

ANNUAL REPORT

DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCES AT MACALESTER

2024–25

Dialogue Across Differences
Advisory Group



MACALESTER



SETTING THE STAGE



VISION & VALUE


We foster a learning environment that challenges our students and supports them as they develop their own opinions. This means encouraging them to remain curious, listen deeply, practice discernment, and maintain a learning stance as they encounter ideas that are unfamiliar or even in conflict with their worldviews. We invite students to engage courageously with the most vexing controversies of the day. Sometimes it gets messy and that's okay.



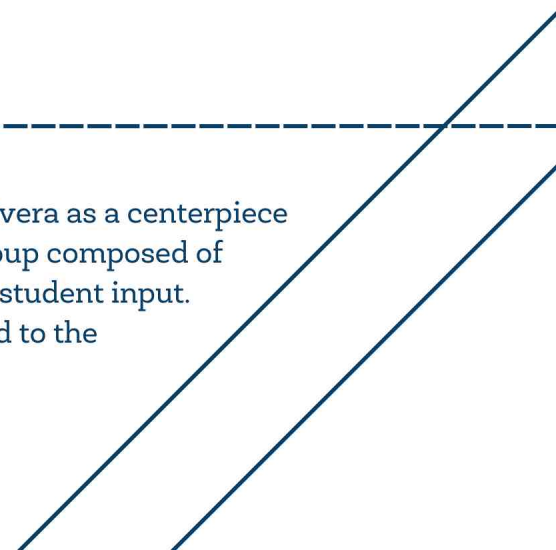
APPROACH

We believe more speech—not less—is vital to learning. We treat differences of opinion as opportunities to learn and grow. For this reason, we encourage academic departments at Macalester to invite speakers to campus from across the political spectrum who are passionate about their areas of expertise. We train students to communicate persuasively in classes, using evidence to support their arguments. And, through co-curricular programming, we provide opportunities to apply these skills in dialogue with others.

A Presidential Initiative



Dialogue Across Differences is an initiative launched by Dr. Rivera as a centerpiece of her presidency. In Fall 2024, she assembled an advisory group composed of faculty and staff to coordinate the various programs and seek student input. In the 2025–26 academic year, student members will be added to the advisory group.



PROCESS



1

Advisory Group

Monthly meeting
Leadership weekly meeting

2

Student Affairs

Orientation
Living and learning community

3

Academic Affairs

First-year course
International Roundtable
Faculty training on discussion and
civil discourse

4

Internal Partners

Advancement
Institutional Equity
Institutional Research and Assessment
Kofi Annan Institute for Global Citizenship
Serie Center for Scholarship and Teaching
Student Affairs

5

External Partners

Braver Angels
Citizens League
Congress to Campus
Essential Partners
Heterodox Academy
Institute for Citizens & Scholars/Campus
Presidents for Civic Preparedness
The Discussion Project

GOALS



➤ To build a campus culture that aligns with the values of liberal arts such as critical thinking, creativity, and curiosity about diverse points of view

➤ To help intergenerational members of the Macalester community cultivate the skills to interact with and learn from those with different ideas, identities, and histories



DIALOGUE PROGRAMS IN 2024–25

Reduce the Rancor, in collaboration with Braver Angels

Congress to Campus - President's Office

Critical Dialogue Series - Lealtad-Suzuki Center for Social Justice

How to Think in an Age of Political Polarization - Political Science course taught by Professor Lesley Lavery

Essential Partners training - Center for Religious and Spiritual Life

Campuswide Immersion Cohort through College Presidents for Civic Preparedness

Discussion Project training - Serie Center for Scholarship and Teaching

How to Talk to the "Other Side": Finding Common Ground in a Time of Political Polarization and Climate Change with Kevin Wilhelm - Sustainability event

How to Cook a Brontosaurus: Fugitivity, blackness, and Agency at the End of the World with Dr. Bayo Akomolafe - Kofi Annan Institute for Global Citizenship event



PROJECTS PLANNED FOR 2025–26

Events, e.g. Citizens' League Mind Opener Panel

Living and Learning Community

Orientation (This Matters at Mac)

First-Year course

Application for Arthur Vining Davis Foundation Civil Discourse Grant and Henry Luce Foundation Confidence in Democracy Grant

Year One: Objectives



Catalogue

Existing Programs

Connect

People and Programs

Create

New Ideas

Communicate

Across stakeholders



LESSONS LEARNED

The most impactful work results from a combination of visionary leadership and broad buy-in from the grassroots.

Online learning might not be a good fit for Macalester. We can develop our own in-person dialogue curriculum, possibly delivered in small cohorts who can then teach and work with their peers.

Dialogue work should infuse everything we do and become a lens through which we do community building and educational work. Pathways to Peace, for example, can benefit from dialogue processes.



TESTIMONIES

“[This class] made me take to heart the importance of connecting with people regardless of how much you agree with them as a cornerstone of surpassing political polarization. It showed me that empathy and curiosity—not just shared beliefs—are what build real understanding.”

Student participant in the political science course "How to Think in an Age of Polarization"

“Given the strong political and cultural divides that exist in our country today, it is very easy to surround yourself with individuals who hold the same beliefs as you. As a result, walls are built and dialogues with people of different ideology are overlooked...RtR has allowed me to tear down these ideological walls and zoom in on the similarities I share with different people. In doing so, I have forged real connections with individuals I would have never spoken with.”

Student participant in the Reduce the Rancor campaign

“[The Discussion Project] was effective and thought-provoking and I wish more colleagues were skilled at the art of discussion.”

Faculty participant in The Discussion Project training in May 2025

“Essential Partners training gave me important tools to engage in dialogue not only at work. I feel empowered to hold space for dialogues in my community.”

Staff participant in Essential Partners training in January 2025





ADVISORY GROUP 2024–25

Andrew Latham
Special Advisor for the President, Professor of Political Science

Duchess Harris
Professor of American Studies

Emma Kippley-Ogman
Center for Religious and Spiritual Life

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Julie Dolan
Professor of Political Science

Jonathan Cardenas
Student Affairs

Leah Witus
Professor of Chemistry

Roopali D. Phadke
Professor of Environmental Studies



Learn more at
[macalester.edu/life-at-mac/
dialogue-across-differences](https://macalester.edu/life-at-mac/dialogue-across-differences)

