

The Open Dissent

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Project Summary

The Open Dissent seeks to challenge ideological echo chambers by prioritizing civil disagreement, real-time fact checking, and inclusive participation. The Open Dissent offers a space between academic discourse and everyday conversation on our website, theopendissent.com. Unlike traditional social media outlets, ideas shared on The Open Dissent can be challenged and expanded, not just reinforced.

Our website encourages our users to anonymously, or publicly, share their beliefs regarding any social, political, or cultural issue. We hope to teach UC students how to listen actively, challenge assumptions respectfully, and articulate their views without fear of judgement. In an open forum, we hope that polarizing social, political, and cultural issues can bring people together in constructive conversation, rather than apart in stonewalled disagreement.

Ultimately, The Open Dissent is not just about talking across differences; it's about strengthening the skills and values that sustain a democratic society.

Impact

As The Open Dissent has grown to host more members of our campus community, it has also adapted to feedback from our users. Various updates have allowed us to create a multifaceted platform that encourages thoughtful discussion, creative expression, and the open exchange of diverse perspectives. These improvements have made the website more intuitive and accessible, encouraging users to engage with discussions, respond to one another, and return to the platform to continue conversations over time rather than treating it as a one-time forum.

The Open Dissent has helped normalize respectful dialogue around complex social, political, and cultural issues. Students have been able to encounter viewpoints that differ from their own in an environment designed to promote critical thinking instead of polarization. Through continuous improvements based on user feedback, we have created a platform that not only reflects the needs of our campus but also empowers over 50 students to contribute to and shape the conversations that matter most to them.

Beyond measuring engagement through participation, the project has also demonstrated the value of listening to our users and incorporating their suggestions into future development. We hope to continue to promote our website to our community at UCLA and plan on conducting in-person interviews with users during the 2026–27 school year. These interviews will allow us to share diverse viewpoints with an in-person discussion. Our long-term goal is to expand participation while maintaining a culture of respectful, evidence-based discussion that encourages students to engage thoughtfully with perspectives different from their own.