

Guide for Discussion  
Leaders

# Free Speech & Inclusion on Campus

How Do We Protect Free  
Expression, Inclusion, and the  
Open Exchange of Ideas?

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## Credits

This guide draws from a dialogue-to-change process and discussion guide format developed by Everyday Democracy in Hartford, Connecticut (<https://www.everyday-democracy.org/>).

## Resources on Facilitating Political Conversations

Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (2016). *Facilitating political discussions: Facilitator training workshop* ([online resource](#)).

Everyday Democracy. *A guide for training public dialogue facilitators* ([online resource](#)).

Landis, K. (ed.) (2008). *Start talking, A handbook for engaging difficult dialogues in higher education*. The University of Alaska Anchorage and Alaska Pacific University ([online resource](#)).

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation. *Best-of-the-best resources* ([online resource](#)).

Hess D., McAvoy P. (2014). *The political classroom: Evidence and ethics in democratic education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Nash, R. J., Bradley, D. L., & Chickering, A. W. (2008). *How to talk about hot topics on campus: From polarization to moral conversation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Tatum, B. D. (2017) (updated edition). *“Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?” and other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.

# Introduction

The public square has devolved into a place of hateful rhetoric, extreme polarization, and ineffective policymaking. The problem is not limited to politicians. Sadly, everyday Americans are also deeply divided along lines of social identity and political ideology. Hardly immune to social and political forces, colleges and universities seem caught in a crossfire. Self-appointed watchdogs, elected officials and legislatures, and social commentators accuse the academy of liberal indoctrination, political correctness and of stifling unpopular – and often more conservative – political perspectives. Students in particular have drawn sharp criticism for disruptive responses to controversial speakers and intolerance toward people they find offensive or with whom they disagree. At the same time, many Americans, both within and beyond the academy, express anger and frustration with the slow pace of social change or change viewed as heading in the wrong direction. Organizations that track incidents report increases in targeted, degrading speech and violent action aimed at people of color, women, immigrants, Muslims, and other groups. On a college campus, repeated, targeted demeaning sexist or racist remarks can create unacceptable toxic and unequal learning environments for some students and employees, exposing institutions to legal liability under civil rights laws.

Colleges and universities are places of learning that should support both a vigorous and open exchange of ideas across difference *and* a sense of belonging for all, not just some, members of the campus community. Colleges and universities should be models of democratic principles and practices.

We encourage colleges and universities to examine the tensions around free expression, political polarization, and inclusion on their campus. The goal would be to (1) increase our understanding of different perspectives on and tensions around encouraging free expression while fostering an inclusive learning environment and (2) identify ways to work together to create a campus community that values free speech, inclusion, and the open exchange of ideas. The work you do here will help you foster the kind of learning environment and community you want.

You may wonder why these will be *guided* discussions. Studies suggest that Americans gravitate toward people who share their socio-economic status, social identity, values, political viewpoints, and interests. College students are no exception. Since 1965, a research institute at UCLA has conducted an annual survey of first-year students. According to the researchers, students entering college in the fall of 2016 were the most polarized cohort in the 50-year history of the survey.<sup>1</sup> Discussions under these conditions work better when skillfully facilitated.

**FACILITATOR TIP:** We designed this discussion for 2.5 hours. For each section, we suggest a time limit, but you can adjust. In our experience, people can talk about this subject for hours, if not over a period of weeks, but most people simply cannot invest that kind of time. For that reason, we suggest aiming for 2.5 hours. You will want people to arrive on time and commit to the entire process.

For information about the First Amendment and other relevant legal parameters, see Appendix A.

<sup>1</sup> Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (2017, May). *The American freshman: National norms Fall 2016 (Research Brief)*. Retrieved from <https://www.heri.ucla.edu/briefs/TFS-Brief-Report-2016.pdf>.

It might also be useful for you to know what we are *not* doing today.

- This is not a debate. You are not here to decide who is right and wrong. Your task is to examine the tensions, but you will not need to take sides.
- This is not an expert or panel presentation. We believe that there is wisdom in groups. You want to hear multiple perspectives and help people on your campus learn to find common ground.

## How To Use This Guide

Treat this guide as a roadmap, not a prescription, to guide conversations about free speech and inclusion. The structure is envisioned for diverse groups of 8 to 12 people – faculty, staff, students – who meet once for 2.5 hours. You can organize a large forum with multiple small group discussions or a series of small group discussions spread out over time. Led by a facilitator, the discussion will follow a sequence:

Part 1: Introductions, relationship building, and establishing ground rules.

Part 2: Framing the issue – collecting perspectives on the nature and cause of the challenges. The goal is to ensure that all perspectives on the topic get a fair hearing.

Part 3: Envisioning the ideal – the norms, attitudes, and behaviors of people that foster a healthy campus climate for free speech and inclusion.

Part 4: Brainstorming solutions – what needs to happen and what everyone on campus, as individuals and collectively, can do to create a campus climate conducive to the robust exchange of ideas.

Part 5: Wrap Up.

## Strategies for Organizers

The role of the organizers is to create opportunities for a diverse group of stakeholders from across the institution to come together, build a common vision of success, and foster collective action.

**Build a Coalition:** Discussions should be organized by a strong coalition of people who represent different populations and functions on campus. Why? Coalitions make organizing manageable because tasks are shared. The most important role of coalition members is to capitalize on connections and affiliations to recruit participants to the discussions. One individual or a small group will find it difficult to attract participants. People attend because they are invited by someone they trust. The more diverse and connected the group, the easier it will be to recruit participants.

**Set Goals:** The coalition members should discuss why it is important to engage the entire campus community in designing change and the kind of change being sought. Consider:

- Changes in individual behavior (e.g., increasing the ability of people to talk despite differences).
- Bolstering existing or developing new networks (e.g., bringing together faculty representing multiple disciplines to collaborate on a program in student discourse).
- Changes in institutional policy (e.g., revisiting the stated purposes of academic freedom and adding a statement about political speech).
- Changes in campus climate (e.g., advancing discussion as a cultural norm).

**Pilot this Discussion Guide:** Coalitions members should pilot the guide to learn the content and process. Coalition members who complete the discussion will become more enthusiastic about the initiative, making them better advocates and recruiters.

**Train Facilitators:** If your institution has not yet done so, identify a cadre of individuals who are either already trained facilitators or willing to learn to facilitate. Discussion is not simply a matter of casual conversations. Americans tend to gravitate toward people who share their socio-economic status, social identity, values, political viewpoints, and interests. Facilitating meaningful and productive conversations across these and other differences are learned skills.

**Support Facilitators:** Create a system for facilitators to stay connected with each other, whether in person or on-line. It's important for facilitators to be able to share concerns and tips beyond the training. Consider bringing facilitators together periodically for advanced facilitation training.

**Consider the Makeup of the Groups:** Think about how participants are grouped. We recommend heterogeneous groups – mixing faculty, staff, students, institutional leaders, and members of the local community. The goal is to improve political understanding, communication and tolerance.

**Logistics Matter:** Physical spaces matter, from holding the discussions in a room with the right lighting and acoustics, to whether the location is welcoming to all prospective participants. Bring the right supplies: easels, newsprint, markers, name tents or tags, water, food. Occasionally, facilitators need to prepare and post sheets of newsprint in advance.

**Launch the Discussions with a Kick-Off:** Events to launch a discussion series increase visibility, excitement, and credibility. A good kick-off event brings together a broad group of people (invited by a diverse coalition). Consider running an information session and even a mock segment of the discussion to generate interest.

**Provide Incentives for Participants:** Food, extra credit, and prizes all help, and consider your students' needs for child care and transportation as well.



PART 1-2-3-4-5 20 minutes

# Part 1: Getting Started

## Goals:

- Get to know each other a bit
- Establish the conditions for a good discussion

## Introductions

### Circle around and exchange names and your role

**on campus.** Consider using a short icebreaker here, such as turning to a neighbor to find something in common or asking people what they like best about the campus.

 FACILITATOR TIP

Start by welcoming the group and explaining your role, which is to:

- Keep the process moving
- Help the group stay on time
- Ensure that everyone gets a chance to participate.

### Explain the process, goals, and why you are doing this

Our goals for this discussion are to:

- Increase our understanding of the conflict between free expression and inclusion on campus.
- Increase understanding of why the conflict exists.
- Imagine the ideal – a campus without the conflict.
- Explore strategies for achieving the ideal.

 FACILITATOR TIP

These goals reflect the sequencing of the discussion.

## Establishing ground rules

 FACILITATOR TIP

There are many ways to establish ground rules. Here, we offer a short version (5 to 10 minutes). If this discussion is in response to a controversial incident or a perceived problem with your institution's campus climate for diversity and inclusion, incidents over free expression, or political polarization, consider using the longer version (20 to 30 minutes) in Appendix B. You will need to set aside more time, however.

Ask, "How many of you are familiar with the concept of ground rules or group agreements?" Explain the importance of ground rules – not to chill speech but to create conditions that encourage it.

Conduct a quick brainstorm (no more than 2 minutes) seeking suggestions for ground rules – capture these on newsprint.

**Listen for the following and add any that are missing:**

- Everyone’s viewpoint counts equally.
- Seek first to understand, then be understood. Listen.
- Assume good will.
- If you are offended, say so and say why.
- You can disagree, but don’t personalize it.
- Share “air time.”
- We all share responsibility for the quality of this conversation.
- Confidentiality: It’s OK to share ideas and themes, but not what individuals say.
- Be present. Turn off cell phones.

**! FACILITATOR TIP**

Write these out in advance and show them at this point.

**Wrapping up:**

- Ask, “Do you have any questions about these? Does anyone want to add?”
- Consider discussing one or two rules before moving on. One particularly relevant to this conversation is the “ouch” rule – if you are offended, say so and say why.
- Obtain agreement to adhere to these.

**PART 1—2—3—4—5** 60 minutes

# Part 2: Framing the Issue

## What is the nature of the problem?

### Goals:

- Gain understanding of the different perspectives on this issue
- Identify the tensions and why they exist

### Challenges and Opportunities

Using a board or markers/newsprint, create two lists, one marked “Challenges” and the other marked “Opportunities.” Give people a minute or two to jot down their thoughts, and then ask them to respond, but not in long stories or



descriptions. The point of this exercise is to identify the many perspectives on this issue. Capture the ideas on newsprint or board.

To capture challenges, ask: “What concerns do you have about how free expression and inclusion intersect on this campus?”

**Some probes to consider:**

- Do you feel your social or political perspectives receive a fair hearing here on campus?
- Have you ever felt that you could not say or do something because of its political nature?
- Are there people or groups on campus who cannot say something because of its political nature or because of who they are, their social identity?
- Does it matter where you are – the classroom, the cafeteria, clubs?

To capture opportunities, ask: “Can you see any opportunities to increase both free expression and inclusion?”

**Some probes to consider:**

- Has the context for free expression changed over the past year?
- Are people more or less interested in politics since the recent election season?

**Reviewing the opportunities and challenges:**

- What principles are at stake when we consider free expression and inclusion?
- Does the treatment of expression and inclusion on this campus align with those principles?

**Why are there tensions around speech and inclusion on college campuses?**

 **FACILITATOR TIP**

Below are a set of “viewpoints,” perspectives on why the problem exists on college campuses. This is not an exhaustive list, and participants can add more. Participants will not need to build consensus around any of these views. The goal is to give each a fair hearing and ensure that participants consider viewpoints not expressed by people around the table.

**Some probes to consider:**

- Which viewpoint(s) are closest to your own?
- Why do you hold the viewpoint you hold?
- What viewpoints are missing?
- Choose a viewpoint that you do not hold. Discuss why someone might hold this viewpoint.

You will need to print these for every participant and hand them out. People will need some time to read them. We've created a one-page handout with the viewpoints listed below that you could use (see Appendix C).

**Viewpoint #1: Colleges and universities must fully honor freedom of expression.** Established and left untouched for more than two hundred years, the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights says, “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech...” Even abhorrent, hateful, and demeaning speech is protected by the First Amendment at public institutions and as a critical normative value at private institutions. Picking and choosing when speech should be sanctioned results in arbitrary censorship, which in turn makes it hard for people to talk through their differences. The response to “bad” speech should be more speech, not censorship.

**Viewpoint #2: We need to restrict toxic speech to reinforce institutional goals and values and to provide equal learning conditions for all students.** Existing rules and principles worked when the nation was founded but not for our increasingly pluralistic society. The slow pace of social justice and economic equality calls for changes in the rules. When words are hateful or insulting toward disadvantaged populations of students, their harm outweighs the individual’s right to use them. By allowing speech that is antithetical to our values, we normalize it. Doing so not only creates a toxic and unequal learning environment for some students; it also prevents this institution from achieving its educational goals.

**Viewpoint #3: The attention to inclusion has fallen short of inclusion of people with unpopular political viewpoints.** Institutions protect certain groups of students, such as people in social identity groups who have been historically marginalized, but not students with minority or unpopular *political* perspectives. People whose views are not consistent with the dominant political leaning on campus keep their heads down and their mouths shut, preventing not only their speech but also the consideration of diverse perspectives. A climate that chills unpopular views inhibits learning and the vigorous exchange of ideas.

**Viewpoint #4: We fundamentally disagree on how best to affect social change.** Some people call for polite, civil dialogue. Others are tired of talking and want action, so they engage in protests and other forms of activism. Marginalized groups on both sides of the political aisle feel small and outnumbered, so they resort to visible, vocal, and even disruptive behavior. We face deep ideological and practical differences about effective approaches to social change. Until we settle those differences, solving other problems is unlikely.

**Viewpoint #5: We lack understanding of what it means to share responsibility for our campus community or for each other.** By definition, a “college” is a place of learning where all members of the community share responsibility for each other’s learning and well-being, yet this is a responsibility that most do not understand or want to undertake. Were all members of the campus community to understand and accept that responsibility, problems of demeaning speech, exclusion, polarization, and intolerance would be inconsistent with community norms and standards.

**Viewpoint #6: We do not know how to talk and collaborate across cultural and political differences.** Most of us lack practice in talking about race, gender, religion, disabilities, or politics. Many of us grew up or currently live in homogeneous communities where family members, neighbors, friends,

and colleagues share our lived experiences and perspectives. We need opportunities to practice intergroup discussions and problem solving. Concerns about free expression or cultural inclusion miss the main problem. College offers the ideal opportunity for everyone to learn and model how to work together to find common ground.

**How did this conversation go?**

- What perspectives may be missing?



- Did anything surprise you about this conversation?
- Did we identify any campus norms or values that need to be bolstered or introduced?

Don't forget to allow participants to generate new viewpoints, such as "*colleges and universities have become too political, and should focus more on career development,*" or "*American values are shifting, so should campuses.*"

**PART** 1—2—**3**—4—5 20 minutes

# Part 3: Envisioning the Ideal

**What institutional attributes – norms, practices, attitudes, behaviors – advance political discourse, free speech, and inclusion?**

## Goal:

- Develop a shared understanding of the ideal balance of free speech and inclusion on campus



This brainstorm is designed to be a quick exercise.

It is important for people to imagine an ideal before trying to implement changes or interventions. In a campus setting, creating a shared vision is challenging because (1) colleges and universities serve a broad range of constituencies and people with diverse perspectives and (2) the image needs to be appropriate to an educational setting. In other words, the way the institution or people on campus approach free speech and inclusion needs to align with and be conducive to the institution's *educational goals*. Colleges and universities have the right to academic freedom, which the U.S. Supreme court defined as the right to determine on *academic grounds* who may teach, who may be taught, how it is taught, and who is admitted to study.

Tell everyone to take two minutes or so to envision (or turn to a neighbor and discuss) a healthy campus climate for speech and inclusion. Ask everyone to think of descriptors that reflect principles ("open-mindedness") and practices ("listening before speaking").

Ask everyone to share their words or phrases. Capture them on newsprint. Suggest that if a person has heard a descriptor that they had in mind, say “ditto” to it and add another. You can go around and collect more ideas, but if this group is one of many, you do not necessarily need to capture all recommended principles and practices here and now.

**Once everyone has had a chance to contribute at least one idea, ask:**

- Which ideals are the most important?
- Do any of these ideals conflict?
- Are there ideals to which we can all agree?



**FACILITATOR TIP**

You will need to get the list down to something manageable, perhaps six descriptors or a concise vision statement.

**PART 1—2—3—4—5** 30 minutes

# Part 4: What Next?

## How can we achieve the campus we envision?

Different campuses will have different goals for these discussions. If administrators want feedback so they can establish programs or policies, then the ideas of the group need to be collected and communicated. If the goal is to spark collective action, then it is necessary to capture names and specific interests as well. If the goal is to catalyze individual commitment, then you will want to focus on what each person in the group can do.

Ask, “What needs to happen? What ideas do you have for improving our campus climate for both free expression and inclusion?”



**FACILITATOR TIP**

Remind the group that they do not need consensus, but they do need to identify a few things that seem to take priority. If there is disagreement, you can also make a “minority report” or communicate dissenting viewpoints. Make sure that what is being reported out reflects the will of the group and not just of a few effective advocates. You might want to poll them (or even do a secret ballot).

## Where should we focus our energies?

- Policies
- Curriculum
- Co-curricular programming
- Community-based experiences for students
- New traditions
- Faculty development
- Staff development

Of these ideas that you generated, which

- Are most likely to facilitate change?
- Are already being done on campus?

What needs to happen that isn't already happening?

- What can you recommend that others (institutional leaders, staff, faculty) do?
- What could we do as a group, collectively?
- What could each of us do as individuals?

**! FACILITATOR TIP**

Collect the ideas. Decide as a group which recommendations (for others) will be communicated to the coalition organizing the discussions.

Try to end on a festive and upbeat note. One way to do that is to invite participants to make individual commitments in response to the question, "What can each of us do as individuals?" Ask participants to write down "I will..." statements reflecting behaviors and actions they personally commit to doing. For this, hand out post-it notes and have each participant write *one commitment per note*. You may need to provide an example, such as "I will talk with and listen to someone whose political views do not match mine." Have each participant share one commitment, and if there is time, more. Do it in a way that is celebratory, such as having each person walk to a place where ideas can be posted, read their idea aloud, and the group applauds.

Collect all ideas and disseminate them to the group or publish them on campus along with the other ideas.

All too often, groups create pages of strategies that someone else, usually the administration, should do. Resist the urge to do that. If the group wants to make recommendations, limit them to one or two.

**PART 1—2—3—4—5** 10 minutes

Part 5: Report Out & Wrap Up

Summarizing

- What are the key takeaways from today?

**! FACILITATOR TIP**

Tell the group what will happen next.

Thank everyone for coming!

Plan in advance how you will wrap up the dialogue. A report? An email to the group? An action forum with other groups? Tell the group the plan. Make sure you have email addresses and phone numbers.

# Appendix A

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

— The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

*Note: The below is an interpretation of existing law and practices; it is not intended as legal advice. For the individual stance of your campus, please discuss with your college or university’s legal counsel.*

The U.S. Constitution applies to *public actors* only – “the government shall make no law” – and public colleges and universities are agents of the government or public actors. While the First Amendment does not apply to private institutions, the protection of free expression is not only a normative value, but it may be protected through contracts or handbooks and may therefore be enforceable under contract law.

The First Amendment right to free speech has long been the subject of debate and litigation. Americans generally recognize the importance of free expression, but some want to curtail speech that conflicts with cultural norms or their own ideology. With some narrow exceptions, speech cannot be censored or sanctioned based on its viewpoint or content.

Not all speech is protected. In limited situations, words that create a risk of immediate violence (e.g., falsely shouting “fire” in a crowded theater) can be sanctioned. Colleges and universities have a duty to maintain the safety of the campus community, but “safety” cannot be a false pretext for wanting to prevent speech based on its viewpoint or content.

Whether and when institutions may restrict speech depends on the location and situation. Institutions can restrict speech that interrupts the learning process. They have a greater right to limit speech in classrooms and other settings not dedicated to open public conversation, such as offices, and *some* latitude over common spaces such as student unions and performance halls. How much latitude depends on how that space has been traditionally used. Outdoor areas of campus are presumptively open for speech and expressive activity. The institution may institute reasonable “time, place, and manner restrictions” to ensure that speech does not disrupt learning (for example, bans on amplified sound near classroom activity), so long as such restrictions are no broader than necessary and do not target speech because of its content or message.

Both invited speakers, and students who protest those speakers, are protected by the First Amendment. However, people who substantially interfere with the ability of students to hear an invited speaker (for example, by physically blocking entrance to a speech or intentionally shouting down a speaker so she may not be heard) may, in some circumstances, be removed from the premises.

Finally, under the anti-discrimination laws, Titles VI, VII, and IX, colleges and universities have a duty to prevent hostile environments based on a student’s race, ethnicity, sex, religion, or sexual orientation. To be censored or punished, however, the speech would need to be repeated, targeted at an individual student, and so hostile and offensive that it results in an unequal learning environment for an individual under the civil rights laws.

## Resources On Free Speech on Campus

Association of American Colleges and Universities (2017). *Free expression, liberal education, and inclusive excellence* ([online resource](#)).

Association of American Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2017). *Freedom of speech on campus: Guidelines for governing boards and institutional leaders* ([online resource](#)).

Chemerisnsky, E. and Gillman, H. (2017). *Free speech on campus*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

# Appendix B

## Establishing Ground Rules, Option 2 (20 - 30 minutes)

If this conversation is in response to a controversial incident or a perceived problem with your institution's campus climate for diversity and inclusion, open expression, or political polarization, consider using this option to establish ground rules.

Ask, "How many of you are familiar with the concept of ground rules or group agreements?" Explain the importance of ground rules – not to chill speech but to create conditions that encourage it.

Conduct a quick brainstorm (no more than 2 minutes) seeking suggestions for ground rules – capture these on newsprint.

### Listen for the following and add any that are missing:

- Everyone's viewpoint counts equally.
- Seek first to understand, then be understood. Listen.
- Assume good will.
- If you are offended, say so and say why.
- You can disagree, but don't personalize.
- Share "air time."
- We all share responsibility for the quality of this conversation.
- Confidentiality: It's OK to share ideas and themes, but not what individuals say.
- Be present. Turn off cell phones.

### Ask, "Any questions about these? Does anyone want to add or discuss these?"

For this particular discussion, you may want to discuss particular ground rules, such as "keep it civil" or "be respectful." "Civility" may be used to oppress ideas – who makes the rules about what is civil? Who defines respect? Is disagreement inherently disrespectful? Is there a way to disagree respectfully? Or discuss the role of silence and listening. Some people are not talkers by nature – how do we include their voices without calling them out? People may opt to be silent, but they should never feel silenced. How might we signal to each other that we are listening? Seek suggestions for making the discussion work for people of all cultures and personalities.

Someone might suggest that the group create a "safe space." It is important to dig deeper to understand what that means to people. To some, it might mean, a situation where no one is ever offended. To others, it might mean as situation in which people can say things they may not say elsewhere, and know that others

might call them out, but that they can take risks with language. Some facilitators promote an alternative – Brave Spaces, to suggest that people can ask questions or express a viewpoint, even if they may offend others, without fear of being ostracized or embarrassed.

You might also ask the group about how they want to handle microaggressions. Start by defining them: *Verbal or nonverbal slights or insults that communicate negative messages to a person or group of people based solely upon their social identity and marginalized group membership.*

### Consider posing some examples:

- (To a person of color) *What are you?*
- *I don't expect you to understand. You don't go to church.*
- *We have a serious problem in this country with rural White men.*
- *We have a serious problem in this country with urban Black men.*
- *I didn't know deaf people could drive.*
- *You people are so touchy.*

### Some probes to consider:

- Is this a microaggression, using our definition? Does it matter whether the identity represents a dominant or marginalized group?
- Is this comment malicious or naïve? Does it matter? Who decides?
- Should the speaker be called out or ignored? What happens if microaggressions go ignored? How do we call out people?
- Do we need a ground rule about this? What about “Assume good will?” Does that always work?
- How do we allow people to make mistakes or test our intercultural communications without intimidating people from speaking or wrecking group dynamics? How much caution is too much caution?

The goal of this exercise is to raise awareness of different perspectives on candor, honesty, mistakes, bigotry, ignorance or naiveté. It is not to prevent mistakes necessarily but to help people talk about them. And in cases where a statement is intentional, the goal is to raise awareness about how that statement is received.



# Appendix C

## Why are there tensions around speech and inclusion on college campuses?

- Which viewpoint(s) are closest to your own?
- Why do you hold the viewpoint you hold?
- What viewpoints are missing?
- Choose a viewpoint that you do not hold. Discuss why someone might hold this viewpoint.

**Viewpoint #1: Colleges and universities must fully honor freedom of expression.** Established and left untouched for more than two hundred years, the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights says, “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech...” Even abhorrent, hateful, and demeaning speech is protected by the First Amendment at public institutions and as a critical normative value at private institutions. Picking and choosing when speech should be sanctioned results in arbitrary censorship, which in turn makes it hard for people to talk through their differences. The response to “bad” speech should be more speech, not censorship.

**Viewpoint #2: We need to restrict toxic speech to reinforce institutional goals and values and to provide equal learning conditions for all students.** Existing rules and principles worked when the nation was founded but not for our increasingly pluralistic society. The slow pace of social justice and economic equality calls for changes in the rules. When words are hateful or insulting toward disadvantaged populations of students, their harm outweighs the individual’s right to use them. By allowing speech that is antithetical to our values, we normalize it. Doing so not only creates a toxic and unequal learning environment for some students; it also prevents this institution from achieving its educational goals.

**Viewpoint #3: The attention to inclusion has fallen short of inclusion of people with unpopular political viewpoints.** Institutions protect certain groups of students, such as people in social identity groups who have been historically marginalized, but not students with minority or unpopular *political* perspectives. People whose views are not consistent with the dominant political leaning on campus keep their heads down and their mouths shut, preventing not only their speech but also the consideration of diverse perspectives. A climate that chills unpopular views inhibits learning and the vigorous exchange of ideas.

**Viewpoint #4: We fundamentally disagree on how best to affect social change.** Some people call for polite, civil dialogue. Others are tired of talking and want action, so they engage in protests and other forms of activism. Marginalized groups on both sides of the political aisle feel small and outnumbered, so they resort to visible, vocal, and even disruptive behavior. We face deep ideological and practical differences about effective approaches to social change. Until we settle those differences, solving other problems is unlikely.

**Viewpoint #5: We lack understanding of what it means to share responsibility for our campus community or for each other.** By definition, a “college” is a place of learning where all members of the community share responsibility for each other’s learning and well-being, yet this is a responsibility that most do not understand or want to undertake. Were all members of the campus community to understand and accept that responsibility, problems of demeaning speech, exclusion, polarization, and intolerance would be inconsistent with community norms and standards.

**Viewpoint #6: We do not know how to talk and collaborate across cultural and political differences.** Most of us lack practice in talking about race, gender, religion, disabilities, or politics. Many of us grew up or currently live in homogeneous communities where family members, neighbors, friends, and colleagues share our lived experiences and perspectives. We need opportunities to practice intergroup discussions and problem solving. Concerns about free expression or cultural inclusion miss the main problem. College offers the ideal opportunity for everyone to learn and model how to work together to find common ground.