, members of both parties characterize those from the other side as exhibiting traits such as laziness, closed-mindedness, dishonesty, and lack of intelligence compared to the general American populace. In addition, negative views of the other party have become appreciably more pronounced in recent years. In 2022, 62% of Republicans and 54% of Democrats had a very unfavorable view of the other party. In contrast, in 1994, 21% of Republicans and 17% of Democrats had a very unfavorable view of the other party (Pew Research Center, 2022).

At the same time, while they express increasingly negative views of people in the other party, today's partisans have increasingly positive views of the members of their own party.

Specifically, the Pew Research Center found that:

a majority of Republicans (63%) now say that members of their party are a lot or somewhat more moral than other Americans; about half of Republicans (51%) said that in 2016 and 2019. The share of Democrats who say their fellow Democrats are more moral than other Americans has increased from 38% in 2016 to 51% currently. (p. 7)

More recent polling by the Pew Research Center (2023) has found that today's polarization has produced a public that is dissatisfied with the status quo. Among U.S. adults, just 4% say the political system is working well or very well, 16% trust the federal government most of the time or always, and 28% express unfavorable views of not one but both political parties. In addition, "nearly two-thirds of Americans (65%) say they often feel exhausted when thinking about politics, while 55% feel angry" (Pew Research Center, 2023, p. 3). Exhaustion and anger have led more people to embrace proposed changes to the system, such as term limits for those elected to Congress, the abolition of the Electoral College, and age limits for members of the Supreme Court and elected officials in Washington, D.C. General satisfaction with democracy is also declining. In 2008, roughly 75% of Americans were "satisfied with the state of their democratic system" (Mounk & Foa, 2020, para. 9). By 2020, 55% of Americans were dissatisfied "with their system of government" (para. 10).

Polarization also affects college campuses nationwide as they struggle to promote dialogue and discourse during a challenging era. Indeed, in March 2023, protestors shut down or interrupted speakers at the State University of New York at Albany, Stanford University, San Francisco State University, and the University of California, Davis (Alonso, 2023). The Stanford

event generated national headlines and debate. It began when Stuart Kyle Duncan, a federal judge appointed by Donald Trump, accepted an invitation to speak at Stanford University Law School. Before becoming a judge, Duncan had defended Louisiana's gay marriage ban and a North Carolina law that restricted transgender people from using the bathrooms they preferred (Patel, 2023). Stanford students were particularly concerned when, as a judge, "he had denied a request of a transgender woman who asked the court to refer her to with female pronouns" (Patel, 2023, para. 19). The event at Stanford went badly. Duncan began recording student protestors on his phone as he entered the room. He traded insults with the students during the event. The students began heckling Duncan as soon as he started to speak. Their insults ranged from "pointed to shockingly vulgar, continuing almost nonstop for 12 minutes until Duncan asked for an administrator to intervene" (Lubet, 2023, para. 6). Tirien Steinbach, the associate dean for diversity, inclusion, equity, and inclusion, responded with a 6-minute statement that argued that Duncan's work had caused harm and asked if his decision to speak was worth the division it was causing (Patel, 2023).

The event was emblematic of the country's polarization and the breakdown in civil discourse that this polarization has produced. Commentary about the event then further reflected this polarization. Conservative commentators warned that vigorous protest is essential in the academy, but protests that shut down speeches are mob censorship (French, 2023). More liberal commentators argued that "everybody has the right to speak; nobody has the right to be heard above the din of the crowd" (Mystal, 2023, p. 1). Others criticized all those involved and pleaded for more productive conversations in the future. One commentator wrote, "Going forward, perhaps we can hope that students learn to exercise better judgment. We ought to expect it from administrators. We must demand it from judges" (Lubet, 2023, para. 7). Paul (2023) noted that

much of the commentary focused on asking universities to do a better job of managing campus speaker controversies. In her view, this missed the more critical and challenging task of teaching students not to want to prevent others from speaking since “they shouldn’t avoid opportunities to hear other perspectives but should actively seek them out and reckon with the humbling fact that what they already know—or think they already know—may not be all there is to know” (Paul, 2023, para. 16).

Our political divisions and the impact of events like those listed above have generated calls for universities to promote robust discourse to support our democracy. Universities have been challenged to develop a new generation of citizens and leaders for a diverse democracy by offering students a theoretical explanation of the value of civil discourse and supplying them with the skills to practice it (Leskes, 2013). Daniels (2021) argued that universities need to become places of purposeful pluralism by developing policies and initiatives that encourage students to encounter others unlike themselves and promote discourse across all sides of experience and identity. Satz and Edelstein (2023) emphasize the need for civic education through a common intellectual framework that promotes and explains values such as free speech and helps students develop the skills and attitudes needed to practice them. Higher education institutions have also been encouraged to counter the framing of free speech and diversity as incompatible, as both are essential for advancing and sharing knowledge (Whittington, 2019). In the past, universities were limited in achieving their mission because they systematically excluded a wide range of individuals from the campus community. Today, universities and colleges are in the early stages of creating something unprecedented: a profoundly inclusive university devoted to the relentless pursuit of knowledge (Lederman, 2023). Today’s challenge is to include all voices and create environments in which controversial ideas can be raised and

freely discussed, conventional wisdom is critically examined, and unconventional thinking thrives (Whittington, 2019). In the wake of Judge Duncan’s visit to the Stanford Law School, Dean Jenny Martinez wrote that “some students might feel that some points should not be up for argument and therefore that they should not bear the responsibility of arguing them” (Patel, 2023, para. 5). However, Martinez countered that such a view is incompatible with the training that law schools must deliver and that “the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion actually means that we must protect the free expression of all views” (Patel, 2023, para. 6).

Some have questioned the claim championed by Martinez that universities can and should promote civil discourse and the free expression of all views. Critics have warned that calls for civility can promote conformity, protect the powerful, and delegitimize those who challenge the status quo (Braunstein, 2018). Lukianoff and Haidt (2015) presented a different challenge for universities, arguing that the contemporary campus culture is increasingly vindictive and produces an environment in which “everyone must think twice before speaking up, lest they face charges of insensitivity, aggression, or worse.” Recent legislative efforts also threaten discourse and scholarship that seek to reflect all views. For example, an article by Sachs et al. (2023) noted:

a troubling new trend in censorship legislation that affects higher education: a shift from bills that ban lists of so-called “divisive concepts” in classroom instruction, toward a new class of bills that specifically restrict the content of curricula, including majors, minors, and general education. (para.1)

Higher education’s reputation poses another constraint on its ability to make a positive impact on public discourse, as a recent poll conducted by Gallup found that only 36% of Americans have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in higher education, a decrease of

about 20 percentage points from eight years ago (Blake, 2023). Worryingly, some research suggests that education may not increase our commitment to genuine conversation. Mounk (2019) cited a recent study that found “the best educated and most politically interested Americans are more likely to vilify their political adversaries than their less educated, less tuned-in peers” (p. 5).

Many college students seek the places that Leskes, Daniels, Whittington, and Martinez call for, but they struggle to find and navigate them. Miller (2022) detailed an emerging movement among college students seeking conversations marked by diverse opinions, passion, and respect. Similarly, Rose (2021) claimed that students want to be challenged by views they do not hold, want freer discourse on their campuses, and thrive when the classroom is structured to welcome all opinions, "provided they are offered in the spirit of humility and charity" (para. 4). Mounk (2022) found a similar enthusiasm for discussion and the importance of fostering an open culture that exposes a diversity of perspectives. However, he also found that students are apprehensive about participating in conversations about challenging issues because they worry about how their peers and institutions will respond. Similarly, the Knight Foundation (2022) found that most students say colleges should allow all types of speech, including offensive expressions, instead of restricting speech. The study also found that only half of all students are comfortable offering dissenting views in conversations with their peers or their instructor in the classroom.

In response to the call to depolarize our conversations, scholars and practitioners are designing strategies to make this possible. Those looking for more productive conversations have been encouraged to replace certainty with curiosity and to abandon the tendency to see individuals solely as representatives of groups whose opinions can be dismissed (Guzman,

2022). They have been encouraged to think like scientists who embrace humility, search for truth, and test hypotheses instead of thinking like preachers who try to persuade others to embrace our ideals, politicians who seek approval, or prosecutors who try to prove that someone else is wrong (Grant, 2021). They have been challenged to break the binary that reduces complex issues to struggles with no room for nuance or common ground (Mehl & Haidt, 2022) and to reject the teachings of a “road rage” society defined by a “this or that” mentality (Lederman, 2023). Importantly, nuance, curiosity, and complexity should not be used to eliminate emotions from our conversations. For example, Grant (2021) claimed that frustration and indignation can contribute to a productive conversation if you mix in other emotions, acknowledge competing claims, and stay curious. Employing these and similar techniques will promote “a form of conversation in which people who have different values, beliefs, and perspectives build new ways of understanding complex issues and interacting with others, even as they retain commitments to their own principles and perspectives” (Mehl & Haidt, p. 5, 2022).

Universities have also been engaged in this effort. The University of Arizona, University of Delaware, American University, Davidson College, Providence College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Pennsylvania have established institutes or implemented projects focused on civil discourse. More recently, the Board of Trustees at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill passed a resolution to accelerate the development of a School of Civic Life and Leadership at the university. The resolution was criticized by faculty members and others who were troubled because the board did not seek their input. They also expressed concerns that those not associated with the university have had too much influence on the project (Lu, 2023). Nonprofits are also supporting these efforts on campuses. For example, this year, the Heterodox Academy launched programs to support open inquiry, constructive

disagreement, and viewpoint diversity at 23 universities. In addition, 12 schools in Virginia, including Virginia Tech University and George Mason University, have established campuswide programs with the Constructive Dialogue Institute (Svrluga, 2023).

Problem Statement

The polarization and division visible in the United States today have generated calls for universities to prepare students to engage in robust and honest conversations about challenging issues. Honors programs often serve as laboratories for innovative curricular and co-curricular programming. The courses and enrichment programming they deliver emphasize conversation, prioritize student engagement, and place students' voices at the core of the learning process (Badenhausen, 2020). On campuses nationwide, these programs provide a welcoming atmosphere and spaces that promote community, conversation, collaboration, and collegiality (West, 2014). This atmosphere makes them particularly promising places to introduce students to contemporary approaches designed to promote civil discourse. ThinkerAnalytix (2023), an educational nonprofit organization, has developed an approach that uses argument mapping and systematic empathy to help students develop skills and values that they can use to discuss challenging issues constructively. This project used the tools developed by ThinkerAnalytix to support the design and delivery of co-curricular programming that promotes civil discourse and the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with it among first-year University Honors Program (UHP) students at North Carolina State University. Furthermore, it investigated the impact this programming had on them.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess their knowledge of civil discourse?**
2. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess the importance of civil discourse for the UHP and themselves?**
3. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess their command of the skills needed** for civil discourse?
4. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess their commitment to the values** associated with civil discourse?
5. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess the impact of civil discourse?**
6. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on **the overall assessment of civil discourse** of first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups?
7. What are the differences, if any, in responses to the research questions above among a selected list of **demographic or attribute variables?**

Operational Definitions

Definitions of the key concepts and variables associated with the study are given below:

Civil discourse: Written or oral communication in which individuals with opposing positions on a controversial issue converse in an honest, robust, and charitable way to reduce cultural misunderstanding and political polarization.

Student ID: Participant's student identification number, as measured by participant responses to Question 1 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Race: Participant's race or ethnicity, as measured by participant responses to Question 2 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Sex: Participant's sex, as measured by participant responses to Question 3 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Generation: Participant's college student generation, as measured by participant responses to Question 4 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Community: Description of the participant's community when they were in high school, as measured by participant responses to Question 5 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

College of primary major: Participant's college of their primary major, as measured by participant responses to Question 6 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Knowledge: Participant's self-reported knowledge of civil discourse, as measured by participant responses to Questions 7-11 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Importance: Participant's self-reported assessment of the importance of civil discourse for the University Honors Program and themselves, as measured by participant responses to Questions 12-15 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Skills: Participant's self-reported assessment of their command of the skills associated with civil discourse, as measured by participant responses to Questions 16-23 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Values: Participant's self-reported commitment to the values associated with civil discourse, as measured by participant responses to Questions 24-31 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Impact: Participant's self-reported assessment of the impact of civil discourse, as measured by participant responses to Questions 32-35 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Overall assessment of civil discourse: Participant's overall assessment of civil discourse, as measured by participant responses to questions 7-35 of the *Cassidy Civil Discourse Survey*.

Delimitations

This study was conducted through the UHP at North Carolina State University. North Carolina State University is a research-intensive institution in Raleigh, North Carolina. The university's undergraduate enrollment is approximately 27,000. The UHP serves 2200 students, and the program welcomes 550 new first-year students each August. Therefore, the results and conclusions of this study should be limited to similar students participating in programs like the UHP at other higher education institutions.

Statement of Significance

Daniels (2021) argued clearly and convincingly that universities have long played a vital role in supporting our democracy. Along with institutions such as the media, churches, and community organizations, universities have promoted the common good, safeguarded liberties, and managed societal tensions and challenges. They have been essential during critical times in our history. For example, President Lincoln signed the Morrill Land-Grant College Acts as the Civil War raged, creating a network of new institutions. Similarly, after World War II, a commission convened by President Truman determined that higher education was responsible

for promoting democratic values, ideals, and processes (Daniels, 2021). In an era marked by polarization and stress, it is vital for universities to continue to play this role and for them to promote informed conversations about critical issues.

This project advanced current knowledge about the promotion of civil discourse on university campuses in several ways. First, it offered an example of a semester-long experience that modeled civil discourse for students and provided them with opportunities to practice it through small-group activities with their peers. Second, the project was offered through a unique course that features traditional academic content and access to a broad range of enrichment activities. Third, and most importantly, it did not simply expose students to examples of discourse and opportunities to engage in discourse with others. Instead, it taught students how to engage in civil discourse by introducing them to an approach that emphasized the skills and dispositions necessary for it. With its commitment to an experience that will serve 550 students during the Fall 2023 semester and its focus on argument mapping and systematic empathy, this project contributed to and extended the efforts already underway at institutions nationwide.

The project is relevant to educational leaders and faculty. For university leaders, it assessed a product designed to foster productive conversation and intellectual debate on university campuses. For administrators who oversee university-wide programs, it investigated the impact of an approach that can be deployed in honors, first-year experience, and residential life programs. Faculty seeking to teach students the skills and values associated with critical thinking and civil discourse will be interested in learning how this project could be replicated in their courses.

The project also supported students interested in developing leadership skills. Contemporary ideas about leadership emphasize the diversity of our society, the need for

collaboration, and a commitment to the common good. Communication is vital for the next generation of leaders, especially when it requires working with colleagues who may view the world and issues differently. According to Perreault (2012), while old views of leadership that emphasized command and control were not consistent with dialogue, more recent conceptions are more open to the idea that “while a leader can provide the solution for a group in some situations, in other cases a leader may need to engage with others in seeking solutions because the problems faced by leaders are without easy answers” (p. 238). This project’s focus on systematic empathy and argument mapping helped prepare students to develop inclusive teams, show understanding, build consensus, resolve conflicts, and solve problems.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review begins by summarizing recent assessments of our society's dysfunction, calls from policymakers and academic leaders for higher education institutions to develop educational initiatives that address the growing challenges associated with the current era's polarization, and student views of contemporary campus expression and discourse. It then introduces the case for civil discourse, considers arguments made by critics of the concept, and reconciles the competing positions. Third, it details ways to prepare for initiatives that foster discourse and dialogue. Fourth, it introduces contemporary curricular and co-curricular initiatives designed to foster civility and civil discourse on college campuses. It concludes with a summary of the review's key themes and explains how this study contributes to contemporary initiatives designed to foster civil discourse on college campuses.

Polarization and Higher Education

Concerns about the division, hostility, dysfunction, and uncertainty displayed throughout American society are common today. While polarization can foster debate, present voters with competing policy options from which to choose, and reflect efforts to address societal challenges, the polarization of our era is generating more extreme positions, less willingness to seek common ground, and a breakdown of constructive dialogue. Unfortunately, this may be getting worse. Edsall (2023b) recently argued that the voters in the United States “are now split into warring camps at remarkable levels of hostility” (para. 2). Ideological polarization is intensifying due to differences in stances on issues such as abortion, health care, immigration, racial oppression, the role of government, and gun control. This ideological polarization is being amplified by affective polarization, as many Americans do not trust and do not like members of the other party. The result is that “Democrats and Republicans both say that the other party's

members are hypocritical, selfish, and closed-minded, and they are unwilling to socialize across party lines” (para. 9). Unsurprisingly, Washington, D.C. is defined by “deadlock, dysfunction, and national decay” as “it is increasingly rare for members of one party to cross the aisle and support legislation by the other, and it is even more common for them to publicly disparage, ridicule, and condemn members of the other party” (Coleman, 2021, p. 4).

Unwilling to cross party lines, we are sorting, othering, and siloing (Guzman, 2022) in our communities. Sorting leads us to join others and form groups. Othering causes us to divide against those who seem opposed to us. Siloing occurs as we become unable to hear or see anything that inconsistent with our group’s views and ideas. Sorting “goes too far when the people around us shape so much of our thinking—it stops being thinking at all” (p. 15). It also prevents us from confronting and connecting with new and different viewpoints. Othering produces a biased view of the other side. Thus, we do not approach them “as they really are but as they appear through a layer of our own misperceptions” (p. 26). Siloing intensifies these processes as we harden our opinions, rely more and more on the people and ideas in our silos, and wall ourselves off from others.

For Brooks (2023), polarization has made Americans rude, angry, sad, and mean. In his attempt to understand why this has happened, he outlined four typical explanations for our current crisis. The technology narrative warns that social media is making us unstable and unhinged. The sociology narrative emphasizes the increasing isolation as we retreated from active community participation. The demography narrative highlights the anxiety of White Americans. The economic narrative stresses the pessimism of many in an era marked by economic disparities. While Brooks found something he agreed with in all these narratives, he argued that a straightforward explanation for our current predicament is the best. Specifically, he

claimed “we inhabit a society in which people are no longer trained in how to treat others with kindness and consideration. Our society has become one in which people feel license to give their selfishness free rein” (p. 4).

While Brooks emphasized how we develop individuals to explain our polarization, Klein (2020) highlighted broader forces and incentives in his analysis. Klein emphasized the role of systems and feedback loops. Klein found feedback loops in areas such as partisanship driven by negativity towards the other political party rather than positive feelings toward one’s own, political parties focusing on their bases instead of more moderate voters, and Americans sorting themselves into political camps closely aligned with their social identities, leading to an intensified emotional connection to politics and a desire to make sure their group wins. In the current era, foundational identities related to region, faith, culture, and race “are fusing together, stacking atop one another, so a conflict or threat that activates one activates all” (p. 136). Klein noted that the interaction between partisan elites and the general voting public also influences polarization. While elites were initially more polarized, increased political engagement from the public encouraged politicians to develop policy positions that amplified polarization to cater to their constituents. This created another feedback loop as “institutions polarize to appeal to a more polarized public, which further polarizes the public, which forces institutions to polarize further, and so on” (pp. 136–137).

Research has found conditions that can encourage people and societies engaged in long-running conflicts to open themselves up to breaking feedback loops and seeking common ground. Coleman (2021) argued that instability and the endurance of a painful stalemate provide an opportunity for people to “sense that there may be a way out in which they can get unstuck, change course, and move on with their lives without having to lose face or give up too much”

(Coleman, 2021, p. 9). When this combination is present, we can take advantage of it through a reset if we “stop and pause in our life to recalibrate our approach, recognize our own contribution to the pattern we seek to change, and begin to establish new initial conditions for a qualitatively different future” (Coleman, 2021, p. 210). Our society has absorbed destabilizing shocks in recent years. Many Americans feel stuck and exhausted. This moment presents an opportunity to get unstuck.

Academic leaders and policymakers have proposed ways for higher education to help us change course. A decade ago, the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Engagement expressed alarm about an era increasingly marked by incivility and hyperpolarization that was reducing thoughtful deliberation about public issues (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). The team argued that our democracy demands an engaged and knowledgeable population and called on higher education institutions to emphasize civic learning and active citizenship. The task force challenged colleges and universities to establish “ambitious standards that can be measured over time to indicate whether institutions and their students are becoming more civic minded” (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, p. 18). Specifically, the report urged colleges and universities to infuse a civic ethos into campus life by integrating democratic values into practices and emphasizing open-mindedness and civility, making civic literacy a goal for every graduate by fostering knowledge about democratic principles and promoting critical thinking about complex issues, incorporating civic inquiry into majors and general education programs, and advancing civic action as a lifelong practice by helping students develop the commitment and capacity to work with others in a pluralistic society to achieve a public good (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012).

In the decade since the task force completed its work, academic leaders have stressed the need for universities to serve the public good. In 2021, another task force warned that polarization and controversies about free expression undermined the civic role of higher education (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2021). This role involves fostering a pluralistic democracy by equipping students to engage in civic life as critical thinkers who can embrace differing perspectives and collaborate effectively with individuals who have principled disagreements. The task force called for educational institutions to promote increased diversity of viewpoints on campuses and to implement robust policies safeguarding the freedom of expression of both students and faculty, arguing that “colleges and universities should elevate the skills and dispositions necessary to academic and civic discourse as a deliberate aim of the collegiate experience” (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2021, p. 7). Finally, the task force called for universities to “address the perceived tension that pits academic freedom and freedom of expression against diversity, equity, and inclusion in creating a respectful learning environment for all” (p. 7).

Concerned about democratic vulnerability and backsliding in the United States and abroad, Daniels (2021) argued that universities must not be passive or indifferent. Because universities require vibrant democratic societies to achieve their mission, they must contribute to a democratic renaissance and build a vibrant society by promoting social mobility, developing curricular and extracurricular programs that increase knowledge of the history of democracy, serving as institutions that produce and check facts, and implementing policies that ensure impactful “interactions across diversity actually occur once students arrive on campus” (p. 195). He argued that universities are well-positioned to support this renaissance because higher education has played a vital role in preserving and improving our democracy throughout the nation’s history. Unfortunately, colleges and universities have been less committed to this role in

recent decades. Instead, admissions policies that fail students with modest financial resources are becoming common, curricula neglect the teaching of democratic habits, and our campuses have struggled to counter “the hyperpolarization and self-segregation that have undercut our ability as educational institutions devoted to expressive freedom to speak to one another in a way that promotes compromise and mutual understanding” (Daniels, 2021, p. 21). In his view, universities have engaged in important work by focusing on creating diverse communities of students. However, they need to devote more resources to promoting robust exchanges among students once they arrive on campus. He called for universities to embrace purposeful pluralism by structuring campus spaces and initiatives to generate encounters across differences and for universities to uphold liberal values by “reimagining their legacy as places of blending and vibrant discourse across all facets of identity and experience” (p. 196).

Satz and Edelstein (2023) called for universities to move away from the à la carte curricula, free-market ideology, and emphasis on individualism that have become widespread in higher education in recent decades. They asserted that the lack of a core curriculum and the shared intellectual framework it would supply leave students poorly prepared for a world full of controversy and conflict. They warned that the emphasis on the supremacy of the individual encourages students to believe their goals are the only ones that matter, discourages them from considering alternative perspectives, and allows them to view those who do not share their goals as “obstacles that need to be swept away” (Satz & Edelstein, 2023, para. 10). They called for universities to focus on the cultivation of skills such as humility, the acceptance of differences of opinion, and listening. Since disagreement is natural in democracies, “universities have a moral and civic duty to teach students how to consider and weigh contrary viewpoints, and how to

accept differences of opinion as a healthy feature of a diverse society” (Satz & Edelstein, 2023, para. 13).

While leaders proposed ways for higher education to address the effects of polarization, students expressed complicated views on its campus impact. Survey results suggest that college students seek pluralistic communities but hesitate to contribute to conversations in them, especially conversations about controversial issues. A recent Knight Foundation (2022) survey found that most students say colleges should allow all types of speech, including offensive expressions, instead of restricting speech. However, it found that only half of all students are comfortable offering dissenting views in conversations with their peers or their instructor in the classroom. It also discovered that while 65% of students surveyed believe that their school’s climate constrains free expression, 17% feel unsafe on campus because of comments made by others and that “this is particularly true for female students and students of color” (p. 4).

Elsewhere, a survey of more than 3,400 students from eight UNC system universities found that students think faculty are inclusive when managing political discussion (Johnson, 2022). The survey results also showed that students want more opportunities to engage with people who think differently, but many students are unwilling to offer their political views and choose to self-censor because of social pressures and concerns about the potential reactions of their peers. Finally, the study found that conservative students expressed concerns about free expression more often than their liberal peers and that students displaying elevated levels of open-mindedness were less inclined to be politically involved. Another study (Zhou & Barbaro, 2023) revealed that “63.2% of students agreed that the climate on their campus prevents people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive” (p. 5). However, it also indicated that 61% of students agree that “their university ‘frequently’ or ‘very frequently’

encourages students to consider a wider variety of viewpoints” (p. 5) and claimed that “students who reported high levels of interaction with fellow students were less likely to self-censor and more likely to feel confident to share their views in the classroom” (p. 25).

These findings have generated competing interpretations. Some see a crisis. They worry that universities are failing to support free inquiry, as students interested in exploring ideas and controversies are self-censoring because they worry that sharing their views “might lead to being shunned by their classmates and investigated by their own institution” (Mounk, 2022, p. 5). Others have noted that, while the statistics may be striking, many of the reasons students give for choosing not to share their views are innocuous. For example, students who completed a University of Wisconsin survey indicated that they did not share their views about controversial issues because they did not know enough about the issues, did not want to discuss their experiences, and because of “a simple tendency to stay quiet in class” (Zahneis, 2023, p. 4). Wilson (2022) highlighted similar innocuous reasons for self-censorship, including being in large classes that do not encourage discussion, giving others a chance to speak, not wanting to disrupt a conversation, and not having a strong position on the issue being discussed. He also cited work that found a disconnect between how students respond to survey questions and how they act. He suggested that self-censorship could increase in a free environment because “in a free society with viewpoint diversity, people tend to silence themselves to avoid conflict, and the presence of differing views makes them more aware of self-censorship than when nothing is being debated” (p. 3).

Debates about the survey results have not quieted calls for universities to foster conversations and meaningful encounters among students. For example, one recent commentator (Nossel, 2023) argued that campuses need to build pluralistic communities that embrace

academic freedom, freedom of speech, and empathy while rejecting discourse that feeds off and amplifies absolutes and stressing that “hateful speech, though protected by the First Amendment, is still contemptible and thwarts reasoned discourse” (para. 17). These communities should teach the complexities of a pluralistic society, investigate uncomfortable topics, encourage students to share the experiences that shaped them, and help staff and faculty develop “the tools and techniques to help guide students toward more constructive, elucidating exchanges” (para. 20). Similarly, Zahneis (2023) suggested that “the most effective way to alleviate fears about indoctrination might be to rely more, not less, on professors to skillfully guide discussions of fraught topics—and to give them the resources to do so” (p. 11).

Proponents and Critics of Civil Discourse

In recent years, efforts to promote civil discourse have become increasingly prominent on our campuses. Many have welcomed these efforts and view them as essential to a university education and critical for preserving liberal democracy. Supporters often begin by turning to the work of John Stuart Mill. Skorupski (2006) argued that, when considering the key texts of liberalism, John Stuart Mill’s essay *On Liberty* “stands in the first rank” (p. 39). Indeed, he claimed that it outlines what many view as the essential principle of liberalism. Specifically, this principle states “that individual freedom may be constrained by society only on specific grounds” (p. 39). More broadly, he described liberalism as a doctrine that limits the authority of the state and society over individuals, outlines a vision of how we should live and relate to others, and promotes free thought. Elsewhere, Sunstein (2023) argued that liberals “believe not only in democracy, understood to require accountability to the people, but also in deliberative democracy, an approach that combines a commitment to reason giving in the public sphere with the commitment to accountability” (para. 6). Mill’s work has generated conversation,

commentary, and controversy since its publication in 1859. It has endured the test of time as one of the most impassioned pleas for freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and open discourse ever written. Even some who once viewed Mill's claims about speech and discourse as pedestrian or conventional find them relevant today, as the "ubiquity of social media, coalescence of new taboos based on progressive theories of race and gender, and moralization of major institutions have rescued Mill from the syllabus of forgotten classics" (Goldman, 2022).

In *On Liberty*, Mill distinguished between traditional and emerging threats to liberty (Brink, 2007). Throughout history, threats appeared from political systems defined by the rule of one or a few. In these societies, the interests of the rulers prevailed, and the rights of their subjects were constrained. However, Mill warned that democracies, while championing self-governance, harbor their own unique perils to liberty, notably the potential tyranny of the majority—as opposed to the tyranny of the few or the one (Brink, 2007). Mill argued that society can promote "a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life and enslaving the soul itself" (Mill, 1859/2006, p. 11).

Preventing this tyranny requires a commitment to free speech and discourse unconstrained by social censorship to support both society's search for truth and the individual's "ability to develop as an autonomous thinker" (Bloom, 2017, p. 3). Mill argued that there "is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence; and to find that limit and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism" (p. 11). Mill then asserted the principle that "the only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his own will, is to prevent harm to others" (p.11). To clarify this

principle, Mill proposed confining himself to a focus on one specific element: “the Liberty of Thought: from which it is impossible to separate the cognate liberty of speaking and writing” (p. 21). For Skorupski (2006), Mill focused on the liberty of thought and discussion and the safeguards they need because of “the social importance of dialogue. Dialogue, unconstrained, truth-seeking discussion is nothing but the social expression of free thought,” and since “only continued exposure to free discussion can give us continued rational warrant for our beliefs” (p. 57).

Mill argued for free expression and dialogue in a series of passages. First, he wrote:
But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong they lose what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer and livelier impression of truth produced by its collision with error.
(p. 23)

He then stressed the need for people to study and understand arguments that are opposed to their own. He argued:

He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion. (p. 44)

Finally, he encouraged people to hear arguments opposed to their own from those who are true adversaries who view issues differently than they do. He insisted:

Nor is it enough that he should hear the arguments of adversaries from his own teachers, presented as they state them, and accompanied by what they offer as refutations. That is not the way to do justice to the arguments, or bring them into real contact with his own mind. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them; who defend them in earnest and do their very utmost for them. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form; he must feel the whole force of the difficulty which the true view of the subject has to encounter and dispose of; else he will never really possess himself of the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty. (p. 44)

For Mill, freedom of expression, the resistance of social censorship, and the testing of our claims through dialogue with others are essential for the advancement of knowledge, the discovery of truth, and the functioning of a healthy society. Without these, we risk creating societies dominated by mediocrity, stagnation, orthodoxy, and dogma. He warned that when “there is a tacit convention that principles are not to be disputed; where the discussion of the greatest questions which can occupy humanity is considered to be closed, we cannot hope to find that generally high scale of mental activity which has made some periods of history so remarkable” (Mill, 1859/2006, p. 41).

Mill’s ideas have significantly influenced today’s advocates of civil discourse. An editorial in *The New York Times* described the ability to express one’s views as an essential element of the democratic process. It claimed that “ideas that go unchallenged risk becoming weak and brittle rather than being strengthened by tough scrutiny” (The Editorial Board, 2022, para. 7.) Using language that would be recognizable to Mill, Zimmer (2016) argued that free expression is the foundation of true education. He argued that universities must ensure that challenging perspectives are welcomed, difficult questions are asked, and students accept that

these may cause discomfort. Without these, “students’ experience becomes a weak imitation of a true education, and the value of that education is seriously diminished” (Zimmer, 2016, para. 8). To thrive in the 21st century, fulfill their promise, and achieve their key mission, our educational institutions “cannot be viewed as a sanctuary for comfort but rather as a crucible for confronting ideas and thereby learning to make informed judgments in complex environments” (Zimmer, 2016, para. 13).

In 2017, Robert George and Cornel West released a statement detailing why we should embrace civil discourse that cited and amplified Mill’s arguments. George and West argued that democratic societies require the cultivation of virtues such as the love of truth, humility, and openness and that these virtues “will manifest themselves and be strengthened by one’s willingness to listen attentively and respectfully to intelligent people who challenge one’s beliefs and who represent causes one disagrees with and points of view one does not share” (Volokh, 2017, para. 2). They asserted that we should oppose efforts to silence people we disagree with because our views could be wrong and because our arguments will be strengthened if we are called upon to defend them. In addition, they noted that while the right to protest peacefully is sacrosanct, we should all ask if it might be better to try to learn from those with whom we disagree and to pursue truth by engaging provocative speakers in honest discussion. For George and West,

the more important the subject under discussion, the more willing we should be to listen and engage—especially if the person with whom we are in conversation with will challenge our deeply held—even our most cherished and identify-forming—beliefs.

(Volokh, 2017, para 5)

Some pundits worry that the willingness to engage in discourse that challenges our views about deeply held beliefs is in short supply today. They warn that the conformity and orthodoxy that Mill feared are prominent features of today's educational landscape and emphasize the need for colleges and universities to foster conversations that challenge students in the pursuit of truth. Bruni (2017) claimed that "colleges owe students turbulence, because it's from a contest of perspectives and an assault on presumptions that truth emerges—and, with it, true confidence" (para. 4). Stephens (2023) warned that groupthink increasingly defines the higher education environment. Sullivan (2020) lamented a new "moral clarity" on many issues that denies moral complexity and is marked by crudeness, intolerance, and dogmatism. In response, Sullivan calls for a commitment not simply to the rules of liberalism but to the spirit of liberalism. For Sullivan, this is a spirit:

that deals with an argument—and not a person—and that counters that argument with logic, not abuse. It's a spirit that allows for various ideas to clash and evolve, and treats citizens as equal, regardless of their race, rather than insisting on equity for designated racial groups. It's a spirit that delights sometimes in being wrong because it offers an opportunity to figure out what's right. And it's generous, humorous, and graceful in its love of argument and debate. (para.18)

Along with supporters of civil discourse, critics have also engaged with Mill's ideas. While acknowledging his eloquence, Winegard (2022) claimed that his arguments are vague, contradictory, and tendentious. For example, he suggested that Mill provides very little guidance about critical concepts such as harm. He also rejected Mill's argument that orthodoxy leads to stagnation, as many examples show that "uncontested views are fervently held, defended, and promoted" (p. 16). Goldman (2002) detected a contradiction between Mill's belief in the

advancement of society and his unwavering commitment to allowing objections to be heard without rejection. Endless debates about concepts and ideas that do not stand up to scrutiny are especially troubling for universities, as one of the primary purposes of the university is to produce knowledge to inform and educate (Amesbury & O'Donnell, 2023). Specifically, the authors asserted that the “purpose of considering different opinions about disputed questions is precisely to separate the wheat from the chaff. Only those opinions that survive scrutiny deserve to be treated as authoritative, and only until something better comes along” (Amesbury & O'Donnell, 2023, p.5).

Critics also warned that Mill does not see that dialogue can harm democracy. Skorupski (2006) contended that Mill never considered the dangers of unrestricted dialogue and the possibility that it could lead to democracy's disintegration by enhancing the inclination of democracy to succumb to the allure of celebrity, the embrace of uncomplicated issues in politics, or the attraction of simplistic narratives. Bell (2021) argued that Mill's commitment to freedom of opinion and expression as essential to our well-being caused him to embrace a narrow view of harm and to miss other values essential to our well-being and the health of our political community, such as security. Stanley (2018) criticized the utopian assumption that “conversation works by exchange of reasons: one party offers its reasons, which are countered by the reasons of an opponent, until the truth ultimately emerges” (p. 3). He further warned that political discourse is often not used to pursue truth but to undermine presuppositions that make discourse possible, generate emotions, limit perspectives, and increase prejudice. Similarly, Goldman (2022) criticized Mill for acknowledging that ideas compete in a market but not understanding that “market success can be influenced by advertising, incomplete information, or other forms of

distortion and indifference to the outcomes of discussion that could leave society susceptible to political, moral, or other forms of discussion” (p. 3).

Arguments about civility’s importance for our democracy have also been met with skepticism. One critic connected assertions about the decline of civility to America’s ongoing culture wars and assessed them as part of an effort to “cast a pall of legitimacy over the egalitarian ethos embodied in the movements of the 1960s for black liberation, women’s liberation, and gay liberation” (Kennedy, 2001, p. 6). Serwer (2019) criticized those who romanticize the past. He claimed that “the idea that we’re currently experiencing something like the nadir of American civility ignores the turmoil that has traditionally characterized the nation’s politics, and the comparatively low level of political violence today despite the animosity of the moment” (Serwer, 2019, p. 4). He also warned that the fixation on civility is distracting us from understanding that “the true cause of American political discord is the lingering resistance of those who have traditionally held power to sharing it with those who until recently only experienced its serrated edge” (Serwer, 2019, p. 5). Structural factors such as the Electoral College and each state having two senators regardless of population, and strategic decisions such as gerrymandering and voting rights restrictions have also drawn the attention of those who question the ability of civility to generate effective political movements (Ingraham, 2018).

Yoshino (2012) outlined several common objections offered by skeptics of civility. First, civility puts those committed to it at a disadvantage because our opponents may not be civil in return. In addition, it asks us to sacrifice for strangers we disagree with. Second, critics argue that civility prevents true engagement. The author warned that civility is at odds with liberalism’s need for “intellectual clarity; an insistence upon grappling with the substance of controversies; and a willingness to fight loudly, openly, militantly, even rudely, for policies and values that will

increase freedom, equality, and happiness in America and around the world” (Yoshino, 2012, p. 475). The emphasis on civility will not provide this clarity. Instead, it will lead to superficial conversations that avoid difficult issues, emphasize tone instead of substance, avoid discomfort, and discourage a critical approach that forcefully challenges claims made by those we agree with and those we disagree with.

Yoshino and others also claimed that civility honors the dishonorable. Civility assumes a commonality of values, purposes, and aspirations that are often lacking. Participants in a conversation may resist or deny that commonality. Treating these individuals with civility “can sometimes be a form of appeasement or even a collaboration with evil” (Yoshino, 2012, p. 473). Strunk (2018) claimed that the focus on civility has created a demand for educational institutions and educators to place oppressive, incorrect, and dehumanizing ideas on an equal footing with all other perspectives. This focus offers free speech to some while requiring civility from others in conversations about oppression and privilege, as “some students expect to be free to express their objectively incorrect and harmful views (free speech), while those targeted by that expression are expected to listen calmly and politely (civility)” (Strunk, 2018, p. 2). Others argued that this dynamic makes civility a tool that serves the privileged and reinforces the status quo (Keith & Danisch, 2020) and that the emphasis on civility “spends more time and energy condemning the conduct of those with relatively little power than those who have a great deal of power” (Kennedy, 2001, p. 8). In too many cases, the civility norms “that individuals are expected to adhere to are different for different groups. In particular, the less powerful are held to higher standards of civility and deference, while the more powerful are readily excused for aggressive rhetoric” (Zurn, 2013, p. 57).

How can the arguments of the supporters and skeptics be reconciled? Bybee (2016) argued that we should acknowledge that contradictions, tensions, and paradoxes plague civility. He writes:

We feel civility's absence as a result of its abundance. We see civility as an impediment to free expression, and at the same time, we demand civility to sustain the free exchange of ideas. We encounter civility as a bulwark of hierarchy and domination, and we also enlist civility to level social relations and promote inclusion. We condemn civility's inauthenticity, yet we depend on the many opportunities for hypocrisy that civility affords. (p. 67)

For Bybee, these inconsistencies do not diminish the value and importance of civility. Instead, he claimed that they reflect the dynamism and diversity of our society, the thriving of our culture of free expression, and our struggle to practice the values in which we believe.

French (2018) stressed the need to accept that the critiques of civil discourse hold some truth because civility is not always proper, as there are injustices that require a more dramatic response, and because "calls for civility are often one-sided, manipulative, and made in bad faith (French, 2018, para. 4). Despite its weaknesses, he nonetheless called for us to seek civility when we engage in public debates by using humility, conviction, and a sense of proportion as the foundations for our approach to public speech.

Bejan (2017) also cautioned the supporters of civil discourse and acknowledged that "calls for civility can serve as swords as well as shields, and they are often abused to put an end to disagreement rather than enable it" (para. 11). Still, she advocated for *mere* civility, an approach that replaces the mutual respect and reasonableness associated with civility with a "minimal, often grudging conformity to social norms to respectful behavior needed to keep the

conversation going” (Bejan, 2017, para. 11). She encouraged an embrace of mere civility as evidence of a “commitment to using our words with, as well as against, our opponents. To live together, we must be able to talk to one another; the fate of our own tolerant society hangs in the balance” (Bejan, 2017, para. 11). For Mounk (2023), the ability to talk freely is particularly important in an era marked by polarization, as efforts to constrain speech and expression are likely to systematically favor the ideals of the powerful, vastly increase the stakes in our political competitions, and reduce the effectiveness “of a crucial safety valve that allows victims of bad public policies to protest the status quo, making it harder to achieve much-needed social change” (p. 170). Elsewhere, Longo and Shaffer (2019) stressed dialogue’s ability to challenge the status quo when they noted that critical theorists such as bell hooks and Paulo Freire have made “dialogue a fundamental vehicle for understanding issues and making social change” (p. 22).

Bybee (2016) challenged the critics of civil discourse. He noted, “in many instances those who decry civility’s coercive use are not opposed to the general idea of civil conduct” (p. 32). He claimed that contemporary protest movements such as Black Lives Matter feature demands that focus on recognition and inclusion. The protestors “did not altogether dispense with codes of appropriate behavior so much as they sought to revise prevailing practices in order to foster equal treatment and a sense of belonging for people of color” (p. 32). For Bybee, civility is “a mode of behavior that is developed and perpetually refashioned in the democracy of everyday life” (p. 69). In addition:

The need for civility is ever present, and the work of enacting better and more acceptable rules of conduct will always be with us. Recognizing this fact is not a reason to give up so much as it is a call to join in and to embrace the paradoxes on which our efforts to get along depend. (p. 69)

These arguments create space for robust, honest, and spirited civil discourse to consider contemporary political and moral challenges. They highlight tensions and paradoxes surrounding civility but explain why it is still essential. They acknowledge that civil discourse is imperfect and not always proper, but they invite us to talk with our opponents when it is. They remind us about power imbalances and challenge us to foster more inclusive conversations. Finally, they alert us to safety valves that allow us to organize and protest injustice and encourage us to build stronger communities to promote change in an era marked by polarization. Zurn (2013) made a similar argument when he suggests that “we have good normative reasons to strive for civil interactions, even as we must be attuned to civility’s limitations, its possible pernicious side-effects, and its potential for strategic manipulation and misuse” (p. 358). The task for supporters of civil discourse is to adapt it to develop initiatives that reduce its misuse and make it relevant to addressing the issues generating conversations and controversies on our campuses today.

Preparing for Civil Discourse Initiatives

Preparing for civil discourse initiatives requires distinguishing discourse from debate. This project’s definition of civil discourse emphasizes robust conversations about controversial and complex issues that are designed to reduce misunderstanding and polarization. It rejects the winner-take-all nature of adversarial approaches that “tends to incentivize problematic communication patterns that cause polarization, misunderstanding, cynicism, making already wicked problems much more diabolical” (Carcasson, 2013, p. 40). The definition of “dialogue” used in this study is consistent with that of Longo and Shaffer (2019), who argued that dialogue “is not about trying to win an argument (the realm of debate); rather, it is a collaborative and relational process to engage with others and cocreate meaning” (p.23). For Perreault (2012), the effort to engage and cocreate meaning makes the affirmation of others and their views essential

to dialogue. Similarly, Garcia and Ulbig (2020) argued that the purpose of dialogue is not “to win but to achieve a deeper understanding of another’s thoughts and ideas” (p. 163).

Acknowledging that civil discourse is difficult is similarly important. Haidt (2012) offered a framework for explaining this difficulty and a path to more productive conversations. His Moral Foundations Theory explains the moral reasoning and intuition that we use to assess and respond to moral challenges and political issues. Haidt outlined six psychological foundations that affect our judgment. The care/harm foundation “makes us sensitive to signs of suffering and need; it makes us despise cruelty and want to care for those who are suffering” (p. 178). The fairness/cheating foundation sensitizes us “to indications that another person is likely to be a good (or bad) partner for collaboration and reciprocal altruism. It makes us want to shun or punish others” (p. 178). The loyalty/betrayal foundation helps us address the need for group cohesion as it alerts us to “signs that another person is (or is not) a team player. It makes us want to trust and reward such people, and it makes us want to hurt, ostracize, or even kill those who betray us or our group” (pp. 178–179). The authority/subversion foundation provides clues and cues about “signs of rank or status, and to signs that people are (or are not) behaving properly, given their position” (p. 179). The sanctity/degradation foundation “makes it possible for people to invest objects with irrational and extreme values—both positive and negative—which are important to binding groups together” (p. 179). Finally, the liberty/oppression foundation addresses concerns related to personal freedom, autonomy, and oppression and “makes people notice and resent any sign of domination” (p. 215).

Haidt’s work suggests that different individuals, groups, and societies vary in their emphasis on the foundations outlined. This variety produces competing perspectives on political, social, and moral issues that reinforce political divisions. For example, liberals tend to support

moral values linked to individual rights, such as fairness and harm, while conservatives emphasize group rights, such as loyalty and authority (Haidt, 2012). Because our views on these issues are also profoundly held, Haidt's work suggests that these competing worldviews make it difficult for us to engage with others who see the world differently. Simultaneously, recognizing that different moral concerns and values underlie political beliefs can be a starting point for constructive political discourse. This recognition encourages us to consider and acknowledge the limitations of our perspective and invites us to consider what our perspective emphasizes, what it misses, and what it is unwilling to consider. It offers insights about how to address the concerns of others and speak to their concerns. It alerts us to the impact that emotion and intuition have on our decision-making. Finally, it can encourage individuals to seek areas of common ground and engage in more respectful conversations.

One way to seek common ground is through complexity. On campuses nationwide, “complex issues, such as immigration or climate change, have collapsed into superficial battles between good and evil, with no room for nuance or common ground” (Mehl & Haidt, 2022, p.3). To overcome this binary bias, they suggested complexifying an issue by highlighting details that do not fit into the typical narrative to “tease out the strengths of both positions and identify novel solutions” (p. 3). According to Grant (2021), we should avoid addressing polarizing issues as two sides of a coin. Instead, we should look at them through the different lenses of a prism. The resulting complexity can lead to “more humility about our knowledge and more doubts about our opinions, and it can make us curious enough to discover information we were lacking” (p. 165). While humility is often misunderstood as a lack of confidence or low self-esteem, Grant claimed that we should try to attain confident humility, defined as “having faith in our capability while appreciating that we may not have the right solution or even be addressing the right problem” (p.

47). In addition, he argued that our quest for complexity should apply to our emotions as well. He cited research that shows that unproductive conversations often feature a limited set of positive and negative emotions. Grant posits that productive conversations do not necessarily require the elimination of frustration or indignation. Instead, incorporating a wider range of emotions, such as expressing curiosity or acknowledging confusion or ambivalence, can contribute to a more constructive dialogue.

The path to complex and nuanced conversations about challenging issues may start by encouraging people to refrain from beginning their discussions with a focus on political issues. “One Small Step,” a program started by StoryCorps founder Dan Isay, brings people together and encourages them to write and share a story about their background and the issues important to them before they address politics. The exercise focuses on “providing context and relationship, connecting on a human level, and moving into a very different zone that isn’t about facts and persuasion, but is about learning and discovery” (Graci, 2021). Mehl and Haidt (2022) maintained that initial meetings of a course should be used for exercises that establish trust and help students to connect with each other. They claim that these exercises build a foundation “that supports dialogue about difficult subjects, helps students give their peers the benefit of the doubt, and enables students to recall areas of commonality or sympathy if contentious issues begin to introduce rifts” (p. 7).

Thomas (2019) introduced a series of approaches to aid preparations for discourse. She argued that leaders should establish and, when necessary, amend group ground rules to “shape the climate for a discussion by setting limits about behavior, encouraging some forms of participation and discouraging others, and even identifying speech that is appropriate and inappropriate” (p. 46). She also stressed the need to carefully consider how to develop questions

that clarify key terms, help people think critically, and foster open-mindedness. Finally, she proposed that leaders invite participants to share responsibility for the event's success. Students have also offered recommendations for promoting civil discourse about controversial political and social issues. Boys et al. (2018) detailed the survey results designed to determine how social work instructors could facilitate inclusive class discussions. The analysis of the responses highlights key suggestions. Students emphasized the significance of ground rules, particularly about confidentiality. They also stressed the importance of faculty members modeling open discourse. Additionally, students proposed offering the choice to opt out of emotionally challenging discussions. Finally, students recommended that educators underscore the complexity of policy analysis and the need to consider perspectives when investigating an issue.

Proponents of civil discourse have also stressed the need to help students develop specific skills and values as they prepare to engage in conversation. Summarizing contemporary scholarship, Garcia and Ulbig (2020) emphasized the importance of active listening, perspective-taking, and empathy. Active listening requires listening “intently to understand another’s point of view with a goal or understanding rather than refuting (p. 156). It requires the listener to ask questions for clarification and to restate or paraphrase what the speaker said. Perspective-taking focuses on understanding how others view and feel about an idea or issue. Empathy requires an attempt to find common ground and connect with another person or persons. It is important for discourse as “understanding another person’s perspective on an issue and displaying empathy for their experiences and opinions has been demonstrated to reduce political prejudgments and increase opportunities for open dialogue” (p. 158). Shuster (2009) identified two additional skills that are essential for civil discourse: namely, the ability to create and refute arguments. Elsewhere, proponents of deliberative pedagogy emphasized the importance of moving from

discussing issues to making decisions about them by encouraging students to “encounter and consider multiple perspectives, weigh trade-offs and tensions and move toward action through informed judgment” (Longo et al., 2017, p. xxi). Carcasson (2017) asserted that deliberative pedagogy is particularly important for preparing students to address difficult societal challenges that require tough choices, as it promotes the development of a range of skills and values, including discernment, curiosity, empathy, collaboration, and argument evaluation.

Implementing Civil Discourse Initiatives

Faculty, student affairs professionals, and nonprofit organizations around the country have enthusiastically responded to the call to support our democracy by developing a generation of active and engaged citizens who understand and embrace civil discourse. Faculty have developed courses in a range of disciplines. University administrators have created programming that can be delivered in student centers, residence halls, and other public campus spaces. Nonprofit organizations and foundations have built models to promote and sustain discourse nationwide. This section of the review introduces this work and highlights initiatives that have been implemented on university campuses in recent years.

Haltzman Zwart (2021) drew inspiration from ancient virtue ethics for her one-credit course. She began by developing a course that would meet for six weeks and address one or two issues in each class. She used a pre-course survey to recruit students with diverse experiences and views. Once selected, she sought to equip students with the skills for conversation and help them “come to see themselves as the kind of people who care about productive dialogue and who could grow in the virtues that would help good dialogue more naturally emerge” (p. 241). The course emphasized virtues such as attentiveness, empathy, curiosity, and intellectual humility. Students cultivated these through readings, keeping a journal detailing their experiences,

responding to issue prompts, evaluating arguments, and completing a final project that required them to host a conversation about an issue of their choosing. Qualitative results integrated into the article provide evidence that the students have practiced these virtues in Halteman Zwart's class and elsewhere on campus.

A recent study assessed a pilot course focused on civil discourse at the University of Delaware (Barnes et al., 2022). The course "interrogated the form and function of civil discourse in diverse, democratic societies, with emphasis on learning and practicing dialogue and deliberation capacities that advance policy processes" (p. 220). Students enrolled in the course completed anonymous pretest and posttest surveys, and the survey results were analyzed to assess changes in "students' self-reported capacity for civil discourse" (p. 221). The study found the following:

Students in Citizens, Civility, and Change self-report that, on average, when compared to the beginning of the course, at the end they are more capable and willing to engage in dialogue with individuals holding diverse or oppositional viewpoints, better able to understand and self-regulate their own behavior during emotional [*sic*] charged situations, and more likely to successfully navigate through and across ideological difference (p. 224)

Garcia and Ulbig (2020) conducted a non-randomized quasi-experiment involving a government course at a four-year university. Of the eight sections in the study, four received interventions through lectures and activities. These focused on defining political discourse and teaching techniques for active listening and perspective-taking during political discussions. The goal was to evaluate whether these would promote better class discussions. Students completed a questionnaire near the end of the semester that focused on recalling the differences between

discourse and debate and assessed their retention of perspective-taking and active listening. The questionnaire also “gauged opinions on the quality of classroom discussion in their particular class and queried the behaviors exhibited by students regarding active listening and perspective taking” (p. 164). The results suggested that students “who received political discourse training were better able to distinguish between political debate and political dialogue and were able to identify behaviors associated with discourse” (p. 172).

Matto and Chmielewski (2021) also reflected on a pilot course. This was a 10-week, one-credit course designed for incoming students that introduced the core skills of political discourse, the links between political discourse and a healthy democracy, and the practice of political discourse. In the first section of the course, students read *Federalist Paper #10*, created a set of norms to guide their discussions, and considered the benefits of discourse. Later, they learned skills such as active listening, perspective-taking, and fact-checking. The last section of the course featured pairs of student activists, state senators, and legislative staffers who described how they see and practice discourse. Student feedback was captured in weekly reflections designed to gauge “how well students absorbed the content, appreciated the skill-building activities, and generally felt about the topic of discourse and its role in democracy” (p. 756). The students described their experiences in the course positively. However, they noted that the discussions were hampered by a lack of knowledge about the topics, insufficient diversity of opinion on the issues discussed, and the absence of “a common understanding of the role and value of free speech in democracies in general as well as on a college campus” (p. 757).

Hess et al. (2010) developed a one-credit course that brought a politically diverse group of undergraduates together to discuss controversial topics. Initial classes introduced students to dialogue and invited them to create ground rules for the course. The remaining weeks focused on

issues such as abortion, foreign policy, and race. A review of student journals, final evaluations, and class comments revealed several positive themes. Specifically, many students discovered a new and more productive way to talk, became more open to hearing perspectives that differed from their own, and saw themselves more clearly. However, not all the feedback was positive. Some students were not comfortable listening to others, while others struggled to share their views. The authors also discussed the challenge of facilitation. They noted that trying to determine when and how to intervene in a conversation and when and how to step out of a conversation “proved to be an unremitting and humbling challenge” (p. 163).

Public speaking courses present fertile ground for cultivating initiatives that foster civil discourse, requiring students to both speak and listen. Gayle (2004) noted that developing skills related to civil discourse requires students to consider new perspectives and demonstrate an openness to attitude change. Her introductory public speaking course challenged student speakers to create several presentations that engaged them “in the disorienting exercise of supporting multiple perspectives on the same topic” (p. 176). Student listeners assessed the persuasiveness of the presentations. The study’s results suggested that “attitude change as a form of subject framing is more powerfully affected by message construction activity than by listening to speeches” (p. 182). After researching and presenting two speeches from contrasting viewpoints on a contentious subject, most speakers changed their initial position on the topics they had studied. In contrast, most of those who listened to the speeches did not change their positions.

To counter affective polarization and its negative impact on people’s willingness and ability to collaborate and participate in conversations across differences, a recent initiative used and assessed an online educational program developed by the Constructive Dialogue Institute

called *Perspectives* (Welker et al., 2023). The project was designed to “simultaneously examine the impact of an intervention on the outcomes of affective polarization, intellectual humility, and conflict resolution skills” (p. 453). The researchers recruited 775 college students enrolled in 10 courses at three higher education institutions. Students in the treatment group completed an initial assessment, the *Perspectives* modules, and another assessment after completing the program. Students in the control group completed the assessments before completing the *Perspectives* modules. The findings from the study indicated that students who used *Perspectives* showed small to medium-sized increases in intellectual humility and small to medium-sized reductions in affective polarization. In addition, completing *Perspectives* led to reductions in negative conflict tactics such as attacking and negative evading.

Despite concerns that debate may hinder civil discourse by leading to a focus on winning instead of understanding, there is evidence that academic debate improves critical thinking skills and prepares students for citizenship (Bailey, 2020). Intentionally structured academic debate is a particularly promising approach. According to Bailey (2020), the University of Alabama’s Moral Forum seminar acquaints honors students with ethical discussions and civil deliberation by examining a single resolution centered around a complex sociopolitical issue. Students delve into the matter from the perspectives of various ethical traditions. As they grasp the nuances of the issue, they articulate both affirmative and negative positions in response to the resolution, employing a single ethical tradition. Subsequently, the students form pairs to revise and improve their position papers. Their efforts culminate in a Moral Forum Tournament, where student teams employ ethical theories to debate the issue. Judges “evaluate students’ success in the debate rounds based on persuasiveness, moral reasoning, and the use of empathetic dialogue” (Bailey, 2020, p. 52). The author concludes that the seminar promotes teamwork, encourages

collaboration and inclusion, challenges students to consider ideas they disagree with, invites students to reconsider their viewpoints, and promotes the development of values such as empathy which are critical for citizenship.

A similar approach, “structured academic controversy” (SAC), entails a collaborative form of debate in which groups of four address a contentious topic. Two pairs in each group alternate in presenting arguments for each side of the issue before meeting as a group to seek a consensus or, at the very least, to respectfully acknowledge their differing views on the topic (Dettman, 2022). Embedding an SAC activity in a one-credit information literacy course resulted in students in the experimental group spending more time discussing and researching the topic outside of class. When compared to students in the control group who did not take part in the SAC activity, the students in the experimental group used more sources. They were more likely to use their own language, as opposed to language from summaries and abstracts, in their projects. Finally, the exercise addressed elements of civil discourse, as the worksheet completed by students in the experimental group asked them to synthesize the viewpoints and propose how a discussion that included the different views could promote informed decision-making (Dettman, 2022).

While many initiatives are being delivered through academic courses, co-curricular programming to address civil discourse is common. Horton et al. (2021) describe one approach used at the University of Central Arkansas. Each year, faculty at the university’s Schedler Honors College recruit and train student mentors, who then facilitate “Tough Talks” for honors students. Tough Talks are designed to promote productive dialogue about politics, gender, race, and religion. The monthly programs occur in a residence hall. The programs are grounded in the “brave spaces” ideology. The authors acknowledge the importance of safe spaces for all students,

especially marginalized students and their allies. However, they argue that the brave spaces ideology is vital for the talks they sponsor because it emphasizes the need for a willingness to be uncomfortable as we seek personal growth. They argue that “if our students are going to learn to engage in authentic dialogue and have difficult conversations, they must learn to lean into discomfort” (p. 115). These programs seek to replace an “agree to disagree” approach with one emphasizing “controversy with civility.” The “agree to disagree” mindset favors majority viewpoints, allowing individuals to conveniently sidestep the discomfort of expressing their opinions or facing challenges to their perspectives. This approach can be an escape for some, but for students from minority and marginalized backgrounds, there is no such luxury, as discomfort often characterizes their ongoing experiences. A “controversy with civility” framework “posits that we can openly, rationally, and civilly discuss challenging topics through a shared commitment to curiosity and community, thus leading us closer to genuine inclusion and belonging” (p. 116).

Denison University also used residential spaces to cultivate skills that foster democratic living and empower students to become change agents committed to exploring diversity and themselves (Kennedy, 2019). The university has introduced several changes to support this initiative. Resident assistants have been renamed community advisers, and their work has shifted from a focus on administrative policies to a focus on relationship-building. Advisers have been trained to implement one-to-one meetings with all residents to learn more about them. These meetings “use a structured format to invite conversation, storytelling, and the practice of deep listening” (p. 212). These conversations informed the development of programming that responded to the worries and interests of residents. The model also emphasized “civic deliberations” to solve problems. The new model has led to a reduction in bias-related behaviors,

fewer parental contacts for roommate conflicts, increased respect for community advisers, and a change in the composition of the applicant pool for the community adviser position as applicants “now increasingly express interest in social change, community organizing, conflict resolution, and matters of student well-being” (p. 214).

Reflecting on their work with the University of New Hampshire’s Civil Discourse Lab, Heath and Borda (2021) highlight student-designed and implemented public dialogues about complex issues that employ gracious contestation and “calling out language associated with the issue and calling in the conversants to negotiate what that language means” (p. 14). This approach focuses “our attention away from strict definitions describing what civility ‘is,’ and asks instead what work civility does—that is, it initiates and maintains the possibility for further conversation among those with deeply held differences” (p. 9). This approach “invites conflict as a norm of decision-making in the public sphere. With a focus on forgiveness, gracious contestation is the communicative enactment of calling out while maintaining earnestness and humility” (p. 14). It requires ground rules that promote open conversation. Heath and Borda (2021) offer validating all voices, listening to understand, avoiding generalizing, focusing on the issue instead of the person, and avoiding interrupting as examples of validating practices. In an event focused on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, participants engaged in an exercise that “drew attention to the language around the conflict and facilitated open dialogue and deliberation about what these terms meant with respect to one another” (p. 15). Exercises such as this one allow people to “negotiate the acceptable language they will use to discuss the topic and better understand the way the words they use reflect choices about how they wish to convey their place in the world” (p. 15).

In recent years, nonprofit organizations have designed many programs to promote public discourse about controversial issues. One example is the Perspectives program developed by the Constructive Dialogue Institute, which was introduced earlier. Sarrouff and Hyten (2019) detail another program, this one called “Essential Partners” (EP). This program promotes constructive conversations by inviting a campus community to clarify its purpose, setting up and enforcing ground rules, using questions that allow people to use personal narratives, and inviting participants to ask questions of each other that reflect a genuine desire to understand rather than to trap, convince, or judge (p. 88). They also counter attempts by participants to dominate conversations by using communication agreements and designed pauses. Finally, the organization emphasizes dialogue that “relies heavily on taking moments to pause and reflect before responding to questions, between speakers, and when looking back on the conversation” (p. 88). The organization has worked with institutions such as Bridgewater State College and Tufts University. The assessment of this work has been promising. Sarrouf and Hyten highlight increased cohesion and resilience in communities using the (EP) approach. In addition, “although most participants, both before and after dialogue, feel that they understand others, almost 40% of participants before a dialogue do not feel understood by those different from themselves. This number falls to 10% after they participate in EP’s approach to dialogue” (p. 92).

National Issues Forums offer opportunities to attend locally sponsored conversations about challenging issues at universities, community colleges, K–12 schools, and community organizations around the country. The programs “offer both a place for effective public problem-solving and a space in which citizens learn a key civic skill—the skill of choicework” (Johnson & Melville, 2019, p. 142). The authors claim that “choicework” emphasizes that political decision-making presents significant issues that are challenging and not cost- or risk-free;

requires people to weigh competing proposals and compare different courses of action; and requires listening, exchanging views with others, and absorbing their perspectives. Data analysis of forums suggests that participants feel less manipulated and more knowledgeable about complex problems. They also feel more empowered, as “issue frameworks prompt citizens to think more clearly about what is in the public interest and what they can reasonably expect from elected leaders and public officials” (p. 146).

Summary and Conclusion

This review of the literature began by introducing polarization and summarizing the arguments of leaders who have urged universities to prioritize civic learning and the teaching of democratic values. Reflecting on the role that higher education has played in similar moments in the past, they also called for the promotion of social mobility, the development of programs on democracy's history, the development of curricula that offer a shared intellectual framework, an emphasis on the skills necessary for academic and civic discourse, and impactful interactions among students with diverse viewpoints.

A summary of the competing views of civil discourse followed. It began with references to Mill's *On Liberty* and the claim that societal pressure can lead to social tyranny, limiting individual freedoms more insidiously than political oppression can. Preventing this requires a commitment to free speech and unrestricted discourse to aid the search for truth and intellectual development. Mill's ideas continue to influence contemporary civil discourse advocates. The importance of expressing views, engaging with challenging perspectives, and embracing discomfort for intellectual growth is highlighted by various scholars, echoing Mill's arguments. Critics of civil discourse describe Mill's ideas as vague, contradictory, narrow, and naïve. They also question the claim that our current era is particularly polarized, view calls for civility as

efforts to silence marginalized voices, honor the dishonorable, and preserve unjust power structures, and claim that civil discourse cannot generate due political and social structures that resist change. The end of this section proposes that arguments can be reconciled by finding a balance that acknowledges the complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes of civil discourse while recognizing its importance for maintaining a functioning and inclusive society capable of change.

The following section reviewed the preparations for and implementation of civil discourse initiatives. This section defined civil discourse and distinguished it from debate, offered a framework for explaining why discourse is difficult, and emphasized the importance of complexifying issues. It also stressed the need for ground rules to guide conversations, the need for facilitators and faculty to model the behavior sought, and the importance of building trust by sharing stories and narratives before discussing controversial issues. Faculty and staff implementing these initiatives have highlighted the importance of helping students understand the foundations and principles of our democracy and the need for discourse to support its health. They emphasized the development of skills associated with civil discourse—such as active listening, exchanging of views, critical thinking, perspective-taking, fact-checking, teamwork, and choicework. They have also stressed the importance of helping students develop empathy, curiosity, openness, and humility. Several projects have emphasized assignments that required students to summarize, assess, and defend competing perspectives when considering controversial issues. Faculty and staff have also emphasized the need to practice civil discourse in the classroom and in spaces throughout campus. Nonprofit organizations have provided tools and materials to generate conversations throughout campus. They have also developed online modules to support the development of skills and values associated with productive dialogue.

Initiatives have been assessed using a range of approaches. Surveys, pretest and posttest comparisons, and qualitative evaluations are common.

This project contributes to contemporary research in several ways. First, the project was delivered through a course enrolling 550 first-year students. Thus, it offered a model that can be used by academic and student affairs units that serve first-year students. Second, it randomly assigned students enrolled in the course to treatment and control groups to isolate the impact of the intervention. Furthermore, it provided students in the treatment group access to an online program called *How We Argue*. This program is designed to help students enhance their command of the skills and commitment to the values needed for civil discourse. Fourth, it gave students structured and informal opportunities to display the skills and values they developed through the activities delivered via the Honors Forum throughout the semester. Finally, it used statistical techniques to analyze the pretest and posttest surveys students completed by the students enrolled in the treatment and control sections of the course to investigate whether the programming associated with the Honors Forum affected the students' perceptions of civil discourse.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study was conducted during the Fall 2023 semester. It investigated the impact that co-curricular programming delivered by the University Honors Program at North Carolina State University had on first-year students' assessment of their knowledge of civil discourse, their view of the importance and impact of civil discourse, their command of the skills and commitment to the values related to it, and their overall assessment of it. This chapter details the methods used in the study, including the research design, participants, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, and limitations.

Research Design

McMillan (2016) described experimental research designs as studies in which researchers “have control over one or more interventions in the study that may influence participants' behavior” (p. 14). This involves the manipulation of the intervention or interventions and measuring the subsequent impact on participants. This project used an experimental research design to examine student assessments of civil discourse before and after enrolling in a course offered by the University Honors Program. The researcher generated a list of all entering first-year students who began participating in the program during the Fall 2023 semester. This list was shared with the Office of Registration and Records. Registration and Records randomly assigned each student to one of two sections of the Honors Forum. Students assigned to section 001 were part of the treatment group. These students completed a modified version of the course that included an intervention designed to teach them the skills and values associated with critical thinking and civil discourse. Students assigned to section 002 were part of the control group. These students completed a standard version of the course. The project

evaluated the two course approaches to determine the intervention's impact on whether to introduce it into all course sections in future years.

Participants

As noted above, the primary participants were first-year students who joined the University Honors Program at North Carolina State University and enrolled in our Honors Forum course during the Fall 2023 semester. 544 first-year students enrolled in the course in August 2023. These students completed a pretest survey at the beginning of the semester. 520 of the students who completed the initial survey consented to take part in the study. By the end of the semester, 460 students had completed all the questions on the pretest and posttest surveys. The project analyzed the surveys completed by these 460 students.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a survey that students completed in the Honors Forum at the beginning and end of the semester. This pretest survey and posttest survey captured students' self-reported responses to a series of statements about their understanding of civil discourse, their perceptions of its importance and impact, their command of the skills that support it, and their commitment to the values associated with it. The instrument included thirty-five items. While the instrument was created by the researcher for this study, it included questions developed by Minson et al. (2020) and variations of questions developed by Barnes et al. (2022). The researcher contacted Dr. Minson and Dr. Barnes to request permission to integrate these into the new instrument. They both granted permission.

The survey had two sections. The first section of the instrument included a set of six (1-6) introductory questions. Students responded to these questions by providing their student ID number, race, sex, college generation, information about the community they lived in during

high school, and the college of their primary NC State major. The second section of the survey included Likert scale statements with a 7-point scale. Possible responses were 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7. 1 included *strongly disagree* as an anchor. 7 included *strongly agree* as an anchor. Statements were grouped into five categories. Statements 7-11 focused on knowledge of civil discourse. Statements 12-15 addressed the importance of civil discourse. Statements 16-23 emphasized skills associated with civil discourse. Statements 24-31 highlighted values associated with civil discourse. Statements 32-35 invited students to express their views on the impact of civil discourse.

The instrument was shared with and reviewed by a member of the UHP staff who coordinates our co-curricular programming and the Honors Village Director who teaches in our program. In addition, 35 students who work for the UHP to support our curricular and co-curricular programming completed a pilot version of the survey in early August when they arrived on campus for training related to their positions. The pilot survey included statements connected to the five survey categories. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of each category and the complete survey. The Knowledge category consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .84$), the Importance category of 4 items ($\alpha = .90$), the Skills category of 7 items ($\alpha = .86$), the Values category of 8 items ($\alpha = .88$), and the Impact category of 4 items ($\alpha = .88$). The complete survey included 28 items ($\alpha = .93$). Feedback from students and colleagues resulted in slight changes to the wording of a few questions and adding one statement to the skills category. This statement asked students to indicate to what extent they disagree or agree that they listen carefully when they have a conversation with someone whose views differ from theirs.

Procedures

This study assessed the impact of an intervention implemented in North Carolina State University's Honors Forum course during the Fall 2023 semester. The Honors Forum is a 0-credit course that provides enrichment activities that help students develop a broad worldview. The course is designed to expose students to a range of issues, ideas, and experiences. It also encourages students to participate in conversations about the events they experience. Students must attend at least twelve events each semester to receive a passing grade in the course. The course features lectures by public figures, discussions of contemporary social, political, and scientific issues, and musical and theatrical performances. Pair and share conversations in response to brief readings, and peer-facilitated conversations also occur in the weekly meetings of the course. In addition to the weekly meetings that occur each Monday and Tuesday during the fall semester, students also have access to additional Honors Forum events that allow them to attend lectures and workshops sponsored by campus administrative and academic units, participate in field trips, watch and discuss films, read and discuss books, investigate contemporary issues in a weekly discussion series, explore campus and community arts programming, and engage in conversations with UHP graduates and NC State faculty. During a typical semester, students have access to more than 250 activities. The course has excelled at exposing students to a broad range of issues, ideas, and conversations. While the initial class meetings of the course emphasize the importance of intellectual curiosity, openness to new cultural and educational experiences, and the need to consider a diverse range of viewpoints and ideas, the course has not explicitly taught students the skills and dispositions necessary to analyze the events they attend and facilitate productive conversations related to those events.

All first-semester University Honors Program students enrolled in the Honors Forum during the Fall 2023 semester. They were randomly assigned to one of two course sections by NC State's Department of Registration and Records. Approximately 50% of the program's first-year students were enrolled in a course section that meets on Monday afternoons, and 50% were enrolled in a section that meets on Tuesday afternoons. Students enrolled in the Tuesday section served as a control group. They experienced the Honors Forum as it has typically been offered. Students in the Monday section served as a treatment group. They had access to the traditional Honors Forum programming. In addition, they completed a program developed by ThinkerAnalytix. ThinkerAnalytix is an educational nonprofit organization that works with the Philosophy Department at Harvard University. The organization's *How We Argue* (HWA) program uses argument mapping and systematic empathy to help students develop skills they can use to discuss challenging issues constructively. Argument mapping emphasizes visual representations that detail the logical structure of an argument, summarizing how reasons and evidence justify an argument's claim. Systematic empathy employs straightforward steps to aid students in actively listening, correctly restating, and charitably interpreting someone else's position (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2024).

Students in the treatment group completed the HWA modules during the semester's first weeks. The modules are designed to equip students with skills and dispositions that will allow them to effectively navigate the issues, conversations, and activities delivered through the course. Students in the control group participated in a series of activities traditionally delivered through the course during the semester's first weeks. Once the students in the treatment group completed the HWA modules, students in both sections of the course had access to similar programs and activities. More details are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1*Fall 2023 Honors Forum Schedule*

Dates	Treatment	Control
August 21, 22, 28, 29	Introduction to course requirements and goals, brief explanation of the importance of critical thinking and civil discourse, introduction to HWA, pretest survey	Introduction to course requirements and goals, brief explanation of the importance of critical thinking and civil discourse, pretest survey
September 11 and 12	Review of HWA Lesson 1 (What is an argument?), 2 (Components of Arguments), and 3 (Indicator Words) followed by small group (6-8 students) conversations and exercises	Staff facilitated introduction to polarization and civil discourse followed by small group (6-8 students) conversations about polarization, civil discourse, and a <i>New York Times</i> article
September 18 and 19	Review of HWA Lesson 4 (The Reason Rule), 5 (Argument Structures) and 6 (Co-premises) followed by small group (6-8 students) conversations and exercises	NCSU Wellness Day: No class

Dates	Treatment	Control
September 25 and 26	Review of HWA Lesson 7 (The Charity Principle and Systematic Empathy) followed by small group (6-8 students) conversations and exercises	Performance by jazz musician and composer Elmer Gibson
October 16 and 17	Honors Village panel discussion. Topic: <i>The Cost of Food</i>	Honors Village panel discussion. Topic: <i>The Cost of Food</i>
October 23 and 24	Small group conversations about artificial intelligence and freedom of expression on university campuses	Small group conversations about artificial intelligence and freedom of expression on university campuses.
October 30 and 31	NCSU Phi Beta Kappa lecture by Donald Lopez about <i>Buddhism and Science</i>	NCSU Phi Beta Kappa lecture by Donald Lopez about <i>Buddhism and Science</i>
November 6 and 7	Presentation by a photojournalist and film producer Brian Skerry	Presentation by photojournalist and film producer Brian Skerry
November 13 and 14	Presentation by Smirti Ravindra about her novel entitled <i>The Woman Who Climbed Trees</i>	Presentation by Smirti Ravindra about her novel entitled <i>The Woman Who Climbed Trees</i>
November 27 and 28	Posttest survey	Posttest survey

Data Analysis

Students in the treatment and control groups completed a pretest survey and a posttest survey. Students accessed the survey through NC State's Qualtrics software. The survey included six demographic and attribute questions, followed by 29 statements about civil discourse. The statements in this section were grouped into five categories. The first category assessed students' knowledge of civil discourse, the second concentrated on the importance of civil discourse, the third focused on skills associated with civil discourse, the fourth addressed values related to civil discourse, and the final set of statements gauged students' assessment of the impact of civil discourse. Students responded to each question using a rating scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Student responses to the statements in each category were added together to produce a total category score. The category scores were summed to produce a total survey score. Finally, the researcher calculated the difference between the pretest and scores for each statement, category score, and the total score.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 29) was used to analyze the data. The researcher completed the following: after the pretest, (1) an independent samples *t*-test assuming equal variances to compare mean scores between the control and treatment groups at the beginning of the semester; (2) a paired samples *t*-test assuming equal variances to estimate the differences in the control group's scores between the pretest and posttest; (3) a paired samples *t*-test assuming equal variances to estimate the differences in the treatment group's scores between the pretest and posttest; (4) an independent samples *t*-test assuming equal variances to compare the mean posttest scores of the treatment group with the mean posttest scores of the control group; (5) an independent samples *t*-test assuming equal variances to compare the mean differences of the posttest and pretests scores of the treatment group and the

control group. Additionally, subgroup analyses were conducted to explore the impact of demographic variables and other attributes.

Limitations

This project investigated what impact, if any, the programming associated with the Honors Forum had on how students view civil discourse and if there were differences between a control group and a treatment group that completed a program developed by ThinkerAnalytix. The program teaches students to engage in complex conversations using argument maps and systematic empathy. The results of this study will not be easy to replicate unless other researchers develop an intervention with a similar structure.

This project collected quantitative data through surveys that students completed at the beginning and end of the semester. The instrument the participants completed was developed by the researcher. This instrument may not be as reliable and valid as a standardized instrument. In addition, the instrument relied on self-reported data provided by students enrolled in the Honors Forum. It is possible that students responded to the survey in ways that reflected a desire to support the researcher, especially since students in the experimental group were aware of this status. They may also have provided answers that they think are more acceptable instead of being honest. Finally, they may not have been able to assess themselves accurately.

The study faced limitations related to history. The project took place over the Fall 2023 semester and measured the impact of co-curricular programming and an experimental intervention. The students who participated in the project enrolled in other courses and engaged in experiences that may have influenced their views about civil discourse during the semester. Diffusion of intervention was another limitation. While students in the experimental and control groups enrolled in two different sections of our Honors Forum course, most of the traditional

content of the course was available to both groups. They attended many of these events and activities together. They lived in the same residence halls. They enrolled in other classes together. Thus, it is possible that the intervention's effects may spread from the experimental group to the control group during the semester.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

This study aimed to determine to what extent, if any, co-curricular programming delivered through the University Honors Program's Honors Forum course affected student perceptions about civil discourse and if the effect differed between students assigned to treatment and control groups. The researcher developed a survey instrument to collect student feedback. The survey included six demographic and attribute questions, followed by 29 statements about civil discourse. The statements were grouped into five categories. The first category assessed students' knowledge of civil discourse, the second concentrated on the importance of civil discourse, the third focused on skills associated with civil discourse, the fourth addressed values related to civil discourse, and the final set of statements gauged students' assessment of the impact of civil discourse. Students responded to each statement using a rating scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). This chapter provides information about the data collection process, respondent characteristics, and findings derived from the analysis of survey results. The closing section provides a chapter summary.

Data Collection

Students enrolled in the Honors Forum accessed and completed the survey through Qualtrics using their laptops or phones during class. The students completed the survey twice. They completed the pretest survey during the first week of the semester and the posttest survey during the semester's final class meeting. Overall, 520 students completed one or the other survey and consented to be included in the study. Among them, 460 completed all 29 civil discourse questions on the pretest and posttest surveys. This project analyzed the surveys completed by these 460 students.

Characteristics of Respondents

The survey began with a set of questions about demographic variables and other characteristics. The description of the respondents is based on the usable responses from the 460 students who completed all the questions on the pretest survey and the posttest survey. The most common racial groups were White, Asian, more than one race, and Black. Specifically, 319 (67.4%) identified as White, 63 (13.7%) identified as Asian, 42 (9.1%) selected more than one race, and 24 (5.2%) identified as Black. Two hundred fifty-eight (56.1%) were female and 202 (43.9%) were male. Most respondents were enrolled in three of NC State's 10 colleges, with 215 (46.7%) from the College of Engineering, 85 (18.5%) from the College of Sciences, and 47 (10.2%) from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Moderate-sized cities ($n = 143$; 31.1%), small towns ($n = 114$; 24.8%), and urban areas ($n = 82$; 17.8%) were the most common high school communities. Fifty-eight (12.6%) identified as first-generation college students, while 400 (87%) indicated they were not first-generation college students. Two students did not respond to this question. For more information and to see the similarities between the total and usable responses, please refer to Table 2.

Table 2*Total and Usable Respondent Characteristics*

Characteristic		Total Response		Usable Response	
		(N = 520)		(N = 460)	
		n	%	n	%
Race	White	344	66.2	319	67.4
	Black	30	5.8	24	5.2
	Native American	2	0.4	1	0.2
	Asian	73	14	63	13.7
	Hispanic	16	3.1	15	3.3
	Middle Eastern	3	0.6	2	0.4
	Other	3	0.6	3	0.7
	More than one	48	9.2	42	9.1
	No response	1	0.2	0	0
Sex	Male	226	43.5	202	43.9
	Female	294	56.5	258	56.1
College	Ag. & Life Sciences	35	6.7	29	6.3
	Sciences	95	18.3	85	18.5
	Design	7	1.3	6	1.3
	Education	4	0.8	3	0.7
	Engineering	240	46.2	215	46.7
	Hum. & Soc. Sci.	53	10.2	47	10.2

Characteristic		Total Response		Usable Response	
		(N = 520)		(N = 460)	
		n	%	n	%
<hr/>					
College					
	Management	38	7.3	32	7.0
	Natural Resources	20	3.8	19	4.1
	Textiles	5	1.0	3	0.7
	University College	23	4.4	21	4.6
HS Community	Rural	61	11.7	53	11.5
	Small town	127	24.4	114	24.8
	Moderate-sized city	155	29.8	143	31.1
	Large city	81	15.6	67	14.6
	Urban area	94	18.1	82	17.8
	No response	1	0.2	1	0.2
Generation	First	65	12.5	58	12.6
	Not-First	452	86.9	400	87
	No response	3	0.6	2	0.4

The 460 respondents represented students enrolled in two different sections of the Honors Forum. Two hundred and seventeen were enrolled in the treatment section, and 243 were enrolled in the control section. The most common racial categories for students in both sections were White, Asian, more than one race, and Black. One hundred forty-eight (68.2%) of the students in the treatment group and 162 (66.7%) of the students in the control group identified as

White. Twenty-six (12.0%) of the students in the treatment group and 37 (15.2%) of the students in the control group identified as Asian. Twenty-one (9.7%) of the students in the treatment group and 21 (8.6%) of the students in the control group indicated more than one race. Thirteen (6.0%) of the students in the treatment group and 11 (4.5%) of the students in the control group identified as Black. One hundred twenty-seven (58.5%) of the students in the treatment group and 131 (53.9%) of the students in the control group were female. Ninety (41.5%) of the treatment group and 112 (46.1%) of the students in the control group were male.

Most of the students in the treatment group were enrolled in three of NC State's 10 colleges, with ($n = 102$; 47.0%) enrolled in the College of Engineering, ($n = 37$; 17.1%) in the College of Sciences, and ($n = 17$; 7.8%) in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. For the control group, the numbers were ($n = 113$; 46.5 %) in the College of Engineering, ($n = 48$; 19.8%) in the College of Sciences, and ($n = 30$; 12.3%) in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Moderate-sized cities ($n = 61$; 28.1%), small towns ($n = 60$; 27.6%), and urban areas ($n = 35$; 16.1%) were the most common high school community types for students in the treatment group. Moderate-sized cities ($n = 82$; 33.7%), small towns ($n = 54$; 22.2%), and urban areas ($n = 47$; 19.3%) were the most common high school community types for students in the control group. Twenty-four (11.1%) of the students in the treatment group and 34 (14.0%) in the control group identified as first-generation college students. Table 3 contains additional information about the control and treatment groups.

Table 3*Treatment and Control Group Characteristics*

Characteristic		Treatment (<i>n</i> = 217)		Control (<i>n</i> = 243)	
		n	%	n	%
Race	White	148	68.2	162	66.7
	Black	13	6.0	11	4.5
	Native American	1	0.5	0	0
	Asian	26	12.0	37	15.2
	Hispanic	6	2.8	9	3.7
	Middle Eastern	1	0.5	1	0.4
	Other	1	0.5	2	0.8
	More than one	21	9.7	21	8.6
Sex	Male	90	41.5	112	46.1
	Female	127	58.5	131	53.9
College	Ag. & Life Sciences	16	7.4	13	5.3
	Sciences	37	17.1	48	19.8
	Design	3	1.4	3	1.2
	Education	3	1.4	0	0
	Engineering	102	47.0	113	46.5
	Hum. & Soc. Sci.	17	7.8	30	12.3
	Management	14	6.5	18	7.4
	Natural Resources	10	4.6	9	3.7

Characteristic		Treatment ($n = 217$)		Control ($n = 243$)	
		n	%	n	%
College					
	Textiles	2	0.9	1	0.4
	University College	13	6.0	8	3.3
HS Community	Rural	30	13.8	23	9.5
	Small town	60	27.6	54	22.2
	Moderate-sized city	61	28.1	82	33.7
	Large city	31	14.3	36	14.8
	Urban area	35	16.1	47	19.3
	No response	0	0	1	0.4
	Generation	First	24	11.1	34
	Not-First	192	88.5	208	85.6
	No response	1	0.5	1	0.4

Students responded to the 29 survey items using a scale that provided options from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Question 30 was reverse-scored since a lower score demonstrates a more open-minded approach and suggests a willingness to consider and respect different views instead of trying to persuade others to endorse the respondent's views. The highest mean scores for the entire sample of students related to the willingness to have conversations with those holding different views ($M = 5.68$), curiosity about understanding others' opinions ($M = 5.67$), trying to understand arguments made by others with different views ($M = 5.64$), being comfortable expressing how experiences have impacted their views ($M =$

5.64), and the importance of having conversations with individuals who hold different views ($M = 5.63$). Scores for valuing interactions with people who have strong views that are different ($M = 5.10$), being comfortable expressing views when others disagree ($M = 5.08$), being comfortable accepting criticism of one's views ($M = 5.05$), interpreting different views charitably and with sensitivity ($M = 5.04$), questioning assumptions when conversing with someone who has different views ($M = 4.95$), and learning the limitations of one's views when conversing with someone who holds different views ($M = 4.75$) were lower. Excluding the reverse-scored question, the lowest scores related to being able to explain why civil discourse is important ($M = 4.53$), being able to explain why civil discourse is difficult ($M = 4.51$), familiarity with civil discourse ($M = 4.47$), the ability to list three arguments made by supporters of civil discourse ($M = 3.52$), and the ability to list three arguments made by critics of civil discourse ($M = 3.02$). A complete summary detailing the pretest means, and standard deviations for each question for the treatment group, control group, and entire sample is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Pretest Statements

Statement	Treatment		Control		Full Sample	
	<i>(n = 217)</i>		<i>(n = 243)</i>		<i>(N = 460)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
7. Civil discourse is a familiar concept to me.	4.29	1.73	4.64	1.63	4.47	1.68
8. I can list 3 arguments made by supporters of civil discourse.	3.38	1.89	3.64	1.93	3.52	1.91

Statement	Treatment		Control		Full Sample	
	<i>(n = 217)</i>		<i>(n = 243)</i>		<i>(N = 460)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
9. I can list 3 arguments made by critics of civil discourse.	2.86	1.74	3.16	1.78	3.02	1.77
10. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is important.	4.30	1.98	4.74	1.98	4.53	1.89
11. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is difficult.	4.37	1.99	4.63	1.86	4.51	1.93
12. It is important for the University Honors Program to provide opportunities for me to have conversations with people who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.67	1.34	5.59	1.40	5.63	1.38
13. It is important for the University Honors Program to sponsor events that expose students to all types of speech even if they may find it offensive or biased.	5.51	1.47	5.28	1.63	5.39	1.56
14. It is important for me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.53	1.34	5.55	1.36	5.54	1.35

Statement	Treatment		Control		Full Sample	
	(n = 217)		(n = 243)		(N = 460)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
15. It is important for me to participate in events that expose me to all types of speech even if I find it offensive or biased.	5.40	1.37	5.11	1.53	5.25	1.46
16. I have the skills that allow me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.25	1.43	5.33	1.27	5.30	1.35
17. I am comfortable communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.01	1.54	5.27	1.40	5.15	1.47
18. I am comfortable accepting criticism of my views.	5.07	1.49	5.02	1.40	5.05	1.44
19. I am comfortable expressing how my personal experiences have impacted my views.	5.62	1.18	5.65	1.08	5.64	1.13
20. I am comfortable expressing my opinions when others disagree.	5.16	1.47	5.01	1.41	5.08	1.44
21. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to understand the arguments they make.	5.62	1.24	5.65	1.16	5.64	1.20

Statement	Treatment		Control		Full Sample	
	<i>(n = 217)</i>		<i>(n = 243)</i>		<i>(N = 460)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
22. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I listen to them carefully.	5.53	1.24	5.56	1.20	5.55	1.22
23. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I question my assumptions and consider their point of view.	4.99	1.35	4.92	1.40	4.95	1.37
24. I am willing to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.65	1.22	5.70	1.24	5.68	1.23
25. I like reading well thought-out information and arguments supporting viewpoints that are different than mine.	5.10	1.54	5.26	1.41	5.18	1.48
26. I find listening to opposing views informative.	5.38	1.43	5.33	1.38	5.35	1.40
27. I value interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to mine.	5.04	1.48	5.14	1.47	5.10	1.47
28. I interpret claims made by people with strong views that are different than mine	4.99	1.42	5.09	1.34	5.04	1.38

Statement	Treatment		Control		Full Sample	
	<i>(n = 217)</i>		<i>(n = 243)</i>		<i>(N = 460)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
charitably and with sensitivity to their ideas and experiences.						
29. I am generally curious to find out why other people have different opinions than I do.	5.67	1.31	5.68	1.28	5.67	1.29
30. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to persuade them to endorse my views.	3.84	1.57	3.89	1.53	3.87	1.55
31. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I learn the limitations of my views.	4.78	1.40	4.72	1.33	4.75	1.36
32. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues in the classroom.	5.50	1.37	5.42	1.44	5.46	1.40
33. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial campus issues.	5.57	1.28	5.42	1.32	5.49	1.30
34. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial national issues	5.65	1.34	5.49	1.44	5.56	1.40

Statement	Treatment		Control		Full Sample	
	<i>(n = 217)</i>		<i>(n = 243)</i>		<i>(N = 460)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
35. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues outside the classroom.	5.63	1.35	5.51	1.37	5.57	1.36

Baseline Comparison

The mean pretest scores for each category and the total score were analyzed with independent samples *t*-tests to determine if there were differences between the treatment and control groups at the beginning of the semester. For the Knowledge category, the mean pretest score of the control group ($M = 20.80, SD = 7.58$) was significantly higher ($p < .05$) than the mean pretest score for the treatment group ($M = 19.20, SD = 7.84$). There were no significant differences in the other categories or the total score. For more information, see Table 5.

Table 5

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Pretest Category Scores and Total Score by Group

Category	Treatment ($n = 217$)		Control ($n = 243$)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Knowledge	19.20	7.84	20.80	7.58	-2.22	.03*
Importance	22.11	4.62	21.53	5.07	1.28	.20
Skills	42.26	8.32	42.42	7.41	-0.22	.83
Values	40.45	7.71	40.81	7.45	-0.50	.62
Impact	22.35	4.89	21.84	5.15	1.08	.28
Total	146.37	26.01	147.40	25.28	-0.43	.67

* $p < .05$.

Independent samples *t*-tests were also used to determine if there were differences based on sex at the beginning of the semester. There was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores for males and females in every category and for the total score. The score for males

($M = 20.87$, $SD = 8.06$) in the Knowledge category was higher ($p < .05$) than the score for females ($M = 19.40$, $SD = 7.42$). The score for males ($M = 22.33$, $SD = 4.89$) in the Importance category was higher ($p < .05$) than the score for females ($M = 21.39$, $SD = 4.82$). The score for males ($M = 43.47$, $SD = 7.33$) in the Skills category was higher ($p < .01$) than the score for females ($M = 41.46$, $SD = 8.12$). The score for males in the Values category ($M = 41.47$, $SD = 7.18$) was higher ($p < .05$) than the score for females ($M = 39.99$, $SD = 7.81$). The score for males ($M = 22.73$, $SD = 4.72$) in the Impact category was higher ($p < .05$) than the score for females ($M = 21.57$, $SD = 5.21$). The Total score for males ($M = 150.87$, $SD = 24.03$) was higher ($p < .01$) than the score for females ($M = 143.81$, $SD = 26.41$). A summary of the results is available in Table 6.

Table 6

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Pretest Category Scores and Total Score by Sex

Category	Males ($n = 202$)		Females ($n = 258$)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Knowledge	20.87	8.06	19.40	7.42	2.03	.04*
Importance	22.33	4.89	21.39	4.82	2.06	.04*
Skills	43.47	7.33	41.46	8.12	2.74	<.01**
Values	41.47	7.18	39.99	7.81	2.09	.04*
Impact	22.73	4.72	21.57	5.21	2.48	.01*
Total	150.87	24.03	143.81	26.41	2.96	<.01**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if there were differences between first-generation and non-first-generation college students at the beginning of the semester. In the Importance category, the mean pretest score of the non-first-generation students ($M = 21.98, SD = 4.86$) was significantly higher ($p < .05$) than the mean pretest score for first-generation students ($M = 20.62, SD = 4.83$). In the Impact category, the mean pretest score of the non-first-generation students ($M = 22.31, SD = 4.93$) was significantly higher ($p < .01$) than the mean pretest score for the first-generation students ($M = 20.35, SD = 5.39$). More information is available in Table 7.

Table 7

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Pretest Category Scores and Total Scores by College Generation

Category	First ($n = 58$)		Not First ($n = 400$)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Knowledge	19.47	7.76	20.12	7.75	-0.60	.54
Importance	20.62	4.83	21.98	4.86	-1.99	.05*
Skills	41.41	8.91	42.48	7.68	-0.97	.33
Values	40.24	8.19	40.68	7.49	-0.41	.68
Impact	20.35	5.39	22.31	4.93	-2.80	<.01**
Total	142.09	27.11	147.57	25.40	-1.52	.13

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean pretest category scores and total scores for participants based on the characteristics of their high school community. No statistically significant differences were detected.

A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to compare the mean pretest category scores and total scores for participants based on race. The analysis was limited to participants who indicated their race as White, Black, Asian, or more than one since there were few participants in the other categories. This analysis detected statistically significant differences in the Knowledge ($F(3, 435) = 3.99, p = .008$), Importance ($F(3, 435) = 3.68, p = .012$), and Impact categories ($F(3, 435) = 5.11, p = .002$) categories. There was also a difference in the Total score ($F(3, 435) = 4.346, p = .005$).

Tukey's HSD test showed a significant difference between White students ($M = 20.25, SD = 7.58$) and students indicating more than one race ($M = 16.93, SD = 8.17$) in the Knowledge category. A difference in the category was detected for Asian students ($M = 21.29, SD = 7.71$) and students indicating more than one race ($M = 16.93, SD = 8.17$). In the Importance category, there was a significant difference between White students ($M = 22.08, SD = 4.54$) and Black students ($M = 19.33, SD = 6.49$) and between Asian students ($M = 22.37, SD = 4.89$) and Black students ($M = 19.33, SD = 6.49$). There was a statistically significant difference between White students ($M = 22.53, SD = 4.76$) and students indicating more than one race ($M = 19.92, SD = 4.98$) in the Impact category. Finally, there was a statistically significant difference in the Total score for Asian students ($M = 151.67, SD = 26.36$) and Black students ($M = 136.08, SD = 27.68$) and between Asian students ($M = 151.67, SD = 26.36$) and students indicating more than one race ($M = 137.83, SD = 26.05$).

Major Findings

Several tests were conducted to detect differences between student responses at the beginning and end of the semester. Paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare pretest and posttest results for students in the treatment and control sections of the course. Additionally, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare posttest scores of the two sections. Independent samples *t*-tests were also used to compare the mean difference between the pretest and posttest scores for each survey and category statement for students in the treatment and control sections. The following section provides a detailed overview of the major findings in each category, a summary of these findings, and an overview of the subgroup analyses that were conducted to explore the impact of demographic and attribute variables.

Knowledge Category

The Knowledge category included five statements. Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with statements about their familiarity with civil discourse, their ability to list three arguments made by supporters of civil discourse, their ability to list three arguments made by critics of civil discourse, their ability to explain to a peer why civil discourse is important, and their ability to explain to a peer why it is difficult.

A paired samples *t*-test of the treatment group detected a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$) between the mean pretest and posttest category scores. The mean score at the end of the semester ($M = 27.66$, $SD = 5.44$) was higher than it was at the beginning of the semester ($M = 19.20$, $SD = 7.84$). The mean posttest scores for each statement in the category were higher at the end of the semester, and paired samples *t*-tests detected statistically significant differences ($p < .001$) for each statement. Data related to these findings are presented in Table 8.

Table 8*Paired Sample t-Test Results for Knowledge Category for Treatment Group*

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
7. Civil discourse is a familiar concept to me.	4.29	1.73	5.73	1.11	12.00	<.001***
8. I can list 3 arguments made by supporters of civil discourse.	3.38	1.89	5.36	1.41	14.07	<.001***
9. I can list 3 arguments made by critics of civil discourse.	2.86	1.74	4.92	1.59	14.06	<.001***
10. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is important.	4.30	1.98	5.75	1.24	10.94	<.001***
11. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is difficult.	4.37	1.99	5.89	1.13	11.30	<.001***
Knowledge Total	19.20	7.84	27.66	5.44	15.88	<.001***

n = 217. ****p* < .001.

A paired samples *t*-test of the control group detected statistically a significant ($p < .001$) between the mean pretest and posttest category score. The mean score at the end of the semester was higher ($M = 26.22$, $SD = 5.87$) than the score at the beginning of the semester ($M = 20.80$, $SD = 7.58$). The mean posttest scores for each statement in the category were higher at the end of the semester, and paired samples *t*-tests detected statistically significant differences ($p < .001$) for each statement in the category. Data related to these findings are presented in Table 9.

Table 9*Paired Samples t-Test Results for Knowledge Category for Control Group*

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
7. Civil discourse is a familiar concept to me.	4.64	1.63	5.45	1.29	7.04	<.001***
8. I can list 3 arguments made by supporters of civil discourse.	3.64	1.93	4.99	1.54	10.16	<.001***
9. I can list 3 arguments made by critics of civil discourse.	3.16	1.78	4.67	1.55	11.56	<.001***
10. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is important.	4.74	1.80	5.57	1.25	6.98	<.001***
11. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is difficult.	4.63	1.86	5.54	1.24	7.25	<.001***
Knowledge Total	20.80	7.58	26.22	5.87	10.58	<.001***

n = 243. *** *p* < .001.

Independent samples *t*-tests conducted to compare posttest mean scores for the treatment and control groups for each statement in the category and the category score detected a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) and higher category score for the treatment group ($M = 27.66$, $SD = 5.44$) compared to the control group ($M = 26.22$, $SD = 5.87$). Statistically significant differences were detected for the statements that asked students to report their familiarity with civil discourse, their ability to list three arguments made by supporters of civil

discourse, and their ability to explain to a peer why civil discourse is difficult. For each of these statements, the scores of the treatment group were higher than the scores of the control group.

While the mean posttest scores for students in the treatment group were higher than the scores of the control group for the other questions in the category, statistical significance was not met for these statements. The complete results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Independent Samples t-Tests Results for Posttest Scores for Knowledge Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
7. Civil discourse is a familiar concept to me.	5.73	1.11	5.45	1.28	2.49	.01*
8. I can list 3 arguments made by supporters of civil discourse.	5.36	1.41	4.99	1.54	2.68	.01*
9. I can list 3 arguments made by critics of civil discourse.	4.92	1.59	4.67	1.55	1.74	.08
10. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is important.	5.75	1.24	5.57	1.25	1.58	.06
11. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is difficult.	5.89	1.13	5.54	1.24	3.15	<.001***
Knowledge Total	27.66	5.44	26.22	5.87	2.72	.01*

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). **p* < .05, *** *p* < .001

The final comparison used independent samples *t*-tests to investigate the impact of the intervention. The mean difference between the pretest and posttest scores was calculated for each statement in the category and the category score. Statistically significant differences were detected for each statement in the category and the category score. Complete details are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Mean Difference Scores Between Pretest and Posttest for Knowledge Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
7. Civil discourse							
is a familiar concept to me.	1.44	1.77	.81	1.81	.63	3.78	<.001***
8. I can list 3 arguments made by supporters of civil discourse.	1.98	2.07	1.35	2.07	.63	3.24	.001**
9. I can list 3 arguments made by critics of civil discourse.	2.06	2.16	1.51	2.04	.55	2.83	.005**

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
10. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is important.	1.45	1.95	.83	1.85	.62	3.50	<.001***
11. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is difficult.	1.53	1.99	.91	1.96	.62	3.32	<.001***
Knowledge Total	8.46	7.85	5.42	7.98	3.04	4.11	<.001***

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Importance Category

The Importance category included four statements. Students were asked to indicate to what extent they disagreed or agreed that it is important for the University Honors Program to offer them opportunities to have conversations with people with strong views that differ from theirs. They were asked to consider if it is important for the University Honors Program to sponsor events that expose students to all types of speech, even if they find it offensive or biased. Additionally, they were prompted to reflect on the importance of engaging in conversations with people who hold strong views different than theirs and whether they thought it is important for

them to participate in events that expose them to all types of speech, even if they find it offensive.

A paired samples *t*-test of the treatment group detected a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$) for the Importance category score with a higher score at the end of the semester ($M = 23.17, SD = 4.23$) compared to the beginning of the semester ($M = 22.11, SD = 4.62$). The scores for all four statements in the category were higher at the end of the semester. Paired samples *t*-tests detected statistically significant differences between the scores at the beginning and end of the semester for three of the four statements in the category. The complete results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12

Paired Samples t-Test Results for Importance Category for Treatment Group

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
12. It is important for the University Honors Program to provide opportunities for me to have conversations with people who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.67	1.34	5.86	1.22	1.92	.06
13. It is important for the University Honors Program to	5.51	1.47	5.85	1.13	3.49	<.001***

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
sponsor events that expose students to all types of speech even if they may find it offensive or biased.						
14. It is important for me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.53	1.34	5.74	1.21	2.27	.02*
15. It is important for me to participate in events that expose me to all types of speech even if I find it offensive or biased.	5.40	1.37	5.71	1.27	3.26	.001**
Importance Total	22.11	4.62	23.17	4.23	3.51	<.001***

n = 217. **p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

A paired samples *t*-test of the control group detected a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$) for the Importance category score with a higher mean score at the end of the semester ($M = 22.61$, $SD = 4.09$) compared to the beginning of the semester ($M = 21.53$, $SD = 5.07$). The mean scores for all four statements were higher at the end of the semester, and paired samples *t*-tests detected statistically significant differences for the two statements that refer to events that expose students to all types of speech, even if they find it offensive. Data related to these findings are presented in Table 13.

Table 13*Paired Samples t-Test Results for Importance Category for Control Group*

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
12. It is important for the University Honors Program to provide opportunities for me to have conversations with people who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.59	1.40	5.73	1.21	1.34	.18
13. It is important for the University Honors Program to sponsor events that expose students to all types of speech even if they may find it offensive or biased.	5.28	1.63	5.63	1.22	3.26	.001**
14. It is important for me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.55	1.36	5.72	1.16	1.84	.07

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
15. It is important for me to participate in events that expose me to all types of speech even if I find it offensive or biased.	5.11	1.53	5.53	1.19	4.21	<.001***
Importance Total	21.53	5.07	22.61	4.09	3.23	.001**

$n = 243$. ** $p < .01$. $p < .001$ ***

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare posttest mean scores for the treatment and control groups for each statement in the category and the category score. No statistically significant difference was detected in the Importance category score. A statistically significant difference was detected for one of the four statements. Specifically, a difference ($p < .05$) was detected for the question that asked students to provide their opinion about whether it is important for the University Honors Program to sponsor events that expose students to all types of speech, even if they may find it offensive or biased. For this statement, the mean score for the treatment group ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.13$) was higher than the mean score for the control group ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.22$). The complete results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Posttest Scores Importance Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
12. It is important for the University Honors Program to provide opportunities for me to have conversations with people who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.86	1.22	5.73	1.21	1.13	.26
13. It is important for the University Honors Program to sponsor events that expose students to all types of speech even if they may find it offensive or biased.	5.86	1.13	5.63	1.22	2.07	.04*
14. It is important for me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.74	1.21	5.72	1.16	.155	.88

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
15. It is important for me to participate in events that expose me to all types of speech even if I find it offensive or biased.	5.71	1.27	5.53	1.19	.156	.12
Importance Total	23.17	4.23	22.61	4.09	1.42	.16

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). **p* < .05.

The final comparison used independent samples *t*-tests to investigate the impact of the intervention. The mean difference scores for the treatment and control groups were compared for each statement in the category and the total score in the category.- No statistically significant differences were detected for the category scores or any statements in the category.

Table 15

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Mean Difference Scores Between Pretest and Posttest for Importance Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
12. It is important for the University Honors Program to provide opportunities for me to have conversations with people who hold strong views that are different than mine.	0.19	1.42	0.14	1.58	0.05	0.35	.73
13. It is important for the University Honors Program to sponsor events that expose students to all types of speech	0.35	1.50	0.35	1.69	0	0.01	.995

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>			
even if they may find it offensive or biased.								
14. It is important for me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	0.21	1.35	0.17	1.46	0.04	0.26	.79	
15. It is important for me to participate in events that expose me to all types of speech even if I find it offensive or biased.	0.31	1.39	0.42	1.55	-0.11	-0.80	.42	
Importance Total	1.06	4.43	1.09	5.22	-0.03	-0.06	.95	

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243).

Skills Category

The Skills category included eight statements. Students were asked to indicate to what extent they disagreed or agreed they have the skills that allow them to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views different than theirs, they are comfortable communicating with such individuals, they are comfortable accepting criticism of their views, they are comfortable expressing how their experiences have impacted their views, they are comfortable expressing their opinions when others disagree, they try to understand the arguments made by people who have different views than theirs, they listen carefully when conversing with someone whose arguments are different than theirs, and they question their assumptions and consider the other person's point of view when they converse with someone whose views differ from theirs.

A paired samples *t*-test of the treatment group detected a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$) between the mean pretest and posttest Skills category scores. Specifically, the test detected a higher mean Skills category score at the end of the semester ($M = 45.73, SD = 7.21$) compared to the beginning of the semester ($M = 42.26, SD = 8.32$). Paired samples *t*-tests also detected statistically significant differences and higher scores for each statement in the category. Data related to these findings are presented in Table 16

Table 16*Paired Samples t-Test Results for Skills Category for Treatment Group*

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
16. I have the skills that allow me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.25	1.43	5.78	1.13	5.64	<.001***
17. I am comfortable communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.01	1.54	5.56	1.29	5.48	<.001***
18. I am comfortable accepting criticism of my views.	5.07	1.49	5.60	1.15	5.65	<.001***
19. I am comfortable expressing how my personal experiences have impacted my views.	5.62	1.18	5.85	1.09	2.49	.01*
20. I am comfortable expressing my opinions when others disagree.	5.16	1.47	5.53	1.22	4.00	<.001***
21. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to	5.62	1.24	5.94	1.04	3.75	<.001***

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
understand the arguments they make.						
22. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I listen to them carefully.	5.53	1.24	5.93	1.00	4.81	<.001***
23. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I question my assumptions and consider their point of view.	4.99	1.35	5.55	1.21	6.23	<.001***
Skills Total	42.26	8.32	45.73	7.21	6.98	<.001***

$n = 217$. $p < .05^*$, $p < .001^{***}$.

A paired samples *t*-test of the control group detected a statistically significant ($p < .001$) difference for the Skills category scores at the end of the semester ($M = 44.43$, $SD = 7.33$) compared to the beginning of the semester ($M = 42.42$, $SD = 7.41$). Paired samples *t*-tests also detected higher scores and statistically significant differences for five of the eight statements in the category. Statistically significant differences were found for the statements focused on being comfortable communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than theirs, being comfortable expressing how the student's personal experiences have impacted their views,

and their effort to understand the arguments made by those with differing views during conversations with them. While the posttest scores were higher for the remaining statements in the category, statistically significant differences were not detected. Data related to these findings are presented in Table 17.

Table 17

Paired Samples t-Test Results for Skills Category for Control Group

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
16. I have the skills that allow me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.33	1.27	5.66	1.11	3.69	<.001***
17. I am comfortable communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.27	1.40	5.41	1.24	1.41	.16
18. I am comfortable accepting criticism of my views.	5.02	1.40	5.43	1.24	4.79	<.001***
19. I am comfortable expressing how my personal experiences have impacted my views.	5.65	1.08	5.73	1.10	0.92	.36

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
20. I am comfortable expressing my opinions when others disagree.	5.01	1.41	5.28	1.27	2.89	.004**
21. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to understand the arguments they make.	5.65	1.16	5.76	1.11	1.31	.19
22. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I listen to them carefully.	5.56	1.20	5.81	1.07	2.92	.004**
23. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I question my assumptions and consider their point of view.	4.92	1.40	5.35	1.25	5.03	<.001***
Skills Total	42.42	7.41	44.43	7.33	4.05	<.001***

n = 243. ***p* < .01, *p* < .001***.

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare posttest mean scores for the treatment and control groups for each statement in the category and the category score. An

independent samples t-test did not detect a statistically significant difference for the Skills category scores of the treatment group ($M = 45.73$, $SD = 7.21$) and the control group ($M = 44.43$, $SD = 7.33$). An independent samples t -test detected a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) for one of the statements in the category. The mean score for the treatment group ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.22$) was higher than the mean score for the control group ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.27$) for the statement that asked students to assess if they are comfortable expressing their views when others disagree. Table 18 includes a complete summary.

Table 18

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Posttest Scores for Skills Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
16. I have the skills that allow me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.78	1.13	5.66	1.11	1.16	.25
17. I am comfortable communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.56	1.29	5.41	1.24	1.25	.20

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
18. I am comfortable accepting criticism of my views.	5.60	1.15	5.43	1.24	1.53	.13
19. I am comfortable expressing how my personal experiences have impacted my views.	5.85	1.09	5.73	1.10	1.13	.26
20. I am comfortable expressing my opinions when others disagree.	5.53	1.22	5.28	1.27	2.18	.03*
21. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to understand the arguments they make.	5.94	1.04	5.76	1.11	1.83	.07
22. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I listen to them carefully.	5.93	1.00	5.81	1.07	1.24	.22

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
23. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I question my assumptions and consider their point of view.	5.55	1.21	5.35	1.25	1.69	.09
Skills Total	45.73	7.21	44.43	7.33	1.93	.06

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). **p* < .05.

The final analysis of the category used independent samples *t*-tests to examine the intervention's impact. The mean difference scores for the treatment and control groups were compared for each question in the category and the total score in the category. The mean difference for the category score was higher for the treatment group (*M* = 3.48, *SD* = 7.33) than the control group (*M* = 2.01, *SD* = 7.74). The result was statistically significant (*p* < .05). A higher mean difference score and a statistically significant difference (*p* < .01) were detected for the treatment group for the statement that asked students to assess how comfortable they are communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than theirs. The mean difference scores were higher for the treatment group for the remaining statements in the category, but statistically significant differences were not detected. Complete details are presented in Table 19.

Table 19

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Mean Difference Scores Between Pretest and Posttest for Skills Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>		
16. I have the skills that allow me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	.53	1.39	.33	1.40	.20	1.55	.12
17. I am comfortable communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	.54	1.46	.14	1.55	.40	2.87	.004**

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>		
18. I am comfortable accepting criticism of my views.	.53	1.37	.41	1.33	.12	.94	.35
19. I am comfortable expressing how my personal experiences have impacted my views.	.23	1.37	.08	1.32	.15	1.21	.22
20. I am comfortable expressing my opinions when others disagree.	.37	1.38	.27	1.44	.10	.80	.42
21. When I have a conversation	.32	1.25	.11	1.27	.22	1.79	.08

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>		
with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to understand the arguments they make.							
22. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I listen to them carefully.	.40	1.21	.24	1.30	.16	1.31	.19
23. When I have a conversation with someone	.56	1.32	.44	1.35	.12	.97	.17

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
who holds views different than mine, I question my assumptions and consider their point of view.							
Skills Total	3.48	7.33	2.01	7.74	1.47	2.08	.04*

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). **p* < .05, ** *p* < .01.

Values Category

The Values category included eight statements. Students were asked to indicate to what extent they disagreed or agreed they are willing to have conversations with individuals who have strong views that are different than their own, they like reading well-thought-out information and arguments supporting viewpoints different than their own, they find listening to opposing views informative, and they value interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to theirs. They were also asked to indicate to what extent they disagreed or agreed they interpret claims made by people with strong views that are different than theirs charitably and with sensitivity, they are genuinely curious to learn why people have opinions different than theirs, they try to

persuade people with different views to accept their views during conversations, and they learn the limitations of their views when they have a conversation with someone who has different views.

A paired samples *t*-test of the treatment group detected statistically a significant ($p < .001$) difference for the Values category score at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester. The mean total score at the end of the semester was higher ($M = 42.93, SD = 6.51$) than the total score at the beginning of the semester ($M = 40.45, SD = 7.71$). Except for the statement that was reverse-scored, the mean posttest scores for each statement in the category were higher at the end of the semester, and paired samples *t*-tests also detected statistically significant differences for each statement in the category. Data related to these findings are presented in Table 20.

Table 20

Paired Samples t-Test Results for Values Category for Treatment Group

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
24. I am willing to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.65	1.22	5.85	1.15	2.29	.02*
25. I like reading well thought-out information and arguments	5.10	1.54	5.66	1.24	5.41	<.001***

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
supporting viewpoints that are different than mine.						
26. I find listening to opposing views informative.	5.38	1.43	5.71	1.21	3.88	<.001***
27. I value interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to mine.	5.04	1.48	5.52	1.23	5.29	<.001***
28. I interpret claims made by people with strong views that are different than mine charitably and with sensitivity to their ideas and experiences.	4.99	1.42	5.65	1.18	7.35	<.001***
29. I am generally curious to find out why other people have different opinions than I do.	5.67	1.31	5.94	1.16	3.24	.001**
30. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to persuade them to endorse my views.	3.84	1.57	3.21	1.55	-5.13	<.001***

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
31. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I learn the limitations of my views.	4.78	1.40	5.39	1.26	6.51	<.001***
Values Total	40.45	7.71	42.93	6.51	5.97	<.001***

$n = 217$. $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$.

A paired samples *t*-test of the control group detected statistically a significant ($p < .01$) difference for the Values category scores at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester. The mean category score at the end of the semester was higher ($M = 42.15$, $SD = 6.60$) than the total mean score at the beginning of the semester ($M = 40.81$, $SD = 7.45$). Except for the question that was reverse-scored, the mean posttest scores for each statement in the category were higher at the end of the semester, and paired samples *t*-tests also detected statistically significant differences for seven of the eight statements in the category. Complete information is available in Table 21.

Table 21*Paired Samples t-Test Results for Values Category for Control Group*

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
24. I am willing to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.70	1.24	5.81	1.07	1.24	.22
25. I like reading well thought-out information and arguments supporting viewpoints that are different than mine.	5.26	1.41	5.50	1.32	2.37	.02*
26. I find listening to opposing views informative.	5.33	1.38	5.66	1.25	3.82	<.001***
27. I value interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to mine.	5.14	1.47	5.36	1.30	2.33	.02*
28. I interpret claims made by people with strong views that are different than mine charitably and with sensitivity to their ideas and experiences.	5.09	1.34	5.43	1.11	4.08	<.001***

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
29. I am generally curious to find out why other people have different opinions than I do.	5.68	1.28	5.88	1.17	2.22	.03*
30. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to persuade them to endorse my views.	3.89	1.53	3.26	1.48	.590	<.001***
31. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I learn the limitations of my views.	4.72	1.33	5.26	1.88	6.38	<.001***
Values Total	40.81	7.45	42.15	6.60	3.08	.002**

n = 243. **p* < .05 ***p* < .01, *p* < .001***

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare posttest mean scores for the treatment and control groups for each statement in the category and the category score. No statistical difference was detected for the category score. There was a statistically significant difference for the statement that asked students to what extent they disagree or agree they interpret arguments made by people with strong views different than theirs charitably and with sensitivity. For this statement, the score for the treatment group (*M* = 5.65, *SD* = 1.18) was

higher than the score for the control group ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.11$). The mean posttest scores for students in the treatment group were higher than the scores of the control group for six of the other questions in the category, but statistical significance was not met for these statements. The remaining question was reverse-scored. The mean posttest score for this question was lower for the treatment group than the control group, but statistical significance was not met for the statement. The complete results are presented in Table 22.

Table 22

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Posttest Scores for Values Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
24. I am willing to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	5.85	1.15	5.81	1.07	.44	.66
25. I like reading well thought-out information and arguments supporting viewpoints that are different than mine.	5.66	1.24	5.50	1.32	1.35	.18
26. I find listening to opposing views informative.	5.71	1.21	5.66	1.25	.45	.66

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
27. I value interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to mine.	5.52	1.23	5.36	1.30	1.38	.17
28. I interpret claims made by people with strong views that are different than mine charitably and with sensitivity to their ideas and experiences.	5.65	1.18	5.43	1.11	2.04	.04*
29. I am generally curious to find out why other people have different opinions than I do.	5.94	1.16	5.88	1.17	.51	.61
30. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to persuade them to endorse my views.	3.21	1.55	3.26	1.48	-.36	.72
31. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I learn the limitations of my views.	5.39	1.26	5.26	1.88	1.15	.25

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Values Total	42.93	6.51	42.15	6.60	1.27	.20

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). **p* < .05.

The final comparison used independent samples *t*-tests to investigate the impact of the intervention. The mean difference scores for the treatment and control groups were compared for each statement in the category and the category score. A statistically significant difference was not detected for the Total score in the category. Statistically significant differences were detected for three statements in the category. Specifically, there were differences in the statements that focused on reading well-thought-out arguments supporting views different than mine, valuing interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to mine, and interpreting claims made by people with strong views different than mine charitably and with sensitivity. The mean difference score for the treatment group was higher for each of these statements. The mean difference score for the treatment group was higher for all but one of the remaining statements in the category, but statistically significant differences were not detected for any of them. Complete details are presented in Table 23.

Table 23

Independent Samples t-Test Results of Mean Difference Scores Between Pretest and Posttest for Values Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
24. I am willing to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.	.20	1.27	.11	1.34	.09	.74	.46
25. I like reading well thought-out information and arguments supporting viewpoints that are different than mine.	.56	1.53	.24	1.57	.32	2.23	.03*

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
26. I find listening to opposing views informative.	.33	1.24	.33	1.34	0	-.017	.99
27. I value interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to mine.	.48	1.33	.21	1.43	.27	2.05	.04*
28. I interpret claims made by people with strong views that are different than mine charitably and with sensitivity to their ideas and experiences.	.66	1.33	.35	1.32	.31	2.57	.01*
29. I am generally curious to find out	.27	1.21	.20	1.42	.07	.53	.60

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
why other people have different opinions than I do.							
30. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to persuade them to endorse my views.	-.63	1.80	-.63	1.66	0	.02	.99
31. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I learn the limitations of my views.	.61	1.38	.54	1.32	.07	.55	.58
Values Total	2.48	6.12	1.35	6.82	1.13	1.87	.06

$N = 460$ (Treatment $n = 217$; Control $n = 243$). $*p < .05$.

Impact Category

The Impact category included four statements. Students were prompted to indicate to what extent they disagreed or agreed civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues in the classroom, contributes to finding solutions to controversial campus issues, contributes to finding solutions to controversial national issues, and has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues outside of the classroom. The posttest scores were higher for every question in the category and for the category score. A paired samples t -test of the treatment group detected a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$) for the Impact category score at the end of the semester ($M = 23.36$, $SD = 4.27$) compared to the beginning of the semester ($M = 22.35$, $SD = 4.89$). Paired samples t -tests also detected statistically significant differences for three of the four statements in the category. Additional information is available in Table 24.

Table 24*Paired Samples t-Test Results for Impact Category for Treatment Group*

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
32. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues in the classroom.	5.50	1.37	5.86	1.07	3.77	<.001***
33. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial campus issues.	5.57	1.28	5.77	1.20	2.27	.024*
34. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial national issues.	5.65	1.34	5.80	1.24	1.73	.085
35. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues outside the classroom.	5.63	1.35	5.93	1.13	3.52	<.001**
Impact Total	22.35	4.89	23.36	4.27	3.34	<.001***

n = 217. **p* < .05, *** *p* < .001

A paired samples *t*-test of the control group did not detect a statistically significant difference for the Impact category scores at the end of the semester compared to the score at the beginning of the semester. In addition, paired samples *t*-tests did not detect statistically significant differences in any of the four statements in the category at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester. While statistically significant differences were not detected, the posttest scores were higher for every question in the category and the total score in the category. A complete summary is available in Table 25.

Table 25*Paired Samples t-Test Results for Impact Category for Control Group*

Statement	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
32. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues in the classroom.	5.42	1.44	5.47	1.24	.51	.61
33. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial campus issues.	5.42	1.32	5.55	1.18	1.36	.17
34. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial national issues.	5.49	1.44	5.64	1.25	1.69	.09
35. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues outside the classroom.	5.51	1.37	5.67	1.16	1.81	.07
Impact Total	21.84	5.15	22.33	4.31	1.52	.13

n = 243.

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare posttest mean scores for the treatment and control groups for each statement in the category and the total category score. The mean difference scores were higher for the treatment group for every statement in the category and the total score in the category. A statistically significant difference ($p = .01$) was detected between the Impact category score of the treatment group ($M = 23.36, SD = 4.27$) and control group ($M = 22.33, SD = 4.31$). Statistically significant differences indicating higher mean scores for the treatment group were detected for three of the statements in the category. A complete summary is available in Table 26.

Table 26

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Posttest Scores Impact Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
32. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues in the classroom.	5.86	1.07	5.47	1.24	3.56	<.001***
33. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial campus issues.	5.77	1.20	5.55	1.18	2.05	.04*
34. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial national issues	5.80	1.24	5.64	1.25	1.41	.16
35. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues outside the classroom.	5.93	1.13	5.67	1.16	2.39	.02*
Impact Total	23.36	4.27	22.33	4.31	2.58	.01*

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). **p* < .05., ****p* < .001

The final comparison used independent samples *t*-tests to investigate the impact of the intervention. The mean difference scores for the treatment and control groups were compared for each question in the Impact category and the total score for the category. A statistically significant difference favoring the treatment group was detected for the statement that focused on the impact that civil discourse has on classroom conversations about controversial issues. Statistically significant differences were not detected for any of the other statements in the category or the total score in the category, but the mean difference scores for the treatment group were higher for all of them. A complete summary is available in Table 27.

Table 27

Independent Samples t-Test Results Mean of Difference Scores Between Pretest and Posttest for Impact Category for Treatment and Control Groups

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
32. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues in the classroom.	.36	1.40	.05	1.53	.31	2.26	.02*

Statement	Treatment		Control		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<hr/>							
33. Civil discourse							
contributes to							
finding solutions	.20	1.31	.12	1.41	.08	.62	.53
to controversial							
campus issues.							
34. Civil discourse							
contributes to							
finding solutions	.15	1.29	.15	1.40	0	-.00	.99
to controversial							
national issues							
35. Civil discourse							
has a positive							
impact on							
conversations							
about	.30	1.27	.16	1.42	.14	1.11	.27
controversial							
issues outside the							
classroom.							
Impact Total	1.02	4.49	.49	5.01	.53	1.19	.24

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). **p* < .05.

Category Scores and Total Survey Score

A summary of the results of the tests conducted for the category scores and the survey score is presented in Tables 28-31.

Paired samples *t*-tests of the treatment group detected statistically significant increases for all categories and the survey Total score from the pretest to the posttest. A complete summary is available in Table 28.

Table 28

Paired Sample t-Test Results for Category Scores and Total Survey Score for Treatment Group

Category/Total	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Knowledge	19.20	7.84	27.66	5.44	15.87	<.001***
Importance	22.11	4.62	23.17	4.23	3.51	<.001***
Skills	42.26	8.32	45.74	7.21	6.98	<.001***
Values	40.45	7.71	42.93	6.51	5.97	<.001***
Impact	22.35	4.89	23.26	4.27	3.34	<.001***
Total	146.37	26.01	162.85	23.89	10.83	<.001***

n = 217. ****p* < .001.

Paired samples *t*-tests of the control group detected statistically significant increases for the Total survey score and all categories except the Impact category. A complete summary is available in Table 29.

Table 29

Paired Sample t-Test Results for Category Scores and Total Survey Score for Control Group

Category/Total	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Knowledge	20.80	7.58	26.22	5.87	10.58	<.001***
Importance	21.53	5.07	22.61	4.09	3.23	.001**
Skills	42.42	7.41	44.42	7.33	4.05	<.001***
Values	40.81	7.45	42.16	6.60	3.08	.002**
Impact	21.84	5.15	22.33	4.31	1.52	.129
Total	147.40	15.28	157.74	24.09	6.32	<.001***

n = 243. ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Independent samples *t*-tests of the posttest scores detected statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups for the Total survey score and the scores for the Knowledge and Impact categories. No significant differences were detected for the Importance, Skills, and Values categories. category. A complete summary is available in Table 30.

Table 30

Independent Samples t-Tests Results for Posttest for Category Scores and Total Survey Score for Treatment and Control Groups

Category/Total	Treatment		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Knowledge	27.66	5.44	26.22	5.87	2.72	.01*
Importance	23.17	4.23	22.61	4.09	1.42	.16
Skills	45.74	7.21	44.42	7.33	1.93	.06
Values	42.93	6.51	42.16	6.60	1.27	.20
Impact	23.36	4.27	22.33	4.31	2.58	.01*
Total	162.85	23.89	157.74	24.09	2.28	.02*

N = 460 (Treatment *n* = 217; Control *n* = 243). **p* < .05.

Independent samples *t*-tests of the mean difference scores detected significant differences between the treatment and control groups for the Knowledge category, Skills category, and Total survey score. No significant differences were detected for the Importance, Values, and Impact categories. A complete summary is available in Table 31.

Table 31

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Mean Difference Scores Between Pretest and Posttest for Category Scores and Total Survey Score for Treatment and Control Groups

Category/Total	Treatment (<i>n</i> =217)		Control (<i>n</i> =243)		Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Knowledge	8.46	7.85	5.42	7.98	3.04	4.11	<.001***
Importance	1.06	4.43	1.09	5.22	-.03	-.06	.95
Skills	3.48	7.33	2.01	7.74	1.47	2.08	.04*
Values	2.48	6.12	1.35	6.82	1.13	1.87	.06
Impact	1.02	4.49	.49	5.01	.53	1.19	.24
Total	16.48	22.42	10.34	25.53	6.14	2.73	.01*

* *p* < .05, *** *p* < .001

Sex, College Generation, Race, and High School Community

Independent samples *t*-tests assuming equal variances were used to determine if there were differences in the total mean score for the categories or the Total survey score based on sex at the end of the semester. No statistically significant differences in the mean scores were detected between males and females for any of the category scores or the total score. A summary of the results is available in Table 32.

Table 32

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Posttest Category Scores and Total Score by Sex

Category	Males (<i>n</i> = 202)		Females (<i>n</i> = 258)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Knowledge	27.08	5.86	26.76	5.60	.60	.55
Importance	22.87	4.41	22.88	3.96	-.01	.99
Skills	44.93	7.71	45.13	6.97	-.29	.77
Values	42.02	6.80	42.92	6.36	-1.45	.15
Impact	22.72	4.62	22.90	4.06	-.46	.65
Total	159.62	25.71	160.57	22.82	-.42	.34

Independent samples *t*-tests were used to determine if there were differences between first-generation and non-first-generation college students at the end of the semester. No statistically significant differences in the mean scores were detected between first-generation and non-first-generation college students for any of the categories or the total score. More information is available in Table 33.

Table 33

Independent Samples t-Test Results for Posttest Category Scores and Total Scores by College Generation

Category	First (<i>n</i> = 58)		Not First (<i>n</i> =400)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Knowledge	26.60	5.68	26.93	5.73	-.41	.69
Importance	22.60	4.46	22.90	4.13	-.50	.62
Skills	46.16	7.17	44.87	7.33	1.25	.21
Values	43.33	6.36	42.40	6.60	-1.01	.31
Impact	22.67	4.47	22.83	4.31	-.26	.80
Total	161.37	24.58	159.92	24.11	.43	.67

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean posttest category scores and total scores for participants based on the population of their high school community. No statistically significant differences were detected. A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to compare the mean posttest category scores and total scores for participants based on race. The analysis was limited to participants who indicated their race as White, Black, Asian, or more than

one since there were few participants in the other categories. No statistically significant differences were detected.

Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the findings presented in this chapter. It details the key results of the baseline assessment conducted at the beginning and the analyses conducted at the end of the semester.

A baseline assessment was conducted at the beginning of the semester to determine differences between the treatment and control groups and to examine differences based on demographic variables or other characteristics. An analysis of the results of surveys completed at the beginning of the semester using independent samples *t*-tests detected a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups in the Knowledge category, where the control group scored higher. Additionally, analysis based on sex showed statistically significant differences in all survey categories and the Total score, with higher scores for males.

A comparison based on whether students were first-generation college students revealed significant differences in the Importance and Impact categories, with non-first-generation students scoring higher. Using ANOVA to examine differences based on race revealed statistically significant differences in the Knowledge category, Importance category, Impact category, and Total score. In the Knowledge category, Tukey's HSD test showed a significant difference between White students and students indicating more than one race and between Asian students and students indicating more than one race. In the Importance category, there was a significant difference between White students and Black students and between Asian students and Black students. There was a statistically significant difference between White students and students indicating more than one race in the Impact category. Finally, there was a statistically

significant difference in the Total score for Asian students and Black students and between Asian students and students indicating more than one race.

Statistical tests conducted at the end of the semester focused on assessing how participation in the Honors Forum affected student perceptions of civil discourse and determining if there were differences between the treatment and control groups for the statements associated with each survey category and the total score for each category. In the Knowledge category, paired samples *t*-tests detected a significant increase in the treatment group's mean scores for each question and the category score from the pretest to the posttest. Similar findings were observed in the control group. Independent samples *t*-tests of the posttest scores for the treatment and control groups revealed that the treatment group had higher posttest scores, with statistically significant differences for most statements and the total Knowledge category score. Further analysis of mean difference scores between pretest and posttest with independent samples *t*-tests detected significant differences between the groups for all statements and the category score. In all cases, the scores for the treatment group were higher.

In the Importance category, the treatment group's posttest scores were higher for all statements and the total category score. Paired samples *t*-tests detected a statistically significant increase in the treatment group's mean scores from pretest to the posttest for three of the four statements in the category and the total score in the category. The control group's posttest scores were higher for each statement in the category and the total score in the category. Statistically significant differences were detected for two statements in the category and the total score in the category. Independent samples *t*-tests of the posttest scores for the treatment group and control group detected a significant difference in the statement related to the importance of sponsoring events exposing students to various speech types, with a higher score for the treatment group.

Analysis of mean difference scores between pretest and posttest with independent samples *t*-tests showed no significant differences between the treatment and control groups for individual statements or the total category score.

In the Skills category, paired samples *t*-tests detected a statistically significant increase in the treatment group's mean scores from pretest to posttest for each statement in the category and the category score. For the control group, there was a statistically significant difference in the total score in the category and five of the eight statements in the category. While statistically significant differences were not detected, the posttest scores were higher for the remaining questions. Independent samples *t*-tests did not detect statistically significant differences in the posttest category scores for the treatment and control groups. For individual statements, a significant difference was detected for the statement related to the comfort level in communicating with individuals holding different views. The score for the treatment group was higher. Analysis of mean difference scores between pretest and posttest using independent samples *t*-tests detected a statistically significant difference in students' comfort level in communicating with individuals holding different views, with a higher score for the treatment group. A statistically significant difference was also detected for the category scores, with a higher score for the treatment group.

In the Values category, paired samples *t*-tests of the treatment group detected statistically significant differences in the category scores and all eight statements in the category. Paired samples *t*-tests of the control group detected statistically significant differences in the category scores and seven of the eight statements in the category. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean posttest scores for the treatment and control groups for each statement and the total score in the category. A statistically significant difference was not

detected for the total score in the category. A statistically significant difference was detected for the statement that addressed treating different views charitably and with sensitivity, with a higher score for the treatment group. Independent samples *t*-tests were used to compare the mean difference scores for the treatment and control groups for each statement in the category and the category score. Statistically for three statements in the category. These statements focused on reading well-thought-out arguments supporting views different than one's own, valuing interactions with individuals who hold strong views opposite to mine, and interpreting claims made by people with different views charitably and with sensitivity. In all these cases, the treatment group scores were higher.

In the Impact category, paired samples *t*-tests of the treatment group detected statistically significant differences for three of the four statements and the total score for the category. Paired samples *t*-tests of the control group did not detect statistically significant differences for any of the statements in the category or for the total score in the category. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare posttest mean scores for the treatment and control groups for each statement in the category and the total category score. A statistically significant difference was detected with a higher score for the Impact category score for the treatment group than the control group. Statistically significant differences were also detected for three of the statements in the category. Independent samples *t*-tests were used to compare the mean difference scores for the treatment and control groups for each question in the category and the category score. No statistically significant difference was detected for the category scores. A statistically significant difference was detected for one of the four statements in the category. In this case, the treatment group improved more.

The analysis of the treatment group conducted at the end of the semester detected higher scores and statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest scores for all categories and the Total score. For the control group, the posttest scores were higher for all categories and the Total score. In addition, statistically significant differences were detected for the control group in all categories except the Impact category. For the comparisons of the posttest scores for the treatment group and control group, statistically significant differences were detected for the Total score, Knowledge category, and Impact category. In all categories, the scores for the treatment group were higher. The analysis of the mean difference scores detected higher scores for the treatment group in all categories except for the Importance category and statistically significant differences in the Knowledge category, Skills category, and Total score.

Following the posttest, tests were conducted to explore differences in posttest scores based on sex, college generation status, high school community, and race. The findings revealed no statistically significant differences in mean scores between males and females, first-generation and non-first-generation college students, students from different high school communities, or racial groups.

Chapter 5: Conclusion, Discussion, Recommendations

This chapter begins with an introduction to the problem addressed, outlines the research questions addressed, explains the data collection process, summarizes key findings, and provides conclusions. The final sections summarize the implications for leadership and provide recommendations for future research.

Problem Statement

The polarization and division visible in the United States today have generated calls for universities to prepare students to engage in robust and honest conversations about challenging issues. Honors programs often serve as laboratories for innovative educational initiatives. The courses and enrichment programming they deliver emphasize conversation, prioritize student engagement, and place students' voices at the core of the learning process (Badenhausen, 2020). On campuses nationwide, these programs provide a welcoming atmosphere and spaces that promote community, conversation, collaboration, and collegiality (West, 2014). The emphasis on student-centered learning and community building provides an ideal setting to introduce students to contemporary approaches designed to promote civil discourse. ThinkerAnalytix (2023), an educational nonprofit organization, has developed an approach that uses argument mapping and systematic empathy to help students develop skills and values that they can use to discuss challenging issues constructively. This project harnessed the tools developed by ThinkerAnalytix to support the design and delivery of co-curricular programming that nurtured civil discourse and the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with it among first-year University Honors Program (UHP) students at North Carolina State University. Furthermore, it evaluated the impact this programming had on them.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess their knowledge of civil discourse?**
2. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess the importance of civil discourse for the UHP and themselves?**
3. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess their command of the skills needed** for civil discourse?
4. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess their commitment to the values** associated with civil discourse?
5. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups **assess the impact of civil discourse?**
6. What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on **the overall assessment of civil discourse** of first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups?
7. What are the differences, if any, in responses to the research questions above among a selected list of **demographic or attribute variables?**

Data Collection

The researcher developed a survey instrument to gather student feedback to answer the project's research questions. The instrument included six demographic and attribute questions and 29 statements about civil discourse. The statements were grouped into five categories. The first category assessed students' knowledge of civil discourse, the second concentrated on the importance of civil discourse, the third focused on skills associated with civil discourse, the fourth addressed values related to civil discourse, and the final set of statements gauged students' assessment of the impact of civil discourse. Students responded to each statement using a rating scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly disagree).

Students in the Honors Forum accessed the survey through Qualtrics and completed it using their laptops or phones during class sessions. Each student completed the survey twice: once at the beginning of the semester (pretest) and again during the final class meeting (posttest). Of the 520 students who participated and provided consent for inclusion in the study, 460 completed all questions on the pretest and posttest surveys. The data analysis focused on the responses from these 460 students.

Summary of Findings

A baseline assessment was conducted at the start of the semester to compare the treatment and control groups and to explore differences based on additional factors. Initial analysis using independent samples *t*-tests found a significant difference in Knowledge scores, favoring the control group. Sex-based analyses revealed significant differences in all survey categories, with males scoring higher. College generation analysis detected differences in Importance and Impact scores, favoring non-first-generation students. ANOVA analyses based on race uncovered significant differences in Knowledge, Importance, Impact, and Total scores.

Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between various racial groups across different categories, highlighting differences in perceptions about civil discourse.

Statistical tests conducted at the end of the semester focused on investigating differences between the treatment and control groups for each survey category and overall survey score. The analysis of the treatment group detected higher scores and statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest scores for all categories and the Total score. For the control group, the posttest scores were higher for the Total score and for all categories. In addition, statistically significant differences were detected for all categories except the Impact category. Comparisons of the posttest scores for the treatment group and control group detected higher scores for the treatment group in all categories and for the Total score. Statistically significant differences were detected for the Total score, Knowledge category, and Impact category. The analysis of the mean difference scores detected higher scores for the treatment group in all categories except for the Importance category and statistically significant differences in the Knowledge category, Skills category, and Total score.

In contrast to the pretest results, analyses conducted at the end of the semester based on sex, college generation status, high school community, and race revealed no statistically significant differences in mean scores.

Conclusions

The data collected and analyzed in this study are sufficient to support the following conclusions:

What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups assess their knowledge of civil discourse?

Co-curricular programming delivered through the Honors Forum significantly affected how students assessed their knowledge of civil discourse, with a larger impact on students in the treatment group. Posttest mean scores were higher for both groups for all statements in the category and the category score. Comparisons of the pretest and posttest scores of students in the treatment group detected statistically significant differences for each statement in the category and the category score. This was also the case for the control group. Analysis of the posttest scores for the treatment group and control group detected statistically significant differences and higher scores for the treatment group for statements focused on familiarity with civil discourse, the ability to list three statements made by supporters of civil discourse, and the ability to explain why civil discourse is difficult. A statistically significant difference was also detected for the category scores. The differences in the posttest mean difference scores for each statement in the category and the category score were statistically significant, and the scores were higher for students in the treatment group.

What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups assess the importance of civil discourse for the UHP and themselves?

Co-curricular programming delivered through the Honors Forum significantly affected how students assessed the importance of civil discourse. Posttest means were higher for both groups for all statements in the category and the category score. Comparisons of the pretest and posttest scores of students in the treatment group detected statistically significant differences for three of the four statements in the category and the category score. A statistically significant difference was detected for the control group for two of the four statements and the category score. Analysis of the posttest scores of the treatment group and control group detected a

statistically significant difference and a higher mean score for the treatment group for the statement about the importance of the UHP to sponsoring events that expose students to all types of events, even if they find the speech offensive or biased. No statistically significant differences in the posttest mean difference scores were detected.

What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups assess their command of the skills needed for civil discourse?

Co-curricular programming delivered through the Honors Forum significantly affected how students assessed their command of the skills needed for civil discourse, with a larger impact on students in the treatment group. Posttest means were higher for both groups for all statements in the category and the category score. In the Skills category, paired samples *t*-tests showed a statistically significant improvement in the treatment group's mean scores from pretest to posttest for each statement in the category and the category score. For the control group, there were statistically significant differences in the Total score in the category and five of the eight statements in the category. Statistically significant differences were not detected for the statements that addressed being comfortable communicating with others who hold strong views different than mine, being comfortable expressing how experiences have impacted views, and trying to understand the arguments made by others when engaging those with different views. No statistically significant differences were detected in the posttest category scores for the treatment and control groups. A statistically significant difference was detected for the statement that focused on being comfortable expressing views when others disagree, with a higher score for the treatment group. Analysis of mean difference scores between pretest and posttest detected a statistically significant difference in students' comfort level in communicating with individuals

holding different views, with a higher score for the treatment group. A statistically significant difference was also detected for the category score, with a higher score for the treatment group.

What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups assess their commitment to the values associated with civil discourse?

Co-curricular programming delivered through the Honors Forum significantly affected how students assessed their commitment to the values associated with civil discourse. Posttest means were higher for both groups for seven of the eight statements and the category score. Comparisons of the pretest and posttest scores of students in the treatment group detected statistically significant differences for the eight statements in the category and the category score. A statistically significant difference for the control group was detected for seven of the eight statements and the category score. Analysis of mean difference scores between the pretest and posttest detected statistically significant differences in the statements that focused on reading well-thought-out arguments supporting views different than mine, valuing interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to mine, and interpreting claims made by people with strong views different than mine charitably and with sensitivity. The treatment group scores were higher for each of the statements. No statistically significant difference was detected for the category score.

What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on how first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups assess the impact of civil discourse?

Co-curricular programming delivered through the Honors Forum significantly affected how students assigned to the treatment group assessed the impact of civil discourse. In contrast,

it did not affect how students assigned to the control group assessed the impact of civil discourse. Comparisons of the pretest and posttest scores of the treatment group found statistically significant differences for three of the four statements and the category scores. Conversely, no significant differences were detected in the control group. Comparisons of posttest mean scores for each statement in the category and the category scores revealed a statistically significant and higher category score for the treatment group. Additionally, statistically significant differences and higher scores were detected for the treatment group for the statements addressing the impact of civil discourse on controversial campus issues and its impact on conversations about controversial issues in and outside the classroom. Comparisons of mean difference scores between the treatment group and control groups detected no significant difference in the category score. However, a significant difference was detected for the statement that focused on the impact of civil discourse on conversations about controversial issues in the classroom.

What impact, if any, does co-curricular programming delivered by the UHP have on the overall assessment of civil discourse of first-year students assigned to treatment and control groups?

Co-curricular programming delivered through the Honors Forum significantly affected the overall assessment of civil discourse of students assigned to the treatment group and control group with a larger impact on students in the treatment group. The mean score for the complete survey increased from 146.4 to 162.9 for students in the treatment group and from 147.4 to 157.8 for students in the control group. Paired samples *t*-tests detected statistically significant differences for both groups. Analysis of the posttest total survey scores of the treatment and control groups also detected a statistically significant difference. In addition, an independent samples *t*-test comparing the mean difference scores of the treatment and control groups for the

complete survey detected a statistically significant difference. The score for the treatment group was higher.

What are the differences, if any, in responses to the research questions above among a selected list of demographic or attribute variables?

Co-curricular programming delivered through the Honors Forum impacted differences based on sex. Analyses conducted at the beginning of the semester based on sex detected statistically significant differences between males and females and higher scores for males in all categories and for the Total score. Similar analyses conducted at the end of the semester detected no differences between males and females. Among males, from pretest to posttest, the mean Knowledge score increased from 20.9 to 27.1, the mean Importance score from 22.3 to 22.9, the mean Skills score increased from 43.5 to 44.9, the mean Values score increased from 41.5 to 42.2, the mean Impact score of 22.7 was unchanged, and the mean Total score increased from 150.9 to 159.6. Among females, from pretest to posttest the mean Knowledge score increased from 19.4 to 26.8, the mean Importance score increased score from 21.4 to 22.9, the mean Skills score increased from 41.5 to 45.1, the mean Values score increased from 40.0 to 42.9, the mean Impact score increased from 21.6 to 22.9, and the mean Total score increased from 143.8 to 160.6.

The Honors Forum programming also eliminated differences based on college generation. The pretest comparison of first-generation and non-first-generation college students detected statistically significant differences and higher scores for non-first-generation students in the Impact and Importance categories. No statistically significant differences were detected at the end of the semester. From pretest to posttest, the mean Importance score increased from 22.0 to 22.9, and the mean Impact score increased from 22.3 to 22.8 for non-first-generation students.

From pretest to posttest, the mean Importance score increased from 20.6 to 22.6, and the mean Impact score increased from 20.4 to 22.7 for first-generation students.

The pattern was similar for differences based on race. Analyses conducted at the beginning of the semester based on race detected statistically significant differences between White students and students indicating more than one race in the Knowledge category, Asian students and students indicating more than one race in the Knowledge category, White students and black students in the Importance category, Asian students and Black students in the Importance category, and White students and students indicating more than one race in the Impact category. Statistically significant differences in the Total score were detected for Asian and Black students and for Asian students and students indicating more than one race. No statistically significant differences based on race were detected at the end of the semester.

Discussion

Widespread calls for higher education to address deteriorating public discourse by fostering robust discourse to support democracy and engaged citizenship catalyzed this project. Through the Honors Forum, it responded to the call for universities to shift from refereeing controversies about campus discourse to “hard-wiring into campuses spaces and programs that promote encounters, rather than standing to one side or worse, constructing barriers that keep people apart” (Daniels, 2021, p. 196). This project was also motivated by research detailing concerns that contemporary polarization in the United States is eroding the civic function of higher education and pleas for universities to foster democracy by preparing students to participate in civic life as discerning critical thinkers capable of embracing diverse viewpoints and working constructively with those who hold different ideas (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2021). Additionally, the project was informed by assessments of student opinion about the current state

of campus expression and their aspirations for a more constructive and inclusive environment (Johnson, 2022; Knight Foundation, 2022). Utilizing the Honors Forum, the project aimed to investigate the impact of both traditional and modified versions of the course on student perceptions of civil discourse.

The results of the project are encouraging. They suggest that the standard version of the Honors Forum and the treatment version positively affect student perceptions of civil discourse. The analysis of the treatment group detected higher scores and statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest scores for all categories and the Total survey score. For the control group, the posttest scores were higher for all categories and the Total score. In addition, statistically significant differences were detected for the control group's Total survey score and in all categories except the Impact category. While all the results are encouraging, the increases in student perceptions of their command of the skills and commitment to the values of civil discourse are particularly exciting. This is especially significant considering recent work indicating that students are enthusiastic about discussing controversial issues but that many are uncomfortable offering dissenting views in the classroom because they worry about their peers' reactions (Mounk, 2022; Knight Foundation, 2022; Johnson, 2022). While preliminary and requiring additional work to fully understand the reasons for the changes that occurred during the semester, the subgroup findings are also exciting.

The results suggest that the treatment version of the course is more impactful than the traditional version. Comparisons of the posttest scores for the treatment and control groups detected statistically significant differences for the Total score, Knowledge category, and Impact category. Scores for the treatment group were higher. Statistically significant differences were not detected in the Skills and Values categories, but statistically significant differences were

detected for several questions in the categories. Specifically, there were statistically significant differences, with higher scores for the treatment group for the statements that asked students to assess how comfortable they are communicating with individuals with strong views different from theirs and whether they interpret claims made by those with different views charitably and with sensitivity.

Comparisons to investigate the effect of the intervention used independent samples *t*-tests to compare the category mean difference scores for treatment and control groups. The mean difference scores were higher for the treatment group in all categories except for the Importance category. In addition, statistically significant differences were detected in the Knowledge category, Skills category, and Total score. Similar comparisons were conducted for each instrument statement. Statistically significant differences with higher scores for the treatment group were detected for all questions in the Knowledge category. Statistically significant differences with higher scores for the treatment group were also detected for the statements that asked students to assess how comfortable they are communicating with individuals with strong views different than theirs, whether they like reading well-thought-out information and arguments supporting viewpoints different than theirs, the extent to which they value interactions with people who hold strong views different than theirs, whether they interpret claims made by those with different views charitably and with sensitivity, and their evaluation of the impact civil discourse has on classroom conversations. These differences suggest that the intervention effectively targeted essential skills and attitudes related to civil discourse and communication.

This project's pretest survey results reinforce claims made by Miller (2022), Rose (2021), and Mounk (2022) that students are seeking open and robust conversations with their peers. Students who participated in this project expressed a willingness to engage in conversations with

those holding different views, curiosity about understanding others' opinions, and a desire to understand arguments made by those with different views. The results are also consistent with the Knight Foundation's (2022) findings. Specifically, while students are open to conversing with those holding different views, this project's results also indicate they are less comfortable expressing their views. In addition, many of the lowest pretest scores were associated with knowledge of civil discourse, echoing findings from Matto and Chmielewski's (2021) pilot course. In that case, student feedback was generally positive, but students also suggested that a lack of knowledge about the role and value of free speech for democracy and on university campuses hindered discussions. The lack of knowledge of civil discourse in this study's pretest results also suggests that students would benefit from education about critical principles such as freedom of speech and academic freedom to help them see that "free speech is most valuable not as a weapon to wield against ideological opponents but as a tool to search for common truths" (Nossel, 2023, para. 14).

To support students interested in civil discourse but less sure about how to practice it, the intervention associated with this project drew on recent work related to the design and implementation of civil discourse initiatives. Introductory sessions of the course distinguished discourse from debate (Longo & Shaffer, 2019) and stressed the need to affirm others (Perrault, 2019). These sessions also highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of discourse, acknowledged that it is not always sufficient, and emphasized its significance for democratic societies (Bybee, 2016). Class conversations were preceded by reminders for students to complexify (Mehl & Haidt, 2022) and to look at issues through a prism lens (Grant, 2021).

Many recent projects have considered the role of virtues like empathy and humility (Halteman Zwart, 2021), skills such as active listening, communicating, navigating differences,

and perspective-taking (Garcia & Ulbig, 2020; Barnes et al., 2022), or the ability to create and refute arguments (Shuster, 2009). One contribution of this project stems from its emphasis on all of these. The *How We Argue* lessons introduced students to virtues such as charity, empathy, and humility. They were encouraged to offer modest interpretations of claims made by others and to consider what is “not wrong” in an argument as they crafted their responses. Students were encouraged to appreciate the perspectives of others, listen carefully, repeat the claims made by others, ask questions about things they did not understand, and evaluate arguments based on the understanding the process produced. They learned how to map arguments and evaluate claims, premises, and objections related to them.

The design of this project combined elements of other recent work. Garcia and Ulbig (2020) conducted a non-randomized quasi-experiment that featured treatment and control groups and an end-of-semester questionnaire to determine how well students could remember the differences between discourse and debate and assess their understanding of active listening and perspective-taking. Barnes et al. (2022) assessed a pilot course that did not feature a control group but did include a pretest and posttest to capture changes in students’ self-reported command of civil discourse. Similarly, this project used pretest and posttest surveys to capture changes in student perceptions about civil discourse. In addition, like Garcia and Ulbig (2020), it featured treatment and control groups. In that study and this one, students in the treatment group experienced an enhanced version of the course that emphasized developing skills related to active listening, values such as empathy, and concepts such as political polarization.

While the initiatives outlined above typically emphasized developing civil discourse skills in the classroom, other projects (Heath & Borda, 2021; Horton et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2019) highlighted the impact of co-curricular programs facilitated by students and held outside the

traditional classroom. A noteworthy contribution of this project reflects the scale and structure of the Honors Forum. First, the Honors Forum enrolled over 500 first-year students in treatment and control groups. More importantly, the Honors Forum was a blended course that featured some meetings in a traditional classroom setting, some that required students to attend lectures, panel discussions, and performances, and others that were more intimate conversations with peers moderated by student staff. Thus, it included some events that delivered traditional classroom instruction and related exercises, others that introduced students to presentations about contemporary issues and the arts, and some that encouraged students to deploy the skills they learned in the classroom in more informal conversations with their peers. The events allowed students to learn about civil discourse, see it modeled in campus events, and use the skills they developed while engaging in discussions with their peers. The course's structure also required students to participate in events each week during the semester. The focus on multiple interactions throughout the semester is another area of strength for this project since recent research found that students who experience high levels of interaction with their peers also report being more confident sharing their views in classroom conversations (Zhou & Barbaro, 2023).

While the scale and structure of the Honors Forum contributed to the project's success, it also presented some limitations. One limitation was related to the data collected. While students in the treatment group had to pass a quiz at the end of each *How We Argue* module to demonstrate command of the module's learning outcomes, there was no similar requirement for students in the control group. Thus, the instrument used in the study relied on self-reported data from students and did not include a posttest assessment that required students in the treatment and control groups to provide evidence consistent with their claims. A second limitation was related to the content of the course. This intervention focused directly on promoting civil

discourse through lessons related to argument mapping and systematic empathy. Simultaneously, students in the control group complete a standard semester of the Honors Forum. Some of the lowest scores on the pretest survey were related to students' familiarity with civil discourse, their ability to list arguments in support of or opposed to it, and their ability to explain to a peer why it is important and difficult. Instruction at the beginning of the semester focused on the role of civil discourse in contemporary democracies (Barnes et al., 2022), and integrating historical texts into course requirements (Matto & Chmielewski, 2021) could have addressed this deficiency. Finally, the students who participated in the project may not have been representative of the broader campus population since the UHP's application process emphasizes elements of civil discourse such as intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness.

Implications for Leadership

This project has implications for university leaders, directors of administrative units, faculty, and students. For university leaders seeking to develop a campuswide culture of critical thinking and free expression, the project demonstrated the successful integration of *How We Argue* into an existing program and summarizes the encouraging results of the experience. Extending the treatment to an entire class of entering students could be readily accomplished. While this project highlighted an intervention that university leaders can utilize to promote civil discourse, its effectiveness will be limited unless they display the necessary leadership to integrate the norms, skills, and values of civil discourse into academic and enrichment programs throughout campus.

The project also demonstrated that *How We Argue* can be employed through a co-curricular experience. Administrators responsible for residential life, leadership and engagement, study away, service learning, and orientation programs could use an approach similar to the one

used here in their programs. For faculty members aspiring to instill critical thinking skills and nurture civil discourse among students, *How We Argue* can be easily integrated into course assignments and expectations. Finally, the skills and values associated with systematic empathy and argument mapping prepare students for the challenges of leadership in a rapidly evolving world and foster the development of inclusive teams, consensus-building, conflict resolution, and innovative problem-solving.

Future Research

Further research related to assessing the impact of educational initiatives designed to support civil discourse on university campuses should focus on the following areas:

1. A longitudinal study could conduct survey students throughout their undergraduate careers to assess the long-term effects of an intervention.
2. Qualitative research could be used to gather feedback from participants about their experiences with an initiative and its impact on their views about civil discourse. This work could help provide rich explanations of the study's findings. For example, interviews related to this project might provide insight into the reasons why the differences between males and females at the time of the pretest were not detected in the analysis of posttest results. Qualitative research could also be used to explore additional demographic variables more deeply.
3. The current study assigned students to treatment and control groups. Students in the treatment group had access to an enhanced section of the Honors Forum that included an intervention. Students in the control section did not receive the intervention but were still enrolled in the Honors Forum. A future iteration of the project could add another

condition by recruiting and including a third group of students who have a similar academic profile to students in the UHP but are not enrolled in the Honors Forum.

4. This project used a product called *How We Argue*. Welker et al. (2023) used a product called *Perspectives* in their project. Future research could use both programs in a course like the Honors Forum and compare the results at the end of the intervention.
5. The current study was limited to students in the University Honors Program. Future projects could focus on a more representative group of first-year students.
6. This study integrated tools designed to support students as they developed skills related to critical thinking and civil discourse. This experience could be a gateway 3-credit courses focused on advanced critical thinking, ethics, or contemporary problems in American democracy. Students could enroll in one or several of these courses to increase their knowledge and enhance their skill set.
7. This project was designed to help students develop the skills and dispositions for critical thinking and civil discourse. Future work could investigate if enrollment in the Honors Forum, particularly the section that included *How We Argue*, affects students' campus and civic engagement.
8. This project emphasized the importance of discourse and sought to develop the skills, knowledge, and values required for conversations across differences. A future version of the project could move from discourse to deliberation by focusing on a single or a small number of controversial issues and inviting students to consider a range of options, engage competing values, and manage tradeoffs as they “move toward making a collective decision on a difficult public issue” (Longo & Shaffer, 2019, p. 22).

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Appendix A: Marshall University Institutional Review Board Approval



Office of Research Integrity

July 25, 2023

Ron Childress, EdD
Leadership Studies
College of Education and Professional Development
Marshall University

Dear Dr. Childress,

This letter is in response to the submitted dissertation abstract for Sean Cassidy entitled "*How We Argue: A Quasi-Randomized Controlled Trial of a Pedagogical Intervention to Improve Critical Thinking.*" The study was approved by the NC State IRB and will only be conducted at that institution. After assessing the abstract and NC State IRB approval, we are in agreement with their determination. The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. If there are any changes to the abstract, you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director

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Appendix B: NC State University Institutional Review Board Approval

7/13/23, 12:20 PM RESOURCES
 NC State Home

HUMAN
SUBJECT
PROTOCOL
SYSTEM (e-IRB)
Help Line: 919-515-7543

IRB PROTOCOL - 25902

Title	Description	Populations	Consent	Procedures	Data Security	Risks and Benefits	Compensation	Routing and Status
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< Previous
Return to Main Menu
Next >

Project Title

Source of funding (provide name of funder not account number):

NCSU Faculty point of contact for this protocol:
NB: only this person has authority to submit the protocol

Gary Comstock	gcomsto@ncsu.edu
Philosophy and Religious Studies	
Phone: 919-515-6173 Fax:	
COI Filed: 01-Apr-2023_26549_COI, filed 04/01/2023	

Additional Personnel	
If the primary contact is not also the principal investigator, list the PI here. Make sure to enter the unity ID (ex: dapaxton) appropriately. Any other investigators should be listed in the appropriate field on the Description tab.	
Name:	Gruehn, Daniel (dgruehn)
Email:	dgruehn@ncsu.edu
Name:	Cassidy, Sean (smcassid)
Email:	smcassid@ncsu.edu
Name:	O'Leary, Scott (smoleary)
Email:	smoleary@ncsu.edu
Name:	Johnson, Ken (kejohns2)
Email:	kejohns2@ncsu.edu

Does any investigator associated with this project have a significant financial interest in, or other conflict of interest involving, the sponsor of this project? (Answer No if this project is not sponsored)

View Supporting Documentation

Add New Renewal/Amendment Request

https://www3.acs.ncsu.edu/hs/protocol.php 1/2

7/13/23, 2:22 PM

North Carolina State University Mail - Comstock - 25902 - IRB Protocol assigned Exempt status

NC STATE

Sean Cassidy <smcassid@ncsu.edu>

Comstock - 25902 - IRB Protocol assigned Exempt status

1 message

IRB Administrative Office <pins_notifications@ncsu.edu>
Reply-To: ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu
To: smcassid@ncsu.edu

Tue, Jul 11, 2023 at 4:31 AM

Date: July 11, 2023

Study Title: How We Argue: A Quasi-Randomized Controlled Trial of a Pedagogical Intervention to Improve Critical Thinking

NC State eIRB #: 25902

Funding Source:

Dear Gary Comstock,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved on July 11, 2023 as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exempt d.1, d.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

This approval for this research study does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation in accordance with the NC State university regulation and IRB unit standards.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NC State University projects, the assurance number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation in accordance with the NC State university regulation and IRB unit standards.
3. If any problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

To request an official, signed approval letter on NC State letterhead, please submit a request on our website under "Request a Letter"

Sincerely,

Jennie Ofstein, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Director
North Carolina State University
irb-director@ncsu.edu
919.515.8754

Appendix C: Permission to Use Survey Items

From: Cassidy, Sean <cassidy34@marshall.edu>

Date: Tuesday, June 6, 2023 at 7:02 PM

To: Minson, Julia Alexandra <julia_minson@hks.harvard.edu>

Subject: Receptiveness to Opposing Views Scale Request

Hello Dr. Minson,

I hope all is well. My name is Sean Cassidy. I am a doctoral student at Marshall University and the Director of the University Honors Program at North Carolina State University. During the upcoming academic year, I will be completing a dissertation in Leadership Studies at Marshall. I recently read *Why Won't You Listen to Me? Measuring Receptiveness to Opposing Views*. I am requesting permission to use some questions from the 18-item self-report measure of receptiveness to opposing views outlined in the article as I complete my dissertation.

Specifically, I am interested in integrating the questions related to intellectual curiosity into a survey I will be developing for my project. The survey will be designed to gather student perceptions of the *importance* and *impact* of civil discourse and their understanding of its *goals*, *skills*, and *values*. The questions from the instrument you developed with Dr. Chen and Dr. Tinsley that focus on intellectual curiosity would be particularly useful for the *values* section of the instrument I plan to develop. Some additional information about the project is below.

This study will assess the impact of an intervention implemented in North Carolina State University's Honors Forum course during the Fall 2023 semester. The Honors Forum is a 0-credit course that provides enrichment activities that help students develop a broad worldview. It features musical and theatrical performances, addresses by public figures, and discussions of contemporary issues. Pair and share conversations in response to brief readings and peer-facilitated conversations about books, films, and controversial issues are also offered through the course. Finally, the course features cultural events, field trips, and conversations with faculty and alumni.

All first-semester University Honors Program students enroll in the Honors Forum. They are randomly assigned to one of two sections of the course. 50% of the program's first-year students are enrolled in a section of the course that meets on Monday afternoons. 50% are enrolled in a section that meets on Tuesday afternoons. Students enrolled in the Monday section will serve as a control group. They will experience the Honors Forum as it has typically been offered. Students in the Tuesday section will serve as an experimental group. They will have access to the traditional Honors Forum programming. In addition, they will also complete a program developed by ThinkerAnalytix. ThinkerAnalytix is an educational nonprofit organization that works with the Philosophy Department at Harvard University. The organization has developed a program called *How We Argue* that uses argument mapping and systematic empathy to help students develop skills they can use to discuss challenging issues constructively.

This project will use the tools developed by ThinkerAnalytix as a foundation to support the design and delivery of co-curricular programming that promotes civil discourse and the

development of the skills and values associated with it among first-year University Honors Program (UHP) students at North Carolina State University and investigates the impact this programming has on them. At the beginning of the Fall 2023 semester, students enrolled in both sections of the Honors Forum will complete a self-report survey that assesses their views of the importance and impact of civil discourse and their understanding of its goals, skills, and values. Students will complete the same survey at the end of the semester to determine if the programming associated with the course impacts their assessment of the importance and impact of civil discourse and their understanding of its goals, skills, and values. I am interested in learning if there are differences between students who complete *How We Argue* and those who do not complete it. Interviews with a subset of students who enroll in the course in the Fall 2023 semester will be conducted early in the Spring 2024 semester to provide additional information about themes that emerge from the survey data and to explore students' Honors Forum experiences that either promoted or impeded civil discourse.

As noted above, I would like to use the questions focused on intellectual curiosity as part of the survey our students will complete. I will use the questions only for my research study and will not use them for other purposes. Thanks for your consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Sean Cassidy

Re: Receptiveness to Opposing Views Scale Request

Minson, Julia Alexandra <julia_minson@hks.harvard.edu>

Wed 6/7/2023 11:06 AM

To: Cassidy, Sean <cassidy34@marshall.edu>

Hi Sean,

You are very welcome to use the scale. Good luck with your work!

Julia

~~~~~

Julia A. Minson

Associate Professor of Public Policy

Harvard Kennedy School

[juliaminson.com](http://juliaminson.com)

[calendly.com/julia\\_minson](https://calendly.com/julia_minson)

On Tue, Jun 27, 2023 at 2:17 PM Cassidy, Sean <cassidy34@marshall.edu> wrote:

Hello Dr. Barnes,

I hope all is well. My name is Sean Cassidy. I am a doctoral student at Marshall University and the Director of the University Honors Program at North Carolina State University. During the upcoming academic year, I will be completing a dissertation in Leadership Studies at Marshall. I recently read *Answering the call: Offering and analyzing civil discourse opportunities in public affairs education*. I am writing to request permission to use variations of some of the questions included in the pre- and post-test survey students in your Citizens, Civility, and Change course completed as I work on my dissertation. Specifically, I am interested in integrating variations of the questions into a survey I will be developing for my project. The survey will be designed to gather student perceptions of the *importance* and *impact* of civil discourse and their understanding of its *goals, skills, and values*.

The questions from your instrument that I would like to modify, proposed revisions, and additional information about my project are below.

Original: I am comfortable and confident communicating with someone who holds political views that differ from my own.

Revised: I am comfortable communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.

Original: When I have a conversation with someone who holds political views that differ from my own, I seek to convert them to my point of view because I believe I am right.

Revised: When I have a conversation with someone who holds different views than mine, I try to persuade them to endorse my views.

Original: The more conversations I have with people who hold political views that differ from mine, the more uncertain I am about my own views.

Revised: When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I learn the limitations of my views.

My study will assess the impact of an intervention implemented in North Carolina State University's Honors Forum course during the Fall 2023 semester. The Honors Forum is a 0-credit course that provides enrichment activities that help students develop a broad worldview. It features musical and theatrical performances, addresses by public figures, and discussions of contemporary issues. Pair and share conversations in response to brief readings and peer-facilitated conversations about books, films, and controversial issues are also offered through the course. Finally, the course features cultural events, field trips, and conversations with faculty and alumni.

All first-semester University Honors Program students enroll in the Honors Forum. They are randomly assigned to one of two sections of the course. 50% of the program's first-year students are enrolled in a section of the course that meets on Monday afternoons. 50% are enrolled in a section that meets on Tuesday afternoons. Students enrolled in the Monday section will serve as a control group. They will experience the Honors Forum as it has typically been offered. Students in the Tuesday section will serve as an experimental group. They will have

access to the traditional Honors Forum programming. In addition, they will also complete a program developed by ThinkerAnalytix. ThinkerAnalytix is an educational nonprofit organization that works with the Philosophy Department at Harvard University. The organization has developed a program called *How We Argue* that uses argument mapping and systematic empathy to help students develop skills they can use to discuss challenging issues constructively.

This project will use the tools developed by ThinkerAnalytix as a foundation to support the design and delivery of co-curricular programming that promotes civil discourse and the development of the skills and values associated with it among first-year University Honors Program (UHP) students at North Carolina State University and investigates the impact this programming has on them. At the beginning of the Fall 2023 semester, students enrolled in both sections of the Honors Forum will complete a self-report survey that assesses their views of the importance and impact of civil discourse and their understanding of the goals, skills, and values related to it. Students will complete the same survey at the end of the semester to determine if the programming associated with the course impacts their assessment of the importance and impact of civil discourse and their understanding of the goals, skills, and values related to it. I am interested in learning if there are differences between students who complete *How We Argue* and those who do not complete it. Interviews with a subset of students who enroll in the course in the Fall 2023 semester will be conducted early in the Spring 2024 semester to provide additional information about themes that emerge from the survey data and to explore students' Honors Forum experiences that either promoted or impeded civil discourse.

I will use the questions only for my research study and will not use them for other purposes.

Thanks for your consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Sean Cassidy

Re: Request to Modify Questions from "Answering the Call"

Philip Barnes <pbarnes@udel.edu>

Tue 6/27/2023 5:00 PM

To:Cassidy, Sean <cassidy34@marshall.edu>

Sean, thanks for reaching out. Your dissertation sounds great, I love the research design, and I'd be very curious to hear what kind of results you get. Yes, absolutely, you are fully free to use/modify any questions from the survey instrument we administered to students in Citizens, Civility, and Change.

It's great to hear that NC State Honors Program is developing this kind of intervention into their curriculum. We need a lot more of it across academia! We also need more research like yours to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of those interventions. Another big need (maybe something to consider when you write your "Ideas for Future Research" section of your dissertation) is to follow the impact of the intervention through time. In our course and research design, we took a pre-post snapshot at the beginning and end of the semester, but how durable is the impact years later? Following and evaluating the research subjects over time is a gap in the literature.

Thanks again and good luck with your research. And feel free to share a write-up with me when you're ready. I'm personally and professionally invested in this topic.

Phil

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**Philip Barnes**

Biden School of Public Policy & Administration

Institute for Public Administration

298P Graham Hall, Newark, DE 19716-7201

University of Delaware

c: 906-458-6590 | f: [302-831-3488](tel:302-831-3488)

## Appendix D: Consent Form

### Informed Consent

### Informed Consent

**Title of Study: How We Argue: Testing a Pedagogical Intervention Aimed at Improving Critical Thinking**

IRB Protocol #25902

Principal Investigator: Gary Comstock, [gcomstock@ncsu.edu](mailto:gcomstock@ncsu.edu), 919 515 6173

Co-PIs: Daniel Gruehn, [dgruehn@ncsu.edu](mailto:dgruehn@ncsu.edu), 919 515 0317; Sean Cassidy, NC State Honors Program, [smcassid@ncsu.edu](mailto:smcassid@ncsu.edu) 919 513 3984; Scott O'Leary, NC State Honors Program, [smoleary@ncsu.edu](mailto:smoleary@ncsu.edu), 919 515 0946; Ken Johnson, NC State Honors Program, [kejohns2@ncsu.edu](mailto:kejohns2@ncsu.edu), 919 513 2449

**What is the purpose of this study?**

To assess the effects on critical thinking of two courses.

**How many people will be in the study?**

Approximately 1,000 (500/yr x 2 yrs).

**Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?**

You are eligible if you have been admitted to the Honors Program at NC State University.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

You will complete a questionnaire, self-assessment, and pre- and post-tests. Depending on your assignment, you may also complete one or both of two critical thinking courses, How We Argue and How We Evaluate.

**Benefits to participating in this research**

There is no direct benefit associated with participating in the study, though, you may improve your critical thinking skills.

**Risks to participating in this research**

There are minimal risks associated with participation.

**What data will be collected about me and are there risks associated with that?**

Basic demographic information, general personality measures, and your performance on the pre- and post-tests. In addition, we will access student records for details about your major, academic level, GPA, geographic home, and first-generation status. There is a risk that someone might be able to identify you as having been involved in this research project if they know that you were an entering Honors student in the 2 years in which the study was conducted. We will mitigate this risk by implementing NC State data protection standards.

**How will my identity and the data about me be stored and protected?**

The data will be stored and protected on NC State U. servers. After the data is collected, researchers will remove all direct identifiers and assign your data a random ID number linked to a master list. The master list will be stored separately from the raw data in a password-protected document on the University server. After the study, the master list will be destroyed. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that your identity could be deduced from responses in the dataset.



**Who can access my data and how will my data be shared and used in the future?**

Your data, with direct identifiers removed (to render anonymous), will be stored, used, and shared with others for future research studies without additional consent from you.

**How will the data about me be reported to the public and are there risks associated with that?**

We will only report aggregated data, not your individual information or responses. We may quote your answers to open-ended questions, but we will not know who is the author of a quote and, therefore, you will not be able to be identified. As a result, there are minimal risks to you as a result of how we report the data.

**Right to withdraw your participation**

Your participation is voluntary. Even if you agree initially, consent is an ongoing process. You can stop participating at any time for any reason. To do so, simply tell any one of the co-PIs. Their contact information is listed above. If you withdraw, we will stop any procedures or data collection that may be happening and delete any data collected from you whenever possible. We will not be able to delete your data if we cannot identify which responses are yours or if the data has already been published. We de-identify the data when we transfer it from Moodle to a spreadsheet. After the transfer, we may not be able to identify which responses are yours.

**Compensation**

There is no financial compensation for participating in this study.

**What if you are a student or employee?**

No student is required to participate in the study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact any of the PIs. Their contact information is listed above.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State University IRB office at [IRB-Director@ncsu.edu](mailto:IRB-Director@ncsu.edu), 919-515-8754, or fill out a [confidential form online](https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form) at <https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form>.

By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. If I consent to participate, I understand that I can stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

- Yes, I want to participate in this research study.
- No, I do not want to be in this research study.

## Appendix E: Survey Instrument

The following questions ask for some personal information. The information is used to understand different students' experiences at NC State. Remember, all your responses are confidential. Any identifying information will be separated from your answers.

1. What is your student ID number?

2. Which do you feel best describes your racial background? (Multiple answers are possible!)

White and/or European American

Black and/or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Hispanic or Latinx

Middle Eastern or North African

Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your sex?

Male

Female

4. Are you a first-generation college student?

Yes

No

5. Which best describes the area in which you lived during high school?

Rural area

Small town (20,000 people or less)

Moderate-sized city (20,001 - 60,000)

Large city (60,001 - 100,000)

Urban area (over 100,000 people)

**6. College of primary major**

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

College of Design

College of Education

College of Engineering

College of Natural Resources

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

College of Sciences

Wilson College of Textiles

Poole College of Management

University College

**Civil discourse is written or oral communication in which individuals with opposed positions on a controversial issue converse in an honest, robust, and charitable way to reduce cultural misunderstanding and political polarization. It seeks to help us address contested issues in social and political discourse such as abortion, gun control, animal rights, immigration, racism, environmental regulation, etc. Please indicate the extent to which you disagree with the statements below with this explanation in mind.**

7. Civil Discourse is a familiar concept to me.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

8. I can list 3 arguments made by supporters of civil discourse.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

9. I can list 3 arguments made by critics of civil discourse.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

10. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is important.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

11. I can explain to a peer why civil discourse is difficult.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

12. It is important for the University Honors Program to provide opportunities for me to have conversations with people who hold strong views that are different than mine.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

13. It is important for the University Honors Program to sponsor events that expose students to all types of speech even if they may find it offensive or biased.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

14. It is important for me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

15. It is important for me to participate in events that expose me to all types of speech even if I find it offensive or biased.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

16. I have the skills that allow me to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

17. I am comfortable communicating with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

18. I am comfortable accepting criticism of my views.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

19. I am comfortable expressing how my personal experiences have impacted my views.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

20. I am comfortable expressing my opinions when others disagree.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

21. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to understand the arguments they make.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

22. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I listen to them carefully.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

23. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I question my assumptions and consider their point of view.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

24. I am willing to have conversations with individuals who hold strong views that are different than mine.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

25. I like reading well thought-out information and arguments supporting viewpoints that are different than mine.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

26. I find listening to opposing views informative.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

27. I value interactions with people who hold strong views opposite to mine.



|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

28. I interpret claims made by people with strong views that are different than mine charitably and with sensitivity to their ideas and experiences.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

29. I am curious to find out why other people have different opinions than I do.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

30. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I try to persuade them to endorse my views.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

31. When I have a conversation with someone who holds views different than mine, I learn the limitations of my views.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

32. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues in the classroom.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

33. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial campus issues.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

34. Civil discourse contributes to finding solutions to controversial national issues.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

35. Civil discourse has a positive impact on conversations about controversial issues outside the classroom.

|                        |   |   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Strongly disagree<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly agree<br>7 |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|

## Appendix F: Curriculum Vitae

**Sean Cassidy**  
502 Carriage Woods Circle  
Cary, NC 27513  
smcassid@gmail.com

### **Professional Experience**

**University Honors Program (formerly University Honors and Scholars Programs)**  
**Director** **2017-present**  
North Carolina State University

#### *Responsibilities*

- Provide leadership and guidance for the University Honors Program (UHP), an enrichment program serving 2300 North Carolina State University undergraduates.
- Supervise and collaborate with seven full-time employees and four part-time employees.
- Develop new initiatives and consider future directions for the UHP.
- Manage and analyze personnel, operating, and programming budgets.
- Establish and expand partnerships with department heads and faculty to design and deliver fifty interdisciplinary HON seminars annually.
- Coordinate the delivery of the Scholars Forum, a zero-credit course with an annual enrollment of 1400.
- Collaborate with partners in University Housing to enhance the Honors Village, the residential component of the UHP.
- Promote the UHP to academic and administrative partners to enhance opportunities available to UHP students and to leverage resources.
- Advise students about program requirements and completion, course selection, campus involvement, and off-campus opportunities.
- Approve honors contracts and senior capstone project proposals.
- Conduct program research by retrieving, summarizing, and analyzing program data.
- Manage the program's assessment and reporting efforts.
- Represent the UHP at recruitment events such as the session for academically motivated students at Open House, Experience NC State events for accepted students, and during the Park Scholarships Finalist Weekend.
- Serve as a leadership team member in the Division of Academic & Student Affairs.

**University Scholars Program**  
**Senior Associate Director** **2013-2017**  
**Associate Director** **1998-2013**

**Assistant Director**  
North Carolina State University

**1996-1998**

*Responsibilities*

- Provided leadership for the University Scholars Program (USP), an enrichment program serving 1500 North Carolina State University undergraduates.
- Managed program's personnel, operating, and programming budgets (\$400,000 annually)
- Supervised four full-time employees.
- Advised students about USP requirements and completion, course selection, campus involvement, and off-campus opportunities.
- With USP Assistant Director, developed recruitment strategy and admissions process.
- Coordinated the design and delivery of the Scholars Forum, a zero-credit course with an annual enrollment of 1400.
- Coordinated the development of co-curricular enrichment activities designed to enhance the Scholars Forum. Students enrolled in the course have access to almost three hundred activities each semester.
- Coordinated program completion process and graduation activities.
- Implemented the USP Cultural Explorations Series by designing and delivering spring break programs in England, France, Turkey, Morocco, Germany, and Hungary.
- Collected, analyzed, and distributed data summarizing program recruitment, participation, completion, and evaluation.

**Co-Director, Florence Summer Program and Oxford Summer Program**      **2012-2024**  
North Carolina State University

- With University Honors Program Associate Director and Assistant Director, provided leadership for two summer study abroad programs.
- Collaborated with partners in the Study Abroad Office to develop outcomes, budgets (\$350,000 annually), and program marketing materials.
- Recruited students to participate through information sessions, classroom visits, and individual appointments.
- Provided on-site administration and assistance. Developed orientation programs and emergency response plans.
- Designed and implemented a series of field trips and co-curricular opportunities for program participants.

**Coordinator, National Student Exchange Program**      **2008-2012**  
North Carolina State University

- Recruited students to participate through email marketing, classroom visits, and information sessions.
- Promoted program to academic advisers, campus partners, and faculty.
- Recruited NC State students to participate and advised them about campus selection, placement, tuition plans, course selection, and financial aid.

- Assisted students visiting from other universities with course registration, understanding NC State policies, and campus opportunities.

## **Education**

### **Marshall University**

Ed.D. in Leadership Studies (expected 2024)

### **Duke University**

M.A. in Political Science

### **Franklin & Marshall College**

B.A. in Government

## **Current and Recent University Service**

Member of Committee on International Programs

Member of DASA Assessment Council

Member of Office of Undergraduate Research Advisory Committee

Member of the UHSP (now UHP) Advisory Committee

Member of the Honors and Scholars (now Honors) Village Advisory Committee

Member of the Park Scholarships Program Advisory Committee

Member of DASA Strategic Plan Leadership Team

*-Co-Chair from 2016-18*

Member of the Harrelson Fund Committee from

*-Chair from 2013-15*

Member of Division of Academic & Student Affairs Courses and Curriculum Committee

*-Chair during 2015-16*

Member of the International Operations Council