CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS
at Columbia

Race, Ethnicity and Inclusion Task Force
Office of University Life
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The Importance of Campus Conversations
*An Invitation from the Columbia Race, Ethnicity and Inclusion Task Force*

How do we have conversations that are both hard and necessary? Especially conversations about what it means to belong at Columbia. Meaningful inclusion and belonging are core Columbia community values, but our different experiences – and the realities of history, inequality and disparities – complicate where we start. Playwright and novelist James Baldwin once said, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” The Race, Ethnicity and Inclusion Task Force *Campus Conversations* Initiative aims to help us get started.

**Who We Are**

Dozens of students, faculty, and staff from each Columbia school belong to the Race, Ethnicity, and Inclusion Task Force convened by the Office of University Life. The Task Force works to identify issues and develop responsive strategies that address students’ experiences both in and outside of the classroom related to race, ethnicity, and other intersecting aspects of identity.

**What is the Campus Conversations Initiative?**

You can think of this initiative as a conversation-based project that offers you a jumpstart and a helpful guide to discussing identity, race and inclusion with peers, friends of friends, and others at Columbia or elsewhere in your life.

Each conversation has been developed by members of the Race, Ethnicity and Inclusion Task Force and has three parts that, all in all, take around 90 minutes to complete:

1. An introduction for the group to get to know each other and set conversation guidelines.
2. A discussion on a specific topic.
3. A closing exercise to help everyone think about next steps.

**Join Us In Conversation**

We invite – and we’ll help – you to host a conversation – in your residence, in your class, in your organization, or with your friends. We’ll provide the tools, and you’ll provide the space and opportunity. Sign up for a free facilitation training by contacting universitylife@columbia.edu.

*Building a diverse university community is not the work of a moment. It requires sustained commitment, concerted effort, and the attention of us all.*

- Lee C. Bollinger, President, Columbia University
Campus Conversations Continue with #unitedCU

*As members of one community, we can care for one another, hold each other accountable, and commit to acting with each other’s best interests in mind.*

- Associate Vice President for Student Life Ixchel Rosal

Campus Conversations help us explore the ideas of meaningful inclusion and belonging. #unitedCU is a way for students to share their perspectives on these ideas with the University community, and thus, continue the conversation.

After you facilitate a conversation, consider writing a post reinforcing #unitedCU. Here are some examples of thoughts students have shared, with tips for more personal posts, below:

1. **Take posed, “spontaneous” or artsy-abstract photos - your choice** (but we love to see your faces)! If posed, encourage everyone to smile and show pride in participating in your conversation. Use #unitedCU!
2. **Tell us who’s in the photo/s you’re sending** - if the people in your conversation are comfortable being identified, give us their first and last names (or just first and last initial, or first name only if preferred), your schools, and any student organizations applicable!
3. **Share an inspiring line or idea from your conversation**, such as something you learned or just really enjoyed about having the conversation. Or, share an aspiration or topic you are working through.
5. **Look out for your pic on the University Life social media** – share, tag and like! Our accounts are:
   - Facebook – [@ColumbiaUniversityLife](https://www.facebook.com/ColumbiaUniversityLife)
   - Twitter – [@ColumbiaULife](https://twitter.com/ColumbiaULife)
   - Instagram – [@ColumbiaULife](https://www.instagram.com/ColumbiaULife)
   - YouTube – [Columbia Office of University Life](https://www.youtube.com/ColumbiaOfficeOfUniversityLife)
Steps for Hosting a Campus Conversation

Before

1. Pick a time and date that works for you.
2. Pick a location. Perhaps:
   - Your residence hall or apartment
   - A lounge or space within your school (ask your school’s Student Affairs office)
   - A coffee shop or other open spaces on campus
3. Invite friends, classmates and friends of friends to participate. A few ideas:
   - Make an announcement before the start of one of your classes.
   - Reach out to your study group, student organization, team, etc.
   - Ask someone in your school’s Student Affairs Office to help you connect with other students who may be interested.
5. Check out the 10 Tips for a Great Conversation (see next page).
6. Please review the conversation guide a few times before your group meets. (If you have a question, the Office of University Life can help – just reach out to AVP for Student Life Ixchel Rosal at irosal@columbia.edu.)
7. Pick up supplies from the Office of University Life.
8. Create a welcoming environment – arrive 20-30 minutes before the conversation to set things up. If possible, have people sit in a circle.
9. Place a copy of “The Importance of Campus Conversations” (page 1 in this packet) on each chair.

During

1. Most importantly: Stay relaxed and enjoy yourself.
2. Practice the 10 Tips for a Great Conversation (next page).
3. Collect names of people who express interest in hosting a conversation. The Office of University Life can reach out to assist them.
4. If everyone is comfortable doing so, take a group picture at the end of your conversation and help spread the word about campus conversations and the #unitedCU campaign.
5. Collect all materials and cards / post-its written by the group.

After

2. If you haven’t already, join the Campus Conversations Facebook group (http://bit.ly/ULifeCampusConvosGroup)! Share any photos using #unitedCU. (See previous page for more.)
3. Turn in index cards, dated for your group, to the Office of University Life. Also return leftover supplies.
4. Make a list of names and contact information of anyone who wants to host a conversation. (You can email the list to irosal@columbia.edu.)
5. Consider hosting a future conversation!
10 Tips for a Great Campus Conversation

1. **Offer snacks/refreshments!** People are more likely to participate if they’re feeling welcomed. You can apply for a CommUnity Grant to help cover costs at http://bit.ly/unitedCUgrant.

2. **Make the conversation your own.** We’ve prepared a conversation guide — not a script; you’re not required to use every activity or ask every question. Pick and choose what works for you. The main point is to get folks talking!

3. **Take time to prepare.** Including, make sure you have all the supplies you need (see page 11; the Office of University Life can provide these). Reach out to universitylife@columbia.edu or irosal@columbia.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

4. **Be clear about logistics.** Make sure everyone knows the date, time and place for the conversation. Send reminders.

5. **Respect everyone’s time.** Start on time — you want to have enough time for everyone! We recommend 90 minutes to have these conversations. Also, don’t go over time. Watch the clock and end on time.

6. **Get comfortable with silence.** Sometimes people need a moment to think. That’s okay. If you throw out a question and no one responds, give it some time before you throw out another question.

7. **Build the momentum.** Bring energy and enthusiasm to your role as facilitator. Share your own thoughts on the questions. Just make sure you give others a chance to talk — actively include them. Model the participation you want in the conversation.

8. **Make it a brave space.** Encourage honesty and practice/follow the Community Learning Guidelines (see “Getting Started,” page 7).

9. **Get everyone involved.** Watch and make sure that everyone is participating. Gently encourage those who are quiet to share and those who are talking a lot to leave space for others.

10. **Be part of something big,** and bigger than this one conversation. Remind participants they’re part of Columbia’s Campus Conversations Initiative, and invite them to host a conversation of their own and/or join the Race, Ethnicity, and Inclusion Task Force.
A Guide to Campus Conversations
Identities – *Citizen: An American Lyric*
Second in a series of Conversation Guides from the Race, Ethnicity and Inclusion Task Force

Introduction

The overall goal for this conversation is to **create and engage in open and honest dialogue about identity and building community**.

This guide includes a series of activities to generate and stimulate thoughtful conversation. As the facilitator, **don’t be concerned about completing all the activities**. If there’s an activity that generates a lot of conversation, it’s often best to let the discussion flow!

Sometimes, it can take a little time to get a group to connect and feel comfortable with each other. Other times, people will be ready to dive in and won’t need activities to generate conversation. **Use your judgment**, watch how the conversation is going, and pick and choose the activities you think will best get everyone to the goal of talking about identity.

**This guide is meant as a jumping off point** for you. There are tools you can use to facilitate any number of conversations. Want to talk about climate change and students’ roles in addressing it? Or, political divisions playing out across our country? This guide can help frame any conversation you’d like to host. Just choose the topic for “Digging In” and use this guide to get there in a productive and effective way.

Finally, **keep the conversation going** – share a picture or a quote on the Campus Conversations Facebook group and other social media (and use #unitedCU!).

I. Getting Started (30 minutes)

Welcome

- Once your group has settled in, introduce yourself (sharing just your name for the moment) and welcome everyone to the conversation.
- Let them know that this event is part of an initiative from the Office of University Life Race, Ethnicity and Inclusion Task Force, and give out University Life brochures.
- Share the focus of the conversation and review the goal – to talk honestly and openly about identity and community. Let them know the conversation will take about 90 minutes and that you’ll be facilitating their participation through a series of exercises.
I. Getting Started continued

Welcome continued

- Give an overview of the flow of the conversation: you’ll begin with some ice breakers, then go into a discussion about an excerpt from Claudia Rankin’s poem *Citizen: An American Lyric* and then end with a discussion about community. Once you’ve reviewed the flow of activities share the following question with the group:

> How do our identities impact how we connect with others and build community here at Columbia?

Ask everyone to keep this question in mind during the conversation.

Introductions

- Have everyone introduce themselves. This gives each person the opportunity to have their voice heard in the circle, which is an important first step in making sure they are all engaged, especially those who may be nervous or anxious.
- Invite everyone to share their name, school or program, the gender pronouns they use, and a quick fun fact about themselves. Not everyone may be familiar with sharing what pronouns they use, so you should explain what this means (more on this in your facilitation training). It’s also good to explain that the exploration of individual’s identity begins with these introductions.
- If everyone already knows each other, then the introductions can just include pronouns in use and something each participant hopes to get out of the conversation.
- As the facilitator, you should introduce yourself first (i.e. provide a model) and then pick a direction to go around the room.

Ice Breakers (choose one!)

Ice breakers help people ease into the setting and the topic via a low to no risk activity. They also give participants a chance to gather their thoughts and get to know others.

- **Option A – Pair and Share**:  
  - Ask everyone to find someone in the room they don’t know and introduce themselves. Share that this is a great tool for practicing listening skills, which are critical to successful conversations and building community.
  - Everyone will take turns listening to each other for two minutes (as the facilitator, you’ll need to watch and call the time) responding to the following prompt: *I feel ______ about having this conversation because _______.*

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1 If you don’t think the group needs pair & share activities to warm up before starting the activities, you don’t need to use the ice breakers.
Ice Breakers continued

- Remind the group that the job of the person listening is to simply listen (i.e. not ask questions or share similar experiences, etc.) and to give their conversation partner complete attention.

- Explain that if one person runs out of things to say, they can start over again and see if it generates any new ideas. Or, they can simply talk about how their day has been.

- Once each person has gone, have people share in the larger group what that was like. Encourage them to share what it was like to either listen or be listened to for two minutes, not to describe what the other person said.

➢ Option B – All About Respect

- Ask everyone to pair with someone in the room they don’t know and introduce themselves. Have everyone talk for five to ten minutes about respect using questions like: What does it mean to you to “show respect”? How do you show respect to others?

- When time’s up, ask everyone to regroup. Kick off the discussion with any of these questions (or others you make up):
  - How did people define respect?
  - What were some of the core concepts discussed?
  - Where did your ideas about respect come from and whom are they meant to protect?
  - Does everyone really want to be treated the same way you want to be treated? Is eye contact during conversation respectful in every culture?
  - If someone’s ideas are oppressive, should we still respect them?

Community Learning Guidelines

It is important for everyone to think about and share what they need to stay present, focused, and engaged in the conversation. Share the Community Learning Guidelines you received in your facilitation training as a jumping off point and explain their purpose:

- Respect one another’s ideas and comments - Dialogue not Debate
- Use "I" statements
- Confidentiality – remind everyone that what is said stays in the room
- Listen to each other and don’t interrupt
- Support each other
- Seek to understand and ask questions
- “Take Space, Make Space” – share your voice but leave room for others to share as well
- Experiment with new ideas and challenge already established assumptions
- Have fun!

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Community Learning Guidelines continued
Review the guidelines and ask the group if everyone can agree, or if there’s anything else anyone would like to ask of the group. (Refer to your training for more information about how to respond to any discomfort with the guidelines, and how to work with any proposals for additions to the guidelines.)

Once you’ve discussed the Community Learning Guidelines, move on to Digging In!

II. Digging In: Identity – Reading Citizen: An American Lyric (45 minutes)

Activity: Reading Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine

On the train the woman standing makes you understand there are no seats available. And, in fact, there is one.

From “Citizen, VI [On the train the woman standing]”
by Claudia Rankine

This part of the discussion gives participants a chance to think about the assumptions we all make about people’s identities. Pass out the full excerpt from Claudia Rankine’s Citizen: An American Lyric; “Citizen, VI [On the train the woman standing].”

1. Read Rankine – Ask someone to read the poem aloud, or ask several people to read parts. Afterward, ask everyone to read the poem again to themselves.

2. Pair and Share – Have everyone pair with someone they haven’t already and give everyone two to three minutes each to answer the questions below. They don’t have to answer every question during their turn; they can focus on whichever questions seem most compelling to them.

   • Why is there an empty seat? What might it represent?
   • Why does the narrator sit down? What do you think of the narrator?
   • What does it mean to “travel as a family”?
   • Why would this be included in a collection called “Citizen”?
   • When you ride the subway/use public transportation, do you ever strike up conversations? Why/why not?

3. Regroup and Reflect – After sharing in pairs, prompt the larger group to discuss their answers to the questions above. The purpose of the activity is to reflect on assumptions we make about people’s identities, and on how those assumptions impact our interactions. Let the conversation flow.
Activity: Reflection Discussion

Now that everyone has had an opportunity to get a bit more comfortable with each other and the topic, ask the group these questions:

1. Who “owns” identity and how is it defined? How much of your identity is based on how you see yourself, versus how others see you?
2. How do our identities impact connecting with others and building community here at Columbia?

Additional, alternative questions

- What have you wanted others to know and/or understand about your identity/identities and lived experiences?
- Our identity/identities can change over time. How is that useful? How is it confusing or challenging?
- Have any of your identities been more salient or prominent in your life since joining the Columbia community? Which?
- We’ve talked about a lot about social identities, what about personal identities (i.e. political, geographic, personality traits, etc.)? How do they impact your engagement with others/community and how others perceive you?
- How easy or hard is it for you to have a conversation about identity? Why?
- Current events impact how we experience identity and community. Has this been true for you recently? How?

Pair and share for two minutes each, using the questions above as a prompt. They don’t have to answer every question during their turn; they can focus on whichever questions seem most compelling to them.

After the pair and share round, return attention to the larger group and ask everyone to reflect on these questions with the group. Remind them that the purpose of the activity is to have everyone reflect on their identities and how identities impact building community at Columbia. (Reminder to facilitators: If the conversation is flowing, don’t worry about making sure all the questions are answered. Simply use the questions as a jumping off point!)

III. Wrap (15 minutes)

1. Closing Circle

Wrap up your campus conversation with a closing circle: Ask everyone to share one quick thing they appreciated about the conversation, and one word to describe how they feel (e.g. hopeful, inspired, stuck, confused, excited, pleased, etc.). Go first, then pick a direction and invite everyone to respond.
2. Closing Thoughts
Ask participants to answer the following question on an index card:

What did you learn or discover in this conversation?

3. Goodbye and Next Steps

- Thank everyone for participating and encourage them to continue having campus conversations.

- Collect the index cards. Encourage everyone to join the Campus Conversations Facebook group (http://bit.ly/ULifeCampusConvosGroup) and add a post and/or photo about their experience. Remember to use #unitedCU!

- Ask for volunteers who want to host a conversation themselves; the Office of University Life can follow up to provide supplies and other support. Circulate a sign-up sheet.

Appendices

Supplies

| Watch or timer | Handouts: |
| Post-Its (four different colors) | Community Learning Guidelines |
| Pens (enough for everyone, same color, same style) | Activity Questions |
|                   | “The Importance of Campus Conversations” |
|                   | From Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* – “Citizen, VI [On the train the woman standing].” |

| University Life brochures |
| Index cards |
| #unitedCU buttons |
| Sign-In Sheet |
| Sign-Up to Host Sheet |

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Bibliography


