

Edited version of Chapter 7 in Cavalier, Ed Approaching Deliberative Democracy focusing on Campus Deliberative Forums.

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Deliberative polls and related social choice practices are best utilized when they are structurally connected to outcomes that can influence policy formation. The Southwestern Pennsylvania Program in Deliberative Democracy (SPPDD) and its university counterpart, Campus Conversations, has as its mission the goal of instantiating deliberative polling and other forms of democratic dialogue at these regional and university levels. In this chapter, we describe the organizational principles and processes that we have developed and then focus on several case studies. We also note the positive impact that these kinds of practices have on the students and community members who participate in them. This is encouraging news for those who seek a connection between citizenship theory and deliberative democracy. We begin with Carnegie Mellon and end with a collaborative statewide effort involving colleges and universities across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Campus Conversations

With the certification of the 26th Amendment in 1971, the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18, creating a new opportunity for young people to have a voice in the political process. However, hopes for increased participation from this demographic were short lived as the “turnout rate [for the newly franchised voters] of 48% was the lowest for any age group” (Wattenberg, 2007, p. 99) in the 1972 presidential election. Wattenberg further notes, and statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau confirm, that less than half of the eligible young voters have voted in every presidential election since the passage of the 26th Amendment. Despite these disheartening

numbers, there are reasons for hope. Census Bureau data indicates that voter turnout among 18- to 24-year olds grew from 32.3% in the 2000 presidential election to 41.9% in the 2004 presidential election; data from the 2008 presidential election confirms a further increase to 44.3%, albeit a nominal one. Additionally, as reported by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, young voters comprised 18% of the total electorate, an increase from 17% in the 2004 presidential election (Keeter, Horowitz, & Tyson, 2008).

The Pew Center report and other current research offer further insight into civic engagement of young people. The Pew Center report on young voter behavior in the 2008 presidential election notes that 28% of young voters in battleground states reported attendance at a campaign event which exceeded similar participation among other age groups (Keeter et al., 2008). Other data indicates that voting behavior might not be an accurate descriptor of civic engagement among young people, particularly members of the millennial generation¹. According to a report entitled *Millennials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement* published by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and the Charles Kettering Foundation, a majority of the college students studied did not find voting to be a vehicle for substantive social change (Kiesa et al., 2007, p. 15). In particular, they were more likely to volunteer within their local communities (Kiesa et al., 2007, p. 20) or to engage in “civic activities that are supportive and consensual” (Olander, 2003, p. 5) such as participating in an event to raise awareness of a cause or funds for a nonprofit organization. While it is important to note that the CIRCLE study of college student political engagement excluded 18-

¹ According to *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2000), the millennial generation encompasses individuals born in or after 1982. “They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse. More important, they are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct” (Howe, N. and Strauss, W., p. 4).

to 25-year olds who are not attending college (Kiesa et al., 2007), the results underline a unique opportunity for institutions of higher education to promote civic engagement among their student populations.

From the founding of Harvard and the other colonial colleges in the United States, colleges have played a pivotal role in the education of individuals who aspire to positions of political and civic leadership (Rudolph, 1990). In our contemporary context, institutions of higher education continue to advance their role as the source of professional and community leaders through a variety of curricular and metacurricular experiences as well as the intentional cultivation of partnerships with community constituencies as a means of fulfilling their own obligations of “institutional citizenship” (Thomas, 2000, p. 66).

At Carnegie Mellon University, students have the opportunity to experience the democratic process through the Campus Conversations program. Created in 2005 as a derivative of the SPPDD and initially housed in the Center for the Advancement of Applied Ethics and Political Philosophy, it represented the first systematic use of deliberative polling at the campus level. From its inception, the program has received administrative and financial support at the department, college, and university levels due to its ability to bring together a diverse group of students, faculty, staff and alumni to discuss issues of relevance to the community and when possible, inform policy and decision making. A key component of this support came from the University’s Diversity Advisory Council which recognized that “when groups are not in conversation with each other, their misunderstandings and folklore about each other go unexplored and the barriers can grow even thicker and more impermeable” (Baker, Jensen, and Kolb, 2002, p. 8). By elevating the level of dialogue above partisan debates that students of the millennial generation perceive to be limiting

and ineffectual (Kiesa et al., 2007, p. 4), deliberative polls on campus have successfully informed the work of student government, the faculty senate and various university committees.

The Campus Conversations program seeks to fulfill three primary objectives. First and foremost, it is an educational process “whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38) and is consistent with outcomes for developing “empowered, informed, and responsible learners” (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. xi). The background documents developed and used in the deliberative polling process provide participants with balanced information that encompasses a range of perspectives pertaining to a particular issue, thereby encouraging evaluation and synthesis.² Moreover, the process promotes skill building through dialogue as participants articulate their own thoughts, respectfully disagree with others, and collaborate in the formulation of questions for experts. It also encourages critical thinking as participants examine their personal perspective, question any underlying assumptions contained therein, and integrate what they have learned through their experience in the deliberative poll.

Additionally, the Campus Conversations program is designed to promote a commitment to civic engagement and social responsibility. Through our deliberative polls and deliberative loops,³ participants become active members of a process that not only gives them a voice in decision making but also exposes them to diverse viewpoints. As thoughts are shared and ideas explored,

² The development of in-house background materials is a significant effort and requires an interdisciplinary team knowledgeable in document design, statistics, and assessment as well as specific content domains. Organizations like Public Agenda, Everyday Democracy, and the National Issues Forum Institute have developed their own sets of issue guides for use by campuses, making it easier for other sites to implement these kinds of programs.

³ A deliberative loop[®] is a variation of the protocols of deliberative polls. It formally requires that well designed information be given to a diverse group of participants, that these participants engage in a structured conversation about the issues and that a survey or similar data gathering mechanism such as discussion notes be documented in the form of a report or outcome statement. Deliberative loops encompass the work of *AmericaSpeaks* as well as the protocols of a deliberative poll; it can characterize citizen juries and National Issues Forums as well as participatory strategic planning sessions.

they are engaged in a tangible community building process with other thoughtful and committed individuals. By enabling participants to deconstruct a complex issue and embrace the nuances therein through reflection and dialogue, they not only come to a more thorough understanding of the particular issue in question but also acquire an appreciation of democratic practice and explore the relationship of self to others through shared citizenship within a community. It is a process that actively engages participants and reflects the notion that “in a strong democracy, politics is something done by, not to, citizens” (Barber, 2004, p. 133).

The final objective of the Campus Conversations program is to encourage substantive interaction among individuals and groups who traditionally do not interact in the context of daily life within the community. Random sampling ensures that participants who differ with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and age are part of the conversation. It also ensures intellectual diversity as the composition of the random sample is designed to ensure representation from each of the university’s colleges. At Carnegie Mellon, this is a particularly valuable aspect of deliberative polling as the university places a high premium on interdisciplinary collaboration. Moreover, the deliberative process ensures that individuals who report a wide spectrum of political affiliations have their respective voices heard, thereby mitigating the ability of technology via personalized news and weblogs to allow citizens to intentionally and systematically avoid exposure to alternative opinions (Sunstein, 2007).

The Inaugural Conversation: Campus Diversity and File Sharing

The first Campus Conversation was held on Saturday, November 19, 2005 and focused on campus diversity and moral values in private and public life with an emphasis on file-sharing of copyrighted material. Expert panelists reflected the interdisciplinary nature of Carnegie Mellon and included faculty and staff representatives from a variety of departments including the

university's library, philosophy department, graduate education office, and equal opportunity services office. Despite initial marketing and publicity efforts, low turnout from the random sample mitigated overall participant diversity and results could only reflect participants' thoughts as opposed to providing an overall indication of the sentiment of the campus community.

Nevertheless, trends reflected in participant feedback were promising for the future of the Campus Conversations program. Participants assigned high value to aspects of the Carnegie Mellon experience such as being part of a diverse university community and having the opportunity to discuss issues concerning diversity in an academic setting. A majority of participants found the event at least moderately intellectually stimulating and enjoyable and indicated that the deliberative poll exposed them to new or different perspectives to a moderate degree.

Given the positive regard for these aspects of the experience, the Campus Conversations program was established as a viable tool for community development. However, this experience revealed the necessity of supplementing the designated random sample with a convenience sample of interested students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members. It also underlined the need to initiate and cultivate strategic partnerships with student organizations, faculty, and other campus constituencies in order to ensure short-term success of the individual deliberative polls as well as the long-term sustainability of the Campus Conversations program. One strategy that combined both of these supplemental activities involves working with faculty in courses whose curriculum either dovetails with the process itself (say, a course in political science or a course in survey design) or the subject matter (public art) and arranging for students to receive extra credit for participating as a convenience sample.⁴

⁴ Convenience samples drawn this way will not only increase the number of participants, but can also be demographically representative and statistically relevant if analyzed appropriately.

A final lesson learned was embedded in a commitment to attend to institutional culture as well as the cycle of the academic year, which varies among campus communities. At Carnegie Mellon, undergraduate students in particular report a significant increase in academic commitments in week leading up to Thanksgiving break. With the first deliberative poll scheduled for the end of that week, it is likely that many students were unaware of the event or even opted to leave campus early once their academic commitments were fulfilled, thereby dramatically impacting participation.

Informing a Debate: Discussing Student Rights

At the same time that the Campus Conversations initiative was being developed, the Pennsylvania State Senate in 2005 formed a committee to investigate liberal bias in state institutions of higher education. The claims of liberal bias and its effect on classroom curriculum and grading had been forcefully made by David Horowitz and was presented on numerous conservative websites. Horowitz proposed both an Academic Bill of Rights and a Student Bill of Rights to address this perception of liberal bias. These documents call for the representation of a broad range of intellectual perspectives in the classroom and for administrative decisions such as hiring, firing, and promotions to be made with no consideration of political ideology. Horowitz invited universities to adopt these documents as policy.

In tandem with this initiative, a student senator at Carnegie Mellon proposed a Student Rights statement for our campus. Debate within the student government focused on the necessity of adopting such a statement given the existing contents of the University's Students' Rights policy and accompanying procedure for the appeal of grades and academic actions, a multi-step procedure guaranteeing full rights to students to pursue grievances to the highest levels of University

governance. When the proposal was eventually brought before the Undergraduate Student Senate for a vote, only 40% of the senators voted in favor of the proposed statement. Dissenting senators cited the need for more feedback and clarification from members of the campus community.

Accordingly, a Campus Conversation pertaining to the Student Bill of Rights was designed to provide a mechanism by which to gather this data from students and faculty members. Held late in the spring 2006 semester, resource panelists included faculty and staff from the university libraries, the biological sciences department, the school of drama, and student affairs. Additionally, the chair of the academic affairs committee of student government served as a member of the panel which was the first to include a student. Participation increased due to targeted recruitment of the random sample as well as the inclusion of a convenience sample. Additionally, this Campus Conversation also reflected the benefit to cultivating strategic partnerships within the community. Convenience sample participants were recruited from student organizations and the topic for the deliberation was derived from ongoing debates within Student Senate. The success of this collaboration laid the foundation for future partnerships throughout the campus community.

While the random sample and convenience sample were separated during their deliberations, pre- and post- survey analyses showed that both groups tended to shift their beliefs and perspectives in the same direction. Indeed, the data from the combined samples demonstrated significant shifts in beliefs. Prior to the deliberation, approximately 48% disagreed with the proposed amendment; subsequently, 78% were opposed to the Horowitz amendment. Consistent with the analysis of college students in the earlier study by List and Sliwka, results indicated that the participation in the deliberation increased participants' knowledge and conversancy with the existing Students' Rights policy. With a supermajority of participants opposed to the proposed

amendment, the Undergraduate Student Senate was able to conclude that the current policy was sufficient to meet the needs of the students on campus.

As Bridges and Cavalier reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, during the same period as the deliberative poll at Carnegie Mellon, other campuses were grappling with the issues surrounding the Student Bill of Rights and academic freedom, utilizing different methods for seeking campus feedback and with vastly different results. One such example was Princeton University at which a campus-wide referendum on the Student Bill of Rights was held. Like many such debates, it evolved into a battle waged by campus Democrats and Republicans. At the end of the day, a victory was claimed as the Student Bill of Rights was adopted by the student government on the basis of a 51.8% margin of aggregated votes. After the referendum, tension lingered and for many, the legitimacy of the result remained in doubt with such a slight majority in favor of the proposal. Without making any judgments as to the need for such a policy at Princeton (as policies that address the issues raised by Horowitz and others vary widely among campuses), we do claim that the approaches of the two campuses to this issue differed and that moderated, structured conversations have advantages over mere aggregative outcomes.⁵

Broadening Perspectives: Deliberating Campus Procedures and Policies

Building on the successful collaboration with the Student Senate, Campus Conversations for the 2006-2007 academic year were designed in collaboration with the Faculty Senate and the University's Public Art Committee. The Fall 2006 deliberation centered around faculty course evaluations (FCE's) and the Spring 2007 Campus Conversation focused on the role of public art on campus. The Campus Conversation on FCE's was designed to inform the work of a sub-

⁵ See *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 19, 2007).

committee of the Faculty Senate charged with ascertaining changes being made to the content and delivery method of the FCE's while the deliberative poll on public art sought to provide feedback to the Public Art Committee which had been established by a public art policy that was adopted by the University one year earlier.

The results of the deliberation on the FCE's were presented to the Faculty Senate along with the recommendations of the sub-committee.⁶ Aside from many concerns and differences voiced over the general issue of FCE's, which can be a challenging topic under any circumstance, participants also noted the conflated nature of the FCE's as attempting to provide three functions: a mechanism for students to see how courses are evaluated by other students; a means of providing formative feedback to professors for improvements to their courses; and an assessment of teaching to be used in faculty tenure and promotion cases. These matters continue to influence the ongoing discussions of FCE's on campus and the results from the Campus Conversation mirrored the overall complexity of the issue.

Likewise, the deliberation on the role of public art provided a structure for a conversation about an issue that has been contentiously debated within the campus community. The concerns stemmed from the gifting and subsequent installation of a controversial art piece called "Walking to the Sky." While there were many reasons to address this issue, one in particular revolved around the lack of input from the campus community regarding the work and its location. The results of this deliberative poll helped to inform the work of the Public Art Committee by affirming a general appreciation for public art along with some cautionary notes with regard to the acquisition, placement, and maintenance of public art on campus.

⁶ Results of this and all materials pertaining to Campus Conversations can be found at www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/dean/conversations/

Institutionalizing the Process

Throughout these events, data revealed high participant satisfaction with the deliberative and inclusive democratic process as well as an increased awareness of the issues and the choices that need to be considered when addressing these issues in a well-structured forum.⁷ The opportunity for deliberation affords participants time to engage in thoughtful dialogue and reflection on the designated issue, thereby providing higher quality results than those which are generated via traditional polling mechanisms (Fishkin, 1995). These results can then be used to inform the work of relevant decision-makers as a means of connecting the deliberative process with an outcome that can influence the lived experiences of members of the campus community.

Given that the deliberative process not only has the potential to provide campus decision-makers with quality data but also provides opportunities for students to practice the skills needed for citizenship, the various elements of deliberative polls and deliberative loops formed a rationale for institutionalizing this process at the university level. In the case of Carnegie Mellon, this has been at the level of the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs. Here the Dean's Office seeks to systematically incorporate deliberative practice throughout the division of student affairs and utilize subsequent results to improve programs and services that comprise the metacurricular experience on campus. Consistent with the vision of preparing students to be "architects of change" as outlined the University's 2008 Strategic Plan, one of the primary objectives of this initiative is to encourage students to cultivate their skills in ways that promote a sense of social responsibility and assist in their preparation for a life of leadership and impact.

Fine-tuning the Process: Campus Conversations as Beta-Test

⁷ In fact, the campus Alumni Association saw this process as an opportunity to bring former students into the conversations, both through local sampling and online conferences.

In addition to contributing to the educational mission of the institution, deliberative polls and loops at Carnegie Mellon University have also been successfully used to test background materials and survey instruments for use in broader Community Conversations. Two compelling topics explored in this manner were same-sex marriage and climate change. Here the program reflects the dual purpose of higher education within the broader society.

“Although the modern research university must serve society by providing the educational and other programs in high demand, the university must also raise questions that society does not want to ask and generate new ideas that help invent the future” (Shapiro, 2005, p. 4).

Used as beta tests, Campus Conversations not only provide a snapshot of the Carnegie Mellon community perspective for comparative use in subsequent analyses, but also serve as feedback loops to clarify, improve, and amend deliberative poll materials. Adjustments made to the poll materials in this way contribute to the ability to ensure balance in the deliberative process, higher satisfaction among participants in the events, and more insightful data. Taken together, this can enhance the credibility of the results when informing policy and practice.