

PREPARING PUBLIC LEADERS FOR POLARIZED TIMES

Embedding Constructive
Dialogue in Schools of
Public Service

THANK YOU

We would like to begin by acknowledging the fourteen schools that participated in this cohort.



- Clinton School of Public Service**
University of Arkansas
- Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy**
Carnegie Mellon University
- Jeb E. Brooks School of Public Policy**
Cornell University
- Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy**
University of Michigan
- Truman School**
University of Missouri
- John Lewis Public Administration Program**
School of Professional Advancement, Tulane University
- Paul H. O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs**
Indiana University, Indianapolis
- College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs**
University of Illinois Chicago
- Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs**
University of Minnesota
- School of Public and International Affairs**
University of Pittsburgh
- School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences**
University of Texas at Dallas
- Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy**
The University of Virginia
- The Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs**
University of Wisconsin-Madison
- The Goldman School of Public Policy**
University of California, Berkeley

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to prepare students for engaged citizenship and leadership in an increasingly diverse and polarized society. In service to this goal, the Volcker Alliance partnered with the Constructive Dialogue Institute (CDI) to lead the Constructive Dialogue Curriculum Initiative beginning in the spring of 2024 and running through the 2024-25 academic year. The 15-month Initiative equipped 14 schools of public service with skills and resources to bring dialogue-at-scale to their campuses.

The Initiative supported a wide-range of dialogue-focused interventions. Most of the participating schools implemented CDI's flagship learning program, *Perspectives*, into orientation programs and course curricula, resulting in statistically significant improvements in intellectual humility, affective polarization, and finding common ground behaviors across the cohort of learners. Students also reported benefits of the program, with 79% noting that *Perspectives* helped them gain valuable professional and/or life skills. In addition to *Perspectives*, Volcker institutions effectively integrated constructive dialogue into their courses, campus activities, and leadership programs.

Drawing on insights from participating institutions, this paper outlines four key “best practice” recommendations for leaders seeking to effectively embed dialogue at scale into their campuses, as well as common pitfalls to anticipate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ENSURE INSTITUTIONAL ALIGNMENT

Dialogue initiatives thrive when they are supported at multiple levels across a school and include leaders, faculty, staff, and students. Without visible endorsement from deans and program leads, dialogue risks being perceived as optional or peripheral. Without input from students, dialogue programming risks feeling perfunctory. Alignment ensures resources, credibility, and continuity.

The University of Minnesota made constructive dialogue one of its four strategic priorities, which elevated the visibility and importance of the work to faculty, staff, students, and alumni. They offered their communities multiple opportunities to explore constructive dialogue, through orientation activities, leadership development, and ongoing workshops.

At the **University of Illinois Chicago’s College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs**, the College’s leadership took an active role in promoting and supporting dialogue work. The College chose to implement *Perspectives* through a first-year seminar taught by the College’s Dean. The College’s senior academic advisor oversaw the implementation of *Perspectives*. Students saw that leadership valued the work and bought in. As one student put it, “It helped me to stop assuming and listen to people’s stories. It gives me the moment to stop and think about the other side and not just think about my own personal beliefs.”

Leaders can also draw on existing campus centers for civic engagement, pluralism, or teaching and learning. These centers (or other sources) bring cultural legitimacy and technical expertise that help build faculty trust and sustain momentum.

Cornell’s Brooks School of Public Policy brought in expertise from another center on Cornell’s campus, the Center for Dialogue and Pluralism (CDP). To foster this partnership, the entire Brooks School Academic Leadership team participated in two three-hour workshops led by the CDP Director. These workshops introduced Leadership to foundational dialogue skills and created space for them to explore ways to embed these practices in the Brooks School. Encouraging understanding and ownership at the leadership level enhanced collaboration and coordination between the CDP and the Brooks School over the course of the academic year.

EMBED DIALOGUE IN MULTIPLE PATHWAYS

Constructive dialogue programming is most effective when it is embedded deeply into the campus and community ecosystem rather than treated as a one-time skill-building activity. When dialogue is approached as part of an ecosystem, constructive dialogue programming can build the foundation for a self-sustaining campus culture and bring dialogue into the wider community.

Using an ecological framework, **Carnegie Mellon’s Heinz College** embedded dialogue across three levels: micro (individual reflections in class), meso (a joint speaker series with the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Public and International Affairs), and macro (a campus-wide culture initiative). Dialogue was not confined to the classroom, but featured in events, co-curricular programming, and semester-wide themes. By situating dialogue in every layer of student life, Heinz signaled clearly that constructive dialogue is a defining pillar of the school’s culture.

Schools working within the Curriculum Initiative implemented dialogue programming in different pathways. Many used orientation. Others focused on coursework. CDI’s analytics report (see Appendix A) suggests that these pathways were equally effective.

During its Professional Residency Week, **Tulane** integrated dialogue into simulations grounded in workplace dilemmas. Exercises such as “Agree/Disagree” lines and scenario-based discussions allowed students—many already in mid-career—to apply dialogue skills directly to professional contexts. Participants reported high satisfaction and immediate applicability.

Michigan’s Ford School piloted the “Bridge Builders” initiative, selecting four students through a competitive process to serve as dialogue facilitators. The students designed peer-focused programs, introduced constructive dialogue skills across the school, and advised the dean on expanding dialogue initiatives. The experience proved transformative for the Bridge Builders themselves and generated concrete recommendations that the school is now adopting in the 2025–26 academic year.

When possible, dialogue programming should be integrated into existing institutional priorities and initiatives to ensure sustainability and reduce the risk of overburdening administration, faculty, and staff involved. By linking dialogue opportunities with mission-driven goals, institutions can create meaningful, high-value programming that strengthens both campus culture and community relationships.

The Clinton School at the University of Arkansas embedded CDI’s *Perspectives* into an established, year-long practicum where teams of students work in collaboration with community partners on live, field-based projects. The aim was to help groups connect and collaborate in ways that would be resilient to disagreement and conflict. This potentially powerful implementation pathway introduces constructive dialogue skills in a context directly relatable to the work that many graduates of schools of public service will do upon graduation.

PAIR CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE WITH GREATER VIEWPOINT DIVERSITY IN COURSE SYLLABI

Fostering constructive dialogue depends not only on how we teach, but on what we teach. When course syllabi privilege a narrow range of texts, students are insulated from the real intellectual disagreements that shape democratic life. Schools should encourage faculty to include materials that reflect multiple ideological, methodological, and experiential viewpoints. This approach enriches the curriculum and signals to students that public service requires grappling with contested ideas.

Pairing this aim with skill and capacity-building in constructive dialogue is a very promising pathway for schools of public service, as the two can be mutually supportive. Constructive dialogue provides students with the tools to handle disagreement; diverse syllabi provide the material on which to practice. Together, they can foster resilience, curiosity, and civic engagement.

The Instructor of Democracy, Pluralism & Civil Discourse, a feature course at the **Truman School of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Missouri**, paired constructive dialogue skills work with a reading list covering many flashpoint issues that spanned political and social ideologies. Carefully selected readings juxtaposed a range of arguments. Discussion prompts and classroom activities regularly asked students to engage with perspectives they disagreed with, including through “assigned side” debates. A key assignment asked students to interview a friend or relative they disagreed with on an important issue in order to better understand their position. Students rated the class very highly, and in self-reflections at the end of the course often noted how much more they were able to engage with each other when they shifted from “winning arguments” to listening and curiosity.

PROVIDE PRACTICE OPPORTUNITIES

Dialogue is a skill, not a concept. Like negotiation, public speaking, or leadership, it requires rehearsal in structured settings where students can try, fail, reflect, and try again. One-off experiences, even well-designed ones, rarely produce durable change. Schools that build repeated and varied practice opportunities both inside and outside the classroom are likely to see the most significant growth in students' confidence and capacity to engage across different beliefs and perspectives. Schools in the Curriculum Initiative created opportunities for practice at multiple levels.

Course Activities

Within courses, practice opportunities could be connected to assignments, such as University of Missouri's course assignment to interview a friend or relative whom they disagree with, or involve in-class discussions or discussion boards, which encourage participants to take sides they may not agree with to understand different viewpoints. The University of Wisconsin-Madison developed an entire course dedicated to strategies to address disagreement and conflict in public policy, and provided students opportunities to practice dialogue-based skills in structured conversations throughout the semester. These course-related practice opportunities relate the growth of their dialogue skills to course goals that students prioritize and allow students to put skills into practice in a structured environment among peers. These academic activities can also connect constructive dialogue skills to the student's future career development.

Co-Curricular Activities

Campus activities can facilitate practice opportunities for students in less structured environments with a wider range of dialogue participants. Dialogue can be pulled into traditional campus-wide activities, like speaker series. For example, the University of Pittsburgh partnered with Carnegie Mellon University to offer a speaker series tied to both schools' mission to integrate dialogue into their campus culture. Carnegie Mellon University also experimented with other formats to create opportunities to practice dialogue, including facilitated "Conversations at the Crossroads" debates, which allowed the audience to take sides and engage in constructive debate.

Student Leadership

Linking dialogue practice to leadership roles accelerates skill development and allows students to distinguish themselves beyond the classroom. Career-oriented programs and civic initiatives provide natural settings for students to test and refine these abilities. At the University of Virginia, dialogue training spurred greater student participation in leadership and civic engagement programs. At Michigan, the Ford School's "Bridge Builders" were hired to design and lead dialogue activities across campus, embedding practice opportunities into positions of visible responsibility.

Students were key drivers of practice opportunities for constructive dialogue at the **University of California, Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy**. Student leaders applied new dialogue skills to planning and facilitating Lunch and Learn events. After the successful Fall rollout of a new course the school developed to support constructive dialogue, students requested that Goldman offer the class again in the Spring. They also built a bridge across generations of Goldman alums during a reunion with the Class of 1968, which involved a screening of a film about dialogue and opportunities to engage in provocative conversations.

The need for increased practice opportunities was one of the most common areas of improvement identified among participating institutions, and student feedback similarly highlighted the need for ongoing and progressively advanced practice opportunities. Institutions took this feedback seriously, with many highlighting future plans for more scaffolded practice opportunities to allow students at different levels in their programs to apply their dialogue skills in different environments.

Students at the **Paul H. O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University Indianapolis** wanted more opportunities for dialogue. The School incorporated dialogue programming into their orientation "Bridge Week." They then sought to reinforce their work in orientation by building further programming into first-year seminars, including using "peer circles" to practice dialogue throughout the first semester. The tone that the school set resonated with their students, as student feedback at the conclusion of the seminars consistently asked for more scenarios and practice.

COMMON PITFALLS TO ANTICIPATE

While the benefits are clear, leaders should anticipate challenges that have hindered other institutions:

Fit with Curriculum

Dialogue modules can feel “bolted on” when not clearly tied to course objectives. Schools should provide faculty and staff resources to ensure that dialogue resources are smoothly integrated into courses and co-curricular programming.

Time Constraints

Orientation weeks and packed syllabi leave little room for dialogue. Effective implementations often distribute capacity-building across multiple settings rather than relying on a single event.

Assessment Gaps

Traditional assessments typically don’t capture growth in humility or listening skills. Schools can explore assessment options to address these gaps, such as lightweight surveys and reflective course assignments.

Faculty and Staff Buy-in

At this moment, faculty and staff may reasonably hesitate to address polarization directly. Opportunities to explore dialogue programming prior to implementation, structured feedback mechanisms, and visible leadership support can build trust and participation.

CONCLUSION

Public policy education must go beyond equipping students with analytical skills. To lead in divided societies, graduates need the confidence and capacity to engage across ideological, cultural, and experiential lines. By ensuring alignment, embedding dialogue throughout the school’s ecosystem, promoting viewpoint diversity, and providing ample practice opportunities, leaders of schools of public service can prepare their graduates to meet this challenge.

The experiences of participating institutions demonstrate that constructive dialogue thrives when students are offered repeated, scaffolded opportunities to practice, reflect, and grow. By embedding dialogue into coursework, campus culture, and leadership pathways, and by fostering collaboration across institutional and community stakeholders, campuses can create self-sustaining ecosystems that support belonging, inclusion, and resilience. These findings underscore the importance of prioritizing dialogue initiatives as mission-aligned investments in student development, institutional culture, and civic responsibility. Advancing these recommendations offers schools of public service pathways to stronger campus communities and students prepared to navigate and lead in a complex, pluralist society.



APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1

VOLCKER ALLIANCE ANALYTICS REPORT

In the 2024-2025 academic year, 775 Volcker Alliance learners used *Perspectives*, with a completion rate of 87%. The program achieved high satisfaction ratings. Among these learners, 88% were satisfied with the experience of *Perspectives*, with a median satisfaction score of 8 out of 10.

BENEFITS AND QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

Many *Perspectives* learners highlighted the perceived benefits of the program:

- **79%** said that *Perspectives* **helped them gain valuable professional and/or life skills.**
- **77%** said **they practice what they learned** from the *Perspectives* program in their personal or professional life.
- **77%** said that *Perspectives* helped them **feel more confident having difficult conversations.**
- **76%** said that *Perspectives* helped them feel **more comfortable working with diverse others.**

Qualitative feedback highlighted benefits in areas of improving communication skills, learning practical tools for conflict resolution, understanding differing opinions and moral foundations, and developing a greater sense of empathy and common ground.

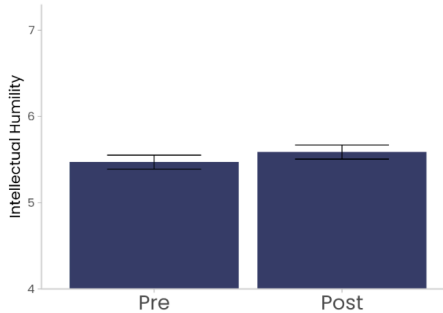
Examples of learners’ responses explaining the main benefit they gained included:

- “I better understand how people with whom I disagree think.”
- “I am a lot more reflective and aware of my own opinions and views.”
- “New ways to view my own morality.”
- “Learning to listen and evaluate opposing viewpoints”
- “How to discuss difficult conversations with others that hold differing opinions.”
- “The understanding of how the brain works was helpful background for this program”
- “Being able to emphasize and understand those who hold different opinions than I do”

KEY METRICS

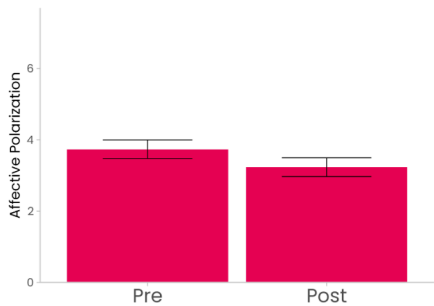
Volcker Alliance learners significantly improved in intellectual humility (Figure 1), affective polarization (Figure 2), and finding common ground behaviors over the course of the *Perspectives* program. There was no significant change in negative conflict behaviors.

Figure 1: Pre to Post Program Improvement in Intellectual Humility



Note: Learners significantly improved ($p = 0.003$), 44.27% of learners improved.

Figure 2: Pre to Post Program Improvement in Affective Polarization

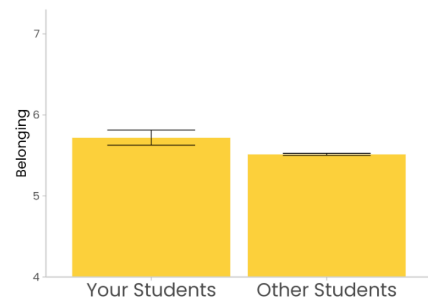


Note: Learners significantly improved ($p < .001$), 48.18 % of learners improved.

Measurements of these outcomes occurred at the beginning and end of the *Perspectives* program and may have been impacted by major sociopolitical events (e.g., the 2024 US presidential election and resulting inauguration).

While learners decreased slightly in belonging over time, Volcker Alliance learners began the program with high levels of belonging compared to average college students (Figure 3) and finished the program with similar levels of belonging to most college students.

Figure 3: Baseline Difference in Belonging of Volcker Alliance Learners vs. Other Learners



Compared to others completing *Perspectives*, Volcker Alliance learners were higher in intellectual humility ($p < .001$), belonging ($p < .001$), and affective polarization ($p < .001$) and engaged in higher levels of finding common ground behaviors ($p < .001$). Volcker Alliance learners engaged in similar levels of negative conflict behaviors compared to other *Perspectives* learners.

APPENDIX 2 SYLLABI

These syllabi demonstrate different ways of building dialogue into coursework: thematic, professional skills, and a shorter module.

SYLLABUS 1 Democracy, Pluralism, & Civil Discourse

HARRY S TRUMAN SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

“He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that.” —J.S. MILL

“Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner.” —JAMES BOVARD

“I don’t want you to be safe ideologically. I don’t want you to be safe emotionally. I want you to be strong. That’s different. I’m not going to take the weights out of the gym. That’s the whole point of the gym.” —VAN JONES

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

Americans today live in a time of deep political polarization, intellectual isolation, and intense partisanship. We are defined in terms of our differences, and our disagreements often appear to be intractable. We rarely have genuine and open interactions with those with whom we disagree; when we do, we often do so on the assumption that they are not just wrong, but are irrational, immoral, and contemptible.

This class aims to explore this phenomenon from a theoretical, empirical, and practical perspective, while learning and practicing methods to remedy its effects. The course is roughly split into 3 broad themes: Theory, Research, and Practice.

Theory: What does democratic theory have to say about civil discourse? Is it a necessary ingredient for a healthy democracy? A civic virtue? Or a mischievous way to platform bad ideas?

Research: What can data tell us about the state of polarization, mistrust, and hatred in politics today? What research (if any) identifies ways to combat polarization?

Practice: What strategies, tools, and mindsets can we use in our lives to improve relationships with those with whom we disagree? Is it possible to build and maintain civic and personal friendships across our differences and disagreements? Throughout the course, we will learn strategies and practice using them to discuss contemporary political

disagreements. Our class will be a space for students to share perspectives on sensitive topics with which you may disagree. There will times you will be challenged, and it is possible you will be upset during the course of this class. While constructive dialogue will be practiced throughout the course, the final weeks of the course will be devoted to discussing controversial topics in a civil and respectful environment.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will learn skills necessary to communicate effectively with individuals with different viewpoints and political perspectives in both personal and professional settings.
2. Students will learn strategies for managing good-faith conflicts by identifying common ground and shared values that underlie different arguments.
3. Students will learn the structural, theoretical, and normative foundations for civil discourse as a virtue in democratic life.
4. Students will apply dialogue skills to address complex issues fundamental to sustaining healthy democratic life.

Class Structure: The course will consist of a combination of group discussions, lectures, guest speakers, on-line written discussions, role-playing exercises, and real-world applications. Class periods are set aside for students to engage in discussions to practice constructive dialogue skills. Additionally, students are encouraged to seek out opportunities outside of class to apply their skills in everyday interactions and situations. Participation will be a part of your grade.

GROUND RULES

Because this class will include discussion about topics that some may find challenging, it is imperative that students are prepared to disagree with civility and mutual respect. As such, there are several principles we will adhere to, including:

The Principle of Free Expression: This class shares the values and goals of the University of Missouri’s Commitment to Free Expression, which states that “Freedom of expression is indispensable to a university’s ability to transmit knowledge and is fundamental to the ability of members of a university community to discover, explore, interpret, and question knowledge... Because the University of Missouri is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it is uncompromising in its efforts to provide all members of the University’s academic enterprise the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the University, the University fully respects and supports the freedom of all members of the academy “to discuss any problem that presents itself.”

The Principles of Community: This class shares the values of the University of Missouri’s Principles of Community, which state:

- We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.
- We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.
- We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and our organizations. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.
- We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, diverse ability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status.

The Principle of Charity: When approaching a new idea, being charitable means attempting to understand the idea sympathetically and in its most persuasive form. When you critique an idea, focus on the argument itself, not the person who said it. Do not attribute bad motives for other’s beliefs, which they do not think they have. When disagreeing, work towards unity and towards keeping the conversation going. This means we do not cancel each other in this class. Rather than “calling out,” we will “call in,” which should be apparent in both the content and tone of our comments, as well as our body language. To help encourage honesty and a willingness to make oneself vulnerable, we will practice Chatham House Rules in this class.

The Principles of Humility and Curiosity: Acknowledge the weaknesses in your own arguments and privilege the pursuit of truth over “winning” the argument. In this class, we will aim to have conversations, not “debates.” Remember that we are all fallible and all of us surely hold beliefs that are wrong, though we don’t know which ones. Keep your mind open to learning new things from authors and fellow classmates whose ideas you don’t share. Be curious. Keep returning to the question, “What might I be missing here?” A sincerely asked and probing question does wonders to improve the atmosphere surrounding difficult conversations, and by expressing curiosity about another’s views you show respect and build trust. Being curious also means being willing to “think in real time” (instead of coming with prepackaged conclusions) and giving others the space, the grace, to do so as well.

These principles are sacrosanct in this class and are possessed by faculty and students alike. Our goal is to advance and deepen every member’s understanding of the issues addressed in the course; accordingly, I encourage everyone to speak their mind, explore

ideas and arguments wherever they might lead, voice your tentative thoughts and conclusions, play “devil’s advocate,” and engage in robust and civil discussion. We will not “police” each other’s thoughts or language—instead, we will offer reasons for our views, through arguments and by telling our stories, reflecting and hopefully laughing together at times. In this class, intellectual courage is to be encouraged, imitated, and rewarded, rather than punished. You will find that such courage is contagious, and its practice creates greater freedom in the classroom. This freedom is as much a gift we give each other and a collective achievement as it is an individual right.

MATERIALS

All readings and materials for this course will be available on Canvas. There will be assigned articles placed on Canvas throughout the semester as well as discussion board forums and other material.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Assessment will be based on participation in class activities, dialogue exercises, reflective journals, and a final project demonstrating the application of dialogue skills in a chosen context.

- **Perspectives (10%):** During some weeks of the course, you will participate in the Constructive Dialogue Institute’s online *Perspectives* module. *Perspectives* is a tool to introduce the mindsets and skills that students need to navigate the different forms of division and conflict that come up when talking about important, complicated issues. These are short exercise and reflections that will teach principles of constructive dialogue.
- **Discussion Board Assignments (15%):** There will be regular discussion board assignments on Canvas. These will be both numerous and brief, and will give you an opportunity to reflect on issues prior to class. You will be asked to take positions with which you may disagree.
- **Interview Paper Assignment (25%):** Students will be required to write a 3-5 page paper (Times New Roman, 12 pt font, double-spaced) interview a friend or relative whom they disagree with on a particular issue. The purpose of this assignment is to better understand the sources of disagreement between you and the person you interview, not to debate or argue. What motivates your subject to hold the positions they hold? What parts of their background and values lead them to hold these beliefs? Did learning about their reasons help you understand them better, and did it change your own beliefs? **The paper is due October 27.**

- **Final Paper Assignment (25%):** At the end of class, students will complete a 3-5 page paper reflecting on what they have learned in this class (Times New Roman, 12 pt font, double-spaced). Students should reflect on what they have learned, how they have changed, and whether they believe civil discourse is valuable and possible in the current political climate. The final paper is due on December 10th.
- **Class Participation (25%):** Because the success of the class largely depends on group discussions, attendance, preparation, and participation are essential. You will receive points based on contributions to class conversations.

Course Outline

WEEK 1: DISCOURSE BY DESIGN

Tuesday, Aug 20 Readings:

- Course Syllabus
- Introductions

Thursday, Aug 22 Readings

- James Madison, Federalist #10 & #51
- The U.S. Constitution

WEEK 2: DISCOURSE AS A VIRTUE, DISCOURSE AS A TOOL

Tuesday Aug 27 Readings

- Cornel West & Robert George, “Truth Seeking, Democracy, & Freedom of Thought & Expression.”
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies”
- Amy Sanford, “Alternatives to Civil Discourse.”
- John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty” (graphic novel version)

Thursday Aug 29

- *Perspectives* Lesson One (online)
- The Political Compass quiz (online)
- Moral Foundations Test (online)
- Nate Silver, “Why liberalism and leftism are increasingly at odds,” *Silver Bulletin*

WEEK 3:

Tuesday, September 3

- John Rawls, A Theory of Justice and the Veil of Ignorance
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6k08C699zI&ab_channel=Then%26Now
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuY79IKLO5U>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8GDEaJtbq4>

Thursday, September 5

- Jonathan Haidt & Greg Lukianoff, “The Coddling of the American Mind,” Ch.1, “The Untruth of Fragility”
- Jonathan Haidt & Greg Lukianoff, “The Coddling of the American Mind,” Ch. 2, “The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning”

WEEK 4: DISCOURSE VIRTUES & THREATS

Tuesday, September 10

- Yascha Mounk, “Republicans Don’t Understand Democrats—and Democrats Don’t Understand Republicans,” *The Atlantic*
- “Political Identity is Fair Game for Hatred: How Republicans and Democrats Discriminate,” VOX Jonathan Haidt & Greg Lukianoff, “The Coddling of the American Mind,” Ch. 3, “The Untruth of Us Versus Them”

Thursday, September 12

- Greg Lukianoff & Rikki Schlott, The Canceling of the American Mind, Ch. 1, “The Gaslighting of the American Mind”
- Emma Camp, “I Came to College Eager to Debate, I Found Self-Censorship Instead,” *The New York Times*
- Ross Douthat, “10 Theses about Cancel Culture,” *The New York Times*

WEEK 5: CANCEL CULTURE

Tuesday, September 17

- Various, “A Letter on Justice and Open Debate,” *Harper’s Magazine*
- Various “A More Specific Letter on Justice & Open Debate,” *The Objective*
- “America Has a Free Speech Problem,” Editorial Board, *The New York Times*
- Amanda Marcotte, “What the New York Times Doesn’t Get about Free Speech & Cancel Culture,” *Salon*
- David French, “Two Different Versions of Cancel Culture,” *The New York Times*
- Jessica Bennett, “What if Instead of Calling People Out, We Called Them In?” *The New York Times*

Thursday, September 19

- Pranshu Verma, “They Criticized Israel. StopAntisemitism’s Twitter upended their lives” *The Washington Post*
- Charles Lane, “Pro-Israel Performer Matisyahu Fights for Artistic Freedom,” *The Washington Post*
- Lisa Respers France, “Dave Chapelle Show Cancelled by Venue Hours Before Performance,” *CNN*
- Courtney McGinley, “Home Depot Cashier Fired over Facebook Comment about TrumpShooting,” *Newsweek*
- Kat Tenbarge, “Law Firm Rescinds Job Offers over Harvard Student Israel Letter,” *NBC News*
- Vimal Patel, “A Hamline Adjunct Showed a Painting of the Prophet Muhammad. She Lost Her Job,” *The New York Times*

WEEK 6: RHETORICAL FORTRESSES

Tuesday, September 24 Readings

- The Cancelling of the American Mind, Ch. 5, “No-Man’s Land”
- The Cancelling of the American Mind, Ch. 6, “The Perfect Rhetorical Fortress” (optional) Jane Mayer, “The Case of Al Franken,” *The New Yorker*
- (optional) Margaret Atwood, “Am I a bad feminist?” *The Globe and Mail*

Thursday, September 26 Readings

- The Cancelling of the American Mind, Ch. 8, “The Efficient Rhetorical Fortress”

WEEK 7: DISCUSSION TOPICS

Tuesday, October 1: Should We Abolish the Death Penalty?

- Nicole Daniels, “Should the Death Penalty Be Abolished?” *The New York Times*
- “Should the Death Penalty Be Legal?” *Britannica ProCon.org*

Thursday, October 3: Which Drugs Should Be Legal?

- Eric Westervelt, “Oregon’s Pioneering Drug Decriminalization Experiment Is Now Facing the Hard Test,” *NPR*
- Conrad Wilson, “Oregon pioneered a radical drug policy. Now it’s reconsidering.” *NPR*
- Maia Szalavitz, “Treating Addiction as a Crime Doesn’t Work. What Oregon Is Doing Just Might.” *The New York Times*
- Keith Humphreys & Rob Bovett, “Why Oregon’s Drug Decriminalization Failed,” *The Atlantic*
- E. Tammy Kim, “A Drug-Decriminalization Fight Erupts in Oregon,” *The New Yorker*
- Bret Stephens, “The hard-drug decriminalization disaster,” *The Seattle Times*

- Trevor Burrus, “Legalize Heroin to Save Lives,” *Cato Institute*
- Amanda Coletta, “A Canadian province decriminalized hard drugs. Now it’s reversing course.” *The Washington Post*
- Andrew Jacobs, “The Psychedelic Revolution Is Coming. Psychiatry May Never Be the Same.” *The New York Times*
- Andrew Jacobs, “Legal Use of Hallucinogenic Mushrooms Begins in Oregon” *The New York Times*
- Christopher P. Holstege & Rita Farah, “Calls to US poison centers spiked after ‘magic mushrooms’ were decriminalized,” *The Conversation*
- Michael Ollove, “More States May Legalize Psychedelic Mushrooms,” *Stateline*
- Gregory Ferenstein, “A glimpse into Colorado’s emerging legal pyschedelics scene,” *Reason Foundation*

WEEK 8: DISCUSSION OF TOPICS

Tuesday, October 8: Monuments, Mascots, and School Names

- Rachel Treisman, “Nearly 100 Confederate Monuments Removed In 2020, Report Says; More Than 700 Remain,” *NPR*
- Sophia A. Nelson, “Opinion: Don’t Take Down Confederate Monuments. Here’s Why.” *NBC News*
- Eddy Rodriguez, “Biden Says We Should ‘Protect’ Columbus, Washington and Jefferson Statues,” *Newsweek*
- Galen Bacharier, “MU refuses to remove Thomas Jefferson statue despite student pressure,” *Columbia Missourian*
- David A. Bell, “Is it still okay to venerate George Washington and Thomas Jefferson?” *The Washington Post*
- Charles Lane, “Opinion. Confederate names are coming down, but San Francisco is now taking on ... Abe Lincoln?” *The Washington Post*
- Gary Kamiya, “The Holier-Than-Thou Crusade in San Francisco,” *The Atlantic*
- Jenny Gross & Azi Paybarah, “San Francisco Schools Will Keep Jefferson, Lincoln and Washington Names,” *The New York Times*
- Debra Utacia Krol, “With Chiefs in the Super Bowl, some Native people say it’s time to erase the offensive name,” *USA Today*
- Leah Asmelash, “How the Kansas City Chiefs got their name, and why it’s so controversial,” *CNN*
- John Woodrow Cox, Scott Clement and Theresa Vargas, “New poll finds 9 in 10 Native Americans aren’t offended by Redskins name,” *The Washington Post*
- Nick Mordowanec, “Washington Commanders Accused of Defaming Native Americans in Name Fight,” *Newsweek*
- TOI Sports Desk, “Family of Blackfeet Chief Wants His Image Restored in the NFL,” *The Times of India*

Thursday, October 10: Do We Need More Gun Control?

- The New York Times, “Gun Control, Explained,” *The New York Times*
- Katherine Schaeffer, “Key facts about Americans and guns,” *Pew Research Center*
- Emily Shapiro, “Guys and guns: Why men are behind the vast majority of America’s gun violence,” *ABC News*
- Madeline Drexler, “Guns and Suicide: The Hidden Toll,” *Harvard Public Health*
- Heather Saunders, “Do States with Easier Access to Guns have More Suicide Deaths by Firearm?” *KFF*
- Everytown Research & Policy, “Fact Sheet: Firearm Suicide in the United States,” *Everytown*
- Leah Libresco, “I used to think gun control was the answer. My research told me otherwise.” *The Washington Post*
- Christine Emba, “Men are lost. Here’s a map out of the wilderness.” *The Washington Post*
- David French, “The Atmosphere of the ‘Manosphere’ Is Toxic,” *The New York Times*

WEEK 9: DISCUSSION TOPICS

Tuesday, October 15: Pronouns, Words, and Identity

- Helen Lewis, “Why I’ll Keep Saying ‘Pregnant Women,’” *The Atlantic*
- Elinor Burkett, “What Makes a Woman?” *The New York Times*
- Emma Green, “The Culture War Over ‘Pregnant People,’” *The Atlantic*
- Kristen Rogers, “The case for saying ‘pregnant people’ and other gender-inclusive phrases,” *CNN*
- Kathleen Stock, “Changing the concept of “woman” will cause unintended harms,” *The Economist*
- Anna North, “Can transgender students go to women’s colleges? Across the country, the answer is evolving.” *VOX*
- Vimal Patel, “At Wellesley College, Students Vote to Admit Trans Men,” *The New York Times* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRh7j2g95HU>
- Brooke Schultz, “Should Schools Tell Parents When Students Change Pronouns? California Says No,” *Education Week*
- Colleen Flaherty, “‘A Hotly Contested Issue’, *Inside Higher Ed*
- Karina Elwood, “Va. school board settles with teacher fired for not using student’s pronouns,” *The Washington Post*
- Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, “Kareem Abdul-Jabbar: Let Rachel Dolezal Be as Black as She Wants to Be,” *TIME*
- Kirk Johnson, Richard Pérez-Peña and John Eligon, “Rachel Dolezal, in Center of Storm, Is Defiant: ‘I Identify as Black’,” *The New York Times*

Thursday, October 17: Transgenderism in Female Sports

- Helen Lewis, “The Olympics Could Have Avoided the Ugly Boxing Debate,” *The Atlantic*
- National Women’s Law Center, “Once and For All: This Is Why We Support Trans Women and Girls in Sports,” NWLC
- “Sports should have two categories: “open” and “female”,” *The Economist*
- Chelsea Mitchell, “Chelsea Mitchell on the unfairness of trans women at the Olympics,” *The Economist*
- Michael Powell, “What Lia Thomas Could Mean for Women’s Elite Sports,” *The New York Times*
- Masha Gessen, “The Movement to Exclude Trans Girls from Sports,” *The New Yorker*
- Louisa Thomas, “The Trans Swimmer Who Won Too Much,” *The New Yorker*
- Chase Strangio & Gabriel Arkles, “Four Myths About Trans Athletes, Debunked,” *ACLU*
- Cyd Zeigler, “Lia Thomas and trans-athlete debate not as easy as left vs. right,” *Outsports*
- Stephen Humphries, “In sports, what’s fair for transgender athletes and their competitors?” *The Christian Science Monitor*
- Cyd Zeigler, “A fourth team forfeits against San Jose State over a possible trans athlete. An NCAA crisis looms.” *Outsports*
- Veronica Ivy—Trans Women in Women’s Sports: The Daily Show, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Fb48tivB-O>

WEEK 10: DISCUSSION TOPICS

Tuesday, October 22: School Choice

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wR4ujuDDu2c>
- Christina Garrett, “No More Lines: An Interview with Kelley Williams-Bolar,” *yes. every kid. foundation.*
- Kavahn Mansouri & Kate Grumke, “St. Louis-area school district aggressively audits student housing, citing ‘educational larceny’,” *STLPR*
- Roger McKinney, “Here’s how much money Boone County school districts may lose if a charter school opens,” *Columbia Daily Tribune*
- The Editorial Board, “The Year of School Choice,” *The Wall Street Journal*
- John Yang & Harry Zahn, “Key points in the debate over public funding for religious schools,” *PBS News*
- Matt Barnum, “New Democratic divide on charter schools emerges, as support plummets among white Democrats,” *Chalkbeat*
- Alia Wong, “Public Opinion Shifts in Favor of School Choice,” *The Atlantic*

- Jon Valant, “Democrats’ views on charters diverge by race as 2020 elections loom,” *Brookings*
- Alec MacGillis, “Conservatives Go to War — Against Each Other — Over School Vouchers,” *ProPublica*
- Robert Pondiscio, School Choice Winning Streak? It’s Culture War, Stupid,” *American Enterprise Institute*
- Ilya Somin, “How School Choice Can Mitigate Harmful Culture War Policies in Public Education,” *Reason*

WEEK 11: DISCUSSION TOPICS

Tuesday, November 5: Immigration Policy

- Jonathan Martin, “Just Not Right: A GOP Governor Confronts Trump’s Lies,” *Politico*
- Mike DeWine, “I’m the Republican Governor of Ohio. Here is the Truth about Springfield,” *The New York Times*
- Christian Paz, “3 Theories for America’s anti-immigrant shift,” *VOX*
- “Why the Arguments against Immigration are so Popular,” *The Economist*
- Neil Gross, “The Conservative Case for Immigration,” *TIME*
- “No, You’re not Imagining a Migrant Crime Spree,” *City Journal*
- Ted Hesson and Mica Rosenberg, “Explainer: Trump says migrants are fueling violent crime. Here is what the research shows,” *Reuters*
- John Washington, “11 Arguments for Open Borders,” *The Nation*
- Alex Nowrasteh, “The 14 Most Common Arguments against Immigration and Why They’re Wrong,” *The CATO Institute*

Thursday November 7: Post-Election Debrief

WEEK 12: DISCUSSION TOPICS

Tuesday, November 12: Critical Race Theory in Education

- “Woke Racism: John McWhorter Argues Against What he Calls a Religion of Anti-Racism,” *NPR Morning Edition.*
- Abigail Shrier, “The Kindergarten Intifada,” *The Free Press.*
- “Where Critical Race Theory is Under Attack,” *Education Week.*
- “Florida’s Governor Just Signed the ‘Stop Woke Act.’ Here’s What it Means for Schools and Businesses,” *TIME.*
- “‘Woke Kindergarten’ leader wants US, Israel destroyed: ‘We’ve been trying to end y’all’,” *The New York Post.*
- “This Bay Area school district spent \$250,000 on Woke Kindergarten program. Test scores fell even further,” *The San Francisco Chronicle.*
- Rashawn Ray & Alexandra Gibbons, “Why are States Banning Critical Race Theory,” *Brookings Institution.*

- “Who is Behind the Attacks on Educators and Public Schools?” *NEA News*.
- Evan Rhinesmith & Cameron Anglum, “Do Parents Want Schools to Be Able to Teach About Racism?” *Education Week*.
- Rick Hess, “It’s a Crisis! It’s Nonsense! How Political Are K-12 Classrooms?” *Education Next*.
- Yascha Mounk, “You Can’t Win Elections by Telling Voters Their Concerns are Imaginary,” *The Atlantic*.
- John McWhorter, “How Critical Race Theory Poorly Serves Its Intended Beneficiaries,” *The Economist*.

Thursday, November 14: Should We Get Rid of DEI Policies?

- Nicholas Confessore, “The University of Michigan Doubled Down on D.E.I. What Went Wrong?” *The New York Times*.
- Mark Lilla, “The End of Identity Liberalism,” *The New York Times*.
- “The Rise and Fall of the DEI Movement,” *National Public Radio*.
- Joahn Sailer, “Inside Ohio State’s DEI Factory,” *The Wall Street Journal*.
- Greg Lukianoff & Rikki Schlott, “DEI Statements and the Conformity Gauntlet,” *The Canceling of the American Mind*.
- Perry Bacon Jr., “Colleges Are Home to Many Left-Wing Ideas and Activists. That’s Fine,” *The Washington Post*.
- “Should a Diverse Campus Mean More Conservatives,” *The New York Times*.
- “University of Missouri Axes DEI Office to Pre-empt State Mandate,” *Inside Higher Ed*.
- “How Republicans are weaponizing antisemitism to take down DEI,” *VOX*.
- Tabia Lee, “I was a DEI director — DEI drives campus antisemitism,” *The New York Post*.

WEEK 13: DISCUSSION TOPICS

Tuesday, November 19: Israel-Palestine Protests on College Campuses

- Sam Harris: “Campus Protests, Antisemitism, & Western Values,” *Making Sense*
- Cenk Uygur Vs Douglas Murray On Israel-Palestine War, Piers Morgan
- History, Genocide, and Israel’s War on Gaza: Mehdi Hasan and Benny Morris, *Al Jazeera*. Mehdi Hasan vs Ex-IDF Jonathan Conricus, *Piers Morgan Uncensored*
- “U.C.L.A. Can’t Let Protesters Block Jewish Students From Campus, Judge Says,” *The New York Times*
- “Pro-Palestinian Group at Columbia Now Backs ‘Armed Resistance’ by Hamas,” *The New York Times*
- George Packer, “The Campus-Left Occupation That Broke Higher Education,” *The Atlantic*
- “Pro-Hamas Messages Intensify on College Campuses,” *The Washington Post*
- Helen Lewis, “The Progressives Who Flunked the Hamas Test,” *The Atlantic*

WEEK 14: DISCUSSION TOPICS

Tuesday, December 3: The United States’ Role in the World

- “Gaza and Global Order: A Conversation with Yuval Hoah Harari,” *Making Sense with Sam Harris*
- Suzanne Maloney, Addressing Iran’s Evolving Threats to US Interests,” *Brookings Institution*
- Daniel R. DePetris, “A War with Iran Is the Last Thing the US Should Want,” *Newsweek*
- “Why the United States Must Stay the Course on Ukraine,” *Center for American Progress*
- Angela Stent, “How Would Trump and Harris Handle the Russia-Ukraine War?” *Brookings Institution* “The Importance of US Assistance to Ukraine,” *US Global Leadership Coalition*
- “China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” *Council on Foreign Relations*
- “Who are the Uyghurs and Why is China being Accused of Genocide?” *BBC News*
- “US-Taiwan Relations in a New Era,” *Council on Foreign Relations*
- “Instability in Afghanistan,” *Center for Preventive Action*
- “Where is Afghanistan Three Years into Taliban Rule?” *United States Institute of Peace*
- Vanda Felbab-Brown, “The Taliban’s Three Years in Power and What Lies Ahead,” *Brookings Institution*
- “Cats Have More Freedom than Women in Afghanistan, Meryl Streep Says,” *NBC News*

Thursday, December 5: Journalism, Public Trust, Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Democracy

- “Yuval Noah Harari: Free Speech, Institutional Distrust, & Social Order,” *Making Sense with Sam Harris* ”
- NPR Editor Who Accused Broadcaster of Liberal Bias Resigns,” *The New York Times*
- “NPR Suspends Veteran Editor as it Grapples with His Public Criticism,” *NPR*
- “James Bennet Resigns as New York Times Opinion Editor,” *The New York Times*
- “When the New York Times Lost it’s Way,” James Bennet, *The Economist*
- “Bari Weiss’ NYT Resignation Letter,” Bari Weiss, *The Free Press*
- “Fox News settles blockbuster defamation lawsuit with Dominion Voting Systems,” *NPR*
- “For the Post, more outrage from reader who say they’ve canceled,” *The Washington Post*
- “Is the World Getting Better or Worse?,” A Look at the Numbers,” Steven Pinker Ted Talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCm9Ng0bbEQ&ab_channel=TED

SYLLABUS 2

PUAF 230: Advancing Public Policy in a Divided America

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

LA FOLLETTE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

If a nation wants to promote . . . democracy dedicated to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” to each and every person, what abilities will it need to produce in its citizens? At least the following seem crucial: The ability to think well about political issues affecting the nation, to examine, reflect, argue, and debate, deferring to neither tradition nor authority. —Martha Nussbaum

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Public policy conflict is all around us. We are, in many ways, a divided America. Given this, how can we inspire evidence-based policymaking that advances the public good? This class seeks to understand and contextualize the partisan conflict present in modern American politics and policy making. It then explores several tactics that public policy leaders, practitioners, and advocates may use that acknowledge conflict and attempt to move public policymaking forward. These tactics, which tend not to be explored in tandem, provide strategies for addressing disagreement and come from various disciplinary backgrounds. We begin by exploring the ideas of dialogue, persuasion, and belief change from psychology and neuroscience. Next, we spend time thinking about the core tenets of policy analysis and practicing those skills, including conducting research on a controversial policy topic designed to inform policy change. Finally, we explore the world of business negotiation and then apply negotiation tools to several simulations, including in the world of public policy. Overall, our course goal is to explore ways in which policy conflict can be understood, managed, and channeled for the betterment of public policy decision-making in a divided America.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course aims to get students thinking about public policy as part of everyday life, and is designed to improve understanding of public policy challenges, build critical thinking skills, and encourage civic engagement.

Through active participation in class discussion and engagement with course materials, students will:

- 1. Gain an appreciation for navigating, interpreting, and contributing to effective public policy decision-making throughout their career.
- 2. Gain knowledge and demonstrate application of several strategies for advancing public policy debates and discussions, including civility in dialogue and nonpartisan policy analysis tactics.
- 3. Practice writing, analytic, and communication skills.

Books, Materials, and Expenses

- 1. McRaney, David. 2022. *How Minds Change: The Surprising Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion*. Portfolio Penguin.
- 2. Fisher, Roger, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. 2011. *Getting to Yes: Negotiation Agreement Without Giving In*. 4th Edition, Penguin Books.
- 3. You will need to purchase two simulations at a minimal cost that we will be using in class. Instructions for doing so will be provided on Canvas.
- 4. Several documents may need to be printed out across the semester as discussed below. This is a requirement of the class.

Other readings listed on the syllabus will be provided on the course’s Canvas website or can be found online.

ASSIGNMENTS

The success of this course depends on the informed engagement of students. I expect you to complete the assigned readings *before* our class meets. I also expect students to come to class with an open mind and ready for rigorous academic discussion. This means that you are prepared to present and defend your arguments, accept constructive criticism, listen to others, and discuss views that may differ from your own. Good-faith disagreement is core to our intellectual pursuit. We will define and review our norms for discussion during the first week of the semester.

Grades will be determined per the following formulation:

- **Class participation.** (10%)
- **Moderating a Canvas discussion.** (5%)
- **Canvas discussion participation.** (10%)
- **Nonpartisan Policy Research Assignments.** (30%)
- **Team Paper, Presentation, & Peer/Self Evaluation.** (40%, total)

SCHEDULE

Readings must be completed **before class**. There is a module for each week that includes assigned readings and related assignments and activities. For the weeks noted in the table below, there is also a blank discussion prompt to be created by discussion moderators.

PART 1: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Tuesday, January 21, 2025

- Read: Syllabus
- Read: The First Amendment on Campus 2020 Report: College Students' Views of Free Expression

Thursday, January 23, 2025

- Watch: PBS Newshour's 12-minute story, "How today's divisions in America are different from what we've seen before"
- Browse: <https://americapoliticalpulse.com/elites/>
- Prepare: come ready to tell a story "about a time you changed your mind about a political issue" (Additional details on this activity will be provided in advance of class.)

Tuesday, January 28, 2025

- Watch: PBS Newshour's 12-minute story, "Examining how US politics became intertwined with personal identity"
- Read: Talisse, Robert B. *Sustaining Democracy: What We Owe to the Other Side*. Oxford University Press, 2021, chapter 2. (ebook available through Library)
- Read: Bednar, Jenna. "Polarization, diversity, and democratic robustness." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 50 (2021): e2113843118.

Thursday, January 30, 2025

- Read: Zaki, Jamil. *Hope for Cynics: The Surprising Science of Human Goodness* Grand Central Publishing, 2024, pp. 1-14, 46-64.
- For further reading (not required): Guess, Andrew, Brendan Nyhan, Benjamin Lyons, and Jason Reifler. Avoiding the Echo Chamber about Echo Chambers. *Knight Foundation* 2, no. 1 (2018): 1-25.

PART 2: CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE (AND SOMETIMES BELIEF CHANGE)

Tuesday, February 4, 2025

- Read: McRaney, David. *How Minds Change: The Surprising Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion*, Portfolio Penguin, 2022, chapters 1-2
- Read: Jedediah Britton-Purdy. "We've Been Thinking About America's Trust Collapse All Wrong" *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2024.

Thursday, February 6, 2025

- Read: McRaney, David. *How Minds Change: The Surprising Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion*, Portfolio Penguin, 2022, chapters 3-4
- For further reading (not required): DJ Flynn, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. "The nature and origins of misperceptions: Understanding false and unsupported beliefs about politics." *Political Psychology*, 38:127-150, 2017.

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

- Read: McRaney, David. *How Minds Change: The Surprising Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion*, Portfolio Penguin, 2022, chapters 5-6
- For further reading (not required): Mercier, Hugo. "The argumentative theory: Predictions and empirical evidence." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20 (9): 689-700, 2016.

Thursday, February 13, 2025

- Read: McRaney, David. *How Minds Change: The Surprising Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion*, Portfolio Penguin, 2022, chapters 7, 8, 10

Tuesday, February 18, 2025

- Read: James Fishkin, Alice Siu, Larry Diamond, and Norman Bradburn. Is deliberation an antidote to extreme partisan polarization? reflections on "America in one room". *American Political Science Review*, 115(4):1464-1481, 2021.
- Read: Nick Romeo. "What could citizens' assemblies do for American politics?" *The New Yorker*, December 31, 2024.
- Listen: What does participatory budgeting look like in Wisconsin? Eau Claire is figuring that out

Thursday, February 20, 2025

- Watch: PBS Frontline's 54-minute episode, Policing the Police
- Read: National Issues Forum, "What Should We Do to Ensure Fair Treatment and Keep Neighborhoods Safe for Everyone?"

PART 3: NONPARTISAN POLICY RESEARCH

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

- Read: Weimer’s Memoranda on Writing Policy Analysis Memos (2017).

Thursday, February 27, 2025

- Read: Weimer’s Information Sources for Policy Analysis (undated).

Tuesday, March 4, 2025 and Thursday, March 6, 2025

- This week we will work on the “gathering evidence” assignment. Someone from your team will need to bring a laptop to both classes.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025 and Thursday, March 20, 2025

- In-class “structured academic controversy”

PART 4: NEGOTIATION AND COMPROMISE

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

- Read: Fisher, Roger, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. 2011. *Getting to Yes: Negotiation Agreement Without Giving In*. 4th Edition, Penguin Books. Parts 1 and 2.

Thursday, April 3, 2025

- Finish Parts 1 and 2 if you haven’t already

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

- Read: Fisher, Roger, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. 2011. *Getting to Yes: Negotiation Agreement Without Giving In*. 4th Edition, Penguin Books. Parts 3 and 4.

Thursday, April 10, 2025

- Read: Pre-materials for the Sally Swansong simulation

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

- Read: Fisher, Roger, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. 2011. *Getting to Yes: Negotiation Agreement Without Giving In*. 4th Edition, Penguin Books. Part 5.

Thursday, April 17, 2025

- Read: Warren, Mark E. and Jane Mansbridge. “Deliberative Negotiation” in *Negotiating Agreement in Politics*, edited by Jane Mansbridge and Cathie Jo Martin, American Political Science Association Task Force Report, pg. 86-120.

Tuesday April 22 and Thursday April 24, 2025

- Read: Prematerials for *Dirty Stuff* simulation.

SYLLABUS 3

Constructive Dialogue in Public Policy: PUB POL 290 - 016 | 1 Unit

GOLDMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course builds on the foundational dialogue skills developed in the Fall semester, while welcoming new students to join the conversation. Using the [Constructive Dialogue Institute’s Perspectives training](#), the course emphasizes listening, storytelling, and empathy as tools for effective communication in navigating polarization and advancing inclusive policymaking. Students will engage in peer-to-peer conversations, explore divergent perspectives, and apply dialogue techniques to analyze social and policy issues. Featuring guest speakers, co-created sessions, and themes such as restorative justice, bridging divides through breaking bread, and the implications of civil discourse breakdowns, the course fosters an environment for practicing real-world dialogue skills. Some sessions will be open to the broader GSPP community.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Enhance Dialogue Skills for Democracy:** Develop the necessary dialogue skills for constructive and effective communication, with a particular focus on listening, empathy, and clear articulation of ideas.
- **Apply Dialogue in Diverse Contexts:** Use dialogue techniques not only to advance public service work but also to critically analyze and discuss current events.
- **Engage with Diverse Perspectives:** Interact with fellow students and guest speakers and participate in dialogues that offer divergent viewpoints.
- **Practical Application in Real-World Scenarios:** Foster an environment where you can practice dialogue skills in real-world contexts, including simulations and discussions that reflect on current events and policy implications.

By the end of our course, you will have learned the tools for developing dialogue skills foundational for engaging in democracy and addressing the complexities of policymaking in a polarized, pluralistic society.

Questions we will explore together:

- Who is polarization and mistrust serving? Why is it happening?
- What are policy ideas that unify us? Our community at GSPP? At UC Berkeley?
- What is the impact of social media on our ability to dialogue across differences?
- Why should we consider multiple viewpoints and constituencies in public policy?
- What does free speech, marginalization, and each of our unique experiences have to do with all this?

CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE: AN OVERVIEW

Constructive Dialogue is a communication approach designed to foster understanding, empathy, and effective engagement across diverse perspectives. At its core, constructive dialogue emphasizes listening, inquiry, and reflection rather than debate, persuasion, or coercion. This approach is particularly valuable in addressing complex, polarizing, or contentious issues where mutual understanding and collaboration are crucial. While our orientation in this class is explicitly interpersonal we should also consider how interpersonal communication has institutional and political implications.

The philosophy behind constructive dialogue is rooted in deliberative democracy, which values inclusive, reasoned, and respectful discourse as essential to a thriving democratic society. Additionally, it draws on insights from cognitive and social psychology to shape interactions and deepen understanding. However, dialogue does not occur in a vacuum—it is shaped by our identities, personal experiences, and societal structures. Understanding each other requires more than just engaging with differing opinions; it involves recognizing the life experiences and values that shape our beliefs. We will explore how marginalization and privilege influence dialogue, both within the classroom and in broader societal contexts.

Popper's paradox of tolerance suggests that if a society tolerates intolerance without limits, intolerance will ultimately prevail. Popper argues that certain guardrails—such as restrictions on specific forms of speech—may be necessary to preserve a tolerant society. This raises key questions: How should we think about speech restrictions in the context of free expression? What principles should guide decisions about limiting or permitting certain forms of discourse?

Civil discourse has its limits. When, if ever, do other tools become necessary to protect civil society? We will examine:

- The effectiveness and limitations of civil discourse in driving social change. ▪ The role of nonviolent resistance versus more confrontational or disruptive tactics in historical and contemporary movements.
- What are the uses and limitations of violence in creating and maintaining civil society? How can constructive dialogue remain a guiding principle even when other tools are employed?

PRIMARY MATERIALS

1. **Perspectives** training by the Constructive Dialogue Institute: [Use this link to take the Perspectives training](#). I am able to view your course progress and monitor your completion. [This link](#) will let you preview the course and move around the modules. It's a link for instructors--or you--to revisit the ideas and revisit the course modules as needed.
2. Guzmán, M. (2022). *I never thought of it that way: How to have fearlessly curious conversations in dangerously divided times*. BenBella Books.
3. **Othering and Belonging Institute**. While constructive dialogue is a useful tool we can apply in personal and policy contexts, the Othering and Belonging Institute (OBI) can help us situate this tool within broader questions about expanding our circle of human concern as well as general concepts of bridging and breaking, othering and belonging. Below are some links to help you learn more about OBI.
 - a. [The Practice of Bridging](#)
 - b. [Bridging and Belonging](#)
 - c. [Belonging Design Principles](#)
4. [Bridging Differences program](#) at UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center (GGSC).

CLASS 1. 2/21 INTRODUCTION TO CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Introduction: This week, we explore the foundations of Constructive Dialogue.

Class Activities: getting to know each other, class norms, values spectrum.

What We Bring This week, we begin our first Peer-to-Peer conversation, exploring personal values, group norms, and Moral Foundations Theory through guided discussion.

- **Moral Foundations Theory:** What values do you hold most dear? How is this influenced by your family and culture? How does this shape your political views and how might it shape the views of others?
- **Us and Them:** The dynamics of in-group and out-group distinctions. We will examine the effects of these distinctions on conflict and collaboration.
- **Get curious:** curiosity as a tool for understanding and empathy.

To do before next week:

- Complete *Perspectives* lessons 1-3 & midpoint
- Optional: [Bridging 1](#) module.

CLASS 2. 2/28 OFF-SITE

Off-Site Activities:

- **Reparations conference panel of your choice** (in person or on Zoom):
<https://law.northeastern.edu/event/towards-justice/>
- My session on local reparations (Friday 2/28, 1:30–3 PM)

To do before next class:

- Submit a reflection on your asynchronous class activity for 2/28
- Read: Guzmán Part 1 SOS & Part 2 Curiosity (pp 1-88).
- Submit your first [Dialogue Across Difference #1](#) Reflection
- Optional: [Bridging 2](#) Othering and Belonging Institute's (OBI) & reflection posts

CLASS 3. 3/7 MEET THE MOMENT SPEAKER SERIES

Class Activities:

1. Meet the Moment Speaker Series: Climate Change in the Age of Trump
2. Debrief Reparations panels from conference

To do before next class:

- Read Guzmán Part 4 Paths
- Finish *Perspectives* training in its entirety.

CLASS 4. 3/14 HOW WE SHARE OUR STORY

Class Activities:

- **Peer-to-peer dialogue circles** In this session, we continue with our Peer-to-Peer conversations, focusing on storytelling. Practice sharing personal experiences and responding with curiosity and empathy.
- [Conversation guide](#)

To do before next class:

- Read Murthy, V. H. (2023). [Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation](#).
- Submit your second [Dialogue Across Difference #2](#) Reflection

CLASS 5. 3/21 PEER-TO-PEER DIALOGUE

Class Activities:

- Peer-to-peer discussion circle #3 from *Perspectives* training

To do before next class:

- Read remaining chapters of Guzmán
- Submit your third [Dialogue Across Difference #3](#) Reflection
- Watch [this the Ted Talk from Megan Phelps-Roper](#). This speaker delves into her experience with polarization and shares her approach to conversing with those of differing opinions: She was previously a member of the Westboro Baptist Church, which is known for extreme and hateful measures of protest.

CLASS 6. 4/11 CO-CREATE AS A CLASS

CLASS 7. 4/18 CO-CREATE AS A CLASS

CLASS 8. BREAKING BREAD AS A MEANS TO BRIDGING DIVIDES

Speakers and topics will be determined based on the most relevant and pressing current events, meeting the moment. These sessions will provide students with the opportunity to apply dialogue skills to real-time discussions. Students will be co-creators in this series, meaning we will collectively consider what our community would benefit from most in terms of topics and speakers.

ASSESSMENT

- Participation and Engagement: Active participation in dialogues and discussions including bCourses discussions.
- Completion of *Perspectives* training
- [Engage in three dialogues across difference & submit reflections](#)

Given the evolving nature of current events, the syllabus is subject to change to remain relevant and timely. Students will be notified in advance of any adjustments.

DINNER & DIALOGUE - APRIL 6, 2025

Brought to you by the Constructive Dialogue Initiative and the Goldman Food and Agriculture Club, we invite you to take part in Dinner & Dialogue: a chance to discuss real-time policy issues with your peers while making a meal together. The dinner will take place on Sunday, April 6, 2025 from approximately 5:00-9:00 PM with simultaneous dinners happening in Berkeley and Oakland.

THE VOLCKER ALLIANCE is a nonprofit founded by former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul A. Volcker to empower the public sector workforce to solve the challenges facing our nation. We build partnerships with government and universities, promote innovation in public service education, drive research on effective government, and inspire others with the story of Mr. Volcker's commitment to public service. We envision a public sector workforce with the experience, preparation, and commitment to ensure government is accountable and delivers with excellence.

CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE INSTITUTE (CDI), founded in 2017, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to equipping the next generation of Americans with the mindset and skill set to engage in dialogue across lines of difference. At CDI, we seek to help teachers, faculty, staff, and administrators build learning environments that enable students to feel comfortable exploring challenging topics so that real learning can occur. To accomplish this goal, we translate the latest behavioral science research into educational resources and teaching strategies that are evidence-based, practical, and scalable.



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