

Faculty Dialogues Proposal
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Justification

We have great faculty doing amazing things. We also have a few areas where we are dysfunctional. Relative to most people in most jobs in most countries, faculty (especially tenured) have enormous privilege and autonomy. At this difficult moment in our community, we have the power to change the way we engage with one another, creating a more productive and collegial professional environment.

A critical mass of Middlebury faculty appears interested in reexamining the ways we teach and talk with one another. Consider a selection of faculty thoughts from the September 2017 faculty meeting:

- *We turned to a discussion of what a robust and inclusive sphere really is. There seemed to be a strong appetite for more of this kind of discussion...*
- *There is a sense of impotence and a lack of comfort as we prepare to engage the difficult issues ahead. We think the starting point may well be reconstructing trust.*
- *What should the role of faculty be when these issues or ideas are not part of one's scholarly or pedagogical focus? Should everyone be highly engaged in this process in pursuit of inclusivity?*
- *Can we be comfortable with the lack of safety inherent in not knowing yet what we believe and how we articulate it?*
- *There needs to be both free speech AND deep listening.*
- *Having conversations with small groups of students and potentially small groups of faculty is much more likely to get us through some of our current state.*
- *Need to be purposeful to stand up for intellectual inquiry.*
- *Our idea of ourselves as a community has been shattered – who are we?*
- *The tendency for institutions to go vertical in terms of organizations – why not go horizontal?*
- *How do we create time for faculty to learn? Learning is not optional – but in the context of our to-do lists, we treat it as such.*

This is a proposal for a horizontal, faculty-focused initiative to facilitate productive disagreements on campus. Heated critique and passionate dialogue are important and necessary. If those conversations take place in the absence of durable relationships, our educational project falters. Our faculty must lead the way, but we are often atomized. We interact most frequently with people in our own departments, but those settings can be the worst for difficult dialogues. Junior faculty worry that speaking up will hurt them at review. Senior faculty grow weary of fighting the same battles with their peers. Where can we start? A common thread across all faculty is their presence in the classroom.

Goals

- Build new relationships through which to overcome polarization and broach difficult subjects.
- Use insights generated from those interactions to develop a toolkit of practices.

Projects

- Convene faculty in small-group lunch discussions, to discuss and improve pedagogy.
- Develop a Middlebury handbook on community in the classroom.

Process

- Bottom-up approach, by Midd for Midd. Identify interested parties and talented practitioners.
- Identify similar concerns and ethics across various approaches to pedagogy and community. Insights from civic dialogue, restorative circles, inclusive pedagogy, democratic theory.

Big Questions for this Proposal

Why might we fail? A lack of time, money, or trust can get in the way of changing our practices in the classroom and with our peers. Changing our culture is not necessarily a resource-intensive exercise. I hope that faculty colleagues see in 2017 evidence that they must make the time for building relationships. There may be some ways the administration can create more time for faculty interaction. The lack of trust might be the biggest impediment to showing up, but here we are, and it can get better.

Who else will join? This is not a revolution, and we cannot promise one. We can identify a group of people already willing and able to contribute to a collegial and deliberative community.

- *Faculty from PEN America workshop:* Ata Anzali, David Miranda-Hardy, Jamie McCallum, Sujata Moorti, Caitlin Myers, Roberto Lint-Sagarena, John Schmitt, Sarah Stroup, Marion Wells, Kemi Fuentes-George, Erik Bleich
- *Faculty from 2017-18 Mentor Groups:* Michael Dash, Chong-suk Han, Carrie Wiebe, Molly Anderson, Leila Davis, Michael Sheridan, Brandon Baird, Peggy Nelson, Amanda Crocker, Jeff Howarth, Pete Schumer, David Miranda Hardy, Kathy Morse, Dana Yeaton, Lesley-Ann Giddings, Robert Moeller, Will Pyle, Michael Durst, Fernando Rocha, Mira Veikley, David Munro, Will Nash, Shawna Shapiro, Vickie Backus, Pete Johnson, Jessica L'Roe, Nic Poppe, David Stoll, Noah Graham, Jen Ortgren, Carrie Anderson, Karl Lindholm, Bill Waldron
- *Faculty leaders:* recognized by peers as capable mentors and facilitators: candidates include Larry Yarbrough, Jonathan Miller Lane, James Davis, Jon Isham, James Sanchez, Barbara Hofer.

Select References and Resources

Books

Hess, Diana E. *Controversy in the classroom: The democratic power of discussion*. Routledge, 2009.
Levine, Peter. *We are the ones we have been waiting for: The promise of civic renewal in America*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
Sunstein, Cass R. *# Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton, 2017.
Zehr, H. (2015). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Online Resources

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation <http://ncdd.org/>
On Being's Civil Conversations Project <http://www.civilconversationsproject.org/>
Tufts Institute for Democracy and Higher Ed <https://idhe.tufts.edu>
Hillel's Ask Big Questions Initiative <http://askbigquestions.org/our-work/themes/civil-discourse>

Faculty discussion group topics (Initial Brainstorm)

Small groups of 5-6 faculty agree to meet six times a semester for lunch (every two weeks, provided by the college). Max number of participants each semester will be around 50. The only commitment that the different members make is to show up for every session.

Each meeting has an assigned topic. Each discussion may be led by a different faculty member (need 12 facilitators total, and I will attend all). A sample of topics is below.

1. Introductions
 - Most fun thing you have done in the past week.
 - Describe your own undergraduate experience. What did you like/dislike?
 - Challenging stereotypes: “when people think of the theater department, they think we are X when actually we are Y” or “I have heard that program A is B. Is that fair?”
 - Hardest moment in the classroom in the past year.
2. Mentors and Models
 - How did you learn how to teach? Who do you admire on this campus?
 - What are the costs and benefits of being an activist-scholar?
3. Diversity
 - What does diversity look like in the social sciences, humanities, sciences, and arts?
 - How do changes in the Middlebury student body affect your teaching?
4. Academic Freedom and Risk-taking
 - How does your ideal vision of academia meet up with the reality here at Middlebury?
 - What allows you to take risks as a teacher or scholar here? What factors get in the way?
5. Classroom Climate
 - How do you create trust in the classroom?
 - How do you decide whether and how to approach campus topics (like Charles Murray, student mental health, race) in the classroom?
6. Personal and Professional
 - How much do you share your individual story with your students? Why or why not?

Draft Timeline (through June 2019)

1. Spring 2018: outreach, innovation, research
 - Recruit faculty leaders–Lunch, mentor groups.
 - 3 final deliberation cafes (FFI), paired groups – athletes, debate team, CRE
 - Use faculty survey network data to describe faculty relationships (Phil Murphy @ MIIS)
 - Draft list of teaching techniques

2. Fall Semester 2018: student assistance with research, engaging faculty
 - faculty lunch groups – meet every two weeks, model on mentor group lunches (goal – 8 groups of 6 each).
 - road-test teaching techniques with small group of faculty. Follow-up survey.
 - new course (PSCI 433/IGST 433). Democracy, Deliberation, and Global Citizenship: a listening and speaking senior seminar in PSCI.
 - Research Middlebury faculty case studies with students in IGST/PSCI seminar

3. Winter 2019:
 - Co-teach “Democracy, Deliberation, and Global Citizenship” with Steve Viner (Phil)
 - distribute data from teaching techniques to core group, solicit feedback

4. Spring 2019
 - continue faculty lunch groups
 - April 2019: revise handbook (user friendly PDF guide connected to online resources)
 - May 2019: distribute handbook in print and online

Request from Sarah Stroup (granted in January 2018)

1. 4. Budget to feed lunch to 50 faculty six times each semester in 2018-19 (~\$5000), as well as help finding space (Jim Ralph at CTLR has agreed to help with logistics).

2. travel support of \$700 (\$218 for 400 miles round trip, \$30 parking, \$250 one night hotel, \$195 registration fee) to participate in one-day workshop on May 24, 2018 with Essential Partners, “Dialogue Across Differences: An Introduction to Reflective Structured Dialogue” (College Rabbi Danielle Stillman completed a six-day training course with EP staff in January 2018).

2. permission to alter teaching load in Spring 2019 to 1 course with 40 students (rather than 2 courses with ~20 students each). (permission granted in December 2017)

3. \$1200 for Spring 2019 to hire student assistant (\$12/hour for 8 hours/week) to collect, design, and disseminate materials for teaching handbook.