

Let's Talk

Becoming a campus of facilitated conversations

This white paper is submitted by the IGR Working Group as an outcome of our Visioning Retreat held on Thursday, January 11, 2018. We invite other members of our campus to join our community of practice and to help develop a plan of action for advancing facilitated intergroup conversations at CU-Boulder.

Challenge: Embracing the new student population

Every year, with each incoming class, our undergraduate student population is increasingly diverse by any definition of social identity or self-identified description: notably by socio-economic status; race and ethnicity; gender identity and expression; and other post-traditional categories such as emancipated minors, veterans, and adult learners.

This demographic change is a national trend, but unlike the rest of the country which is predicted to experience a decade-long decline in enrollments, Colorado and its region will experience a steady, significant, and simultaneous increase in absolute numbers as well as diverse composition of high-school graduates bound for college.

This growing population of students is often defined by us as *what it is not*, because measured against our campus traditions, it is neither white nor affluent, not from college-educated families, nor of traditional college age. We have categorized this population as an historical minority, assessed by its deficits and defined by its marginality.

We are alerted by the new WICHE report that these “projections represent a new challenge to the status quo at institutions, one that points toward increased efforts in recruiting minority students and poor students – and keeping them on campus” (Seltzer 2016). As a highly selective 4-year public university, we *traditionally* ask our incoming students if they are ready for us. Now we must *innovatively* ask ourselves: is our 21st century flagship institution ready for them?

Our new incoming students are the “new majority” who define themselves by who they are, where they are from, what they know, why they are here, when they will graduate, and how they will succeed (Ross 2016). And they will categorize, assess, and define their campus or classroom experiences based on their own traditions, rooted in their demographic and geographic identities. Institutions in the western states must adapt: “They will need to brace if they’re not embracing the new student population,” warns Joe Garcia, our former Lieutenant Governor who now serves as WICHE President (Seltzer 2016).

If we are concerned about *their* success and *their* belonging, about *our* readiness and *our* inclusiveness, and about closing the gap between these two measures of inclusive excellence, then we should listen more, invite our students to speak more, and help all students learn how to listen and engage across difference.

We need to become a campus of facilitated conversations.

Strategy: Becoming a campus of facilitated conversations

Those of us who have volunteered as members of the IGR Working Group are faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and staff from across campus who practice dialogue and deliberation in our daily work – in classrooms, research projects, training workshops, diversity summits, and community spaces. We see ourselves as a network of volunteers, convening under a working title, serving a growing need, and proposing in this white paper a vision of CU-Boulder as a “campus of facilitated conversation” that speaks to our values as a flagship and listens to our concerns as a community.

Because this vision is emerging from our daily practices, we believe that we have a listening solution to a telling problem: how do we engage one another across differences to build together a community embracing change? Our

answer is, “Let’s talk” in organized, facilitated ways that allow for a recognition of the intersectional social identities we each hold. That is to say, if we are serious about arriving at an academic future(s), built on a foundation(s) of excellence, that rewards *diversity, inclusion, and excellence* in teaching and in learning, then we need to create a plan of action for sustained engagement across many intersectional social identities on campus. We need to develop opportunities for such sustained engagement between students as well as among faculty, staff, and our stake-holding groups on campus.

We draw on intergroup dialogue as a model for such sustained engagement across differences, but we recognize that intergroup dialogue may look different at CU Boulder than at other institutions and that “intergroup dialogue” may not even be the best term for what we envision. However, because intergroup dialogue acknowledges, in face-to-face conversations, the plurality of our identities, values, and experiences, and how they play out in power structures, it can facilitate new levels of understanding, relating, and action, thus fostering a collective vision and establishing a common ground.

Here and now, we are inspired by the daily work of Boulder Talks in the College of Media, Communication, and Information as well as CU Dialogues in the School of Education, and other “bright spots” of dialogue practiced in campus units as wide ranging as the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program; Office for Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement; Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance; Organization and Employee Development; Student Academic Success Center; The Program in Writing and Rhetoric; and University Libraries, among so many other home bases of our practitioners.

Hereafter, we envision a broader system to promote sustained engagement across social identities that draws on our existing community of practice (and other yet-unidentified partners on campus) and evolves into a collaborative center for intergroup relations. We envision an organization on campus that could be called upon to address multiple tasks in intergroup relations at multiple times for multiple groups, at all levels of the university community (faculty, staff, and students) and one that connects the resources and skillsets that we already have. Ultimately, such a center might be comparable to the Diversity & Social Justice Education (DiversityEd) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign or the Program on Intergroup Relations at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, each model a nationally recognized hub for teaching, research, and outreach on intergroup relations.

At this juncture our group is still visioning, like the rest of the campus.

Proposal: Talking our way into the future

We propose that the campus works to implement the following short-term (1-3 years), medium-term (3-5 years), and long-term (5-10 years) goals in order to develop wider systems to promote sustained engagement across intersectional social identities at CU Boulder. Such a tiered process must involve identifying and bolstering existing programs and personnel in order to build out a broader initiative that draws on and draws together existing expertise.

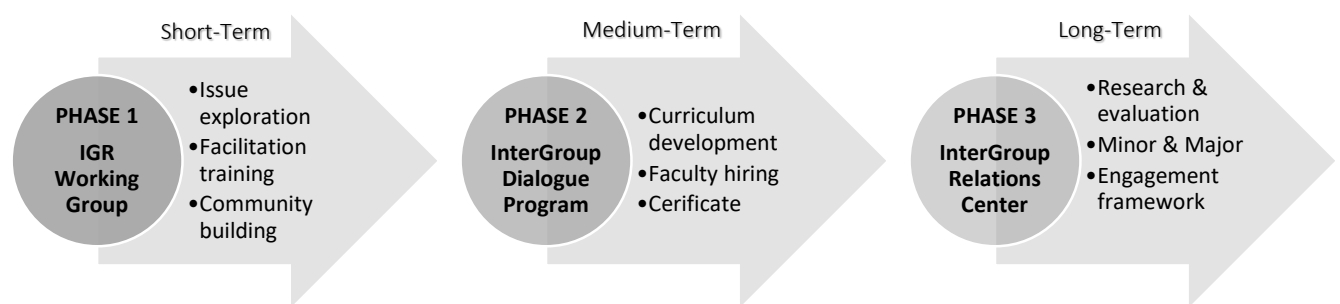


Figure 1. Short-Term, Medium-Term, and Long-Term Goals.

At this time, we ask for the support of campus leadership, as well as for its recognition that building out intergroup relations at CU cannot be the work of a collection of volunteers. The IGR Working Group emerged out of a shared priority that the university needs to expand its efforts in developing intergroup relations. We invite others to join us in calling for such programming. As a group, we hope to assist campus leadership in identifying mechanisms and resource needs for reaching the short-, medium- and long-term goals outlined above.

This is an historical turning point on our campus with so many visioning initiatives asking us to think, talk, and decide on our future as a flagship. And when these highly participatory initiatives are written-up into recommendations for action, dare we stop talking? Let's keep talking and use facilitated, intergroup dialogue as one ongoing method of participatory inquiry *and* accountable action that fulfills our vision of becoming the "new flagship of the 21st century," not as an ink-on-paper promise, but as an intergroup purpose that more fully hears the voices of its faculty, students, and staff.

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Sources

Ross, Kathleen A. *Breakthrough Strategies: Classroom-Based Practices to Support New Majority College Students*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2016.

Seltzer, Rick. "High school graduates to drop in number and be increasingly diverse." *Inside Higher Ed*, December 6, 2016. www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/12/06/high-school-graduates-drop-number-and-be-increasingly-diverse.

Resources

Diversity & Social Justice Education (DiversityEd). The Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. www.oii.illinois.edu/diversityed/about-diversity-ed

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation. www.ncdd.org/

Program on Intergroup Relations. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. www.igr.umich.edu