



Civil Discourse Lab

End of the Year Report May 2018



Quick Facts

- 35 Active Students
- 1 Alumni
- 367.5 Cumulative hours of structured extracurricular training and facilitation
- Five months since soft launch

Mission Statement

The Civil Discourse Lab strengthens the ability of our students and community members to conduct meaningful conversations, collaborate, and weigh decisions around sometimes difficult but important topics to a civil society through research, engaged teaching and praxis.

Addressing Grand Challenges: Department of Communication Launched the Civil Discourse Lab

The Department of Communication “soft” launched the Civil Discourse Lab in November 2017, focusing on achievable accomplishments within the present budget, such as pedagogy and student engagement. The Department is building partnerships with an eye towards cultivating the Lab as an innovative hub for research focused on public participation, civil conversations, and dialogue. The Lab strives to bring academics and student engagement focused on civil discourse together. Support through the College of Liberal Arts, the Responsible Governance and Sustainable Citizens Project, Center for the Humanities, and several small grants, facilitated a faculty visit to the Pennsylvania State’s Center for Democratic Deliberation (CDD), as well as a faculty member’s attendance at a preconference and panels dedicated to research and teaching public dialogue and deliberation at the National Communication Association annual meeting in Dallas, November 2017.



Teaching

- CMN 702 Public Dialogue and Deliberation
- CMN 703 Democratic Deliberation
- CMN 742 Dialogue, Teamwork & Conflict
- CMN 760 Seminar in Mediation
- CMN 598 Collaborative Leadership

First Annual “Stories and Voices: An Interactive Dialogue Engaging

Immigration” was designed and executed by 18 seniors in CMN Public Dialogue and Deliberation, a capstone course. Students read deeply on the subjects of dialogue, deliberation, language, equity and equality. They learned about neutral facilitation and how to include

expertise in the conversation without intimidating or steering the dialogue. In collaboration with university partners, students created an informative program and interactive video to guide the conversation. **More than 90 people attended; 14% of the attendees were community members.**

Three “on-tap” experts on immigration roamed the room to clarify the myths and separate the facts.

The course joined a substantive curricula on dialogue, including Dialogue, Teamwork and Conflict, which had students designing and simulating formal dialogues rooted in difficult conversations, such as those around opioid addiction. Additionally courses on collaboration, rhetoric, media literacy, and deliberation were taught in the CMN department.

Future Teaching

Democratic Deliberation will be another new offering in the fall. We applied for the Association of American Colleges and Universities Civic Learning and Democracy Initiatives mini-grant to develop a curriculum pathway and internship pipeline.



“Thank you and your students for the depth at which you presented the topic and the format - I thought the event was fabulous! Thank you so much and I look forward to next year's event!”

-Community Member
April 19, 2018





Experiential Learning

Quick Facts:

- 114 cumulative hours of volunteer facilitation
- 21 hours of extra-curricular training were offered
- 21 hours of facilitation experience offered
- 4 students earned more than 20 hours
- 16 students earned more than 10 hours
- Student majors: Communication, Political Science, Sustainability, and Business

More than 35 students affiliated with the Civil Discourse Lab The faculty advisor tracked students' structured extra-curricular hours to help build their resumes and foster an identity around civil discourse training. We scanned the university for lectures that would strengthen students' abilities to lead civil discussions. The program began with students attending Megan Phelps' lecture, sponsored by the MUB, who spoke to the power of dialogue as the antidote to hate. Not only did students attend lectures from the outstanding MUB Series, the Kidder Talk, and other university events pertaining to equity, but they had the opportunity to attend NH Listens 6-hour facilitation training for free. Students worked with Professor Sheila McNamee to bring Sallyann Roth to campus for an intimate talk on her pioneering work with the Public Conversations Project. Sallyann and Sheila were part of the team that first brought together opposing sides of the abortion debates as a way of building empathy and acknowledging the complexity of the topic. Their work has been groundbreaking in terms of bringing dialogic theory to practice.



Community partners both in and outside of the university sought our services.

Seventeen students facilitated a two-day scientific summit meeting entitled, "Preparing for a Northwest Passage: A Workshop on the role of New England in Navigating the New Arctic." The NSF funded project granted to UNH scientists called for a participation component. Students received specialized facilitation training, and volunteered a total of 96 hours of facilitation time.

Additionally, the American Civil Liberties Union asked our students to facilitate at the Governor's Listening Session on Diversity and Inclusion April 9, 2018 in Portsmouth. Six CDL Affiliates donated 18 hours of facilitation time for this project.

Future Service

The ACLU is presently meeting with CMN faculty to collaborate on more opportunities for CDL students to facilitate in fall 2018.

We plan to grow the number of Lab Affiliates by **reaching out more specifically across disciplines.**

We are collaborating with NH Listens to formulate a UNH Listens team that is responsive to the University's needs.



Research

Faculty in the Department of Communication partnered with New Hampshire Listens, the Carsey Institute, Paul College, and the Geography Department to form a **MIST** interdisciplinary team. The team has met for nearly a year to conceptualize a larger study regarding equity and Civic Health in the state of New Hampshire. Research partners organized a panel at the New England Political Science Conference April 21, 2018 to discuss the unique lenses through which each team member will approach studying Civic Health. The MIST team won funding for 2018 and has begun to apply for grants to initiate community research partners.

New Hampshire Listens is the subject of study authored by Renee Heath that will be published in the *Journal of Public Deliberation* this fall as the journal examines public dialogue and deliberation in an "Era of Rising Authoritarianism." The interpretive study features NH Listens work regarding Blue and You, a series of dialogues on police and community relationships. Professor Heath also led the study, "Beyond Aggregation: the 'Wisdom of Crowds' Meets Dialogue in the Case Study of Shaping America's Youth," published October 2017 in the *Journal of Public Deliberation*.

Jennifer Borda's current book project examines dominant discourse about working motherhood and sites of deliberation in online communities (blogs, editorials, and activist forums) that negotiate, revise, and resist traditional norms of gender, work, and family.

Research

Future Research:

We applied to the Kettering Foundation to receive “fellowship” training focused on building research programs and partners related to the deliberative model of the National Issues Forum. Two faculty are on deck in 2019 for this fully-funded Kettering Fellow Program.

The Lab foresees partnering across disciplines to catalyze public participation in research projects. For example, NSF grants in the sciences sometimes require a public participation feature as a part of their funding. Presently relationships with University partners are being explored.

Additionally, with greater resources the Lab will engage undergraduates and graduate student research in projects. Students will learn interviewing and observation techniques, as well as qualitative analysis.

The Stories and Voices series will eventually measure the work it is doing with students and community members.

We assigned space for Lab research (to be shared with Language and Social Interaction Lab) for collaboration on future research projects.

CDL Budget

Expenses

Poll Everywhere software	\$79.00
UNH parking for community members	\$66.00
Material costs for brochures, posters, program guides not absorbed by the Department of Communication	\$513.42
UNH Catering for 100 persons for Immigration Public Dialogue (light dinner/soft drinks)	\$1,592.50
Speaker Stipend, Faculty/Student Leader Dinner, Pizza for student seminar attendees Sallyann Roth, Co-Founder Public Conversations Project April 5	\$400.00
Student Intern: on-going tracking Lab credit hours, communication and advertising, updating social media, programming (10 weeks/10 hours week)	\$1,400.00
Frontiers of Democracy Conference 2018 Tisch College, Tufts University June 21-23 for 1 faculty member	\$350.00
Pizza and drinks for student training event	\$60.00
Signature lapel pins for high achievement of lab hours 50 pins (3-year supply)	\$187.00
Total:	\$4647.00

Support

Center for the Humanities	\$950.00
Responsible Governance and Sustainable Citizens Project	\$3,837.00
Office of Engagement and Academic Outreach	\$79.00
Total:	\$4,529.00



High achieving
students earned a
leadership award lapel
pin for their Lab hours
& service to be worn on
their graduation robes

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Why “Civil Discourse”?

It is a fair question to ask why we have named our efforts Civil Discourse. For some the word “civil” is code for suppression of other forms of expression, such as emotion (oft attributed as a gendered weakness), or anger (dismissive to persons who have long experienced social injustice). Therefore we offer our definition of civil discourse in this space.

Civil discourse does not mean an absence of conflict or an absence of expression of conflict. Indeed we cannot arrive at creativity or justice if we do not embrace our differences constructively. Civil discourse does mean that we approach conflict with grace and that we endeavor to respect those with whom we disagree.

Civil discourse does not mean that our discourse will never cause pain. Sometimes very meaningful conversations are so because they were painful to experience. But we do not seek to inflict pain on others when we approach them in the spirit of civil discourse.

Civil discourse does not mean we discount discourses of resistance or anger as a way of moving society towards justice. There is a place for adversarial discourse in the context of a democratic society, especially as it has the power to give voice to the marginalized. That said, the space that we seek to create through our commitment to civil discourse is not driven by resistance but by understanding.

Civil discourse also does not mean that there are no rules. Together we create the standards for how we should engage with one another, recognizing that rules of engagement are an ethical exercise. For example civil discourse applies some of our

core principles of good communication such as not name calling, and owning our positions.

Finally, we believe that being civil and politically correct are not one in the same. To be civil in conversations demands that we grant respect to the perspectives and interpretations of others even if we cannot possibly agree with them. Political correctness does not seek to understand. It is not sincere. In contrast, we demand sincerity in the spaces that we create.

Thus we reclaim that civility; a civility that invites constructive conflict, and gracious contestation; and a civility that sincerely seeks to understand and learn from one another as an important concept in creating a just world.

Thank you

To our sponsors:

Responsible Governance and
Sustainable Citizens Project
Center for the Humanities
Office of Community, Equity,
and Diversity
Office of Engagement and
Academic Outreach
College of Liberal Arts

To our facilitation partners:

Daniel Pontoh, ACLU,
Katharine Duderstadt, UNH,
Michele Holt-Shannon & Bruce
Mallory, NH Listens

To our immigration experts:

Professor Lucy Sayler,
Cathy Chesley, J.D.,
Lina Shay, J.D.,
Professor Sara Withers,
Maggie Fogarty, Director AFSC

*And the many colleagues, students,
and community members who made
this first year possible.*