

Deliberative Dialogue Discussion: Faculty Overview

This section offers a template for incorporating a deliberative dialogue discussion in the curriculum. The faculty member should allow at least 45 minutes for the discussion section. This activity can be used independently and ideally in conjunction with topics on the syllabus.

Goals: Participants will explore the connection between discipline-specific content and its relation to policy, elected officials, and voting.

What is Deliberative Dialogue?

Scott London (Kettering Foundation), in his [essay](#), defines deliberative dialogue as:

*"...a form of discussion aimed at finding the best course of action. Deliberative questions take the form 'What should we do?' **The purpose is not so much to solve a problem or resolve an issue as to explore the most promising avenues for action.** Deliberative dialogue differs from other forms of public discourse — such as debate, negotiation, brainstorming, consensus-building — because **the objective is not so much to talk together as to think together, not so much to reach a conclusion as to discover where a conclusion might lie.**" (Emphasis added.)*

Choosing a Topic

The topic is the key component for bridging course content and a civic dialogue in class. The topic should translate into an issue which students can take a stance on.

Methods for identifying a topic:

- Expand on course content in the syllabus.
 - Many courses discuss multifaceted topics that are influenced by policy. These topics can be adapted for deliberative dialogue discussion topics.
 - See [here](#) for a list of U.S. house committees or search for [CSPAN videos](#) on recent topics.
- Choose a current issue/event.
 - Pick a topic that is easily understood like a popular current event to ensure everyone can participate in the discussion. This can be a global, federal, state, community, or local campus issue/event.
- For a list of topics suggested by faculty members see our “Multi-Disciplinary Topic List.”

Students should take a stance on the issue during the discussion. Because the goal of the discussion is to “think together” as opposed to debating, it is important to keep the stances as clear, plausible, non-divisive, and non-partisan as possible. Phrasing issue stances for potentially triggering/controversial topics such as reproductive rights and gun control warrant special consideration, as the discussion could easily turn argumentative. Offer at least three stances, to encourage exploring multiple points of view. If only two opposite stances are offered, the discussion could easily turn into a “us vs. them” mentality.

Discussion Module

Time: 30-45 minutes

- 1) **Introduce (or expand on) how the topic/issue is influenced by policy.** (3 minutes) For example, if the faculty member has just finished a unit on “The Future of Artificial Intelligence,” this topic would easily transition into a discussion about Artificial Intelligence policies in the government, public research funding, and the relevant house committees.
- 2) **Introduce “Ground Rules” or “Guidelines for Discussion.”** (5 minutes)
Emphasize that the goal of the discussion is to explore issues and stances together rather than reach a definitive conclusion. At the end of the dialogue, students should realize that regardless of their stance on the topic, their opinions have value, and should be shared.
- 3) **Outline the issue and possible stances.** (5 minutes)
Propose open ended prompts that encourage exploring various stances. Students can be prompted questions like “What are reasons to propose or avoid the sugar tax? Should elected officials be able to tax what citizens privately consume? Would a sugary drink tax be a net positive or negative?”
Then outline stances. In order to encourage explorative and civil discussion, avoid only providing two opposite stances. For example, instead of “for a sugary beverage tax vs. against a sugary beverage tax,” a third stance could be, only implement the tax in certain situations/communities. If so, who would get to decide?”
- 4) **Discussion** (at least 15 minutes)
Allow students to discuss the prompts and explore their stances on the issue in small groups (of 2 to 5 people). Reiterate that the goal of the discussion is to explore where the conclusion may lie, instead of the conclusion itself. Encourage each person to speak in the small group discussions.
While discussions are happening, the faculty member(s) should offer support such as redirecting off-track discussions or proposing different perspectives if everyone in a group agrees.
- 5) **Debrief** (3 minutes)
Briefly ask students if:
 - Any parts of the discussion surprised or resonated with anyone?
 - In what way do community members and elected officials have influence over this matter?
 - What can you do to influence this issue?

This is an apt transition to the “Why Voting Matters” module or “How to Vote” module.