

Guidelines for Cultivating Civil Discourse

The following guidelines are informed by the university's core values and offer a framework to move beyond the kind of polarization which often dominates our public discourse. As a university committed to Real Life.Transformed. we ask that as a university community we will consider the following as we engage one another (whether electronic or face-to-face).

Servant Leadership - dedication to a life of service; a preferential awareness of the needs of others in the resolution of problems; a willingness to take the first step, however challenging, in meeting the demands of the day; embracing a spirit of servanthood that extends beyond one's culture.

We are finite, flawed beings and are prone to making mistakes. We need to engage one another with this at the very front of our minds — not only in being comfortable with someone challenging our point of view, but also reserving the right to change our mind when we conclude that our current argument is problematic. In our responses we should strive to avoid "personal" attack on another and seek first to understand the other before making our own argument.

Excellence - high-quality performance, innovation, and creativity; a relentless pursuit of the best in each individual and the wider learning community.

It might feel good to score rhetorical points, but doing so contributes to a polarized discourse. Let us refrain from using polarizing words and phrases like: "radical feminist," "war on women," "neocon," "limousine liberal," "tree hugger," "anti- science," "anti-life," "Take America [our nation] back..."; "Obamacare"; "They are not one of us"; and so on. Instead, let us use language that engages and draws the other into a fruitful engagement of ideas; such as, "I get your point clearly. Thanks for that. I'm wondering though, have you given any thought about...?" "I am not following your line of thinking, John, could you please clarify?"

Integrity - commitment to Christian moral values, shared virtues, and biblical truth; keeping faith with university policies.

It is often best to lead with what you are for. Not only is this the best way to make a convincing case for the view you currently hold, but this practice often reveals that we are actually after very similar things and simply need to be able to talk in an open and coherent way about the best plan for getting there. It is difficult to find common ground/similarities unless we listen to another's position. Do not simply listen to determine your next plan of attack but actively listen with the intention of gaining an understanding of the other person's perspective.

Responsibility - personal and social accountability to God and neighbor; trustworthy stewardship of personal and university resources.

Through actively listening to your conversation partner(s), and with a spirit that one has something to learn, you will be able to get to know the other personally and beyond an abstraction. Never reduce another's ideas because of their gender, race, level of privilege, sexual orientation, or social location. Similarly, never reduce the other to what you suspect are their "secret personal motivations." Instead, give your conversation partner(s) the courtesy of carefully responding to the actual idea or argument that she/he is offering for your consideration.

Generosity - readiness to give of one's gifts and talents with a spirit of gratitude; an attitude and posture of hospitality that comes with intercultural humility; a willingness to extend others the benefit of the doubt, placing mercy above rightness.

Many of life's issues are almost always too complex to fit into simplistic categories like liberal/conservative, religious/secular, open/close-minded, pro-life/pro-choice, etc. Such binary thinking sets up a framework in which taking one side automatically defines one against "the other side" — thus further limiting serious and open engagement. Instead, assume a posture of hospitality seeking to create an atmosphere where all are welcomed. And, extend the benefit of the doubt by avoiding exaggeration of others' beliefs and making unfounded prejudicial assumptions based on labels, categories, or stereotypes.

Adapted from Charles C. Camosy, "5 Tips for Creating Civil Discourse in an Era of Polarization," Seattle Times; http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2018728414_quest20charlescamosy.html (accessed July 25, 2012).