

Civil Discourse Lab

End of the Year 2021-22



UNH Strengthens Commitment to Civil Discourse Lab

The University of New Hampshire solidified its support of the Lab with a tenure line beginning Fall 2022 to maintain and develop curriculum around dialogue, deliberation, collaboration, and organizational communication, as well as develop research in these areas. With two full-time professors focusing on research and teaching in areas that support communication promoting civil discourse, the Lab is in a position to develop sustainable programming within the Department of Communication, with partners across the university, and throughout New Hampshire. New initiatives in the works include certificated training through the UNH Professional Development program, and online training in conflict and communication, dialogue and diversity, collaboration, facilitating difficult conversations, civil discourse fields of practice, and much more.



Participants discuss water sustainability in the Seacoast spring '22

Given the present political context that is often hostile towards academic freedom, quick to censure topics that deserve nuance (i.e., “critical race theory”), and skeptical of science, there is an imperative for constructive communication across differences. This commitment to the Lab is particularly meaningful for UNH and the greater community. The additional tenure line faculty position ensures programming bringing continuity to curricula and longevity to research projects. The position is especially welcome because Professor Lydia Reinig concluded her three-year position (Spring 2022) as a Postdoctoral Research and Teaching Associate. The College of Liberal Arts and the Department of Communication are committed to learning opportunities that “keep the conversation going.”

With Enthusiasm! Jen & Renée,

Co-Directors, Civil Discourse Lab, Department of Communication

The mission of the Civil Discourse Lab is to strengthen the ability of students and community members to conduct meaningful conversations, collaborate, and weigh decisions around sometimes difficult but important topics to a civil society through research, experiential learning, and praxis.

Calendar of CDL Programmed Events

Fall 2021

September Kickoff meeting

September Free Speech &
Inclusive Campus Forum

October Facilitation Training

October NIF Elections Forum

December How Should We Protect
Our Free and Fair Elections?

Spring 2022

February Kickoff Meeting

April Peer to Peer Racial Equity
Challenge Event #1

April Peer to Peer Racial Equity
Challenge Event #2

April Peer to Peer Racial Equity
Challenge Event #3

April Stories and Voices: An
Interactive Dialogue Engaging
Water

April National Student Dialogue
SNF Ithaca Initiative, Joseph R.
Biden School of Public Policy,
University of Delaware

May CDL Alumni Connector End of
Spring Semester Event

Engaging The NH Community: Signature Programming & Curriculum

The Civil Discourse Lab produced two signature programs embedded in upper-division courses that function as co-curricular, experiential learning. Students engaged in coursework that simultaneously prepares for and executes a public dialogue/deliberation event that happens outside of the classroom with the broader university and/or public.

Voting Rights and Responsibilities (Fall)

Professor Borda's CMN 785 Communication and Deliberation Across Differences (Fall 2021) focused on the art of rhetoric in a civic context.

Students considered the role of storytelling; the saliency of facts, values, and rhetorical strategies; their agency as citizens; as well as the role of experts, the media, and the fourth estate in a functioning democracy.



Dr. Borda leads voting dialogue, Nov '21

Through collectively examining the question "Who Has the Right to Vote and Whose Vote Matters in the United States?" students undertook research on issue framing, exercised their analytical perspectives, and sharpened their critical awareness of current public controversies. In the second half of the semester, students worked together to design the issue guide "How Should We Protect Our Free and Fair Elections?" and facilitated a public forum for more than 30 participants from UNH and surrounding communities.

Stories and Voices: Engaging Water (Spring)

Professor Heath's CMN 662 Public Dialogue and Deliberation (Spring 2022) produced Stories and Voices: An Interactive Public Dialogue Engaging Water. The public dialogue was planned, designed, and implemented by students and was sponsored by the Global Racial and Social Inequality Lab. The purpose of the event was to help participants examine what we know about water, recognize the complex web of interests, identify overlapping values, and connect to water and to each other. The program hosted 88 participants and turned toward Indigenous expertise to contextualize water as part of historical and cultural heritage.

Peer Reviewed

Reinig, L., Borda, J., & McNamara, A. *Engaging Civic Conversation in Art Spaces: An Innovation in Practice*. Paper presented in the Public Dialogue division at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Seattle, WA Nov. 2021

Borda, J., Heath, R. G., & Reinig, L. *Preparing to Have Real Conversations: Assessing Alumni Impacts of the UNH Civil Discourse Lab* Competitively accepted as a Research in Progress Submission for the Public Dialogue division at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, New Orleans, LA Nov. 2022

Reinig, L., Heath, R. G., & Borda, J. L. (In press). *Rethinking Polarization: Discursive Opening and the Possibility for Sustaining Dialogue*. Communication Monographs. A journal of the National Communication Association.

Borda, J. L. "Rhetorical Legacies of the Opt-Out Revolution," in *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings* Ed. Andrea O'Reilly (Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2021).

Research in Progress

"Rethinking Polarization: Discursive Opening and the Possibility for Sustaining Dialogue"

Data gleaned from transcriptions of discussions that took place in Fall 2019 in a public dialogue designed to discuss four freedoms (from, of, for, and to) point to evidence that students with little communication training, representing the campus political spectrum (avowed democratic socialists to avowed conservatives), demonstrated not only the willingness but the capacity to engage across ideological stances. Without prompting, students repeatedly pivoted conversations away from performative ideological talking points to genuine and sincere questioning of one another as they tackled topics ranging from immigration to gun regulation. The findings suggest when given the conditions for dialogue, such as ground rules and nonpartisan facilitators, constructive conversation ensues.

"Preparing to Have Real Conversations: Assessing Alumni Impacts of the UNH Civil Discourse Lab"

Competitively accepted as a Research in Progress Submission for the annual meeting for the National Communication Association's Public Dialogue and Deliberation Division, (Borda, Heath, & Reinig). We found that previous studies of similar programs focus on increased political engagement and civic understandings. Our study specifically addresses *how* students interpreted their use of civic learning (particularly the intersection of deliberative mindsets, collaborative leadership, and civic dialogue) as *crossover skills* that positioned them for success engaging in a civically diverse and polarizing world. Our research in progress aims to extend previous assessment of institutional programs and learning outcomes to also consider the impact of deliberative pedagogy and civic learning programs beyond markers of typical civic engagement.

Engaging Water with Attention to Indigenous Knowledge (Analysis in Progress)

Transcription data were collected from the *Stories and Voices* public discussion on values held about water in the Seacoast region. Of the eleven round table discussions, seven groups had the opportunity to learn from local Indigenous participants. The program also featured formal input from Paul Pouliot, Head Male Speaker of the Cowasuck Band of the Pennacook-Abenaki Peoples and featured content narrated by Anne Jennison, an Indigenous storyteller. Our research question compares conversations that included the local knowledge of Indigenous persons in the discussions versus those who did not have the benefit of this diverse perspective represented that evening. We are curious about representation and how different types of knowledge affect understandings of the topic. Data are presently being transcribed by CDL Fellows.

Faculty Invited Presentations

Fall

SNF Ithaca Initiative Meeting,
Joseph R. Biden School of Public
Policy. Inaugural round table of
leaders of civil discourse
University of Delaware, Heath,
October 22, 2021

“CDL Alumni Study”

Our College of Postdoctoral
Scholars, Center for the Humanities,
First Monday Series, Reinig,
October, 2021

“How to Have Difficult Conversations”

UNH Alumni Connections Webinar
Borda & Heath, December 14, 2021

Spring

“Integrating Racial Equity Challenge”
UNH’s [Center for Innovative
Teaching and Learning
\(CEITL\)](#) invited guest speaker,
Faculty Teaching Workshop Series,
Heath, January 18, 2021

“Education in a Democracy and the
Praxis of Civil Discourse: Meeting
People Where They Are”
New Hampshire College &
University Council (NHCUC) Library
Directors Group Development Day,
Heath, March 11, 2022

Summer

“Creating a Culture of Civil
Discourse” President’s Leadership
Council, Heath & Borda, June 9,
2022

“Listening Across Diverse
Perspectives” Global Listening
Centre Festival, Heath, August 2022
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g34GfuKz4T8>

Invited Talks: Highlights

“How to Have Difficult Conversations”

UNH Alumni Connection Webinar

The ability to navigate tough conversations is an important skill in your work, community, and personal life. Being able to do it well is difficult, and sometimes we’d rather ignore these conversations altogether. During this webinar, Professors Borda and Heath discussed rethinking civility, talked about why it’s important to have challenging discussions and provided ideas to have meaningful conversations in

your life. Civil Discourse Lab leaders also discussed the results of a recent Alumni impact study, including what our alumni are saying about the importance of such skills both in the workplace and in their personal lives.



CDL Affiliates and Fellows at
University of Delaware, April ‘22

“Listening Across Diverse Perspectives” (Video Presentation)

The Global Listening Centre (GLC) Festival hosted its first virtual conference collaborating with Ball State University. Professor Heath presented “Listening Across Diverse Perspectives.” Our students featured proudly toward the latter part of the video (25-minute mark). The video was created by student Marco Calvanese (‘22). The Global Listening Centre is an International Consortium of scholars across disciplines advancing the important work of listening toward a better world.

“Creating a Culture of Civil Discourse”

The College of Liberal Arts Dean, Michele Dillon, and Provost Wayne Jones, launched an initiative to foster civil discourse campus-wide. The program began by convening the President’s Council, who participated in a two-hour workshop devoted to brainstorming about civil discourse and other forms of free speech and democratic communication on campus. CDL and COLA are committed to supporting a series of campus discussions that contribute to a culture of civil discourse at all levels of leadership and with all campus partners, that can be tailored toward specific faculty, staff, and student groups. If your department or organization would like to organize training on topics related to civil discourse, such as constructive conflict, dialogue and difference, and setting the conditions for difficult discussions, please contact us at civil.discourse@unh.edu.

By the Numbers 2021-2022

560.5 Cumulative hours of volunteer facilitating, training, and attending related events/lectures

6 CDL Sponsored training opportunities resulted in **21 hours** students spend in extracurricular trainings

Students attended **22 events** resulting in **109 hours** students attended events related to Civil Discourse

7 Facilitation opportunities resulted in **69 hours** spent volunteering/facilitating

4 Students attended the Biden School of Public Policy resulting in **18 hours** of collaboration and discussion for each

24 Active* students in the fall

14 Active students in the spring

2 students received over **40 hours** during the entire academic year

Since December 2017

1,953.35 Cumulative hours students participated in facilitating, training, and related events/lectures

523 Hours students spent in extracurricular trainings

518.5 Hours student spent volunteering facilitating

507.5 Hours students spent attending related events (not training)

206 Active students (extra-curricular, not including course enrollments)

~560 Students enrolled in CDL designed classes: Collaborative Leadership, Public Dialogue & Deliberation, Communication Across Differences, Intro to Civil Discourse, Understanding Civil Discourse (some students will have taken more than one course)

~1,508 Estimated number of event attendees (faculty, students, and community members) in facilitation events organized at the University and in the community (some overlap)

Enhancing Student Success

An Invitation to the Biden School of Public Policy

The Civil Discourse Lab faculty were invited twice in the 2021-22 academic year to participate as advisors and participants in the SNF Ithaca Initiative. Hosted by the Joseph R. Biden School of Public Policy at the University of Delaware, the Initiative, funded by



Left-right, Kyla MacLaughlin, Alexa Bobinski, Renee Heath, Valerie Biden Owens, McKenna Morgan, Ross Blauvelt

the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, aims to support civil discourse curricula in academia towards better policy making. In October, Professor Heath participated in a round table discussion with other national civil discourse leaders. In the spring, four students accompanied her to Delaware to participate in two full-day workshops facilitating discussions on enhancing civil discourse on their respective campuses. University of New Hampshire was one of twenty schools to participate nation-wide in this inaugural event.

Forthcoming

Lab faculty envision a 2-credit dialogue lab section to complement (willing) courses that would benefit from facilitated discussions navigating difficult topics. The program would move future training to a curricular model that serves the university across disciplines.

New Leadership

For the 2022-23 academic year, we welcome a new student Assistant Program Director (APD), Alexa Bobinski, '23, who will be helping to track student volunteer and training hours and assist in research projects. Additionally, Ross Blauvelt, '23, will serve as a CDL fellow assisting on programming and marketing. New fellows, Celia Bajrami and Hayleyann Gifford, will work on other CDL-related projects.

Students with 25 CDL Hours or more:

Celia Bajrami
 Ross Blauvelt
 Alexa Bobinski
 Marco Calvanese
 Jonathan Goldberg
 Kira Kelly
 Kyla MacLaughlin
 Molly McQuaide
 McKenna Morgan
 Phoebe Myers
 Paige Verillo

Students with 10 CDL Hours or more:

MJ Condon
 Emma DaRocha
 Kevin Heroux
 Gillian Horon
 Ellie Humphreys
 Violette Ramy
 Jillian Roster
 Charlotte Stansbury
 Megan Switzgable

With sincere gratitude we say goodbye to dedicated leaders:

APD: Paige Verillo, '22,
 Fellows: Jonathan Goldberg, '21
 Kira Kelley, '22

And especially:

Dr. Lydia Reinig, the new Director of Dialogue Across Differences Program, at beautiful Sewanee (aka The University of the South), TN

Budget

The Civil Discourse Lab is generously supported by contributions from the following organizations: UNH Responsible Governance and Sustainable Citizen Project funded the three-year Post doctoral Research and Teaching Associate position that ended May 2022. The UNH College of Liberal Arts and the COLA Dean's Unrestricted Gift Fund helps support student fellowships and research projects. The UNH Global Racial and Social Inequality Lab granted stipends to facilitate Indigenous participation in our Stories and Voices program. An annual donation from Andy Coville ('82), CEO of Brodeur Partners, supports programming costs for signature public events and helps fund our Assistant Program Director. The Department of Communication at the University of New Hampshire provides administrative and other in-kind support for student programs. The Department supports the CDL directors to manage the Lab as part of their service. CDL directors were not paid for their administrative or student work.

In addition to funding, the Lab's work was supported by various UNH and community partners. Thank you to Denise and Paul Pouliot of the Cowasuck Band of the Abenaki-Pennacook Peoples, Kathleen Blake, Anne Jennison, Kathy Duderstadt, and Jennifer Brewer who all played key roles in the planning of Stories and Voices: An Interactive Dialogue Engaging Water.

Funding/Grants	Expenditures	Descriptions
5741.65 carry over balance from FY 21	5,033.58	Student/Simoneau Fringe & Salaries
5,000 Coville Fund Unrestricted	556.00	Issue Guides and Printing
1,000 GRSIL Restricted	306.67	Supplies (i.e., easels, notepads, dry erase)
	1,762	Food for events
	614.17	Misc. (i.e., Reinig conference; books)
	1,000	Participation Stipends
Totals \$11,741.65	9,271.85	Carry over to 2022-23 2, 469.80

Written by Renee Heath with Jennifer Borda & Alexa Bobinski
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