

Polarization, Academic Freedom, and Inclusion

February 2023

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Report on Polarization, Academic Freedom, and Inclusion

Stanford Law School Policy Lab Practicum Autumn Quarter 2022

Contents

Executive Summary	3
I. Background	4
II. Problems Addressed.....	4
III. Causes of the Problem	9
Social Sanctions and Exclusion	10
Stereotypes, Microaggressions, and Discrimination.....	10
Formal Censorship	10
Deliberate Provocations	11
University Administrators’ Failure to Promote Norms of Academic Freedom and Open and Inclusive Discourse	11
Student Alienation	11
IV. The Centrality of Critical Inquiry	12
V. Improving the Quality of Discourse	13
Criteria for Discourse Quality.....	14
Improving Discourse Quality through Deliberative Practices	15
VI. Preface to Approaches for Achieving Open and Inclusive Discourse in Education at Stanford.....	16
VII. The Core Skill of Active Listening: Listening with Curiosity and Intellectual Humility	16
VIII. Psychological Interventions to Promote Inclusive Discourse in Critical Inquiry	18
Self-Affirmation.....	19
Perspective Getting and Giving	20
Reducing Affective Polarization.....	23

IX. Promoting Inclusive Discourse and Critical Inquiry in Bespoke Courses and Orientation Activities	23
Promoting Viewpoint Diversity	23
Teaching Discourse Skills in Bespoke Courses	25
X. Promoting Inclusive Discourse and Critical Inquiry in Regular Classes	29
The Basics	29
Classroom Discourse Norms	29
Nonattribution of Classroom Discussions	31
Strategies for Encouraging Participation by Reluctant Students	32
Assigning Students to Role-Play Contested Positions	32
“Talk-and-Turns”	32
Prepare for Disruptions	33
Support Students and Instructors Who Say Unpopular Things in the Classroom	33
Further Ideas for Promoting Inclusion	33
XI. Recommendations	34
XII. Conclusion	35
Appendix: Open and Inclusive Discourse at Stanford	36
Works Cited	40

Executive Summary

Intense political, social, cultural, and racial polarization compromise the mission of higher education to promote intellectually rigorous, open, inclusive inquiry; to train a diverse student population to work productively across difference in a pluralistic society; to produce cutting-edge research; and to train leaders capable of creating innovative solutions to major social problems.

Open, inclusive discourse among students and between students and faculty is particularly under threat as a result of self-censorship by students with certain viewpoints and identities, advocacy for suppression of ideas people find repugnant or disturbing, and administrative practices that undermine universities' commitment to academic freedom. Faculty report similarly chilling effects as a result of the current climate. Although none of these may be caused by coercion in a formal legal sense, critical inquiry is nonetheless inhibited because of fears of criticism, ostracization, or sanctions.

With the urgency of the problem in mind, Stanford's Office of the President requested the Law School's Policy Lab to conduct this study of polarization, academic freedom, and inclusion on campus and to explore curricular and co-curricular interventions that have the potential to improve the campus climate. Our goal was to gather research and develop guidance that treats academic freedom, free speech, critical inquiry, diversity, and inclusion as mutually constitutive, rather than as competing principles.

To that end, the report examines two types of intervention to foster deeper commitment to norms of open, inclusive discourse. The first is designed to prepare students individually to engage in productive discourse through skills and practices such as active listening, de-escalation, perspective taking and giving, deliberative dialogue, and self-affirmation. The second identifies well-established pedagogical tools and classroom norms to assist faculty in guiding conversations across differences of ideology and identity. These are not the only conceivable interventions—the ways the university actively supports principles of academic freedom, and the design and implementation of diversity initiatives consistent with those principles, also come to mind. But the focus of the Lab was on the most immediate ways in which the quality of discourse is distorted and can be improved in higher education.

The report concludes with some recommendations for faculty, deans, and other administrators to encourage discourse and inclusion.

I. Background

This report is the product of the Autumn Quarter 2022 Stanford Law School Policy Lab practicum, “Polarization, Academic Freedom, and Inclusion.” Our client was the Stanford President’s Office. This excerpt from the course description (with minor changes) captures the essence of our mission:

Political, social, cultural, and racial polarization compromise the mission of higher education to promote intellectually rigorous, open, inclusive inquiry; to train a diverse student population to work productively across difference in a pluralistic society; to produce cutting edge research; and to train leaders capable of creating innovative solutions to major social problems. The policy lab will explore curricular and co-curricular interventions that have the potential to reduce the adverse effects of polarization.... Our goal is to develop and publish guidance for universities considering reforms that treat academic freedom, free speech, critical inquiry, and inclusion as mutually constitutive, rather than contrary, principles (Stanford Law School Law & Policy Lab).

The Policy Lab was co-taught by Professors Paul Brest and Norman Spaulding. The eight student participants were:

- YuQing Jiang | Stanford Undergraduate
- Natalie Leifer | Stanford Law School, 3L
- Sebastian Naief Ogando | Stanford – Ford Dorsey Master’s in International Policy
- Shafeen Pittal | Stanford Law School, 2L
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- Jackson Richter | Stanford – Master of Public Policy
- Stephen Lavid Sills | Stanford Undergraduate
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II. Problems Addressed

Freedom of inquiry, thought, and expression lie at the core of the university’s mission. These are protected by Stanford’s strong Statement on Academic Freedom, which was forged in campus unrest during the Vietnam War and adopted and approved by the Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees in 1974:

Stanford University’s central functions of teaching, learning, research, and scholarship depend upon an atmosphere in which freedom of inquiry, thought, expression,

publication and peaceable assembly are given the fullest protection. Expression of the widest range of viewpoints should be encouraged, free from institutional orthodoxy and from internal or external coercion (Stanford University).

The Statement on Academic Freedom prohibits the university from sanctioning faculty for their expression and implicitly requires the university to protect them from coercion by others—for example, the disruption of events. Stanford is also bound by California’s Leonard Law, a statute passed in 1992 that prohibits discipline of students of private universities for speech covered by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and the California Constitution.¹

However, the practical realization of academic freedom requires two other qualities: inclusion of diverse voices in academic life and discourse of a quality that advances the university’s mission of critical inquiry. These qualities of *open and inclusive discourse* are indispensable not only to the faculty’s research and scholarship, but to the education of students, which is the focus of this report.

As stated in the Statement on Open and Inclusive Discourse, written in 2022 by a diverse group of Stanford faculty members:

Teaching, learning, and research in higher education require the participation of students and faculty in the open exchange of ideas. We firmly believe that these twin values—inclusive participation and open exchange—are central to Stanford’s mission.... People of different backgrounds, experiences, identities, beliefs, and partisan commitments across the political spectrum can expand and enrich open discourse—but only if all voices are recognized and the terms of participation promote respectful, analytically rigorous, engagement.²

Open, inclusive discourse among students and between students and faculty is threatened at Stanford and other colleges and universities as a result of self-censorship by students with certain viewpoints and identities, advocacy for censorship of language and ideas that people find repugnant or disturbing, and administrative practices that undermine the institutions’ commitment to academic freedom. Although none of these may be coercive in a formal legal sense, critical inquiry is nonetheless inhibited because of fears of criticism, ostracization, or retaliation. Below we note some evidence of these problems.

A survey of campus expression across the country conducted by Heterodox Academy in 2021 found that almost two-thirds of the students surveyed were reluctant to discuss controversial topics related to politics, religion, race, sexual orientation, and gender. About the same number “agreed that the climate on their campus prevents people from saying things that they believe”

¹ Stanford’s attempt to extend the Fundamental Standard to student speech “intended to insult or stigmatize” on the basis of race, sex, or other aspects of identity was struck down in *Corry v. Stanford* as an impermissible content-based regulation of speech under the Leonard Law. Case No. 740309 (Feb. 27, 1995) See also Storslee, Mark. “What the Law Says About Campus Free Speech.” *Stanford Magazine*, May 2019. Thus, there is a prohibition parallel to the Statement on Academic Freedom regarding university sanctions—protected *student* speech.

² Unpublished statement reprinted in an Appendix to this report.

(Zhou et al. 3).³ The most common reason for students' reluctance to discuss controversial topics in class was their concern that peers would find their comments offensive, make critical remarks to others after class, or publish their comments on social media, which would damage their reputation.

In a 2021 annual survey co-conducted by the free-speech advocacy organization Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) and College Pulse, more than 80 percent of student respondents at colleges and universities across the country reported censoring their viewpoints at least some of the time. Notably, students reported the highest concern about having an “open and honest conversation” on some of the most important issues of our time: more than 50 percent reported it would be difficult to discuss racial inequality and nearly 50 percent said the same about abortion and gun control (“2021 College Free Speech” 3).⁴ In a 2022-2023 survey also conducted by FIRE and College Pulse, 63 percent of student respondents expressed concern about damaging their reputation because of someone misunderstanding what they had said or done (“2022-2023 College Free Speech”).⁵

The 2022-2023 FIRE/College Pulse Survey also compared the 208 universities that were involved in the study. Students were asked about their comfort in expressing ideas, their tolerance for liberal speakers, their tolerance for conservative speakers, the acceptability of different methods of protest against a campus speaker, the administrative support of free speech, and the level of difficulty that students felt in discussing contentious issues (“2022-2023 College Free Speech” 9). The survey gave Stanford an overall score of 45.59 (out of 100) and placed Stanford at 141st out of 208 universities with respect to students' comfort in expressing their thoughts in writing, in class, and among their peers and professors (“2023 College Free Speech”).

There have also been numerous incidents at universities around the country, including Stanford, in which faculty have faced firestorms of public criticism and demands for their discipline, including being barred from teaching, for speech clearly protected by the principles of academic

³ The Heterodox Academy report found that while Independents and Republicans were somewhat more likely than Democrats to report reluctance to speak and while Asian and white students were somewhat more reluctant to speak than Black and Latinx students, significant pluralities of *all* groups reported reluctance on topics such as politics, race, sexual orientation, and gender. The report found no significant variation in reluctance based on region, academic field, family income, or “whether students were part of the majority demographic for the topic under discussion.” The report concludes that the findings suggest “efforts to equally engage students from all backgrounds and demographics in discussing controversial topics could help improve campus climates” (Zhou et al. 6).

⁴ The survey data comes from 37,104 undergraduate students then enrolled full time in four-year degree programs at 159 colleges and universities across the country. The report found that “differences in self-censorship between male and female students, by race, and by class year are limited,” but that differences in self-censorship according to political position were “marked,” with conservatives least likely to report no self-censorship (“2021 College Free Speech” 11).

⁵ The survey data comes from 44,847 undergraduate students currently enrolled full time in four-year degree programs at 208 colleges across the country. Two hundred fifty of the student respondents came from Stanford.

freedom (“Scholars Under Fire”).⁶ In some instances, the speech at issue was obviously central to critical inquiry; in others its value was dubious, negligible, or harmful. Universities have often responded in ways that have left the community without clarity about their policies for responding to speech its members find disturbing and left faculty without the sense that the universities value their academic freedom.

Another grave problem facing all universities is the formal and informal exclusion of underrepresented minority groups. Pursuant to Stanford’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access in a Learning Environment (IDEAL) Initiative, the university conducted a student survey in 2021. One of its key findings was that many people who belong to marginalized groups⁷ feel excluded from the broader community—a feeling that is both generated and reinforced by reported acts of discrimination and microaggressions (“Narrative Summary”).⁸ More than 25 percent of graduate and undergraduate students reported one or more experiences of microaggressions or discriminatory or harassing behaviors in the last two years by someone associated with the university (“Narrative Summary”). When asked about the impact of these experiences, 32 percent of undergraduates felt ostracized or excluded, 26 percent felt uncomfortable voicing their opinions, 25 percent changed their daily routine, and 24 percent had difficulty concentrating on academics (“Undergraduate Students”).⁹

⁶ Since the turn of the century, FIRE’s database lists nearly 1,000 “targeting incidents,” defined as “a campus controversy involving efforts to investigate, penalize, or otherwise professionally sanction a scholar for engaging in constitutionally protected forms of speech” (“Scholars Under Fire”). This definition excludes private “harassment and/or intimidation, including death threats.”

⁷ “Students who belong to marginalized groups” describes people who self-report as feeling marginalized or excluded in certain communities, groups, or spaces at Stanford (“2021 IDEAL DEI Survey” 8-15).

⁸ Derald Wing Sue, in *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, states, “Microaggression describes commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups” (qtd. in “Narrative Summary”). What constitutes a microaggression is a subjective experience for each individual. See Scott Lilienfeld’s “Microaggressions: Strong Claims, Inadequate Evidence,” in which Lilienfeld questions the objective, scientific support for the concept of microaggressions as it is defined and whether significant data links microaggressions to poor mental health. In response, Derald Wing Sue, who developed the concept, responds that Lilienfeld’s critique “fails to acknowledge the limitations of psychological science to the study of the human condition” and thus “dilutes, diminishes, and disconnects empirical from experiential reality” (Sue, “Microaggressions and ‘Evidence’”). Sue discusses the necessarily holistic approach to analyzing microaggressions and concludes that they are “real, harmful, and need to be addressed immediately” (Sue, “Microaggressions and ‘Evidence’”). It is worth noting that people’s fear of ostracization for expressing their beliefs, whether conservative, progressive, or moderate, is similarly subjective.

⁹ Of undergraduates who experienced microaggressions, approximately 60 percent indicated that they experienced some sort of significant impact as result of these behaviors. The most commonly cited impact (28 percent) was “Created an intimidating, hostile, or offensive social, academic, or work environment.” Of undergraduates who experienced verbal harassing behaviors, approximately 80 percent indicated that they experienced some sort of significant impact as a result of these behaviors. The most commonly cited impact (53 percent) was “Created an intimidating, hostile, or offensive social, academic, or work environment.” Of undergraduates who experienced discriminatory behaviors, approximately 90 percent indicated that they experienced some sort of significant impact as result of these behaviors. The most commonly cited impact (46 percent) was “Interfered with your academic or professional performance.” When asked if their individual lived experiences had ever been “invalidated” due to their racial or ethnic identity, 55 percent of Black or African American undergraduates and 50 percent of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders responded in the affirmative, compared with 19 percent of white or European students (“Undergraduate Students”). A similar pattern was obtained in the context of psychological safety while participating in day-to-day activities associated with their roles at Stanford.

Without delving into their methodologies, we believe that the FIRE and IDEAL surveys provide a useful perspective on the observations of Stanford faculty in the previously mentioned Statement on Open and Inclusive Discourse:

<p><i>Students are often afraid that expressing or even exploring conservative or centrist views on political and social issues, inside and outside the classroom, will elicit hostility and scorn from their classmates and, in some cases, their professors. They feel ostracized, intimidated, and silenced.</i></p>	<p><i>Students of color and other historically underrepresented groups often feel excluded from academic discourse. They feel that their experiences and views are misunderstood or undervalued, their priorities and research interests are denigrated, and their concerns are not addressed. They feel unsafe, unseen, and silenced.</i></p>	<p><i>Faculty and staff often feel reticent to express any views at all on charged topics. They fear the censure of students and colleagues who may harass or denounce them and seek their removal from teaching and other roles. Faculty of color, in particular, often feel they are not seen or heard by their colleagues. Faculty and staff feel demoralized, under siege, and silenced.</i></p>
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This Statement was based on the faculty members’ personal observations at Stanford. Among its most significant implications is that the phenomena of fear, exclusion, and self-censorship cross ideological and social divides. Pedagogic research is crystal clear that learning outcomes hinge on creating an environment that engages students (Bain).¹⁰ Engagement increases motivation, attention, retention, flexibility, resilience, and performance. An environment shaped by fear, intimidation, public shaming, and exclusion undercuts the engagement essential to learning.

To learn more directly about the problem, the Policy Lab conducted four internally homogeneous focus groups with Stanford undergraduates and law students who self-defined as progressive or conservative.¹¹ Students in all the groups expressed fears that social stigma would ensue from open expression of their beliefs in the classroom. One conservative undergraduate stated:

In the humanities, I feel like I have to pay a lot of attention to what I say [and] hesitate if I want to push back against something a classmate or professor says. Overall, I exercise a good deal of discernment of when to speak, hold back of sharing opinions because of

¹⁰ In addition to Ken Bain’s *What the Best College Teachers Do*, see Susan Ambrose et al. *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. See also Jennifer Case’s “Alienation and Engagement: Development of an Alternative Theoretical Framework for Understanding Student Learning.” Full source information for all three included in Works Cited list.

¹¹ The focus groups were not by any means representative of the whole Stanford student body and did not include students who may identify somewhere between progressive and conservative.

likelihood of alienation or scorn; not so much because of defending policies of Donald Trump, but because of having more traditional views like family is a fundamental unit of society...[and] we are bound to one another and God.

At the other end of the political spectrum, some progressive students said that they refused to engage with conservative students' views that they perceived as "opposing or stripping away fundamental human rights," because even discussing those views would legitimate them. Progressive students also expressed fear of social stigma from their progressive peers if they were to engage with those viewpoints at all. One law student recalled a recent experience in the classroom where she feared those around her might misinterpret her engagement with a conservative perspective as reflective of her personal beliefs:

I was confused about the conservative perspective on an issue we were discussing and I wanted to ask a question about where they were coming from, but I was very, very careful and maybe too careful with my words because I was concerned students in the class, or even the professor would think, "Oh does she actually think this?" ... So, I noticed I was being very careful and I did not want to come off a certain way.... I wouldn't have time to clarify. It's a short class and we don't have time.

Faculty report similar experiences of self-censorship, including withholding viewpoints on crucial faculty governance matters, including appointment decisions, out of the fear of breaches of confidentiality that could lead to public shaming and ostracization.

III. Causes of the Problem

There are many barriers to open and inclusive discourse on university campuses. In the broader context of our society, ideological¹² and affective¹³ polarization play important roles. These are compounded by calcification—people's refusal to consider moving away from their ideological predispositions (Sides 6). The problem is also exacerbated by the persistence of stereotypes and discrimination.

Of course, universities do not exist in a vacuum, and their educational climates have been affected by these broader social forces. However, institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to be transformative because of their diversity (few social spaces are as diverse as universities), their role in inculcating high standards of critical inquiry, and the pathways they open to leadership in other sectors of public life. To realize their transformative potential, the climate of exclusion and self-censorship, which restricts diversity of viewpoint and experience as

¹² Ideological, or political, polarization refers to a process whereby the differences that are considered normal in a society increasingly align along a single dimension, whereby cross-cutting differences instead become reinforcing and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of "us" versus "them" (McCoy et al. 17).

¹³ Affective polarization is the tendency of people to view opposing partisans negatively and copartisans positively (Iyengar and Westwood 691). Affective polarization occurs when individuals dislike or distrust people who do not share their political views.

well as constructive disagreement, must be understood and changed. Below we outline some major contributors to this climate. The following sections explore promising solutions.

Social Sanctions and Exclusion

While the respondents in our focus groups held varied beliefs about the causes of the problem, all of them were concerned that their political views were intimately connected with their standing as members of the Stanford community. Much like the survey data reported above, students feared that saying the wrong things would cause them to lose friends and be excluded from social groups. One progressive undergraduate reported feeling “paranoid” about the reputational stakes associated with stating a position that they viewed as more leftist than the ones held by their peers. Significantly, this connection between political views and social status prevents students from taking positions that they want to experiment with—what one student described as “trying on different hats.” Students believed that these problems were exacerbated by the prospect that their views would be posted on social media.

While students in our focus groups mainly emphasized peer pressures, they also expressed concerns about their instructors’ reactions. One conservative undergraduate said that they often felt great hesitation about disagreeing with something a professor said. Conservative law students feared academic and professional consequences—that professors would be biased against them in grading and in supporting their future professional opportunities. One such law student recalled a classroom discussion of the Supreme Court’s opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, in which the Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. The professor began the discussion by saying, “Well, we don’t like this opinion, so let’s talk about why.” Other conservative law students felt that statements like this one shift the window of acceptable opinions so far to the left that they cannot express their own views.

Stereotypes, Microaggressions, and Discrimination

The IDEAL survey described above indicates the considerable number of members of marginalized groups who believe that they are subject to harmful stereotypes, microaggressions, and discrimination. Participants in two different focus groups described versions of discrimination that they found alienating. One progressive law student, a person of color, recounted being in a class where the professor framed the course subject matter in a way that they perceived to be racist and sexist. The student corresponded with the professor via email and reported that while they were able to leave the incident behind and continue participating, the professor’s remarks continued to disturb others in the class. A conservative undergraduate described how they have been called a “Bible thumper” for “defending the existence of God and wearing a suit.”

Formal Censorship

Some conservative politicians have sought to regulate the content of university instruction on topics concerning race and other aspects of identity if it would cause anyone to “feel guilt,

anguish, or other forms of psychological distress” (Sullivan). At the other end of the ideological spectrum, some progressive students and advocates have claimed that harmful or disagreeable language makes them feel “unsafe” or subjected to “violence.” They have called for instructors to be disciplined even when they were discussing academic sources that used the language in order to subject it to critical inquiry.¹⁴

Deliberate Provocations

Some speakers and some students who invite them to campus appear to delight in being offensive. The events act as accelerants and create lose-lose scenarios in which the choice is between not dignifying such speech with a response (and thereby inviting criticism for acquiescing in its message) or denouncing the speakers and sponsors, leading to charges of censorship or cancellation.

University Administrators’ Failure to Promote Norms of Academic Freedom and Open and Inclusive Discourse

Administrators respond to controversial speech in different ways—sometimes being silent, sometimes intervening to defend open and inclusive discourse without endorsing the content of the speech, and sometimes joining in criticizing the speakers or imposing formal or informal discipline. While the responses to protected speech short of discipline are sometimes justified by the specific circumstances, inconsistency causes confusion, appears unprincipled, and invites charges of preferential treatment. These occasions provide important opportunities—teachable moments—to reinforce the institution’s principles. But making the principles meaningful requires more. Institutions must announce and demonstrate their commitment to open, inclusive discourse and free inquiry in ordinary times as well.

Student Alienation

A large-scale study by Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, conducted before the pandemic, found that a substantial number of college students were disengaged and alienated from their institutions and classmates, did not understand the value of what they were learning, and took what the authors described as a “transactional” view in which the “overarching goal is to build a résumé with stellar grades, which they believe will help them secure a job post-college.” The authors write:

¹⁴ See FIRE database for examples (“Scholars Under Fire”). On the neuroscientific foundation for language as violence, and the psychological and pedagogic value of being exposed to ideas one finds offensive, see Lisa Feldman Barrett’s *New York Times* opinion piece “When Is Speech Violence?” which emphasizes scientific research showing that “[o]ffensiveness is not bad for your body and brain.... When you’re forced to engage a position you strongly disagree with, you learn something about the other perspective as well as your own. The process feels unpleasant, but it’s a good kind of stress—temporary and not harmful to your body—and you reap the longer-term benefits of learning. What’s bad for your nervous system, in contrast are long stretches [such as] a political climate in which people endlessly hurl hateful words at one another...and...rampant bullying.... A culture of constant, casual brutality is toxic to the body” (Barrett).

This deep-rooted alienation will not be easy to repair. But in our view, colleges can significantly enhance the prospects of belonging by promulgating a single, primary purpose of college—that it is a place to focus on learning and transforming one’s mind. Students need to be “onboarded” to this mission by faculty members, administrators, and staff members who model, support, and believe in it (Fischman and Gardner).

This is no easy task, but we believe that the teaching and practices of critical thinking skills and open and inclusive discourse are imperative.

IV. The Centrality of Critical Inquiry

Our ideal for the Stanford campus is (1) that students and faculty feel free to express their views on topics across differences in political ideology and identity, and (2) that all conversations about contested issues are characterized by a commitment to critical inquiry. We have already said plenty about the first of these. We elaborate here on the second.

The mission of the university encompasses the transmission of knowledge, the search for truth, and critical inquiry into issues that do not necessarily have correct answers (“1940 Statement”; Khalid and Snyder). In a polarized environment where students are often immersed in “echo chambers and epistemic bubbles,”¹⁵ the university must take affirmative steps to foster critical inquiry, whose essence is nicely described in John Dewey’s lectures on the topic:

Dewey defines critical thinking as “the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.” Critical inquiry harnesses the power of what Dewey saw as four natural human instincts or interests: conversation and communication, investigation, construction, and artistic expression. These, Dewey says, are the “natural resources” for deep, transformative educational experiences.

Critical inquiry knits these four instincts together, giving them shape, purpose, and direction. How? By placing them in an educational context characterized by discipline, self-awareness, and reflection. Critical inquiry seeks to cultivate habits of mind that go beyond mere curiosity about the world. It combines creativity, experimentation, and evaluation in an ongoing, iterative process. It can encompass the full range of learning, teaching, and research activities on college campuses, from experiments in particle physics to orchestra rehearsals of Brahms’s concertos (Khalid and Snyder).

The university cannot achieve its mission of facilitating critical inquiry unless the classroom and broader environment encourage open exchange and inclusive discourse.

¹⁵ An echo chamber, in this context, is “a social structure from which other relevant voices have been actively discredited.” An epistemic bubble “is an informational network from which relevant voices have been excluded by omission” (Nguyen).

The commitment to open exchange reflects the central concept of academic freedom. As explained by the Statement on Open and Inclusive Discourse, open exchange “depends on resilience and reasoned rebuttal, not suppression, in the face of speech we consider offensive. Open exchange also requires mutual regard for norms of civil discourse that provide broad and equitable opportunities for engagement and that value arguments because they are sound, innovative, and persuasive, and not because they come from the loudest, most powerful, or most provocative voices.”¹⁶ And while open discourse thrives on a wide range of perspectives and voices, it should be self-moderated with regard for the consequences of how one speaks, analytical rigor, evidence-based argument, and terms of participation that invite rather than suppress the engagement of others.

The open exchange of ideas is facilitated by an environment of inclusive discourse, which values diverse views. This “requires active listening, mutual regard, candor, charity, and empathetic engagement across differences in and outside of the classroom.”¹⁷

Faculty play an essential role in advancing these practices in the classroom.

- **Individual participation quality.** Faculty can help students develop the analytical, emotional, and communicative skills to participate effectively in classroom discussions. The skill of active listening is especially important, because listening and feeling heard conduce to successful discussions (Bruneau and Saxe).
- **Discourse quality.** Faculty can explore differing perspectives in an analytical and reasoned manner, enabling students to interact in ways that confront contested evidence and values, to listen to each other, to challenge each other’s assumptions, to respond to challenges, and to remain open to reconsidering their own assumptions.
- **Inclusive discourse.** Faculty can try to ensure that students with different perspectives and backgrounds contribute to conversations and, in turn, receive a listening ear and appropriate appreciation from other participants.

For critical inquiry to flourish, the norms of open exchange and inclusive discourse require systemic university support both inside and outside the classroom, all the more so under conditions of heightened polarization and calcification.

V. Improving the Quality of Discourse

A progressive student in one of our focus groups said that to engage with a conservative viewpoint, they felt they had to change the other person’s mind, and that to achieve this goal, they had to risk offending the other person. The student also disliked the idea of “seeking a

¹⁶ Unpublished statement reprinted in an Appendix to this report.

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compromise” because it suggests that everyone must give something up to come to a consensus. The student was not opposed to the idea of finding a consensus, but was merely skeptical that one must sacrifice some part of one’s ideological commitments to find it.

This is a common view of the purpose of engagement across difference—that the purpose is to convince someone of the correctness of one’s position and the error of theirs, or to reach agreement (perhaps by conceding error). We believe, however, that this view represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of engagement, at least in the classroom and co-curricular settings. High-quality discourse in the service of critical inquiry is about reaching deeper understanding, not agreement. It does not require—and should not, a priori, hold as an objective—changing the other person’s mind or compromising one’s beliefs. Rather, it requires sharing one’s beliefs and defending them with reasoned arguments informed by evidence.¹⁸ The quality of discourse depends on how students carry out discussions. Good discourse consists of participants confronting contested evidence and values, listening to each other, appreciating the experience of others, challenging each other’s assumptions, responding to challenges, and being open to reconsidering their own assumptions. Discomfort is a feature of this process, not a bug.¹⁹

Criteria for Discourse Quality

Two well-established frameworks assess discourse quality. One is the Discourse Quality Index (DQI), which is grounded in the political theory of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and was devised for assessing the quality of discussion of policy issues (for example, by a legislature). Four criteria that are particularly relevant to discourse quality in the university are (Steenbergen et al.):

1. **Participation.** The speaker’s ability to participate freely in a debate (for example, the absence of interruptions).
2. **Level of justification.** The comprehensiveness of the justification a speaker gives for their assertions.
3. **Content of justification.** The extent to which the justifications offered appeal to common values, as opposed to narrow individual or group interests.

¹⁸ “To get anywhere in a disagreement, we need to understand the other person’s story well enough to see how their conclusions make sense within it. And we need to help them understand the story in which our conclusions make sense” (Stone et al. 30; Friedman and Himmelstein).

¹⁹ In “Discomfort, Doubt, and the Edge of Learning,” Arno Kumagai notes that passing through “aporia...discomfort, perplexity, or impasse” and making taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions seem “strange” is essential to learning (649).

4. **Respect.** The amount of respect shown toward the other group’s concerns, assertions, and counterarguments (for example, whether the speaker acknowledges and sufficiently addresses counterarguments).²⁰

Another measure of discourse quality is based on the concept of Integrative Complexity (IC), which was originally developed by psychologists to measure cognitive complexity—the propensity to think about a problem multidimensionally. IC measures the extent to which participants in a conversation consider different information and perspectives regarding an issue and how well they create connections between those differences. In other words, IC reflects how critically a person processes information during discourse. An important article on the topic explains that low IC reflects “rigid, black-and-white thinking, intolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, a desire for rapid closure, and not recognizing the validity of other viewpoints,” whereas high IC implies “flexible, broad thinking that recognizes multiple aspects and possible interpretations of an issue and sees connections and dynamic tensions between perspectives” (Békés and Suedfeld).²¹

Improving Discourse Quality through Deliberative Practices

There is no formula to guide the facilitator of a conversation (for example, the instructor) and its participants (for example, the students) to ensure high discourse quality. However, one valuable approach involves practices of the sort developed by James Fishkin, Larry Diamond, and other proponents of deliberative decision-making.²² These include establishing norms and expectations for participants, providing ideologically balanced briefing material, employing a well-trained moderator, and eliminating pressures toward building consensus. Fishkin and his colleague Robert Luskin describe five characteristics essential for good deliberation (Fishkin and Luskin):

1. **Informed.** Arguments are supported by appropriate and reasonably accurate factual claims.

²⁰ A fifth criterion—constructive politics, or the speaker’s willingness to attempt to compromise and/or build consensus—is relevant to public discourse but not to critical inquiry within the university. This is because much of public discourse involves decision-making, which requires agreement, assent, and implementation, while the goal of critical inquiry is understanding rather than consensus.

²¹ Findings in political psychology illuminate some of IC’s implications. IC is negatively associated with the cognitive traits of authoritarianism and dogmatism and with political tension when the prospect of impending violence is present. Findings also show that the decisions of groups exposed to minority opinions have higher IC than those of homogeneous groups. This is because group members are forced to conceptualize their position to address and incorporate minority views. Scholars have developed instruments for assessing conversations in terms of these two concepts of discourse quality. See Harvard Kennedy School’s “Scoring the ‘Integrative Complexity’ of Student Responses: A New Strategy for Measuring Student Learning.” There are also measures of levels of the civility of discourse. See “Using Machine Learning to Reduce Toxicity Online” and Frimer et al. “Incivility Is Rising among American Politicians on Twitter.” Full information on all three sources is included in the Works Cited list.

²² Much of the literature describing deliberative decision-making centers around making decisions about matters of public policy in a democracy. But these same practices can promote high discourse quality in university settings within and outside of the classroom.

2. **Balanced.** Arguments offered by one side or from one perspective are answered by considerations offered by those who hold other perspectives.
3. **Conscientious.** The participants sincerely weigh the merits of the arguments and talk and listen with civility and respect.
4. **Substantive with equal consideration.** Arguments are considered sincerely on their merits, not on how they are made or who is making them.
5. **Comprehensive.** All points of view held by significant portions of the population receive attention.

Although the applicability of these principles to real-world policy decision-making is the subject of some debate, there is evidence that they reduce partisan polarization in the deliberation on specific topics, and their relevance to critical inquiry seems obvious (Fishkin et al.). At least within the classroom, faculty play an important role in reaffirming these principles of mutual regard and correcting departures from them.

VI. Preface to Approaches for Achieving Open and Inclusive Discourse in Education at Stanford

Having set out the characteristics of open and inclusive discourse in education at Stanford, we now turn to various approaches to achieving that objective. The approaches can be roughly described in two categories, designed respectively to prepare the students individually for engaging in discourse and to guide the discourse itself.

Sections VII and VIII focus on individuals. Section VII describes the core skill of active listening that is essential to productive discourse, and Section VIII takes up interventions that may reduce psychological barriers to discourse.

Sections IX and X describe approaches to promoting discourse in specialized classes and programs and in ordinary classes.

VII. The Core Skill of Active Listening: Listening with Curiosity and Intellectual Humility

In an article about improving engagement with opposing views, Michael Yeomans et al. note: “While encountering opposing viewpoints seems inevitable, in practice, people do not seem to handle disagreement well. An extensive body of research has shown that the presence of contradictory opinions gives rise to avoidance, negative affect, biased information processing, reactance, and negative inferences about the other side.” Rather than listening, people focus uncharitably on flaws in the speaker’s statements, begin preparing counterarguments, or simply ignore the speaker’s content and wait until they can speak their mind.

Active listening avoids these effects and makes the speaker feel genuinely heard. That, in turn, makes the speaker more empathetic when the shoe is on the other foot. Active listening is a communication skill that involves fully focusing on, understanding, and responding to the person speaking. It involves paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues, asking questions, and providing feedback to clarify and show understanding. The goal of active listening is to build trust and create effective two-way communication (Stone).

Active listening is essential to open, inclusive discourse. Without it, there is no actual engagement across difference—just crosstalk. The speaker doesn't feel heard, and the person "listening" has no real grasp on what has been said.

The main skills involved in active listening are giving the speaker undivided attention, acknowledging their message, deferring judgment, and seeking clarification before providing feedback ("Becoming an Active Listener"). Active listeners adopt an engaged, responsive attitude toward their interlocutors (Jalongo).

At root, active listening calls for listening with curiosity about the substance of the message and the motivations underlying it. The greater the disagreement, the more curious active listeners get. The process is nicely captured in the title of Mónica Guzmán's recent book, *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times*.²³

Active listening is also related to listening with humility. "Humble listening" has been described as "attending to someone else with empathy and understanding even if you don't agree to what they say.... It means being inclusive, where you happen to value both the differences and commonalities with someone else" (Vij). The mindset for humble listening is captured by instructions to "[p]ut the focus for the moment on someone else and take yourself out of the equation completely. Set aside your opinions, your advice, your preconceived notions, and your desire to talk about yourself.... Just listen" ("Listening Skills").

In addition to improving communication, active listening has been linked to more positive attitudes toward outgroups, durable decreases in affective polarization, and less prejudiced attitudes (Bruneau and Saxe; Santoro and Broockman; Itzchakov et al.).²⁴ It is among the most important skills in conflict resolution and de-escalation (Friedman and Himmelstein).

Active listening is also linked to the concept of conversational receptiveness—the use of language as well as nonverbal cues to communicate one's willingness to thoughtfully engage with opposing views in ways that are recognized by the other party (Yeomans et al.). Linguistic

²³ For good discussions of the psychology of curiosity, see Kashdan et al. "The Five Dimensions of Curiosity" and Golman and Loewenstein's "Curiosity, Information Gaps, and the Utility of Knowledge." Full information on both sources is included in the Works Cited list.

²⁴ The extent of a participant's engagement when listening to others can be measured in terms of a Listening Styles Inventory (LSI), which categorizes participant listening style on a scale from "detached" to "active" (Spataro and Bloch). The act of taking the LSI itself provides participants with insight into their listening strengths and weaknesses (Spataro and Bloch). Along similar lines, Kashdan et al. have created a five-dimensional "curiosity scale," which reflects people's self-description of curiosity in terms of joyous exploration, deprivation sensitivity, stress tolerance, social curiosity, thrill seeking, and social curiosity.

strategies include using “positive statements, rather than negations; explicit acknowledgement of understanding; finding points of agreement; and hedging to soften claims” (Yeomans et al.). Nonverbal strategies include maintaining eye contact, open body language, and direct rather than askance orientation to one’s interlocutor (Ditlmann et al.).

Participants engaging in conversations on disputed issues report feeling more satisfied and more willing to reengage in dialogue when their interlocutors express interest in their viewpoints. The Heterodox Academy survey discussed above reports that “64 percent of students said, ‘I would ask questions about their opinion so I can understand it better,’ in response to an opinion with which they disagreed” (Zhou et al.).²⁵

VIII. Psychological Interventions to Promote Inclusive Discourse in Critical Inquiry

A varied but interrelated set of psychological interventions have the potential to prepare individuals to engage in challenging conversations. Among other things, they include practices of self-affirmation and cognitive de-biasing prior to engagement across differences (Cohen and Schwalbe). Professor Geoffrey Cohen of Stanford’s Graduate School of Education and Department of Psychology and Michael Schwalbe, a postdoctoral scholar in the Department of Psychology, describe the hypotheses underlying a research agenda currently in progress:

- The motivational component consists of (1) a self-affirmation exercise of reflecting on cherished personal values to bolster self-integrity, reduce defensiveness, and increase openness to alternative perspectives and one’s own cognitive fallibility (Cohen and Sherman). Another key motivational component will be (2) to instill a growth mindset around one’s political beliefs, the notion that our points of view are always works in progress rather than finished products.
- The cognitive component consists of (3) educational content and interactive activities instructing participants on naïve realism, the introspection illusion, and various cognitive biases. These will serve to make participants question their own introspections, fostering a critical perspective on their own minds. Participants will also be taught (4) cognitive strategies that help to offset biases, such as “considering the opposite” (for example, asking oneself what one would have thought of a study had it yielded results contrary to their point of view), inserting confirmation-bias-breaking qualifiers to thought chains (for example, training oneself to think “unless” or “what if” after reaching a conclusion), framing one’s beliefs in probabilistic terms, treating beliefs as testable hypotheses rather than as sacred possessions, and applying appropriate and incremental belief-updating rules.

²⁵ However, 31 percent of students said, “I would not say or do anything about it, but I would think badly of that student” (Zhou et al.). See also Frances Chen et al. “Tell Me More: The Effects of Expressed Interest on Receptiveness during Dialog.” Full source information is included in the Works Cited list.

- The behavioral components include a number of exercises in which participants learn to apply (5) de-escalation techniques to cross-partisan conversations, such as active listening techniques, including bracketing (setting aside immediate reactions and judgments) and reflecting/paraphrasing (restating the other person’s views in their or one’s own words). Participants will subsequently apply these active listening techniques to take the perspective of an intellectual “adversary,” by trying to reformulate and reflect the adversary’s own argument better than the adversary did. Students will also learn conversational strategies such as (6) subjective framing, (7) perspective-getting when sharing their point of view, and (8) analogic perspective-taking, in which they draw on analogous emotional experiences from their own lives in an effort to empathize either with people affected by a social issue or with their political adversaries.
- Two additional components aimed at fostering positive interpersonal contact, oriented more toward relationship building, are (9) finding common ground, based on research that establishing perceived similarities, sharing emotional experiences (for example, laughter), and collaborating on common goals bridge divides, and (10) engaging in prosocial acts toward outgroup members, based on research that small behavioral acts of kindness reduce intergroup animosity.

These psychologically informed interventions make use of the participatory process of “wise interventions,” a body of work focused on using highly psychologically leveraged techniques to induce change (Walton and Wilson). The techniques include putting subjects in empowered roles (for example, in which they absorb lessons by giving advice rather than by getting it) and having them express the new ideas in their own words, in effect taking ownership of them. They also are given practice in enacting and defending the new ideas, mindsets, and practices.²⁶ Such participatory processes have been shown to be more effective than passive approaches in inducing long-term change.

We hope that Cohen and Schwalbe’s experiments will provide an evidentiary foundation for practical interventions to promote open, inclusive discourse on campus. Below we provide additional detail on what we believe to be among the most promising of these interventions.²⁷

Self-Affirmation

The very thought of encountering viewpoints on major issues that differ significantly from one’s own can pose a threat to one’s identity, thus creating a barrier to addressing politically or

²⁶ Cf. Traberg et al. “Psychological Inoculation against Misinformation: Current Evidence and Future Directions.” Full source information included in Works Cited list.

²⁷ We should note at the outset that there is huge variation in the empirical basis for the success and the persistence of many of the interventions considered in the following sections. While some interventions have been subject to robust evaluations, others would not meet minimal standards, and some have not been subject to any evaluation at all. We expect that as universities continue their efforts in this domain, better knowledge of what works and what doesn’t will emerge.

ideologically freighted issues. Research indicates, however, that the mere act of affirming a value that is meaningful to a participant can bolster a sense of self-worth that reduces the barrier.

Cohen and his colleagues have designed a values-affirmation procedure in which, before addressing a controversial political topic, participants select a value from a list that is tailored to exclude political issues, so that they can center their self-worth independent of the aspect of their identity that is being challenged by the topic (Cohen 305). They are then asked to write about why that value is important to them. In one study, after engaging in a values-affirmation exercise, participants with prior views supporting or opposing the death penalty were given identical balanced articles on the topic that differed only in their conclusions. Compared to a control group that did not engage in this exercise, participants were more open to information that contradicted their prior views and had more nuanced views about the death penalty (Cohen et al.). In another experiment, participants engaging in value-affirmation were more likely to assess President Obama based on the merits of his performance rather than on his popularity at the polls (Binning et al.).

The New York Times columnist David French recently provided an example of how affirming some of his most fundamental values as a conservative increased his openness to alternative perspectives on policy issues:

How do we fight past our partisanship to become truly curious about the truth? For me, the answer started with the first principle of my conservatism: Human beings possess incalculable worth...

My initial inability to see the truth is related to the second principle, that human beings are deeply flawed. I had no trouble applying that principle to my opponents. But it also applies to those I generally admire. It applies to police officers. It applies to me.

The lesson I've taken has been clear: Any time my tribe or my allies are under fire, before I yield to the temptation of a reflexive defense, I should apply my principles and carefully consider the most uncomfortable of thoughts: My opponents might be right, my allies might be wrong and justice may require that I change my mind. And it may, in all likelihood, require that I do this again and again (French).

Perspective Getting and Giving

As humans, we tend to be overconfident in our interpretations of other people's beliefs and emotions. As a result, we often do not ask others about their perspectives and misread them in ways that inhibit communication.

Intentionally practicing perspective-getting by asking others for their perspectives rather than imagining them improves understanding. It also strengthens relationships by making others feel that you find them interesting and worthy of attention.²⁸ Geoffrey Cohen writes:

We can avoid implying that their views are based on either ignorance or bias and ask people in a genuinely curious manner about what their views are and why they hold them—which helps to make people feel seen and heard. And we can listen respectfully to their answers. Our attempts at perspective-getting may surprise us. In many cases, we’ll discover that we disagree not so much because we and our adversaries hold different values or have different views on the same issue. Rather, it’s because the very issue, as we perceive it, is different. When liberals and conservatives fight about social security, welfare, and abortion rights, they often fail to realize that they are proceeding from different factual assumptions about what the social problem is and what the policies being considered actually are. By perspective-getting, we can better identify the sources of our disagreements and work through them....

If we let down our guard and show respect for, or at least interest in, others’ beliefs and arguments—responding with comments like “I see what you’re saying and I hadn’t seen it that way” or “That’s interesting, can you tell me more about why you think that?”—they will be more likely to let their guard down (Cohen 307-8).

In a well-known and replicated study by David Broockman and Joshua Kalla, canvassers went door to door in a neighborhood to discuss voters’ views about a law prohibiting discrimination against transgender people (Broockman and Kalla).²⁹ The canvassers encouraged what the authors call analogic perspective taking: “They first asked each voter to talk about a time when they themselves were judged negatively for being different. The canvassers then encouraged voters to see how their own experience offered a window into transgender people’s experiences, hoping to facilitate voters’ ability to take transgender people’s perspectives” (Broockman and Kalla). The strategy had a statistically significant positive effect, with some durability, in changing people’s views.

Perspective giving concerns how people communicate their own views to others. Cohen writes:

I can feel the sense of threat rising in my body when, in the middle of a political conversation, the other person takes a dramatic pause and emits one of these tropes: “the fact of the matter is,” “let me tell you something,” or “the reality is.” Especially off-putting is “you don’t get it,” which implies there is an “it” floating out in space just above us, like a Platonic archetype, for all with clear eyes to behold. So many of us fall into

²⁸ See generally Nicholas Epley’s *Mindwise: How We Understand What Others Think, Believe, Feel and Want*. Full source information included in the Works Cited list.

²⁹ The experiment has been replicated using other issues. See, for example, Kalla and Broockman’s “Which Narrative Strategies Durably Reduce Prejudice? Evidence from Field and Survey Experiments Supporting the Efficacy of Perspective-Getting.” Full source information for both experiments included in the Works Cited list.

such rhetoric because our minds blind us to our own biases and because it's satisfying, triggering the brain's reward system (Cohen 308).

Presenting our views as opinions is more likely to lead to productive discourse and mutual understanding than is stating them as facts.³⁰ Cohen writes that “we will make the most headway and cause the least flare-up of polarization if we coach ourselves to be genuinely curious and respectful in seeking others' views, to acknowledge that our own are also matters of opinion, and to emphasize areas of common values. Much of the time, we can simply express our opinions more accurately and honestly by acknowledging our uncertainty” (Cohen 311).

Cohen summarizes his advice for any dialogue with people with whom you have political disagreements. The advice is useful for students' conversations both inside and outside of the classroom (Cohen 314-5):

- Affirm that you view them with dignity and see them as people of integrity. This can be conveyed verbally and nonverbally.
- Communicate your curiosity and interest in learning; a growth mindset encourages openness in yourself and others.
- Present your own views as opinions rather than as facts.
- Use stories to capture the human dimension of the problem. Although we must be aware of the power of stories to mislead, they can help people achieve a fuller understanding of a problem than they can with facts and arguments alone.
- Ask questions about people's views and their reasons for them in a way that provokes reflection and awareness of contradictions in beliefs and values.
- Evoke empathy for the negative effects of policies and rhetoric that people support by asking if they've ever been made to feel the same way as victims, perhaps also asking if they would share their experiences.
- Talk to individuals away from the influence of their group. One-on-one conversations and discussions in small ad hoc groups...work better than debates and dialogues between preexisting groups.
- Make time for people to reflect on how the conversation has influenced them.

³⁰ Perspective giving and perspective taking among cross-group dyads have been linked with positive changes in attitudes. Perspective giving is linked to outgroups having more positive attitudes toward in-groups, while perspective taking is linked to in-groups having more positive attitudes toward outgroups (Bruneau and Saxe).

- When possible, engage in face-to-face conversation.... Body language and eye contact all say much about our warmth and regard. The emotion and warmth we convey in our voice can matter as much as the words we use.

Reducing Affective Polarization

Many of the interventions described above and in the following sections are designed to reduce affective polarization—the phenomenon of disliking or distrusting people who do not share your political or ideological views. Reducing affective polarization among students who will live and work together and participate in a community at Stanford is a valuable end in itself, and it is essential to critical inquiry and inclusive discourse. It is difficult, to say the least, to engage in open, good faith exchanges about controversial topics with people you dislike and avoid because of their views.³¹ Additionally, these interventions are conducive to other important outcomes, particularly the quality of conversations across political lines, the degree of learning achieved by both parties, and the desire for further intergroup contact.

IX. Promoting Inclusive Discourse and Critical Inquiry in Bespoke Courses and Orientation Activities

The beginning of the school year and some midway points provide particularly favorable opportunities to lay the foundations for inclusive discourse, whether through orientation activities or courses specifically designed for the purpose. While students will naturally bond with like-minded peers, the university can help them escape from what we earlier described as the “epistemic bubbles” and “echo chambers” fostered by that bonding (Nguyen).

Promoting Viewpoint Diversity

A number of national organizations have designed frameworks for conducting constructive conversations across difference within and beyond university settings.

The Constructive Dialogue Institute offers “Perspectives,” an eight-module online education program “designed to foster empathy, strengthen communication, and open people to diverse perspectives” and to foster intellectual humility among participants (“Perspectives”).³² The program has been linked to moderate decreases in affective polarization and increases in intellectual humility (Welker et al.).

Braver Angels is a nonprofit organization that seeks “to bring liberals, conservatives and others together at the grassroots level—not to find centrist compromise, but to find one another as

³¹ For a megastudy of interventions that reduce affective polarization, see Voelkel et al. “Megastudy Identifying Successful Interventions to Strengthen Americans’ Democratic Attitudes.” Full source information included in Works Cited list.

³² The Constructive Dialogue Institute was co-founded by Jonathan Haidt, also a co-founder of Heterodox Academy.

citizens” (“What We Do”). Its Red-Blue workshop is designed to teach active listening and reduce affective political polarization between partisans (Doherty; Baron et al.). Participants are initially separated into groups based on their political affiliations. They generate, discuss, and report on the most common false stereotypes or misconceptions of their side, why these stereotypes are wrong, and whether the stereotypes reflect a kernel of truth. After hearing the other side’s conclusions, the groups again meet separately to generate questions for the other side, and then ask questions to gain genuine understanding of the other side’s views and experiences. The exercise ends with the participants asking what they can do individually and together to promote better understanding of differences and search for common ground.

A study of Braver Angels’ Red-Blue workshop found statistically significant reductions in explicit and implicit measures of affective polarization that persisted for some time (Baron et al.). Another large-scale study of the Red-Blue workshop found that 70 percent of participants improved their mutual understanding and comfort with the other side, discovered areas of commonality, and increased their capacity for constructive conversation with the other side (Jacobs et al.).³³

The nonprofit organization Heterodox Academy (HxA) is an ongoing source of practices designed to advance “open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement” (Zhou).³⁴ These include educating students about the role of American universities and about campus expression policies, acknowledging the harms that students may experience from free expression, and creating opportunities for dialogue across differences. HxA’s “Reclaiming the Culture of Higher Education: A Best Practices Guide for Advancing Open Inquiry, Viewpoint Diversity, and Constructive Disagreement” provides ideas that can be incorporated into syllabi (Vitale and Hedges). Some specific interventions that have the potential to achieve these objectives include:

- Having volunteers unfollow highly partisan Twitter accounts and follow accounts that demonstrate high empathy, perspective-taking, intellectual humility, and politically open-minded cognition (Zhou).
- Participating in an exercise in dialectical (as distinguished from all-or-nothing) thinking (“Dialectical Thinking”).
- Using a conversation guide for encountering controversial ideas. Participants in small groups choose from a list of around a hundred topics. The activity proceeds in three rounds. In the first round, participants introduce themselves. In the second, each participant discusses a question related to the topic without interruption or crosstalk. After some time for clarification or follow-up questions, in the third round participants reflect on the activity (“Encountering Controversial Ideas”). The conversation guide’s

³³ Other efforts at perspective giving and taking have been shown to increase participants’ understanding of an outgroup and willingness to engage with its members (Warner et al.; Wang, et al.).

³⁴ Its motto is: great minds don’t always think alike.

ground rules capture many of the elements of inclusive discourse described earlier: Be curious and listen to understand; show respect and suspend judgment; note any common ground as well as any differences; be authentic and welcome that from others; be purposeful and to the point; own and guide the conversation—take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole.

- Requiring students to argue different positions on controversial issues. For example, one activity asks students to choose a controversial statement from a list provided, such as “testing on animals should be banned” or “funding should be diverted away from police departments and toward social services.” Which side of the question the students take is determined by a coin toss at the beginning of the process, thus not requiring them to share personal beliefs. The students then prepare arguments both for and against the proposition. Students are also interviewed on the topic, live on camera, in front of the whole class (Vitale and Hedges 81-2).
- Using a workshop guide for facilitating conversations among students with political disagreements. Although it was created to guide conversations in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election, it is easily adaptable to many situations in which students disagree politically. It offers a series of guiding questions to create interpersonal connection, reflect on people’s hopes and fears, and seek mutual understanding and common ground (Mashek).

Teaching Discourse Skills in Bespoke Courses

By “bespoke” courses, we mean courses specifically designed to improve open, inclusive discourse. Stanford already offers a number of bespoke courses centered around the discussion of difficult topics. Most of them rely primarily on the instructors’ skillful facilitation to enable productive conversations across ideological lines. Such courses also provide opportunities to study and teach active listening and other discursive skills, as well as to experiment with psychological interventions of the sort described above.

A premise of Stanford’s freshman COLLEGE (Civic, Liberal, and Global Education) curriculum is that “[g]oing to college is...about developing the skills that empower and enable us to live together: in our own communities, in a diverse nation, and in a globally connected society” (De Witte; “Welcome to COLLEGE!”). Stanford Provost Persis Drell and History Professor Caroline Winterer describe their experience teaching an article about animal social rank and status in the course “Why College?” As quoted in *Stanford Report*, Professor Winterer said:

What students were doing throughout their conversations was an example of critical thinking.... The word “critical” in critical thinking...is not to be confused with the other meaning associated with the word—expressing dislike or disapproval—but rather, the process of objectively analyzing and evaluating an issue in order to form a judgment.

What we mean by critical is first identifying what someone is trying to say and what evidence they are using to defend their position.... [It’s also about evaluating evidence being put forward.] Unlike a knee-jerk response, it’s a process of inquiry and a process of

encounter with other critical minds. That's really what we're trying to teach you in four years at the university—that learning is a process of inquiry, and it's a process that can be learned (De Witte).

Another COLLEGE course, *Citizenship in the 21st Century*, addresses questions such as, Who is (or ought to be) included in citizenship? Who gets to decide? What responsibilities come with citizenship? Is citizenship analogous to being a friend, a family member, a business partner? *Citizenship in the 21st Century* is paradigmatic of a specially designed course that focuses on important substantive issues while providing a vehicle for developing critical inquiry skills.

Independent of the COLLEGE curriculum, another undergraduate course, *Deliberative Democracy Practicum: Applying Deliberative Polling*, allows students to work directly on a real-world project using the method of Deliberative Polling developed by Professor James Fishkin and discussed in *Democracy When the People are Thinking: Revitalizing Politics through Public Deliberation*:

Students in this course will work in partnership with the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford, a research center devoted to the research in democracy and public opinion around the world. This unique practicum will allow students to work on an actual Deliberative Polling project on campus. In just one quarter, the students will prepare for, implement, and analyze the results for a Deliberative Polling project. This is a unique opportunity that allows students to take part in the entire process of a deliberative democracy project. Through this practicum, students will learn and apply quantitative and qualitative research methods. Students will explore the underlying challenges and complexities of what it means to actually do community-engaged research in the real world. As such, this course will provide students with skills and experience in research design in deliberative democracy, community and stakeholder engagement, and the practical aspects of working in local communities (“COMM 138”).

The Stanford Civics Initiative, based in the Department of Political Science and drawing on faculty from many disciplines, is premised on the university's “responsibility to offer students an education that will promote their flourishing as human beings, their judgment as moral agents, and their participation in society as democratic citizens.... Citizens living in a pluralistic society must learn to engage one another in rational discourse. They must find ways to meet new challenges and to promote the common good, together” (“About Us”).

The Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) teaches writing through the principles of rhetoric (effective persuasion, attention to audience, and methods of presenting evidence) (“The Program”). This program offers a promising avenue for deeper exploration of the skills for engagement across difference because it is already part of the required curriculum and its multiple levels of courses.

Stanford is a member of the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP), a consortium of five colleges and universities, whose mission is to “advance fundamental democratic commitments to freedom of expression, equality, and agency; develop students' skills to facilitate conversations across political difference; and create spaces for civil disagreement to

flourish on college campuses” (“Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Fellowship”). Participants receive training in facilitation, engage in deliberative conversations, and have opportunities to interact with speakers from different sectors.

Most of these programs and courses do not explicitly teach discursive skills, but rather rely on the instructors to model them while facilitating difficult conversations. An alternative would be to offer courses and programming that combine explicit study of the skills and the research supporting them with repeated opportunities for practice, reflection, and reinforcement.

Other universities have also developed curricular and co-curricular programming. For example, Professor John Rose at Duke University teaches “How to Think in an Age of Political Polarization.” The course is built around readings and discussion of topics such as lost trust in institutions; whether we should pay college athletes; abolishing Greek life; abolishing the police; racial inequality and critical race theory; race, discrimination, and college admissions; and abortion.³⁵ The syllabus states these ground rules:

Together, we will build a community of trust and friendship amid political disagreement. Following the principles below will help guide us along the way.

- **The Principle of Freedom.** Duke University’s Mission Statement affirms its foundational commitment to promoting “an intellectual environment built on a commitment to free and open inquiry,” which encompasses academic freedom and free speech. These rights are sacrosanct in this class and are possessed by faculty and students alike. With the aim of advancing and deepening everyone’s understanding of the issues addressed in the course, students are urged to speak their minds, explore ideas and arguments, play devil’s advocate, and engage in civil but robust discussions. There is no thought or language policing. We expect students to do business in the proper currency of intellectual discourse—a currency consisting of reasons, evidence, and arguments—but no ideas or positions are out of bounds.
- **The Principle of Charity.** When approaching a new idea, attempt to understand the idea sympathetically and in its most persuasive form. When you then critique the idea, focus on the argument itself, not the person who said it. Do not attribute bad motives for other’s beliefs, which they do not think they have. When disagreeing, work towards unity and towards keeping the conversation going. This means we do not cancel each other in this class. Rather than “calling out,” we will “call in,” which should be apparent in both the content and tone of our comments.
- **The Principle of Humility.** Acknowledge the weaknesses in your own arguments and privilege the pursuit of truth over “winning” the argument. Remember that we are all fallible and all of us surely hold beliefs that are wrong, though we don’t know

³⁵ Syllabus on file with Policy Lab.

which ones. Keep your mind open to learning new things from authors and fellow classmates whose ideas you don't share (Rose).

While we have focused on credit-bearing courses, many opportunities exist to encourage discourse across ideological lines in orientation or non-credit-bearing activities during the school year.

For example, Stanford Law School's extracurricular ePluribus Project seeks to "cultivate the virtues of humility, curiosity, candor, empathy, courage, intellectual rigor, and service in a community constituted by difference in order to promote these virtues in society, government, and the practice of law" ("ePluribus Project"). In addition to conducting several workshops to help the entire group develop active listening and related skills, participants meet in small groups to discuss readings that take different positions on controversial issues. The participants commit to inviting someone with whom they disagree on something fundamental and with whom they would like to engage in further dialogue to join the organization.

An interesting example from another institution is U.C. Santa Cruz's Ethics Bowl, a contrarian debate format designed by Philosophy Professor Jonathan Ellis ("Ethics Bowl"). Ellis argues that the typical structure of debates is antithetical to critical inquiry: "teams start with a conclusion...and work backward from there, marshaling the best arguments they can devise to make that conclusion come out on top. The goal is not to determine the most reasonable or fair-minded approach to an issue, but to defend a given claim at all costs. This is an exercise not in deliberation but in reasoning with an agenda (Ellis and Hovagimian).

By contrast, in the Ethics Bowl, "a team is assigned a question...on a contentious topic, such as 'When is the use of military drones morally permissible?' The team then presents and defends whatever conclusion its deliberation has led to. An opposing team and a panel of judges pose questions and raise potential problems, to which the first team responds." Judges "evaluate the team's performance in terms of the coherence of the argument, propriety of reason, and response to challenges" ("Ethics Bowl").

Finally, Duke University recently announced its plan to open a new dormitory: "A new living-learning community [that] will push students to discuss ideas outside their personal bubbles" ("Let Transformative Ideas"). The announcement explains:

In an age when civil discourse and "agreeing to disagree" seem like lost arts, Duke students can choose this fall to live in a community intended to foster those skills.... "This is about having students take the lead in creating a space where students are welcomed and encouraged across all their differences—political, religious and other—to think about the questions that really matter" (Ferreri).

X. Promoting Inclusive Discourse and Critical Inquiry in Regular Classes

With the understanding that many courses involve the transmission of knowledge that is not open to serious dispute, some of the practices described in the preceding section may be applied to an array of regular courses.

The Basics

It is difficult to discuss controversial topics in a class unless the instructor has previously established sound norms of engagement and taken some basic steps to establish trust, charity, and empathy—for example, learning how to pronounce students' names, addressing gender or racial imbalances in student participation, and accommodating the needs of students with disabilities. An instructor's derogation of particular ideological positions is also sure to undermine student trust.

Classroom Discourse Norms

In her recent book *Cancel Wars*, Sigal R. Ben-Porath makes some general remarks about norms that are especially needed in a time of high polarization:

[O]ne of the goals of any class is to prepare students for critical thinking...and citizenship. To facilitate this, the classroom has to make space for students to make mistakes and try on different views, including controversial ones. This calls for some courage on the part of both students and instructors, who should bring in relevant topics and make room for diverse views about them. Sometimes this is planned as part of the course syllabus, and the instructor should be prepared for the ensuing debate. At other times, the world outside the classroom will slip in and claim some space. Instructors would often do best to allow at least some room for such occurrences.... Speaking across political and other divides and navigating differences are useful skills for many fields and topics and can make real contributions to many courses....

Different courses, classrooms, and institutions, and—of course—different instructors call for unique classroom norms. It does not make sense to offer a template.... What is critical to all courses, though, is the importance of *establishing clear and shared classroom norms*, of defining them at the start of the course, and, ideally, including students in the process when possible, either up front or as the semester unfolds. There are two key points to keep in mind across diverse classroom contexts. First, everyone in the class belongs, and all students' questions and comments are welcome. Second, learning is an ongoing process, which is everyone's shared goal. The instructor can openly acknowledge that they may make mistakes, take a wrong step, and not say the right thing, and the same can happen to any of the students. But the group can agree up front to be generous and to have a strategy for talking together. Expecting and offering generosity and the space to correct mistakes can create an ongoing classroom conversation in which

amends can be made when needed.... Such generosity requires trust, and establishing shared norms early in a course creates a solid foundation for such trust (133-4, 149-50).

Of course, different norms may be appropriate depending on the subject matter of the course and the instructor's preference for more or less participation. But at least in courses where discussion is encouraged, norms for discourse in the classroom can simultaneously promote critical inquiry, inclusion, and viewpoint diversity. They can be incorporated in a syllabus or established through a discussion with the class. In any event, if norms are established early in the quarter, the instructor can model and refer to them when conducting discussions.³⁶ The following list of suggestions comes from many sources, including Stanford's Center for Teaching and Learning and the Constructive Dialogue Institute ("Guide for Setting"; "Co-Creating"). Some may be more appropriate for particular classes than others.

Core principles/expectations

- Thoughtful disagreement is essential to high discourse quality.
 - Diverse viewpoints on plausibly contested issues will be valued ("Teaching and Learning").
 - The goal is not agreement or consensus, but achieving a deeper understanding of the issues.
- People learn by hearing from other people whose experiences, identities, and ideas differ from their own.
- The course material may sometimes arouse intense feelings (Warren).
 - An instructor does not expect students to participate without feeling, but rather to mobilize emotion and rigorous intellectual engagement in the service of deeper understanding.
 - Embrace discomfort as an essential part of the learning process.
 - Be prepared for you and others to make mistakes; respond with grace rather than ridicule.
- Honor confidentiality—others' stories remain theirs to tell.

How to listen

- Listen actively while classmates are speaking.
- Give others the benefit of the doubt:
 - Listen with curiosity first, rather than judgment.
 - Assume that others are not trying to offend and will welcome constructive feedback.
- Be mindful of body language and nonverbal responses—they can be as respectful or disrespectful as words.

³⁶ Our focus group respondents expressed ambivalence about class constitutions and other collectively created norm-setting documents unless they are implemented and adverted to during the quarter.

How to speak/respond

- Communicate your perspective thoughtfully and with the intention of being understood.
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing (use “I” instead of “they,” “we,” or “you”).
- Instead of invalidating somebody else’s story by challenging their experience, share your own story and experience.
- Share the air—speak up, but also make room for others to contribute.
- Know that confessing ignorance is a sign of integrity and candor.
- Exercise humility: Acknowledge the weaknesses in your own arguments and privilege the pursuit of knowledge over “winning” the argument. Keep your mind open to learning new things from authors and classmates whose ideas you don’t share.³⁷
 - Before arguing against another student’s position, make the strongest case for that position and argue against that (Chew).³⁸
 - Don’t be afraid to respectfully challenge classmates’ statements by asking questions, but refrain from personal attacks—focus on the ideas expressed.
 - It is important to practice making arguments with which one disagrees because that’s the best way to know if you understand them.

Nonattribution of Classroom Discussions

Agreed-upon norms of nonattribution can mitigate students’ self-censorship based on the fear that their views will be published and criticized outside of the class. Under Chatham House Rules, sometimes called Las Vegas Rules, students are free to convey information outside of the classroom but may not reveal the identity or affiliation of other speakers (“Chatham House Rule”; “Vegas Rules”). There are reasons to believe such a policy is most likely to be effective when it is agreed to by class members. Harvard Law School has adopted a general principle of nonattribution of classroom discussions: “When using social media or other forms of communication designed to reach members of the public, no one may repeat or describe a statement made by a student in class in a manner that would enable a person who was not present in the class to identify the speaker of the statement” (“Harvard Law School”).³⁹

³⁷ “First, you’ll have a better chance of persuading the other party. People want to have their thoughts taken seriously and not brushed aside. The best way to do this is to show that you understand the thrust of their arguments by improving on the way the core idea is expressed. Anything less and you’ll merely be attacking a weak manifestation of an idea, and not the idea itself. Second, and more importantly, you need to constantly test your assumptions and beliefs.... If you can’t respond to the strongest argument from the other side, there’s a good chance you’re wrong. That’s okay, as long as you’re willing to adjust to the evidence and change your worldview” (Rose).

³⁸ See also Conor Friedersdorf’s “The Highest Form of Disagreement.” Full source information included in Works Cited list.

³⁹ “To fulfill Harvard Law School’s mission of training excellent lawyers, our classrooms must offer an environment in which all participants feel able to engage in free, open, respectful discussion of complex, sensitive, and consequential questions. Our classrooms are places in which students make arguments sometimes because they deeply believe in them, sometimes because they’re exploring what they believe, and sometimes because they’re trying to understand a contrary view or have been asked by the professor to take a position with which they may disagree. Everybody is learning, everybody has to think and respond within fast-moving discussions, and everybody will make mistakes as part of the law school learning process. In training to be the best

Strategies for Encouraging Participation by Reluctant Students

Through our focus groups, we learned that many students are anxious and hesitant to participate in classroom discussions, particularly when the discussions involve controversial topics. Students fear stigmatization and are concerned that statements made in the classroom could be misconstrued and used to form false impressions. Here we discuss two strategies for encouraging participation.

Assigning Students to Role-Play Contested Positions

Role play in the classroom is an effective way to expand student participation while promoting viewpoint diversity. Role play allows students to “practice empathy and perspective taking” (“Role Play”). This technique encourages students to consider the most compelling arguments on the side of an issue they may disagree with. By assigning roles, the instructor removes much of the stigma students may fear in advocating an unpopular perspective. To help students avoid self-censorship, instructors can preface a role-playing activity by reminding the class that the strongest arguments for the assigned role should be made notwithstanding the individual student’s personal beliefs about the subject and, indeed, suggest that students not indicate their personal views about their assigned roles.⁴⁰ Instructors can also model role-playing themselves before inviting students to do so, in order to demonstrate the fair characterization of alternative positions.

“Talk-and-Turns”

“Talk-and-turns” are another way to promote active engagement when addressing difficult topics in the classroom. This technique can take various forms but generally involves providing students with a prompt or open inquiry of some sort, giving them time to consider what they think about it, and asking them to share their thoughts with one or more classmates. After the small-group discussion, the instructor asks for volunteers or calls on groups to share their ideas with the class as a whole. This process allows students to “rehearse in a low-risk situation,” clarifying their answers “through a non-threatening discussion with a fellow classmate before communicating in front of a group” (Barkley et al.; Millis; “Pair and Share”). Talk-and-turns

lawyers they can be, students must be able to try arguments on for size, change their minds, and take risks. The proliferation of social media affects this learning environment. Because of the potential permanence and widespread dissemination of communications through social media and other forms of communication designed to reach members of the public, if statements made in class are quoted or described with attribution in those media, students may be reluctant to approach any question, particularly controversial ones, with the openness and vulnerability they need to grow as lawyers and to learn from one another. Moreover, given the particular pedagogy of law classes, it may be hard, when quoting statements made in class, to accurately distinguish when speakers are expressing their own views or speaking in the role of advocate, to capture all of the qualifications or nuance that speakers may have provided, or to fairly convey the full context necessary to understand why speakers took a particular position on a complex legal question. In addition, the widespread dissemination of such statements with attribution may risk subjecting the speaker to online harassment, bullying, or worse” (“Harvard Law School”). We note that the policy was criticized in MyeongSeo Kim’s editorial in the *Harvard Crimson* on the ground that it was overly paternalistic. Full source information for the editorial included in Works Cited list.

⁴⁰ It is important to be explicit with students about the learning benefits of this sort of exercise and to already have established the students’ trust, rather address a controversial topic when students are not confident in the instructor’s impartiality or competence to manage the process.

work to enhance inclusivity as well as the depth and breadth of discussion in the classroom. Often students who would not volunteer to speak before the entire class become more engaged.

Prepare for Disruptions

Instructors should be prepared for disruptions when dealing with issues that are controversial or touch on class members' identities ("Mindful and Learner-Centered"). The Stanford Teaching Commons website includes the Disruption Preparation Guide, which helps instructors navigate such challenges in the course of teaching, and an Inclusive Teaching Guide, which advises on strategies that "promote inclusion, diversity, accessibility, well-being, and community" ("Addressing Disruptive Events"; "Inclusive Teaching Guide"). In addition to its intrinsic value, the suggestions in the Inclusive Teaching Guide may reduce the likelihood of classroom disruptions. Douglas Stone's book *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* contains invaluable guidance on how to lead, participate in, and de-escalate a difficult conversation.

Support Students and Instructors Who Say Unpopular Things in the Classroom

It is inevitable in our polarized environment that faculty and students will make comments in good faith that some will find insensitive or offensive. The correlative to expecting everyone to facilitate and participate in difficult conversations is for other members of the university community, including the administration, to recognize that mistakes are particularly likely to happen when we enter charged conversations and to promote a disposition of compassion and engagement rather than recrimination when mistakes are made in good faith.

Further Ideas for Promoting Inclusion

The Center for Teaching and Learning's IDEAL Pedagogy program trains instructors in inclusive and equitable learning ("IDEAL Pedagogy"). Instructors can enroll in a self-paced Canvas course, schedule a syllabus consultation, or complete a self-initiated pedagogy project. The goals of the program are to:

- Integrate diverse examples, peoples, and texts into course design.
- Encourage student peer learning through group work and discussion.
- Enact and uphold a classroom culture of respect for all students.
- Provide accessible resources and connections to meet the needs of all students.
- Design inclusive learning assessments for students.
- Identify and defuse racist practices in course design and instruction.

The university also offers specific support for instructors in STEM courses.⁴¹ As this suggests, sound judgments about effective interventions and how to build the best classroom norms depend in substantial part on understanding the interrelationship between open, inclusive discourse and the specific content of what is being taught.

XI. Recommendations

We believe the following five recommendations for faculty, deans, and other administrators can begin to address the problems described in this report:

1. Include and explain in application, admission, and orientation materials Stanford's Statement on Academic Freedom, its core mission of critical inquiry, and its commitment to engaging in open, inclusive discourse across differences. Consider how the admissions process might elicit information on the capacity and willingness of applicants to abide by these principles.
2. Offer bespoke courses and programs, especially during students' first years at Stanford, that emphasize the acquisition of active listening and other discourse skills. Such courses should go beyond promoting "difficult" conversations across differences to study and teach the skills that make such conversations possible and instill a durable commitment to critical inquiry and navigating difference.
3. Develop, model, and employ norms of discourse in regular courses. Ensure wide, easy access to these pedagogic tools, including specialized advice tailored to the content of specific departments/fields.
4. Continue to develop a university-wide initiative that promotes the norms of open and inclusive discourse.
5. Develop coherent, values-based policies for responding to unpopular speech, incidents, protests, and demands in ways that are consistent with academic freedom.

Finally, a recommendation particularly for students: whatever your particular career goals may be, take advantage of the opportunities that Stanford offers to hone the listening and deliberative skills you will need as decision makers and citizens.

⁴¹ See, for example, Ward and Ko's "Addressing Diversity in the Stanford Math Classroom: Suggestions and Resources." See also Spector's "Education Researchers Partner with STEM Instructors to Make Courses More Inclusive." See also Robyn Wright Dunbar et al. "Developing Student Teaching Consultants and Mentors at Stanford: The TA Consultant (TAC) and Mentors in Teaching (MinT) Programs." Full source information for all three included in Works Cited list.

XII. Conclusion

Our ideal of the university community is one where students and faculty engage in reasoned discourse about issues ranging from eighteenth-century literature to theories of evolution to current issues of public policy.

A participant in one of our focus groups suggested that we were presumptuous in thinking that we could improve discourse on the Stanford campus given how entrenched affective polarization is in the wider society. We disagree.

First, while students and faculty should not and cannot abandon their diverse views and personal identities at the door, the university is home to a self-selected population of people committed to teaching, learning, and research. Some of the most important advances in these endeavors occur precisely because settled ideas and orthodoxies are challenged. Second, the nature of the academic community allows the university to experiment with approaches, such as those mentioned throughout this report, that are conducive to open, inclusive discourse.

Whether or not our goal is presumptuous, it is a matter of necessity for Stanford to nurture an environment in which open, inclusive discourse can thrive. Universities are among the very few institutions in society committed to the nonpartisan search for truth and critical inquiry and therefore one of the few institutions in which engagement across difference can be meaningful in the everyday lives of its students, staff, faculty, and administrators. In addition to their research mission, universities “train people for positions that give them social, political, and economic power in society.” These words come from Sigal Ben-Porath, who goes on to note that “recognizing that higher education holds this instrumental value for society clarifies the centrality of free speech on campuses: the protection of an open, inclusive, and productive dialogue is at the heart of colleges’ service to society” (114-5). We simply cannot abrogate these responsibilities.

February 12, 2023

Appendix: Open and Inclusive Discourse at Stanford

Preamble

Stanford University, along with many of its peer institutions, faces significant challenges to free and open discourse and therefore to its core academic mission. Students and faculty of all backgrounds—whether minorities or majorities—are disserved by a polarized atmosphere that has become increasingly intolerant and antithetical to the open exchange of ideas.

<p>Students are often afraid that expressing or even exploring conservative or centrist views on political and social issues, inside and outside the classroom, will elicit hostility and scorn from their classmates and, in some cases, their professors. They feel ostracized, intimidated, and silenced.</p>	<p>Students of color and other historically underrepresented groups often feel excluded from academic discourse. They feel that their experiences and views are misunderstood or undervalued, their priorities and research interests are denigrated, and their concerns are not addressed. They feel unsafe, unseen, and silenced.</p>	<p>Faculty and staff often feel reticent to express any views at all on charged topics. They fear the censure of students and colleagues who may harass or denounce them and seek their removal from teaching and other roles. Faculty of color, in particular, often feel they are not seen or heard by their colleagues. Faculty and staff feel demoralized, under siege, and silenced.</p>
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These phenomena reflect the broader polarization of American society. As troubling as they are for the country at large, they pose a special threat to a university where learning and innovative research depend on open participation in the exchange of ideas.

During the past year, a diverse group of Stanford faculty held conversations about the challenges of free speech and inclusive participation on campus. These faculty are affiliated with different Stanford schools and represent a wide array of academic disciplines, identities, political outlooks, and ideological perspectives. They are united, however, in their concern about the current climate.

This statement comes from those meetings and the shared sense that any enduring solution to this problem must emerge from a framework that makes it possible for all stakeholders to participate—to share, hear, thoughtfully consider, and also challenge ideas expressed from a wide range of identities, experiences, and viewpoints.

The statement is only a framework.* Actual improvement in our climate will require the engagement of all stakeholders.

* The statement is fully consistent with, and intended to complement, the University's Statement on Academic Freedom, adopted and approved by the Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees in 1974: "Stanford University's central functions of teaching, learning, research, and scholarship depend upon an atmosphere in which freedom of inquiry, thought, expression, publication and

Statement

Teaching, learning, and research in higher education require the participation of students and faculty in the open exchange of ideas. We firmly believe that these twin values—inclusive participation and open exchange—are central to Stanford’s mission.

1. The formal and informal suppression of ideas we disagree with or find anathema inhibits free inquiry and diminishes opportunities to learn. With narrow exceptions (e.g., incitement to violence, threats, libel) open exchange depends on resilience and reasoned rebuttal, not suppression, in the face of speech we consider offensive. Open exchange also requires mutual regard for norms of civil discourse that provide broad and equitable opportunities for engagement and that value arguments because they are sound, innovative, and persuasive, and not because they come from the loudest, most powerful, or most provocative voices. People of different backgrounds, experiences, identities, beliefs, and partisan commitments across the political spectrum can expand and enrich open discourse—but only if all voices are recognized and the terms of participation promote respectful, analytically rigorous, engagement.

The potential tensions between inclusive participation on the one hand and the open exchange of ideas on the other are real, but they should not be overstated.

We believe Stanford University should endorse standards that ensure that open exchange and inclusive participation are possible and mutually reinforcing, and that its members, although free to disagree with those norms, should adhere to them as terms of participation in the academic enterprise.

2. The open exchange of ideas lies at the very core of the modern university. In the absence of coercion, people will disagree about many things in good faith and based on reasonable judgments. Pathbreaking innovations in the humanities, arts, social sciences, and STEM fields have emerged from students and faculty raising difficult questions about the status quo on a range of issues, from race and economic inequality to the proper role of government in regulating the economy, climate change, technology, and the minimal conditions for a functioning democracy. Like any ideas, these advances are appropriately subject to criticism, modification, and rejection through open debate. Open discourse does not guarantee that the best ideas will surface or that truth will emerge. But the best ideas and new discoveries emerge in an environment in which all individuals are encouraged to share their views, where they are unafraid to do so, and where truth is not immune from debate.

Inclusive participation—which flows from ensuring that diverse positions and perspectives are actively solicited and considered—is a prerequisite to sound deliberation and judgment. Deliberation and judgment are enhanced when an institution ensures that people of different backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints are both present and heard. Being heard requires active listening, mutual regard, candor, charity, and empathetic engagement across differences in and outside of the classroom.

peaceable assembly are given the fullest protection. Expression of the widest range of viewpoints should be encouraged, free from institutional orthodoxy and from internal or external coercion.”

We must be willing to share, encounter and consider unfamiliar, unpopular, and potentially upsetting opinions and ideas in the pursuit of deeper understanding, and we all have a responsibility to act in ways that foster broad participation.

3. Stanford's efforts to be welcoming to people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives and to foster an environment for the free exchange of ideas will always be works in progress.

We commit ourselves to this work.

4. There are specific actions that we as faculty can take to achieve these ends, recognizing that there are many others. Our commitment to the values these actions represent is more significant than collective endorsement of this list, in whole or in part:

- Take affirmative steps to help students, faculty, and staff with different backgrounds, experiences, identities, beliefs, and political commitments feel valued, heard, and welcome as members of the Stanford community inside and outside of the classroom.
- When discussing and teaching⁴² charged topics, engage in and facilitate discussions that are frank, respectful, analytically rigorous, emotionally intelligent, and informed by evidence; and work as hard to hear and to understand opposing opinions as we do to express our own views.
- Raise, invite, and explore alternative viewpoints, especially viewpoints that have been historically slighted or that present challenges to the perceived consensus in the room or society at large.
- Inquire into and work to rectify behaviors and biases that undermine broad participation and open exchange in and outside of class (e.g., who is regularly called on, who receives extra attention outside of class, who gets assistantships, fellowships, other positions of prestige, references, etc.).
- Support curiosity and open discourse rather than shaming people whose ideas and language students or faculty find wrong or offensive.
- Address faculty and student concerns about classroom incidents by promoting understanding rather than condemnation—by “calling in” rather than “calling out.” A climate of surveillance, recrimination, and fear about classroom speech tends to produce silence, conformity, and resentment, undermining both broad participation and open exchange of ideas.

Many of the underlying causes of the problems that beset Stanford and other institutions of higher education can be tied to larger social, political, economic, and technological forces. By

⁴² See pp. 18-19 of the Center for Teaching and Learning's Statement on Open Discourse, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/15NUp5scC067RvQZUdHPUkVt5n-fyzmXcSLHQVSBpy4/edit> .

marshalling our diverse talents and creativity, we can improve the climate of our classes and the University, and in the process produce graduates with the skills needed to improve the world beyond Stanford.

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