

CIVIC DISCOURSE PROGRAMS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

Civic participation and dialogue is critical for a well-functioning, responsive, and representative democracy. In the United States, the right to vote is granted to citizens at the age of 18, coinciding with the age at which many of the nation's youth decide to continue their education at college or university. The point at which students start to independently engage with the world around them is an opportune time to promote and reinforce their civic rights and responsibilities and to make a case for the value and importance of democratic participation. But electoral participation among college-aged U.S. youth is consistently quite low: Americans aged 18–24 participate in U.S. presidential elections at rates of 35–45%, with a record high of 50.9% in 1964 and a low of 32.3% in 2000.¹

Bolstering democratic engagement among youth requires a focused and dedicated effort on several fronts. The mission of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge is “to foster civic culture and institutionalize nonpartisan democratic engagement activities and programs at colleges and universities, making them a defining feature of campus life.”² This initiative seeks to increase and enhance different forms of civic participation and dialogue at colleges and universities across the country. ALL IN aims to expand civic participation — and, in turn, democratic engagement — through institutionalized programs that are dedicated to civic discourse, often also referred to as civil discourse, civic dialogue, and pluralism initiatives.

To aid in this work, ALL IN sought to gain a picture of the range and reach of civic discourse programs at educational institutions from around the country. In surveying this landscape, the aim was to understand the goals of various programs, their activities, how they engage students, what metrics they use to demonstrate effectiveness, and how their programs are evaluated. This memo addresses these factors and identifies patterns of civic discourse programming across the higher education landscape in the United States.

¹ Statista, “Voter Turnout among 18-24 Year Olds U.S. Presidential Elections 1964-2020,” 2025, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1096597/voter-turnout-18-24-year-olds-presidential-elections-historic-al/>.

² ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge 2025, <https://allinchallenge.org/about/>.

Methodology

In consultation with the ALL IN team, the Scrivner Institute team constructed a sample of higher education institutions offering civil discourse programs to build a picture of the range of such efforts underway across the United States. We aimed for representation across the diverse geographic regions of the U.S., using the U.S. Census Bureau's classification of regions.³ We also aimed for representation across different types of institutions of higher education, including public and private community colleges and four-year colleges or universities and both research-intensive and non-research-intensive institutions.⁴

Within each institution of higher education in our representative sample, the specific civic discourse initiative was identified as being located in a school or college, institute or center, or as a standalone project, resource, or class. This helped to identify relevant target populations among the student population as well as the core goals shaping the initiative. Each program's mission was recorded to help illuminate the primary focus and aims of the program. While civic discourse is the focus of this memo, some institutions were found to emphasize pluralism or free speech in their programming over dialogue per se — with the specific label given to the program signaling, at least to some extent, the nature of the approach.

Various forms of available quantitative data were collected to understand the reach and potential impacts of the program. Where available, such data included: the number of participating students or total size of the program including faculty or staff, how many times the program/initiative is offered per year, if funding or scholarships are provided to students to participate in the program, and how the programs are funded and to what degree.

If the program partnered with a national or regional organization, or even another institution, in its civic discourse work, we captured these collaborations

³ US Census Bureau, *Census Regions and Divisions of the United States*, 2025, https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf.

These regions are the West (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming), the Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin), the South (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia), and the Northeast (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont).

⁴ The latter was determined by using the Research Activity Designation of the 2025 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (<https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu>).

to better understand existing networks surrounding civil discourse. Campus Compact has compiled a list of national organizations and networks in which individual institutions participate;⁵ this memo does not explore these national initiatives but references some of them below.

In total, 27 institutions from 18 states were examined with emphasis on providing variety in institutional type, size, and geography. The remainder of the memo addresses the stated goals of the civic discourse programs surveyed, the types of activities the programs carry out to engage students, the metrics used to examine the effectiveness of the program, and information on program funding and evaluation.

Appendix A includes a full list of examined institutions including relevant information such as region, size, mission, etc.

Civic Discourse Program Goals

Among the initiatives examined at higher education institutions, intentionally providing space for students to participate in civic discourse was a common goal, with programs seeking to create a more structured and controlled environment to engage in controversial topics respectfully.

Specific approaches, more granular goals, and the reach and scope of the work varied based on the type of initiative and the degree of resourcing available.

Four-year higher education institutions, both public and private, often frame their initiatives as geared toward building inclusive campus cultures and emphasize the importance of civic dialogue to democratic engagement. Some examples are as follows:

- The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse⁶ and Kansas State University⁷ both aim to promote an inclusive campus culture, facilitate civic engagement, and cultivate a sense of belonging.

⁵ Campus Compact, "Better Discourse: Listing of Bridge-Building and Civil Discourse Service Providers | Campus Compact," July 25, 2024, <https://compact.org/resources/better-discourse-listing-of-bridge-building-and-civil-discourse-service-providers>.

⁶ UW-La Crosse, "Center for Civil Dialogue & Civic Engagement," accessed August 28, 2025, <https://www.uwlax.edu/center-for-civil-dialogue-and-civic-engagement/>.

⁷ A.Q. Miller School of Media and Communications, "Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy," 2025, <https://www.k-state.edu/media-communication/about/icdd/>.

- Other initiatives — such as those at Stanford University,⁸ Macalester College,⁹ and Duke University,¹⁰ as well as those cultivated through the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership¹¹ — emphasize the centrality of engaging in respectful disagreement, via debate or different forms of dialogue, as a core approach to democratic engagement.
- Notably, Ohio Wesleyan University (OWU) has made it a goal to prepare every member of its campus community to engage in civil discourse training. OWU has partnered with the Constructive Dialogue Institute to provide civil discourse training to every student and employee to prepare everyone for difficult conversations within a democratic society.¹²

Community colleges typically serve a more diverse student body than four-year institutions, often with more limited resources, and they still undertake civic discourse programming with available means, sometimes by partnering with broader initiatives. For example:

- The Bipartisan Policy Center and Austin Community College hosted a symposium referred to as “Discourse Across Differences at Community Colleges” featuring 17 community colleges with a focus of distilling successful practices across community colleges. As part of the symposium, colleges were able to highlight their own programs goals, like including faculty from different disciplines, increasing students critical thinking skills through core primary source texts, building trust among peers, and expressing views in a respectful manner.¹³
- Other community colleges — such as Kingsborough Community College in New York, via its Center for Civic Engagement — sought to provide civic awareness while enhancing students’ civic engagement skills, recognizing these skills as fundamental to meeting the challenges of a modern society.¹⁴

⁸ Stanford School of Humanities and Sciences, “Democracy and Disagreement,” 2025, <https://humsci.stanford.edu/events/democracy-and-disagreement>.

⁹ Macalester College, *Dialogue Across Differences*, April 15, 2024, <https://www.macalester.edu/life-at-mac/dialogue-across-differences/>.

¹⁰ Duke University, “Civil Discourse Project,” Polis Center for Politics, accessed August 28, 2025, <https://civildiscourse.duke.edu/>.

¹¹ ICDP and mention the schools that are in the program.

¹² Ohio Wesleyan University, “Campuswide Initiative Promotes Civil Discourse,” accessed August 28, 2025, <https://www.owu.edu/alumni-family-friends/owu-magazine/fall-2024/feature-achieving-one-america/campuswide-initiative-promotes-civil-discourse/>.

¹³ Blake Johnson, “BPC and ACC Highlight Discourse Across Difference at Symposium for Community College,” June 8, 2023, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/press-release/bpc-acc-highlight-discourse-across-difference-at-symposium-for-community-colleges/>.

¹⁴ Kingsborough Community College, “Kingsborough Community College Center for Civic Engagement,” accessed August 28, 2025, https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/civic_engagement/index.html.

Of the higher education institutions surveyed, only a few explicitly state free speech as one of their goals.

- Macalester College, for example, emphasized speech as vital to learning and made it a goal to generate more of it.¹⁵ Macalester participates in the Campus Free Expression Project,¹⁶ which promotes consistent and principled approaches to free speech as well as civil discourse.

While the higher educations examined have differences of focus in their civic discourse programs, these are often quite subtle and, for the most part, reflect a range of complementary aims and priorities. Overarching themes include preparing students to engage in conversations across differences, constructing a sense of belonging and community inclusions, and building the skills for civic engagement and participation in a democratic society.

Activities to Engage Students

Institutions of higher education across the United States engage students in a range of programs designed to enhance their civic discourse capacity, with the further aim of improving youth engagement in democratic society.

University-wide initiatives featuring co-curricular opportunities can reach large numbers of students and reach across the campus community, while particular courses on civic discourse and engagement might reach a smaller number of students while offering in-depth knowledge and skill-building. Larger institutions with more robust programs sometimes encompass a range of activities, often housed in specific centers or institutes.

Appendix B includes a comprehensive list of activities provided by each civic discourse initiative, specifying where the program is located.

We have coded our sample based on our understanding of the nature of the civic discourse activities being offered — the sample includes 19 co-curricular programs, 5 institutes or centers tasked with civic discourse work, and 3 class-based approaches to civic dialogue. Below we describe activities that are examples from each category.

¹⁵ Macalester College, *Dialogue Across Differences*.

¹⁶ Campus Free Expression Project, <https://cic.edu/insights/campus-free-expression-project/>

Co-Curricular Programs

The most prevalent set of civic discourse-related activities for students is co-curricular programming, whereby resources are deployed to offer opportunities for students outside the classroom. Student experiences might range from year-long fellowships to participating in symposia, labs, and specific events. Some examples include:

- The Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) is a six-institution consortium comprising California State University, Bakersfield, DePauw University, Harvard University, Santa Fe College, Stanford University and St. Philip's College. The ICDP provides a host of opportunities to 1–2 students from each school for a year-long hybrid experience. These students receive training in facilitation of difficult discussions, engage in purposeful conversations with their cohort, and interact with select speakers for civil discourse panels.¹⁷ Students are also expected to attend a multi-day retreat and orientation to develop connections with their cohort and begin developing their skills. ICDP provides a structured group environment with a diverse group of students from around the country who represent a wide variety of institutions.
- In partnership with the Bipartisan Policy Center, Austin Community College held a “Discourse Across Differences at Community Colleges” symposium that welcomed 17 community colleges from across the nation. Deans, faculty, and administrators from these community colleges convene to engage with one another and learn best practices around civil discourse techniques in classrooms and co-curricular activities. The symposium is unique in that it provided institutions that typically have fewer resources a direct opportunity to learn from similarly situated institutions. Participants were able to learn about Austin Community College’s Great Questions Seminar, Anne Arundel Community College’s Bridge to the Liberal Arts through Primary Source Texts, Rose State College’s Great Debates Program, and Linn-Benton Community College’s Civil Discourse Program.¹⁸ The assortment of resources showcased provided ample learning opportunities for community colleges at scales they could reasonably reproduce.
- An example of a lab-style approach geared toward both research and action on fostering civil discourse is the Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy Lab (DID) at Providence College in Rhode Island. DID Lab draws on research from

¹⁷ Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics, “Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership Fellowships,” Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership Fellowships, 2025, <https://www.ethics.harvard.edu/ICDP-fellowship>.

¹⁸ Johnson, “BPC and ACC Highlight Discourse Across Difference at Symposium for Community College.”

Deliberative Pedagogy (2017) and *Creating Space for Democracy* (2019) to inform its activities, which include community dialogue sessions and civic discourse workshops, as well as Conversations for Change, intended to embed civil discourse in courses and throughout student life.¹⁹

Some institutions of higher education prioritize pluralism in their initiatives, encompassing a wide-ranging set of activities to target different groups of students and other campus community members.

- At Vassar College, through a series labeled Engaged Pluralism, different working groups each dedicated to a single topic meet over the course of a semester. At the same time, “Igniter Pitches” allowed the campus community to bring together projects that fostered belonging, equity, and/or dialogue.²⁰
- To promote pluralism, Colorado College’s “Conflict and Community: A Pluralism Series” provides funding for trainings, workshops, lectures, or book discussions to meet goals, such as promoting practices of conflict resolution and enhancing understanding and connection among a variety of communities.²¹
- The Initiative on Religion, Pluralism, and American Public Life at Wake Forest University School of Divinity provides resources enabling Wake Forest faculty and other leading scholars to provide lectures, seminars, and public discussions to engage challenging issues.²²

Institutes or Centers

Some institutions of higher education have invested in building or equipping existing institutes or centers to drive civil discourse programming — such as the University of Wisconsin La Crosse, Kansas State University, Kingsborough Community College, University of Arizona, and Duke University in our sample.

Civil discourse institutes or centers at higher education institutions provided numerous and varied opportunities for students to engage in civil discourse over and above one programming stream.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Vassar College, “Engaged Pluralism,” accessed September 19, 2025, <https://www.vassar.edu/engaged-pluralism>.

²¹ Colorado College, “Conflict & Community: A Pluralism Series,” accessed September 19, 2025, <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/offices/presidentsoffice/projects-funds/conflict-and-community/rfp.html>

²² Wake Forest University School of Divinity, *Initiative on Religion, Pluralism, and American Public Life*, 2025, <https://divinity.wfu.edu/initiative-on-religion-pluralism-and-american-public-life/>.

- Kingsborough Community College's Center for Civic Engagement, for example, promotes civil conversations among students. Their work also included "social interdisciplinary research, culturally restoring and sustaining teaching and learning, public facing programs, non-partisan and bi-partisan partnerships, and political engagement through voting and local pragmatic coalition building."²³ The center also hosts an archive of the institution's civic engagement work, providing a space for students to conduct research on the topic.
- Duke University hosts the "Polis Center for Politics: Civil Discourse Project," which sponsors courses and events that provide civil discourse scholarships to students. Courses and summer seminars include topics such as "How to Think in an Age of Political Polarization" (2025), "Policy Choice as Value Conflict" (2025), and "The Presidential Election" (2024).²⁴ The Civil Discourse Project also offers *The Lemur: Duke's Big Ideas Magazine*, which is student-run and features sections specifically dedicated to controversial topics in politics, religion, and philosophy.²⁵
- The University of Arizona's National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD) offers a significant suite of initiatives, albeit not targeted to its student population. Its initiatives include: Engaging Differences, which provides resources to communities around disagreeing better; the State Legislative Program, which aims to increase bipartisanship, collaboration, and civility in state government; and the NICD Research Network, which works with America's teachers and researchers to understand and improve political and social discourse.²⁶

Classes

A number of higher education institutions have chosen to offer classes that are specifically focused on developing the ability of students to engage in civil discourse. These courses offer professors the opportunity to engage more personally with students and develop their skills in a more structured and consistent environment.

- The University of Missouri's "Democracy, Pluralism, and Civil Discourse" course focuses on the foundations of pluralism and provides a structured environment for students to practice civil discourse.²⁷

²³ Kingsborough Community College, "Kingsborough Community College Center for Civic Engagement."

²⁴ Duke University, "Civil Discourse Project."

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ University of Arizona, "National Institute For Civil Discourse - Engaging Differences Constructively," accessed August 28, 2025, <https://nicd.arizona.edu/>.

²⁷ Truman School of Government and Public Affairs, "Practicing Civil Discourse in the Classroom," December 10, 2024, <https://truman.missouri.edu/news/practicing-civil-discourse-classroom>.

- The University of Pennsylvania offers a pilot first-year seminar based on civil discourse in which undergraduates participate in a group film viewing the day before the start of class followed by a dinner conversation on the movie. The program intends to help students understand the implications of the 2024 election and to give the students the opportunity to “hone their critical-thinking skills and to respect opinions different from their own.”²⁸
- Beginning in Fall 2026, the State University of New York (SUNY) system’s core competencies for general education include a new course requirement that adds a civic discourse element to the general curriculum.²⁹ The new requirement will require thousands of new students to undertake civil discourse work at a particularly important juncture in their transition to higher education.

Specific classes on civil discourse, whether stand-alone electives or part of a general curriculum requirement, offer an in-depth opportunity for students to study the value of civic engagement and pluralism and to learn, develop, and practice civic dialogue techniques.

Program Evaluation

Information on evaluation of different civic discourse programs across U.S. higher education varies depending on the type of institution, type of program, and how long they have been operational. Overall, as anticipated, there is limited systematic information evaluating civic discourse initiatives on campuses, given that such initiatives are quite new and, some, even intentionally experimental. Nonetheless, some emerging trends across our sample can be described as follows.

Public institutions seem to provide the most comprehensive evaluation among the different types of institutions.

Among public institutions, the most sophisticated evaluation framework comes out of the University of Colorado Boulder’s CU Dialogues Program. Through a Spencer Foundation-funded study, *“Assessing deliberative spaces for engagement across difference: Two new civics measurement instruments”*

²⁸ Michele Berger, “Small Seminars Foster Sense of Belonging for New College Students,” August 20, 2024, <https://omnia.sas.upenn.edu/story/small-seminars-foster-sense-belonging-new-college-students>.

²⁹ SUNY, “Undergraduate General Education Curriculum,” January 7, 2025, <https://www.suny.edu/suny-news/press-releases/1-25/1-7-25/general-education.html>.

(2015–17),³⁰ the program developed quantitative tools that directly measure dialogue outcomes. The evaluation was systematic, tracking listening across perspectives, self-reflection, and self-discovery through pre-and post-dialogue surveys. The numbers speak to significant impact:

- Among students, 96% reported understanding topics from different perspectives, 91% found dialogue offered a comfortable space for conversation, and 95% became aware of perspectives beyond their own.
- Faculty outcomes are just as striking — 100% found that dialogue created memorable learning experiences and 93% reported extended conceptual learning. As one faculty member put it: “Students are permanently affected and influenced by engaging in dialogue with members of our facilities team. They hear about the rich histories, goals, and dreams of people they see on a regular basis but don’t know.”

At California State University, Bakersfield, evaluation is built into the very structure of its Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) fellowship program.³¹ Funded by an approximately \$500,000 grant that requires annual reporting, the program trains undergraduates in facilitation before they lead workshops on contentious issues like abortion rights and climate change. Feedback loops are immediate: structured debriefs after each session allow participants to assess conversation quality and suggest improvements, making evaluation a continuous process rather than a final measurement.

Comprehensive assessment also shapes Kansas State University’s Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, where a 12-credit graduate certificate in Dialogue, Deliberation, and Public Engagement embeds evaluation into every stage of the curriculum. Assignments, seminars, group discussions, and facilitator workshops all serve as touchpoints for tracking participant development across multiple skills.

At University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, initiatives are funded through the University of Wisconsin System directly and it is part of their overall budgeting. Despite dedicated funding from the Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship & Civil Dialogue, their head of Civic Engagement acknowledged the limits bluntly: *“How are we measuring whether or not we’re achieving change? I think this is really critical. We need to measure and evaluate. And funding is critical to follow through.”*³² For now, positive student responses remain the primary metric.

³⁰ https://www.colorado.edu/academicfutures/sites/default/files/attached-files/desai_et_al.pdf

³¹ <https://csub.edu/kie/fellowships/icdp.shtml>

³² Ibid.

The State University of New York has taken a system-wide approach, launching a Civic Discourse Component in 2024 with established learning outcomes. Since it only launched last year, it is too early for evaluation. The plan, however, is to measure skills such as reasoned deliberation and the ethical practice of advocacy, dissent, and dialogue across conflict.

Partnerships, particularly those with large funders or education initiatives, drive other approaches to evaluation.

- At the University of Missouri, a collaboration with the Constructive Dialogue Institute (CDI) under the Volcker Alliance Initiative anchors their evaluation system. The *Perspectives* curriculum from CDI (available for free online to educators) uses mid-point and final quizzes, embedded in case studies and simulations, to measure comprehension and application of dialogue concepts.
- In contrast, the University of Arizona's National Institute for Civil Discourse has received over \$4 million in Democracy Fund and Hewlett Foundation support since 2011, yet offers no documented evaluation practices.

Among private universities, evaluation is harder to find and trace. Private institutions do not typically make such information available publicly — since they are widely dependent on private grants, it is difficult to assess what was achieved against what was promised, unless the grant-giving organization has publicly accessible reports.

Providence College's evaluation of its civic discourse work is perhaps most transparent because the donor has posted information on their website. Backed by a \$250,000 Arthur Vining Davis Foundation grant, the Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy Lab's (DID) *Conversations for Change* program uses:

- Dialogue Walls that collect more than 800 student responses annually;
- Faculty learning communities that embed dialogue across theology, sociology, and economics; and
- Systematic tracking of community engagement extending even to incarcerated learners.

Initially formalized through research by the Kettering Foundation, this multi-layered assessment has generated publishable findings and national conference presentations.

Macalester College provides no direct evaluation metrics. Yet both the university and its donors track external polls — and alumni support, channeled through the Macalester Alumni of Moderation, ties program success to FIRE’s free speech rankings. Macalester has moved from 191 (2022–23) to 184 (2024–25) in the latest poll.

Ohio Wesleyan University employs a more standardized method. Their partnership with the Constructive Dialogue Institute incorporates the *Perspectives* curriculum, similar to the University of Missouri, with mid-point and final quizzes providing quantifiable measures of dialogue and facilitation skills.

Prestigious private institutions with major civic discourse programs do not present much evaluation information.

- Duke University faculty and administration credit its improvement in civil discourse on its strong placement — 27th of 251 — in College Pulse’s free speech ranking, but offers no systematic internal evaluation.
- Harvard, DePauw, Penn, and Stanford’s Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Fellowship programs also run civic discourse initiatives without documenting assessment practices, underscoring that structured resources don’t necessarily translate into evaluation rigor. At Stanford, weekly polling technology is used in the *Democracy and Disagreement* class to track whether exposure to competing arguments changes student views in real time — the focus is less on participation and more on shifts in opinion.

Community Colleges offer more localized assessment of civil discourse efforts. These metrics vary widely and tend to be focused on single event or completion metrics as opposed to impact or learning outcomes.

- A student club at Linn-Benton Community College started its Civil Discourse program. Program growth, student newspaper op-eds, and testimonials serve as potential markers of impact.
- Austin Community College hosted a Bipartisan Policy Center symposium on discourse across differences but, because it was a single convening, evaluation was limited to the event’s success. Similarly, Rose State College’s *Great Debates*, integrated into CivicsCon 2024 and supported by McGraw-Hill, measured outcomes through conference-level success metrics rather than learning-specific ones.
- Kingsborough Community College takes a credit-based approach. Through a College Council Resolution, for-credit civic engagement is required in three forms: certified courses, component courses, and outside activities. Yet evaluation here focuses on credit completion rather than actual skill

development in dialogue and there is no official information available on whether these requirements translated into change in participants' civic engagement.

- Despite participating in the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Fellowship, Santa Fe Community College and St. Philip's Community College document no evaluation practices.

Institutional Patterns and Assessment Implications

Public universities that integrate research missions and foundation funding — like UC Colorado's Spencer collaboration — show the most advanced evaluation frameworks. Private universities are more uneven: Providence seems to have more comprehensive evaluation, while elite institutions, like Harvard, provide none. Community colleges demonstrate creative assessment under severe constraints, although their metrics tend not to focus on impact.

Ultimately, the most effective evaluations are designed into the program itself, not tacked on as external reporting requirements. Foundation accountability, especially from funders like The Spencer Foundation and Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, appear to drive better evaluation — yet this is uneven since private donors do not have to provide public reports on what worked and what did not. In short, accountability structures built systematically into programs from the outset are the most effective — but this is not the norm for civil discourse programs at institutions of higher education given their nascent nature.

Appendix A: A Sample of Civic Discourse Programs

Institution	Initiative Name	Region	State	Mission
California State University, Bakersfield	Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Program Fellowship	West	CA	<i>The mission of the ICDP is to advance fundamental democratic commitments to freedom of expression, equality, and agency; develop students' skills to facilitate conversations across political differences; and create spaces for civil disagreement to flourish on college campuses. For more about the program approach and experience, please see the ICDP Handbook.</i>
DePauw University	Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Program Fellowship	Midwest	IN	<i>The ICDP began in 2020 and is committed to three core principles: Democracy requires on-going work and investment. Civil disagreement is a core democratic practice. Civil disagreement begins with dialogue; a dialogic approach provides the needed structures and practices for civil disagreement.</i>
Harvard University	Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Program Fellowship	Northeast	MA	<i>The mission of the ICDP is to advance fundamental democratic commitments to freedom of expression, equality, and agency; develop students' skills to facilitate conversations across political difference; and create spaces for civil disagreement to flourish on college campuses</i>
Sante Fe Community College	Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Program Fellowship	South	FL	<i>Initiated in 2020, the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership supports eight ICDP Student Fellows from each of five partnering institutions (Harvard, Stanford, California State Bakersfield University, St. Philip's College, and Santa Fe College) as they engage in bi-monthly workshops (via Zoom), developing skills to engage and facilitate conversations across difference.</i>
St. Philips Community College	Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement	South	TX	<i>The mission of the ICDP is to advance fundamental democratic commitments to freedom of expression, equality, and agency; develop students' skills to facilitate conversations across political differences;</i>

	Program Fellowship			<i>and create spaces for civil disagreement to flourish on college campuses.</i>
Stanford University	Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Program Fellowship	West	CA	<i>The mission of the ICDP is to advance fundamental democratic commitments to critical inquiry, freedom of expression, equality, and agency; to develop students' skills to facilitate conversations across political differences; and to create spaces for civil disagreement to flourish on college campuses. The ICDP is a cross-institutional program led by a consortium of five colleges and universities located throughout the United States:</i>
Stanford University	Democracy and Disagreement Class	West	CA	<i>Host faculty members on opposing sides of a given issue for discussions that model civil disagreement.</i>
University of Denver	The Colorado Project	West	CO	<i>The Colorado Project serves as a state platform for deliberation focused on challenging issues affecting Colorado. Each year, the Scrivner Institute and the Josef Korbel School of Global and Public Affairs will convene a politically and geographically diverse group of civic, political, and private sector leaders to focus intensively on a core series of locally salient public policy challenges. Each group will put civil discourse into action, and work together to produce a set of comprehensive, collaborative policy recommendations to address the challenge. The goal is to establish common ground in order to move forward with practical solutions geared toward the public good.</i>
Linn-Benton Community College	Civil Discourse Program	West	OR	<i>The mission of LBCC's Civil Discourse Program is to promote dialogue that enhances understanding among individuals with diverse viewpoints in an open and respectful environment.</i>
Rose State College	Great Debates: Power, Politics, and People	South	OK	<i>Part of a larger series in which civic engagement and dialogue were a session. Not a stand-alone programming focused on just civic dialogue.</i>

<u>Austin Community College</u>	Discourse Across Differences at Community Colleges	South	TX	<i>It featured presentations on programs that incorporate civil discourse techniques in classrooms and co-curricular activities, and how these programs could be emulated on other campuses. The conversations centered on preparing students to be critical thinkers, engaged citizens, and employees in diverse workplaces.</i>
<u>University of Wisconsin-La Crosse</u>	Center for Civil Dialogue and Civic Engagement	Midwest	WI	<i>The Center for Civil Dialogue and Civic Engagement (CDCE) fosters an inclusive campus culture that celebrates campus communities, promotes civic engagement, and cultivates a strong sense of belonging. Through dialogue, workshops, and community-building initiatives, CDCE empowers students, faculty, and staff to engage with diverse perspectives, practice civil discourse, and enhance global awareness so that all members can thrive as individuals and contribute meaningfully to a more just and connected society</i>
<u>Ohio Wesleyan University</u>	Partnership with the Constructive Dialogue Institute	Midwest	OH	<i>The mission is prepare the entire OWU campus to have difficult conversations by providing civil discourse training to every OWU student and employee</i>
<u>Kansas State University</u>	Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy	Midwest	KS	<i>Our mission is to build community capacity for civic discourse and democratic engagement.</i>
<u>University of Missouri</u>	Democracy, Pluralism, and Civil Discourse	Midwest	MO	<i>Focuses on the foundations of pluralism in the United States' political system and provides students with a structured environment to practice civil discourse with their peers. In addition to offering foundational perspectives for the value of open dialogue and viewpoint diversity, students tackle some of the most controversial issues in U.S. politics in an effort to better understand each other</i>
<u>Macalester College</u>	Dialogue Across Difference	Midwest	MN	<i>We believe more speech — not less — is vital to learning. We treat differences of opinion as opportunities to learn and grow. For this reason, we encourage academic departments at Macalester to invite</i>

				<i>speakers to campus from across the political spectrum who are passionate about their areas of expertise. We train students to communicate persuasively in classes, using evidence to support their arguments. And, through co-curricular programming, we provide opportunities to apply these skills in dialogue with others.</i>
State University of New York	Civic Discourse Component	Northeast	NY	<i>The newly added civic discourse component ensures students gain the skills necessary to participate in civic life and engage in healthy dialogues in order to secure the future of our democracy.</i>
Providence College	Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy (DID) Lab	Northeast	RI	<i>To create a safe space that supports the development of well-informed and engaged students through civil discourse.</i>
Kingsborough Community College	Kingsborough Center for Civic Engagement	Northeast	NY	<i>The Kingsborough Center for Civic Engagement promotes democracy by critically examining, describing, and invigorating its institutions, practices, and multicultural roots. The Center's work is centered around the following foundational elements: democratic thinking, intercultural dialogue, advocacy through laws and institutions, and equitable social and economic conditions.</i>
University of Pennsylvania	Fall Seminars	Northeast	PA	<i>Develop a nuanced understanding of the 2024 election and give students the time and space to try and fail. Ask them to hone their critical-thinking skills and to respect opinions different from their own. And help them develop a nuanced understanding, no matter the subject</i>
University of Colorado	CU Dialogues Program	West	CO	<i>Supports the campus community by offering dialogues across differences, dialogue facilitation skill development, and strategic support for sustainable equity and inclusion capacity building.</i>
University of Arizona	National Institute for Civil Discourse	West	AZ	<i>NICD has developed a multi-faceted strategy to channel Americans' yearning into a coherent and powerful force. Our bold vision, compelling strategy, and high-profile board members combine to set NICD apart as a leader in this movement. In addition to</i>

				<i>inspiring and organizing everyday Americans, our strategy is designed to encourage elected leaders to put country ahead of partisanship.</i>
Duke University	Polis Center for Politics - Civil Discourse Project	South	NC	<i>The Civil Discourse Project (CDP) sponsors courses, events, and scholarship that promote civil discourse through modeling or teaching the capacities and virtues necessary to engage in healthy exchange across difference. At CDP, we aim to create, both inside and outside the classroom, intellectually diverse communities of friends who will both support and challenge in a collective pursuit of truth and knowledge—enabling all to become better thinkers, people, community members, citizens, and leaders. We maintain that such community requires freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression for faculty and students alike.</i>
Vassar College	Engaged Pluralism	Northeast	NY	<i>Engaged Pluralism is a Vassar program dedicated to bringing faculty, students, and administrators together to raise questions around inclusion and belonging, and to create programming to make our campus a better place to live, learn, and work</i>
Otterbein University	Advancing Campus Pluralism Grant	Midwest	OH	<i>Nourishing an inclusive campus culture where everyone feels welcome and accepted is essential to a healthy Otterbein community. This year, the university received the Advancing Campus Pluralism grant from Interfaith America to facilitate more opportunities to bring individuals of different social, cultural, racial, religious, and ideological communities together</i>
Wake Forest	Initiative on Religion, Pluralism, and American Public Life	South	NC	<i>Wake Forest University School of Divinity's Initiative on Religion, Pluralism, and American Public Life is a scholarly hub for critically examining how religion influences American public life and democracy.</i>
Colorado College	Conflict & Community: A Pluralism Series	West	CO	<i>Projects selected for Conflict & Community funding will engage our community in discourse across differences in perspective, experience, ideology, and identity,</i>

				<i>promoting shared understanding of, and empathy for, the human condition.</i>
University of California, Long Beach	Beach Pluralism Project	West	CA	<i>The Beach Pluralism Project, launched in fall 2024, is dedicated to the promotion of constructive engagement with others, regardless of identity and viewpoint, on our CSULB campus and in our local and global communities.</i>

Appendix B: Civic Discourse Activities in Sample Programs

Institution	Initiative Type	Definition of work	Activities Offered
California State University at Bakersfield	Project or Resource	Civil	As part of the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) students receive training in facilitation, engage in deliberative conversations, and the opportunity to interact with speakers. ³³
DePauw University	Project or Resource	Civil	As part of the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) students receive training in facilitation, engage in deliberative conversations, and the opportunity to interact with speakers.
Harvard University	Project or Resource	Civil	As part of the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) students receive training in facilitation, engage in deliberative conversations, and the opportunity to interact with speakers.
Sante Fe Community College	Project or Resource	Civil	As part of the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) students receive training in facilitation, engage in deliberative conversations, and the opportunity to interact with speakers.
St. Philips Community College	Project or Resource	Civil	As part of the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) students receive training in facilitation, engage in deliberative conversations, and the opportunity to interact with speakers.
Stanford University	Project or Resource	Civil	As part of the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) students receive training in facilitation, engage in deliberative conversations, and the opportunity to interact with speakers.
Stanford University	Project or Resource	Civil	Stanford's Democracy and Disagreement is a series of discussions with faculty that represent different

³³ Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics, "Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership Fellowships." The same reference applies to the ICDP programs at all six institutions in the consortium.

			viewpoints on a given issue. The discussions are open to enrolled undergraduates to attend, and available online several days later. ³⁴
University of Denver	Project or Resource	Civil	The Colorado Project brings in diverse stakeholders to deliberate challenging issues affecting Colorado. Select students are invited to engage in the conversations that involve an intense focus on local public policy challenges. As part of the process, the Colorado Project seeks to create collaborative policy recommendations. ³⁵
Linn-Benton Community College	Project or Resource	Civil	The LBCC Civil Discourse Program provides several activities. As previously mentioned, they offer (1) a Civil Discourse Board to engage controversial questions, (2) Braver Angels Debates for structured and casual environment for discussions, (3) Point/Counterpoint Op-eds in the LBCC newspaper, (4) Free Intelligent Conversations where students engage in thoughtful conversation with anyone who comes up to them, (5) Weekly Gatherings where students facilitate topics and agendas for discussion, and finally (6) Workshops and Roundtable Discussions where students combine presentations combined with interactive activities. ³⁶
Rose State College	Project or Resource	Civic	Rose State brought students, faculty, and the community together for two events that focused on civic engagement, democracy, and political awareness. The sessions were part of an annual event known as "CivicsCon" where events encouraged civil discourse and critical conversations. ³⁷
Austin Community College	Project or Resource	Civil	Austin Community College along with the Bipartisan Policy Center hosted the "Discourse Across Differences at Community Colleges" symposium that included 17 community colleges. The symposium featured presentations that incorporated civil discourse techniques in both classes and co-curricular activities in an effort to share best practices and lessons learned amongst community colleges. ³⁸

³⁴ Stanford School of Humanities and Sciences, "Democracy and Disagreement."

³⁵ Josef Korbel School of Global and Public Affairs, *The Colorado Project*, 2025, <https://korbel.du.edu/scrivner/colorado-project/>.

³⁶ Linn-Benton Community College, "Civil Discourse Program Guidebook," accessed August 28, 2025, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Tp2A6aDnsk1j3sW6aZOKlQS8i5vmz0H7Fk2NSZi0rAw/edit?usp=mbed_facebook.

³⁷ Rose State College, *Rose State College Engaged Community Through The Great Debates: Power, Politics, and People Series and CivicsCon – Rose State College*, April 22, 2025, <https://rose.edu/rose-state-college-engaged-community-through-the-great-debates-power-politics-and-people-series-and-civicscon/>.

³⁸ Johnson, "BPC and ACC Highlight Discourse Across Difference at Symposium for Community College."

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse	Institute or Center	Civil and Civic	The Center for Civil Dialogue and Civic Engagement aims to provide an inclusive campus culture and promote civic engagement through campus climate research, civil discourse and free expression, a reflection room and workshop facilitation. ³⁹
Ohio Wesleyan University	Project or Resource	Civil	Ohio Wesleyan, as of 2024, was one of the first institutions to require all members of its campus community, including students and employees, to undergo civil discourse training. The university partnered with Constructive Dialogue Institute to help its campus community engage in constructive dialogue. ⁴⁰
Kansas State University	Institute or Center	Civic	Under the A.Q. Miller School of Media and Communication the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy (ICDD). The ICDD combines a framework developed by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement into courses and co-curricular offerings that identifies skills, knowledge, and values for collective action. ⁴¹
University of Missouri	Class	Civil	The class “Democracy, Pluralism, and Civil Discourse” provides students an elective course with a structured environment to discover the underpinnings of the American system and its system of pluralism. The course offers the ability to practice civil discourse and open dialogue with their peers. ⁴²
Macalester College	Project or Resource	Civic	Macalester College offers several projects that focus on separate parts of civic engagement. Under Dialogue Across Differences the school offers a campus free expression project to provide resources for academic leaders in creating consistent, principled approaches to civil discourse. Also, the program offers the Civil Discourse Project that will “model the capacities and virtues necessary to engage in productive exchange.” ⁴³
State University of New York	Class	Civil	The State University System of New York implemented new general curriculum requirements for undergraduate students as part of their core competencies. The new mandatory requirements include a focus on civil discourse and providing students with skills necessary to advance respectful discourse. ⁴⁴

³⁹ UW-La Crosse, “Center for Civil Dialogue & Civic Engagement.”

⁴⁰ Ohio Wesleyan University, “Campuswide Initiative Promotes Civil Discourse.”

⁴¹ A.Q. Miller School of Media and Communications, “Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy.”

⁴² Truman School of Government and Public Affairs, “Practicing Civil Discourse in the Classroom.”

⁴³ Macalester College, *Dialogue Across Differences*.

⁴⁴ SUNY, “Undergraduate General Education Curriculum.”

Providence College	Project or Resource	Civic	Providence College hosts the Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy (DID) Lab that prioritizes its mission of “dialogue with others.” The DID Lab helps produce research around civic dialogue, community dialogue sessions in a dedicated “civic space,” and conversations for change that provides opportunities for students to engage in civil and meaningful conversations. ⁴⁵
Kingsborough Community College	Institute or Center	Civic	The Center for Center Engagement provides interdisciplinary research, non-partisan and bipartisan, learning and teaching that aims to be culturally restoring and sustaining, public facing programs, political engagement and coalition building. Additionally, the Center for Civic Engagement provides a unique library space dedicated to civic engagement in which archives the history and development of civic learning. ⁴⁶
University of Pennsylvania	Class	Civil	The University of Pennsylvania offers an elective fall seminar class for first-year students that provides a pilot class for civil dialogue. The students in the class participate in a film before class begins followed by discussions at dinner afterwards. During the class students are aided by a sophomore, junior, and senior that previously took the class, an opportunity to develop deeper relationships with peers, and develop nuanced understandings of the 2024 election. ⁴⁷
University of Colorado	Project or Resource	Civil	The University of Colorado Boulder offers the CU Dialogues Program with the purpose of supporting “differences across campus through providing dialogues across differences, dialogue facilitation skill development and strategic support for sustainable equity and inclusion capacity building.” ⁴⁸
University of Arizona	Institute or Center	Civil	The National Institute for Civil Discourse provides several initiatives that are not internal for students, but instead prioritize civil discourse for external populations. This includes CommonSense American (common sense policy solutions), Engaging Differences (constructive engagement of differences), 2020 Golden Rule (faith communities call for more dignity and respect in politics), State Legislative Program (increase bipartisanship, collaboration, and civility in state government), NICD

⁴⁵ Providence College, “Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy (DID) Lab.”

⁴⁶ Kingsborough Community College, “Kingsborough Community College Center for Civic Engagement.”

⁴⁷ Berger, “Small Seminars Foster Sense of Belonging for New College Students.”

⁴⁸ University of Colorado Boulder, “CU Dialogues Program,” 2025, <https://www.colorado.edu/cudialogues/home>.

			Research Center (research on political and social discourse), and Divided We Fall (a film series on Americans bridging divides). ⁴⁹
Duke University	Institute or Center	Civil	Duke University's Civil Discourse Project hosts numerous courses focused on increasing students skills on civil discourse, events dedicated to providing opportunities to engage with speakers, and a student magazine that allows students to share nuanced and diverse perspectives on various topics around politics, religion and philosophy, and civilization among others. ⁵⁰
Vassar College	Project or Resource	Pluralism	Engaged Pluralism provides intergroup dialogue to weather conflict and deepen relationships, restorative practices to help rebuild relationships after conflict, storytelling that allows for members to share their lives in open dialogue across their differences, and inclusive pedagogies that seeks to promote equity in the classroom and in learning spaces on the college. On top of these four resources, Engaged Pluralism operates working groups that delve into a single topic over the semester, while Igniter Pitches allow the campus community to bring together projects that foster belonging, equity, and/or dialogue. ⁵¹
Otterbein University	Project or Resource	Pluralism	Otterbein University has received grant funding from Interfaith America to fund the New Pluralism Collaborative to bring individuals of different social, cultural, racial, religious, and ideological communities together to attend trainings, develop cross-affinity campus events, and help cultivate a welcoming campus environment. ⁵² The new program requires students to apply to be Pluralism Collaborative Fellows.
Wake Forest University	Project or Resource	Pluralism	The Initiative on Religion, Pluralism, and American Public Life aims to create an intellectual space for lectures, seminars, and public discussions with and by Wake Forest faculty around some of the most challenging issues of today. ⁵³
Colorado College	Project or Resource	Pluralism	Colorado College faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners may apply for grant funding under the Conflict and Community: A Pluralism Series of up to

⁴⁹ University of Arizona, "National Institute For Civil Discourse - Engaging Differences Constructively."

⁵⁰ Duke University, "Civil Discourse Project."

⁵¹ Vassar College, "Engaged Pluralism."

⁵² Maggie Nicol, "Interfaith America Funds New Pluralism Collaborative at Otterbein," *Otterbein University*, December 16, 2024, <https://www.otterbein.edu/news/interfaith-america-funds-new-pluralism-collaborative-at-otterbein/>.

⁵³ Wake Forest University School of Divinity, *Initiative on Religion, Pluralism, and American Public Life*.

			\$10,000. Funding may be used for trainings, workshops, lectures or book discussions that engage the community across different perspectives, ideologies and identities. The activities are meant to meet series goals such as (1) highlight the critical role of education in unpacking complex social issues, (2) Promote practices of conflict resolution through meaningful conversations across divergent beliefs, positions, etc., (3) Prioritize solutions and skill building, (4) Enhance understanding and connection among communities, (5) Share and celebrate diverse perspectives, (6) Expand liberal arts learning beyond the classroom setting. ⁵⁴
University of California, Long Beach	Project or Resource	Pluralism	The Beach Pluralism Project is still actively being developed but provides opportunities for students to develop skills around conflict resolution, build interfaith competency, and bridge building. The project also seeks to provide space on campus for difficult conversations. ⁵⁵ The Beach Pluralism Project also provides undergraduate students the chance to become a Conoley Fellow to engage in a yearlong study of theory and practice of pluralism through a two-course sequence of training and vision and knowledge of pluralism.

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