

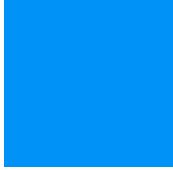



Better Discourse



Reflective Inquiry Guide

Uncovering your context



Better Discourse: A Guide for Bridging Campus Divides in Challenging Times was created in an effort to quickly respond to campus needs to engage in better discourse for what many expect to be a continuously uncertain and potentially tumultuous 2024–2025 academic year. This is produced as part of the larger *Scaling Discourse in Higher Education Project*, supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.

To begin work that prevents conflict or responds to crises, we must first understand where we are beginning, what resources we have at our disposal, and what we hope to achieve. These guiding questions offer an inquiry-based approach to help us deeply examine ourselves and our contexts, discern our paths, and find allies to advance for better discourse on campus and in society. These questions encourage self reflection and campus communication that creates a community that works to meet the needs of the moment.

After you have thought about these questions for yourself we encourage you to ask these questions of multiple members of the community, students, staff, administrators and faculty. Task forces, department meetings, workgroups or over a coffee—there is no “right way” to bring folks together to do this—rather the purpose is to support relationship building to clearly discern the help that is needed and how to address the need.

What does better discourse mean to you?

- What does civil discourse mean to you? To your campus?
- Who is doing civil discourse work on campus? How can you find out? Who could you ask to find out?
- Where is civil discourse in your mission, curriculum and campus at large?
- Is a focus on discourse an institutional priority?

What are the pressing needs?

- What do you think the most pressing need on campus is?
- What do you see as the “problem” in terms of discourse? If you gave this problem a name, what would it be?
- Do people on campus have a shared sense of what the issues or problems are?
- Do you see this need as a crisis? Do others?
- What do you think others (faculty, students, and administrators) think “the problem” or crisis is about?
- What do you fear the most about this problem?
- How has this problem impacted you? Who or what has helped you manage this impact the most?
- What do you think are solutions, treatments, or ways of addressing this issue?
- What do you think other groups think the solutions, treatments, or ways of addressing the issues are?
- What is your hoped for outcome? How can it get better?
- If you had a magic wand to achieve your outcome, what would it be?
- Do you think students, faculty, staff, or administrators would say the same thing? Why or why not?
- Who has worked or is currently working to solve, address, or resource this problem?
- Does what is happening on campus require a different response from you? From others? How can it be potentially prevented in the future?

What's the campus climate like?

- What's your style of managing conflict? Can you imagine ways of contributing toward a peaceful solution?
- How has your campus managed conflict and discourse before? Who could you ask to find out?
- What has been successful in dealing with campus conflicts? What have you learned from situations that may have been unsuccessful?
- How do you find bright spots of what's working well on campus?
- How do you envision your campus overcoming challenging dynamics?
- What do you love about your work and your campus?
- What do others—students, faculty, administrators, and staff—love about your campus?
- What are your campus' free speech policies? Who knows them? Where can you find them?
- What are your campus policies regarding academic freedom? Who knows them? Where can you find them?

How can we center relationships to promote better discourse?

- Who do you turn to for support when you are overwhelmed by campus conflict?
- Who do you love to work with and be around? Why?
- Who do you find most challenging to work? Why?
- Who is the "other"—the people or group who is most often talked *about* but not *with*?
- Who is an unsung hero on your campus doing work that inspires you? What can you learn from their example? How can you collaborate with them?
- Where is your place of peace in your working relationships? What does it look like? How do you get there?

How do we move forward and resource our community?

- What has been the thing that has been most helpful for you to manage challenging times?
- Is there anything you need to handle challenging situations that you feel is not currently possible or accessible? How can you overcome this, perhaps with support from others?
- What is your superpower? What gift can you bring to this work?
- What's your kryptonite?
- What are the superpowers of your community—its students, faculty, staff, and administrators?
- What skills do your students, faculty, and administrators need to engage in better discourse?
- What support do your students, faculty, and administrators need?
- Who is equipped and ready to address the issues? Are they at the table?
- In what ways can technology help to address this issue?
- In what ways has technology made discourse harder?
- What's missing?

Now what

Our hope is that through reflecting on these questions on your own and in community you might have emerged with a clearer understanding of where you are, what you have already with you to have better discourse or the help you might need. You may have identified that you simply don't know the answers to many of these questions, don't know where the policies are, or who is doing this or how different the problems are framed. Please know that this is understandable and you are not alone. This is an important diagnostic step to identify how you might proceed next and how to make sense of the resources provided.

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