



2020 - 2021

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

GUIDE TO MEANINGFUL
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT
RACISM

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What are Community Guidelines?

Community Guidelines can help foster meaningful conversations while avoiding confrontation or disrespect. Meaningful conversations do not have to be confrontational. We recommend community guidelines based on the premise of managing controversy with civility.

Benefits of Controversy with Civility

By agreeing to approach resolution of differences in a respectful, civil, manner the group encourages the expression of a range of personal and potentially useful views and ideas.

At the most basic level, this type of group process encourages problem awareness, improved solutions and productivity, by engaging in conversation that highlights the real issues.

Facilitates creative responses to problems.

Makes more efficient use of resources.

Facilitates personal development by making individuals aware of their impact on others.

Develop psychological maturity, becoming less egocentric by considering the reactions of others.

Makes organizational change possible by creating an atmosphere where the status quo can be challenged.

By understanding the nature of the disagreement and committing to find a satisfactory resolution with “civility”, the group provides a “safe” place to act with congruence and enhance the knowledge of others.

Actions useful to support Controversy with Civility

Repeat and Recall (“I believe you said this”) during group discussions

Engage in reflective discussions

Briefly distancing oneself from emotionally charged situations

Set ground rules for acceptable conduct and interactions during group meetings

Encourage voicing disagreements

Sample Community Guidelines

1. Welcome multiple viewpoints

Speak from your own experience by using “I statements.” Ask questions to understand the sources of disagreements.

2. Own your intentions and your impacts

Respect each other’s experiences and feelings by taking responsibility for the effects of your words. On the other side, if you have a strong reaction to something, let the group know. Be open to dialogue.

3. Work to recognize your privileges

Use this space to recognize and investigate your privileges (for example: class, gender, sexual orientation, ability). Honor the different experiences we all bring to this space.

4. Take risks: Lean into discomfort

We are all in process. Challenge yourself to contribute even if it is not perfectly formulated.

5. Step back

Share speaking time and try to speak after others who have not spoken.

6. Notice and name group dynamics in the moment

We are all responsible for this space. Be aware of how others are responding or not responding. Ask for a “time out” or dialogue if needed.

7. Actively listen

Use your energy to listen to what is said before thinking about how to respond. Notice when defensiveness and denial arise.

8. Challenging with care

Find ways to respectfully challenge others and be open to challenges of your own views. Think about how to question ideas without personal attacks.

9. Confidentiality

Share the message, not the messenger.

10. Break it down

Use simple language and background information when necessary. Ask for clarification if needed.

Community Guidelines require community to come together and set rules for acceptable conduct and interactions. The Student Government Association along with our staff advisors are committed to assisting all students, classes, and cohorts with the process if requested. Let us know how we can serve you and create a culture of respect, openness, and learning through difficult and complex conversations.

What is Racial Gaslighting?

Racial gaslighting is an attempt to manipulate one's experience in an effort to distort their reality. Whether it is intentional or not, it is psychological manipulation. Gaslighting typically happens in situations where there is a power dynamic whether it be through race, gender, or other identities. It is used to avoid accountability or avoid having to feel guilty for the fact that they benefit from something that harms you. It is important to understand what gaslighting is and be familiar with examples of it to reflect on our own statements and become better allies.

Examples of Racial Gaslighting:

I don't see color.

Are you sure that happened?

Racism doesn't exist anymore.

It was a joke, calm down.

In my opinion I don't think that's racist.

___ people are racist too.

It's not all about race.

Not all cops are bad.

Not all Black people experience racism.

Black people should just comply.

People might listen if they protested peacefully.

How can there be racism if we had a Black President?

There's no need to worry about the police if you are not doing anything illegal.

They weren't being racist, you just took it the wrong way.

Why can't they be peaceful? Martin Luther King Jr. was peaceful.

What is Debate Club Racism?

Debate club racism exists when people use debate like phrases and tactics to rebut the lived experiences Black people have had with racism. Similar to gaslighting, this tactic is used when there is something to gain from discrediting you. Racism is not a theoretical issue but a real human rights issue. It is important to remember that the intent of our actions and statements is not more important than the impact. When you ask someone to give you examples and prove their lived experience, they may feel as if you are trying to minimize their experience, dismiss them, and prove your own point rather than gain an understanding of them.

Examples of Debate Club Racism:

We can just agree to disagree.

I'm entitled to my opinion.

Where is the proof to your claims?

I don't agree with your claims.

Just to play devil's advocate here...

How Can I Become a Better Ally?

Becoming a better ally involves the willingness and openness to learn and unlearn behaviors to confront racist ideologies. This includes becoming aware of your own biases and gaining an understanding of how your privilege might interfere with your ability to connect to the lived experience of Black people and other People of Color. Educate yourself by reading books, research, documentaries, and articles recommended by the population from whom you are trying to learn from. Be sensitive and mindful of people's lived experience. Educate yourself on emotional oppression and be sensitive when asking questions and having discussions. We must also become comfortable being corrected. It is important to be held accountable when we're wrong. Accepting our mistakes without being defensive helps us grow.

How to Call Out Racist Statements:

Could you clarify what you meant by that?

That doesn't sound very funny to me. It sounds racist.

As your friend, I fell obligated to let you know that that remark was racist.

Is the person's race relevant to this story?

I didn't want to single you out before, but that comment made me uncomfortable. Here's why...

I know you were just trying to make a joke, but it was offensive.

I don't feel comfortable when you make comments like that.

How to Correct Someone Who Has Made a Racist Statement:

That's offensive because _____. I would appreciate if you didn't say anything like that.

When you said _____ it made me uncomfortable so could you stay away from saying that?

I'm sure you weren't trying to come across this way, but when you said _____ it was offensive.

How to Respond When Someone Corrects You:

Thank you for telling me. I will make sure to think before I speak.

I totally didn't even see it that way. I'm sorry and thank you for telling me.

You're right. Thank you for telling me.

How to Question Racist Remarks:

What informs your opinion?

Who taught you what you know about racism?

What do you gain by defending racism?

What do you lose by acknowledging racism?

Why are you centering your narrative over my lived experience?

Resources

A Social Change Model of Leadership Development: Guidebook version III. (1996) Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute.

AWARE-LA. Alliance of White Anti Racists Everywhere – Los Angeles. www.awarela.org

Dom Roberts. Domrobxrts.contactin.bio @domrobxrts

Sinead Bovell. www.wayetalks.com @sineadbovell

Ogorchukwu. Linktr.ee/ogorchukwuu @ogorchukwuu

Brittney R. Cobb @ablackfemaletherapist

Yolanda Renteria. @thisisyolandarenteria