



Constitution Day Dialogue Background

About Constitution Day

All educational institutions that receive Federal funds are required to hold an educational program about the U.S. Constitution for its students. According to the U.S. Senate, Constitution Day was established “to encourage all Americans to learn more about the Constitution.” Congress established Constitution Week in 1956 “to begin each year on September 17th, the date in 1787 when delegates to the Convention signed the Constitution. In 2004, Senator [Robert C. Byrd](#) of West Virginia included key provisions in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year 2005 designating September 17th of each year as Constitution Day and requiring public schools and governmental offices to provide educational programs to promote a [better understanding of the Constitution](#).”ⁱ

Why Dialogue

In a context of polarization and distrust, conversations about shared values and our nation’s founding documents are deeply important for developing collaborative relationships, Constitutional knowledge, civic agency, and our democracy’s future. Over the last year, Minnesota Campus Compact (MNCC) has worked with campus leaders and community partners to launch a series of local dialogues across the state with the goal of increasing students’ capacities to listen respectfully to the ideas of others and engage in both constructive and critical discussion of public questions.

- 93% of the public agrees that the nation has a civility problem¹
- Higher education institutions across the country are increasingly incorporating the theory and practice of dialogue across different dimensions of the curriculum, co-curriculum, pedagogy, and administration and governance.²
- Dialogue equips students, faculty and staff with the skills to build shared understanding of challenges, to empathize with experiences very different from one’s own, and to create positive change from collaboration.
- Dialogue as pedagogy can enhance student learning, feelings of belonging, and skills for a globalized workforce.³
- Dialogue in college can impact students’ post-college civic and community engagement.⁴

¹ <https://www.webershandwick.com/news/amid-political-party-conflict-individuals-agree-erosion-of-civility-is-harming-our-democracy/>

² <https://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/vol6/iss1/art9/>

³ https://compact.org/resource-posts/dialogue-resources-for-higher-education/#_ftn2

⁴ <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mjcs/3239521.0017.103/1>

Planned Activities

Each participating college or university determines its specific plans. Dialogues are organized using whatever dialogue models and addressing whatever specific topics the local team determines is best. Here are a few examples:

- North Hennepin Community College will be hosting a series of campus dialogues to define a set of Food Access Values specific to the NHCC community. The diverse, unique, and resilient network of student leaders at North Hennepin Community College are committed creating innovative solutions to vexing problems and plan to use these dialogues as a jumping off place to support the campus leadership team as they work to incorporate these values into a comprehensive strategic plan. For more information, contact Jamie Randall at JRandall@nhcc.edu.
- St. Olaf College's Academic Civic Engagement office, Institute for Freedom and Community, and the Great Conversations Program will partner with community organizations to offer several pathways for practicing civic dialogue, starting with Constitution Day Coffees and subsequent Better Angels political depolarization workshops. Student facilitator training will take place on September 14 and campus-wide programming on Constitution Day, September 17. For more information, contact Alyssa Herzog Melby at melby1@stolaf.edu.
- Winona State University will pilot a deliberative dialogue using the updated National Issues Forum guide "A Political Fix" to engage citizens in a new way to talk about complex and difficult issues. Events will take place on September 17, Constitution Day, and September 27, National Voter Registration Day, with the goal of contributing to larger efforts to increase student knowledge of and engagement with the electoral process. For more information, contact Kara Lindaman at klindaman@winona.edu.
- Read more about other campus's activities here: <http://mncampuscompact.org/resource-posts/2018-constitution-day-dialogue-grantees/>

Partners

In preparation for the Constitution Day Dialogue Initiative, Minnesota Campus Compact offered four different civic dialogue train-the-trainer gatherings across the state, partnering with speakers and hosts including Anita Chikkatur of Carleton College, Bill Doherty of Better Angels and the University of Minnesota, Dawn Duncan of Concordia College, the Gustavus Adolphus College Public Deliberation and Dialogue program, Timothy Shaffer of Kansas State University, LeadMN, Matthew Filner and Metropolitan State University, and the University of Minnesota, Morris.

The roster of Constitution Day Dialogue Initiative participating campuses will be finalized on August 1. As of July 26, they include: Gustavus Adolphus College; Minnesota State University, Mankato; North Hennepin Community college, South Central College, St. Catherine University, St. Olaf College, and Winona State University.

About Dialogue Mini-Grants

Mini-grants of \$250 were awarded to campuses to address access-related barriers to participation in dialogues. The mini-grants were made possible by the C. Charles Jackson Foundation.

Dialogue Year-Round

Year-round and throughout the state, campuses are using dialogue and deliberation strategies both inside and beyond the classroom as tools for civic education and community problem solving. Minnesota is home to many leaders and innovators in this work, and information about some of the many dialogue approaches and strategies are available here: <http://mncampuscompact.org/what-we-do/initiatives/dialogue-initiative/>

About Education for Democracy

Nationally, Campus Compact has recently launched Education for Democracy, an important new non-partisan initiative designed to help heal and reinvigorate our democracy, which includes a “Deliberation for our Shared Future” as a key pillar. This initiative has the potential to reach more than 6 million students — one third of undergraduates in the country — at more than 1,000 public, private, two-year, and four-year institutions. Education for Democracy aims to build the knowledge, skills, and motivations to catalyze responsible and effective student participation in public life and policy. As Education for Democracy rolls out, Campus Compact will be engaged in further support for dialogue and deliberation as part of the following six core components:

- **Student voting matters:** With a goal of increasing the proportion of college students who vote in local, state, and national elections;
- **Democracy in principle and practice:** With a goal of increasing student understanding of the underpinnings of democracy and the workings of democratic institutions;
- **Deliberation for a shared future:** With a goal of increasing students’ capacity to listen respectfully to the ideas of others and engage in both constructive and critical discussion of public questions;
- **Media fact and fiction:** With a goal of increasing the capacity of students to distinguish reliable from unreliable political information;
- **Student leadership for democracy:** With a goal of leveraging Campus Compact’s existing student fellowship program to build a network of student leaders committed to democratic renewal; and
- **Teaching for democracy:** With a goal of preparing faculty and staff members to develop and execute high-quality courses and programs focused on democratic engagement.

About Minnesota Campus Compact

Founded in 1994, **Minnesota Campus Compact** supports 37 colleges and universities in preparing students for lives of engaged citizenship and fulfilling the public purpose of higher education. We envision a state where all students graduate with the determination and capacity to contribute to the public good throughout their lives—and higher education institutions are fully engaged with their communities, working together to educate citizens, solve problems, and build a strong democracy. Minnesota Campus Compact is the only organization in the state that works with public and private, two and four-year institutions on the role of higher education in democracy. For more visit mncampuscompact.org.

ⁱ <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/ConstitutionDay.htm>