

CIVIL DISCOURSE LAB

Mission Statement

The Civil Discourse Lab strengthens the ability of our students and community members to conduct meaningful conversations, collaborate, and weigh decisions around sometimes difficult but important topics to a civil society through research, engaged teaching, and praxis.

Co-Directors: Professor Renee Heath and Professor Jennifer Borda
Postdoctoral Research and Teaching Associate: Professor Lydia Reinig

CDL LAB AFFILIATES/ EXTRACURRICULAR WORK



Lab Students

Description: Any student (or UNH alumni) from any major may “Affiliate.” This means they have attended at least one event at which point we begin tracking the hours they are committing to extracurricular learning and training. Your affiliation will stay active until you graduate as long as you attend one activity per semester, unless you wish to stay on as an alumni participant.

CDL Events

Events are approved through the CDL and include campus lectures that we determine to be relevant to strengthening civil discourse (e.g. MUB lecture series, Sidore Lecture series, OMSA Real Talks, etc.). Affiliates will receive a weekly email on Mondays announcing Lab-approved events. Lab Fellows will take attendance at events to help you get credit for your participation. To activate your affiliation, you simply need to inform us and attend at least one CDL- approved event and attend the two

mandatory meetings per semester (beginning and end of term).

Lab Hours

Students who attend events and facilitate for campus dialogues/deliberation/civic participation events also earn Lab hours. Students who achieve 25 hours of Lab time will be honored for their service at our end of semester mandatory meeting (but really, it’s a celebration). All students will receive a list of extracurricular courses and hours they participated in upon graduation. We will annually hold a workshop to help you incorporate this experience into your resume. If you know of an event or seminar that should be considered for Lab Hours please let us know.

Facilitation Opportunities & Experience Pipeline

CDL Affiliates must first participate in a CDL-designed or co-hosted event. Then, Affiliates will have the opportunity to serve as a notetaker or to co-facilitate (shadowing a more experienced Affiliate or Lab Fellow). Students who have logged significant hours in Lab approved events are the first to be called on to facilitate for campus needs, such as Stories and Voices, programming at the 3S Art Space in Portsmouth, or Museum of Art, UNH community conversations.

Criteria for Extra Curricular Activities that Count toward Lab Hours

- Events that promote and understand equity & diversity.
- Events that teach or allow for facilitation of dialogue, deliberation, collaboration, and mediation.
- Events that deepens understanding of difficult and challenging topics.

Cornerstone Courses in Communication:

- CMN 597 Introduction to Civil Discourse, Professor Lydia Reinig (Fall)
- CMN 630 Psychology of Communication, Professor Sheila McNamee (Fall)
- CMN 703 Democratic Deliberation, Professor Jen Borda (Fall)
- CMN 562 Collaborative Leadership, Professor Renee Heath (Spring)
- CMN 662 Public Dialogue and Deliberation, Professor Renee Heath (Spring)
- CMN 742 Dialogue and Teamwork, Professor Jack Lannamann (Spring)
- See other complementary classes on the CDL bulletin board outside of 151 Horton (CMN Main Office)

Leadership Opportunities: Lab Fellows

Fellows serve as lead facilitators at events; conduct facilitator training, interviews, and transcribe data; have opportunities to lead on a CDL project; collaborate on design of deliberative dialogue events; develop facilitation guides and facilitator training materials; earn up to \$500 (50 hours of service) per semester

Leadership Opportunities: Assistant Program Director

This is the premier student leadership position in the CDL. The student holding this paid internship maintains the tracking of CDL affiliates, hours, and events, and communicates weekly with students. Other duties include: coordinating social media and publicity; program design and lead project manager for select CDL events; lesson planning and teaching facilitation training during office hours; event planning and logistics for CDL events and guest speakers; running facilitation debriefs and reporting back to the directors; attend meetings with outside stakeholders and Lab Directors for strategic planning; and other needs as they arise.

Civil Discourse Values Statement

Gracious Conflict - We believe in a civility that invites constructive conflict, and gracious contestation-- a civility that sincerely seeks to understand and learn from one another in creating a just world. For some the word “civil” is code for suppression of other forms of expression, such as emotion (oft attributed as a gendered weakness), or anger (dismissive to persons who have long experienced social injustice). We believe that civil discourse does not mean an absence of conflict or an absence of expression of conflict. Indeed, we cannot arrive at creative or just decisions if we do not embrace our differences constructively. Civil discourse does mean that we approach conflict with grace and that we endeavor to respect those with whom we disagree

Safety versus Comfort - Civil discourse does not mean that our discourse will never cause pain. Sometimes very meaningful conversations are so because they were painful to experience. But we do not seek to inflict pain on others when we approach them in the spirit of civil discourse. We seek safe spaces to communicate and acknowledge they are not always comfortable spaces.

Ground Rules - Civil discourse means that there are ground rules. Together we create the standards for how we should engage with one another, recognizing that rules of engagement are an ethical exercise. For example, civil discourse applies some of our core principles of good communication such as not name calling, mindful listening, and owning our positions.

Respect - We believe that being civil and politically correct are not one in the same. To be civil in conversations demands that we grant respect to the perspectives and interpretations of others, even if we cannot possibly agree with them. Political correctness does not seek to understand. It is not sincere. In contrast, we demand sincerity in the spaces that we create.

Diverse Knowledge - Civil discourse acknowledges many different sources, types of knowledge, and expertise. Civil discourse promotes equality in the expression of different perspectives, but that does not mean that all perspectives are equally valid. Through dialogic deliberation we are committed to negotiating this tension.

An Acknowledgement of Resistance - Civil discourse does not mean we discount discourses of resistance or anger as a way of moving society towards justice. We acknowledge a space for adversarial discourse in the context of a democratic society, especially as it has the power to give voice to the marginalized. That said, we seek equity for marginalized perspectives through our commitment to civil discourse that is not driven by resistance but by understanding and learning.

Contact Us: Civil.Discourse@unh.edu

Website: <https://mypages.unh.edu/civildiscourselab>

Follow us on social media to keep up with events!

Facebook: @UNHCivilDiscourse

Instagram: unhcivildiscourselab

Twitter: @UNHCDDL