

# Campus Conversation Toolkit

*Using the newspaper as a means of dialogue, education, and reflection.*

**A Program of the November Fifth Coalition  
and the American Democracy Project**



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# About Campus Conversations

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**Campus Conversations** are a strategy originally created on college campuses to encourage greater discussion and deliberation about the critical issues facing our country. The strategy was initially developed by *The New York Times*, using the daily newspaper to focus conversations on contemporary issues. Two signature programs, Times Talks and News at Noon, convened groups of students, faculty, and other campus community members to engage in dialogue. These programs typically occurred weekly, biweekly, or monthly, usually at lunchtime, bringing together disparate groups of people to have thoughtful discussion on contemporary topics, usually focusing specifically on a particular article or set of articles in *The New York Times*. The basic guidelines for these conversations include a specific expectation that participants will listen respectfully—with open minds—disagree in positive ways, and engage in genuine deliberation.

These conversations have proven to be very successful. In part, the effectiveness comes from the non-hierarchical setting. Another aspect of the success of this strategy comes from the diversity of participants, a collection of students, faculty and staff not commonly accustomed to meeting and talking together as equals. A final component of the success comes from addressing highly visible and sometimes controversial contemporary public issues, with background and details available in *The New York Times*. Perhaps the greatest reason for the success of this strategy is that it is inherently engaging. The diverse audience assures multiple perspectives. The often-used ground rules make interaction different than the typical exchange between members of a class or discussants in public settings, where positions are sometimes taken without consideration of opposite views, where active listening sometimes does not occur, and where respect for others is not evident. Perhaps most importantly, these discussion formats have been shown in experimental settings to be highly effective in producing more thoughtful, engaged citizens.

**Campus Conversations** aims to create the same atmosphere and for the same reasons. The [November Fifth Coalition](#) is working towards creating citizens who are knowledgeable and prepared to be active in their government. In order to work towards a better tomorrow, people must have the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that enable them to create change in government. This program is one way to give citizens an opportunity to engage and learn about various national and local issues that impact their lives. By coming together to participate in these valuable discussions, it is one step closer to moving away from the ‘me’ and back to the ‘we’ in “We the people...”

## **How to use this toolkit:**

This toolkit has been developed to help you plan, promote, and implement Campus Conversations. Please use this as you see fit. The toolkit includes several samples and templates that can be easily modified to fit your specific needs.

## **Goals:**

The goals of this program are simple: to promote democratic dialogue with members of the campus community with the goal of enhancing knowledge of current issues, building critical thinking skills, and creating more civically-minded students.

# Frequently Asked Questions

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**1.) What is the value of hosting Campus Conversations?**

In the digital age when we use cell phones, text messages, blogs, and the Internet to access news and discussing current events is an often-neglected opportunity. Students participate with no expectation of class credit, grades, or projects, only the chance to engage in civil discourse with university community members representing a diversity of disciplines and points of view.

**2.) How do we start a Campus Conversations program?**

Launching a Campus Conversations program is as easy as finding a common time and place and persuading enough faculty, staff, and students to facilitate one or more discussions during the academic year. Depending on the institution's size, a campus-wide, midday session works for some and on larger campuses multiple sessions in academic or residential settings are more realistic and successful.

**3.) Will faculty participate?**

It is hard to imagine why a professor would not want to choose an issue, facilitate a discussion, and engage students and colleagues in an interdisciplinary approach to their chosen subject. Faculty members have the opportunity to apply theory to current events and learn how students respond to particular issues. A one-hour commitment over the course of the academic year is not much to ask.

**4.) Will students participate?**

Absolutely. There are students eager to meet with their peers and faculty from other disciplines. In many cases, students bring expertise to the subjects being discussed. Students recognize the relevance to the Campus Conversations program. The program also brings international students, graduate students, and undergraduate students together in a vibrant setting.

**5.) Are incentives necessary?**

Pizza and drinks and door prizes help. Oftentimes, people are hesitant to try something new, so once they arrive and begin talking, there will be less need to coax them into attending future conversations.

**6.) Are there any special touches to make Campus Conversations stand out on campus?**

Invite the university president, provost, and deans to participate. Ask students to take a turn facilitating. Consider having a professor's class take responsibility for a discussion. Invite first-year experience leaders to encourage new students to attend.

**7.) How do we promote Campus Conversations?**

Consider making signs and placing them in strategic locations to promote the series. Create Campus Conversations T-shirts. Mention the program in your academic and community circles and ask your colleagues to spark interest with their students.

# **Organizational Steps for Program Implementation**

Below is a list of several tasks to be completed while organizing a Campus Conversation. Please modify as needed.

## **Getting started:**

1. Choose a coordinator to organize and administer the program, recruit faculty and student participants, and promote the series.
2. Determine a time and place. Find a centralized place on campus that is easily accessible to all. Reserve the space through the appropriate campus channels. Afternoon, around lunchtime, has proven highly successful both in terms of turnout and retention. Please see templates for a schedule template.
3. Create a discussion guideline sheet that defines civil discourse (one is also provided in this toolkit).
4. Recruit faculty members, students, and community members to facilitate the discussions for the scheduled dates. Email is an appropriate way to get the word out, as well as newsletters and ads. Work with everyone interested who responds.
5. Instruct facilitators to choose a topic and at least one recent article. Have the facilitator send the topic and article title to the coordinator as soon as possible. Distribute the schedule to the facilitators as well as a discussion guideline sheet. Encourage the facilitator to invite stakeholders on both sides of the issue to help guide the discussion.
6. Disseminate the week's topic with a URL link to the article several days before the scheduled Campus Conversation. Use email, Facebook, university communication outlets, and other communication tools. Also inform participants how they can acquire a hard copy, either from an office or a link to the article, for viewing.
7. Strategically place creative signs, posters, and banners to heighten visibility and promote Campus Conversations.
8. Free food helps! If funding is available, arrange for food and drink to encourage a higher turnout of participants.

## **During the event:**

1. At the meeting, set up a table with print copies of the article for those who might not have had a chance to read it in advance, a one-page blurb on the project for newcomers, a sign-up sheet (to receive announcements for future campus conversations), and the discussion guidelines.
2. Have a student, staff, or faculty member welcome the participants and announce the day's topic. It will be considered a success if there are people who come regularly to the session, even if they have not read the article. Drop-in's show that they enjoy the discussions and learning about the topics they may not have otherwise known anything about.
3. Begin by introducing the topic and article of discussion. Introduce the facilitator and have them launch the discussion. Do your best to be a catalyst for inclusive participation. Please focus on student contributions. Be aware of those who tend to dominate!

### Mention the [step up-step back method](#).

Using step up—step back is a conscious effort to have participation from all members of the discussion. People who tend to be quiet and not contribute need to be aware that they should try to 'step up' and speak. Those who tend to speak a lot should take notice and deliberately 'step back' to allow others a chance to share.

4. End promptly on time by thanking the facilitator and all of the participants. It may behoove the facilitator to have a five or ten minute warning before the end of the session. Announce the next session's facilitator, topic, time, and place. Offer the current space as a means of continued conversation if people feel the discussion needs to be extended past the hour.

# Resources

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This information includes a list of online resources for promotion and marketing. Also included in this section are websites and organizations that will allow you to review different ways to use newspapers in the classroom, as well as some background information on civic engagement and what is happening in the field as of late. Lastly, there is contact information for three campus representatives who have implemented similar discussion series on their campuses.

## **Recruitment and Promotion**

This material can be used to help develop different media materials for marketing and promotion, as well as tips for recruitment and retention.

### **Corporation for National and Community Service**

[http://www.nationalservice.org/pdf/Media\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.org/pdf/Media_Guide.pdf)

This valuable media guide helps with tips for writing press releases, op-ed pieces, organizing an event, and building relationships with the media.

### **Publicity Insider**

<http://www.publicityinsider.com/release.asp>

Use for information about creating several different promotional materials

## **Newspapers as Education**

Although much of these resources are tailored specifically to using newspapers as curricula and in classrooms, much of this information can be slightly modified to assist with the implementation of events taking place outside of the classroom.

### ***The New York Times Knowledge Network***

<http://www.nytimes.com/ref/college/coll-classroomresources.html>

Information about how to integrate the *New York Times* into classroom curricula, as well as why it is important to use current events in the classroom as a way to get students engaged. There are opportunities for a classroom subscription at a significantly discounted rate.

### ***USA Today Education***

<http://www.usatoday.com/educate/homesplash.htm?POE=FOOTER>

Information about lesson plans and resources for engaging students and faculty. Comprehensive information on using *USA Today* in every school subject area. Also provides subscriptions at highly discounted rates.

Knowledge Media Laboratory of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/programs/index.asp?key=38>

The Knowledge Exchange Exhibition and Presentation (KEEP) Toolkit includes a template you can design on the web to prepare for your classroom learning. There are also case studies showing the effects of using media as a means of educating.

### **The Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching at Western Kentucky University**

<http://www.wku.edu/teaching/booklets/newspaper.html>

‘Newspapers in the Classroom’ is a program of the *New York Times* and has reports on the validity of using media to engage students. There is also program information and methods in using newspapers in your curriculum.

### **Newspapers in Education**

<http://nieonline.com/>

This is a website dedicated to providing materials that demonstrate how to incorporate newspapers into every facet of education.

### **Organizations supporting Deliberation and Dialogue Efforts**

<http://thataway.org>

The National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) is running, involved in, and supporting a variety of projects to help advance the rapidly-growing dialogue and deliberation community.

<http://cdd.stanford.edu>

The Center for Deliberative Democracy (CDD) collaborates with government organizations around the world to conduct Deliberative Polls®.

### **Information on Civic Engagement and Service Learning**

#### **American Democracy Project (ADP)**

<http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/default.htm>

A program of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), ADP is an initiative of 228 AASCU campuses that seeks to create an intellectual and experiential understanding of civic engagement for undergraduates enrolled at institutions that are members of AASCU. The goal of the project is to produce graduates who understand and are committed to engaging in meaningful actions as citizens in a democracy. Look for civic engagement programs and resources for developing similar initiatives on your campuses, as well as information about how to become involved.

#### **Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)**

<http://www.civicyouth.org/>

CIRCLE promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people’s engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. A leading institution on civic engagement, information, research, and reports on community participation, civic knowledge, and concepts of citizenship.

#### **National Alliance for Civic Education (NACE)**

<http://www.cived.net/>

NACE believes the time has come to band together to ensure that the next generation of citizens understands and values democracy and participates in the ongoing work of building democracy in America.

#### **National Constitution Center**

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org>

For information on civic research, surveys, and findings.

Visit <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/CitizenAction/CivicResearchResults/index.shtml> for a more direct route to the research.

**American Council on Education (ACE)**

<http://www.acenet.edu/>

ACE helps colleges and universities anticipate and address the challenges of the 21st Century and contribute to a stronger nation and a better world. Our [members and associates](#) are approximately 1,800 accredited, degree-granting colleges and universities and higher education-related associations, organizations, and corporations.

**Times Talk and News at Noon Participating Schools:**

These veterans of media literacy welcome questions and comments. These institutions and administrators have been using programs to encourage knowledge, discussion, and engagement.

**The Coverdell Institute at Georgia College & State University**

Contact:

Gregg Kaufman

GCSU ADP Coordinator

Georgia College and State University

231 W. Hancock Street

CBX 075

Milledgeville, GA 31061

Phone: 478/445-1711

Email: [gregg.kaufman@gcsu.edu](mailto:gregg.kaufman@gcsu.edu)

URL: <http://www.gcsu.edu/coverdell/Times%20Talk.html>

**University of Missouri --- St. Louis**

Contact:

Margaret W. Cohen, Ph.D.

Associate Provost for Professional Development and

Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning

University of Missouri – St. Louis

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Phone: 314/516-5308

Email: [Peggy\\_Cohen@umsl.edu](mailto:Peggy_Cohen@umsl.edu)

URL: <http://www.umsl.edu/ctl>

**Fort Hays State University**

Contact:

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Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science,

Campus Coordinator, American Democracy Project

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Fort Hays State University

600 Park Street

Hays, Kansas 67601

Phone: 785/628-5391

Email: [crackawa@fhsu.edu](mailto:crackawa@fhsu.edu)

URL: <http://www.fhsu.edu/live/timestalk/>

## **Topics for Discussion:**

### **Themes:**

Global Issues  
National Issues  
    Health  
Environment  
    Politics  
    Science  
Technology  
    Business  
    Op/Ed  
    Region  
Higher Education  
    Sports  
    Arts  
    Style  
Education  
    Travel  
Technology

### **Specific Topics:**

Iraq War  
Abortion  
Gay Rights  
Global Warming  
National Security  
The World Bank  
AIDS Epidemic  
Cost/Access to Higher Education  
US Politics  
Bush Administration  
Presidential Campaigns  
Food Industry  
Depletion of Oil  
Stem Cell Research  
Immigration Legislation  
Avian Influenza  
Public Transportation

# Appendix

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This section includes useful samples and templates of some promotion materials, as well as a Campus conversations guideline. There are templates included that may be useful during the implementation of the project.

(On your university's letterhead)

# NEWS RELEASE

**Month, Day, Year**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT:** (name and  
telephone number here)

## Announcing **Campus Conversations**, a discussion series of current events

The November Fifth Coalition and **[the university name]** is introducing a discussion series on current events affecting us today. The program is called Campus Conversations. With less people engaged in the community and politics, it is more important than ever to use information as a means of education and dialogue. Fewer people are voting and even fewer people still are reading the newspaper. This series aims to developing the engagement of students, professors, and community members. Campus Conversations involves reading a newspaper article and coming together to discuss and engage one another. While engaging in meaningful dialogue, Campus Conversations hopes to create citizens that are active in deliberation and take responsibility for their government.

Meetings are weekly and topics, articles, and the facilitator's schedule are available at the website **[insert campus URL]**. If you would like to get involved, please note the meeting time and place below. For information about how to become a facilitator, or to give a presentation on a topic during the series, please contact, **[name, phone number, email]**.

Campus Conversations

**When:**

**Where:**

**Who:**

[www.novemberfifth.org](http://www.novemberfifth.org)

# Campus Conversations

## Participation Guide

The following participation guidelines for the *Campus Conversations Series* are based on the Joseph Campbell Foundation Conversations of a Higher Order website ([http://www.jcf.org/JCF-Forums\\_Guidelines.php](http://www.jcf.org/JCF-Forums_Guidelines.php)). The *Campus Conversations Series* provides an opportunity for the exchange of ideas in a scholarly environment. Please use these guidelines in order to encourage a high level of civil discourse and mutual respect.

### REASON \* RESPECT \* RESPONSIBILITY

1. **Respect others' opinions: These are Conversations, not Conversions.** 'Conversation' comes from the Latin words *con* ('with') and *verso* ('opposite'). We expect diverse opinions to be expressed in these discussions, and welcome them. Remember, just because you disagree with what someone has to say doesn't mean they don't get to say it. Should the opinion of another spark your anger or scorn, rather than your spirit or mind, please take a deep breath and think before making an ungenerous response. Ranting can seem terribly gratifying in the short term, but it is a very ineffective form of communication.

The same can be said of *ad hominem* attacks, wherein a person who is unhappy with another person's opinion attacks the person rather than discussing the ideas that caused distress. If a conversation becomes particularly heated, the facilitator may call for a temporary cease-fire; please respect this request and use the time to calm down and sort out your thoughts.

2. **Come clear of mind:** Our discussions are designed to contribute to a culture of inquiry contrasted to an ideological debate. Consider keeping a journal as you read widely, and please attempt to get a well-rounded background of the topic by reading periodicals such as *The New York Times*, *The Colonnade*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Macon Telegraph*, weekly news magazines, journals and course material – to prepare for the discussions.
3. **Pay attention:** If possible, read the article prior to the discussion session. Please visit [insert URL] to attain the schedule, topic, and article, or to inquire as to where you can pick up hard copies of the paper from which the article is drawn.
4. **Be polite:** Civil discourse and respect for academic inquiry are core values. Just as important is the value of listening to “the other.” Everyone has a right to his or her opinion. The United States Constitution's First Amendment provides for freedom of speech.
5. **Converse:** Last, but not least, participate. Use the *Campus Conversations* sessions to “exercise your voice” and use your critical thinking, analytical, articulation, and evaluation skills. There are NO GRADES, NO PAPERS, and NO EXPECTATIONS other than abiding by these guidelines and ENJOYING THE SPIRIT OF INQUIRY.

# FREE PIZZA?



## Curious about National & International Events, People, & Trends?



**Satisfy your appetite!**



### *“Times Talks”*

*Wednesdays at Noon*

*Lanier Hall Room 211 – ODK Conference Room*

*Enjoy a slice of Pizza (compliments of the New York Times)  
Join a stimulating discussion led by a different GC&SU Faculty member each week.*

Date	Faculty Facilitator	Discipline
<b>FALL SEMESTER</b>		
January 24	Leigh Hern	Early Childhood & Middle Grades Ed.
January 31	Ben Scafidi	Economics
February 7	Steve Auerbach	History
February 14	Amy Harrington	Counseling Center

### **GLOBAL WARMING Teach-In** 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

January 30      Climate Change History and Current Patterns  
Arts & Sciences Auditorium  
Professors Mead, Devore, Oetter, & Rhode

February 6      Film – An Inconvenient Truth  
Arts & Sciences Auditorium

February 13      Climate Change Effects on Nature’s Ecosystems  
University Banquet Room  
Professors Datta, Rhode, and John Gormly

February 20      Climate Change Effects on Human Systems  
University Banquet Room  
Professors Fahrer, Oetter, Sams, & Georgia Power Representative



