

Civil Discourse Group Discussion Guide

UTSA Top Scholars

UTSA's Top Scholars are ready to lead the charge of elevating civil discourse on campus. By participating in training on leading difficult conversations, engaging in civil discourse, and [dangerous speech](#), Top Scholars are positioned to lead discussion sessions and are available to other student organizations for peer-to-peer consulting. By enlisting the help of faculty and staff from across campus, they are committed to representing a variety of views in all discussions.

The following questions can be adapted for any student organization wishing to host a meaningful group discussion around the issues of free speech and civil discourse.

- Start with a brief intro regarding why we are here (referencing any recent debates or activities, and behaviors that followed) [1 min]
- Review of previously agreed upon values and "rules of engagement" [4 min]
 - Spend 2-3 minutes adding any "rules" that participants think should be adopted for the discussion
 - What's said here stays here; what's learned here leaves here
- Review of student code of conduct, Roadrunner Creed and UTSA core values [2 min]
- Challenge participants to consider their own behaviors, and seriously think about whether or not they are upholding UTSA's values. Is their behavior fitting for a UTSA student? [2 min]
- Facilitated discussion [35 min]
 - What does a civil discourse look like? How can we engage in a civil discourse?
 - When students fail to follow the premises of civil discourse, what factors are at play?
 - How do students "in the middle" feel?
 - Discuss the importance of empathy, listening for understanding, and speaking to be understood, not to convince.
 - Understanding how emotion can overtake the message.
- Review of items discussed. Reiteration of living our UTSA values. [2 minutes]
- Issue a challenge - can this group act as leaders in helping fellow students to understand and embrace the tenets of civil discourse? Can the participants be leaders in this effort in the coming months? [3 min]