

TEDTalks

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LEDTalks

LCCC ■ EXPLORES ■ DIFFERENCE

As an institution, we must engage in wide-ranging, open-minded discourse with civility and objectivity grounded in what is best for our students as well as ourselves.

LCCC Aspirational Value

Project Area: (5) Program Start-Up

This project is designed to pilot a contemporary diversity issue series that creates and builds upon a foundational core of LCCC personnel trained in effective dialogue techniques. Success in this project will also impact (1) Instructional Effectiveness (skills necessary by faculty to understand and meet the needs of diverse students), (2) Completion, and Success After (preparation for working and living in a diverse society), (3) Student Support (increased awareness of needs and understanding of LCCC support available), (4) Strategic Plan (Goal 3 An Organizational Culture to Thrive in the Future), and (6) Organizational Change (building the communication skills needed to effectively work with others through times of change).

Executive Summary

Project Title: LED Talks: LCCC ■ Explores ■ Difference

A Crucial Conversations, Civil and Cultural Discourse Series

Funding Estimate: \$35,000 (initial year, approximately half in subsequent years)

Timeline: 2-3 years

Overarching Goals

- Raise campus and community understanding of civil discourse and individual skills needed to foster group and individual dialogue.
- Train on how to conduct individual and group conversations and discussions surrounding polarized and controversial topics to produce more productive and meaningful results.
- Raise awareness and educate on issues affecting diverse populations.
- Assist faculty, staff and students in articulating needs and securing support for all members of the campus community.
- Market the series to campus and community and state/regional agencies to create workshops surrounding diverse societal perspectives, hosted at Laramie County Community College.

Project Description

Problem:

The campus of LCCC comprises one of the most diverse populations of any other area in Wyoming. Our campus includes students, employees and visitors of widely differing backgrounds, experiences and aspirations. We strive to meet the needs of all these groups and are committed to preparing our students for the ever-changing world that they will face in the future. Working with others who are different from us, is not always easy: social, intellectual and personal variables intervene in group and individual relationships. Without the skills to understand and discuss differences, we often do not know what our students and colleagues truly need – and what we can do to improve the success of all members of LCCC.

Most of us are raised to see difference as a challenge and disagreement as a “competition” that must be won. Thus, when discussions center on polarized and controversial issues, dialogue can become

aggressive and lacks the mutual respect participants involved must have for one another. This results in the discussion becoming negative and much more about personal attacks rather than the true issue, which prevents the outcome of the discussion from being positive and productive. Scott London, in his 2015 article *Thinking Together: The Power of Deliberative Dialogue* observed, "As a journalist, I had been trained to listen for conflicting viewpoints—that, after all, was the essence of a good story. But as I listened to citizens deliberate in community forums and town meetings, I made a significant discovery: people's disagreements on issues were usually the starting point, not the final outcome, of their deliberations." Conflicting viewpoints in settings such as classrooms, open forums, and open group meetings may begin with discussion, but disagreements on the issues tend to cause communication to become negative and shift the focus away from the true topic of discussion.

The Board of Trustees and President Schaffer acknowledge that communication on campus between individuals at the interpersonal level is an issue that needs to be addressed after reviewing results from campus climate surveys and focus groups conducted on campus. The diverse population and ideologies represented on our campus from students, staff, and faculty can lead to conflicts when communicating with one another especially when discussions surround topics of change. This project seeks to build campus-wide skills in fostering open dialogue on any difficult topic.

Election year is quickly approaching and 2015 has already been full of polarizing events that have sparked arguments dealing with controversial subject matter. Andrea Leskes (2013) in *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, makes a strong argument that college campuses have an opportunity to provide students with the skills and knowledge to become informed, civilly engaged citizens. The impact of "anonymous" social media outlets (a platform used by most of our students) in fostering aggressive and uncivil behavior continues to grow. We need to ensure that the tools or skills – and models of those using these skills – to discuss topics of this nature are more widely available to the LCCC community.

Project Structure:

LED Talks: LCCC ■ Explores ■ Difference - *A Crucial Conversations, Civil and Cultural Discourse Series* is an opportunity to increase group and individual dialogue skills on campus by focusing on training individuals on how to engage in crucial conversations and civil discourse techniques and to also allow the opportunity to put these skills into practice with additional workshops dealing with specific difference topics seen as an issue of interest at LCCC. This project has the potential to shift the way we communicate with one another in our campus community, while raising awareness of contemporary issues and needs.

Dialogue Skills Workshops:

The series is structured to provide foundational dialogue training to a critical mass of LCCC faculty and staff (to provide the needed leadership core to foster cross-campus skills). Key personnel in areas ranging from the Foundation, to Human Resources, to Academic Affairs, to Student Services, to Institutional Effectiveness, have already agreed to participate in the dialogue training and additional colleagues will be sought through an open invitation and specific recommendations.

For the foundational dialogue skills (1) civil discourse training will be provided for guiding group discussions - civil discourse and deliberative dialogue practices have achieved positive results at institutions such as Kansas State University (KSU) through the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy and Minnesota State University Mankato. The project leader, Zeke Sorenson has training

from KSU to provide these workshops and has done so with student leadership groups at LCCC with great success. And (2) Crucial Conversations™ training will be provided for individual discussion skill building. Crucial Conversations™ has achieved significant results in thousands of organizations, and through the improvement of individual communication and has shown demonstrable impact on systems change (where shared understanding of vision and process are vital to success). The LCCC Division of Workforce Services and Lifelong Learning has a Crucial Conversations™ trainer on their roster, and has offered this training to the community in the past.

Issue Awareness Sessions:

After participants complete workshops and training in civil discourse and deliberative dialogue, additional sessions about specific diversity and cultural topics, relevant to LCCC's needs, will be provided. Participants at these sessions will not need to have completed the dialogue training, but other trained personnel will be participating to help guide the dialogue process. Although the topics selected for the issues awareness sessions will be chosen (by the project team, with input from the campus) as needs arise, three potential topics have been discussed for the pilot year (additional numbers of sessions will be offered in subsequent years, but sufficient time needs to be taken in the first year to have the foundational dialogue training completed). The format for these sessions is expected to be ~ 20 minutes of presentation on the topic followed by ~ 45 minutes of guided discussion on how the topic affects people individually and at LCCC. Particular attention will be paid to effective strategies to apply the specific issue knowledge to real-life situations that participants are encountering at LCCC.

Mental Wellness

Mental wellness session will focus upon key topics from the eight-hour Mental Health First Aid training currently offered by LCCC's Counselling and Wellness area. The session will provide information on mental wellness and techniques to effectively work with students and colleagues needing mental wellness support.

SafeZone

The SafeZone session will build upon the dialogue training by looking specifically at issues students, faculty, staff and visitors face as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals and/or their allies on the LCCC campus. With the passage of several pieces of legislation, awareness of – and conflict around – this issue has arisen. Historically, with the passage of any US civil rights legislation, there has been a backlash (e.g. Brown vs. Board of Education) and students and staff need accurate information and dialogue skills to navigate the coming year.

Disability and Accessibility

This session will be offered by Disability Support Services. Disability encompasses many factors and can impact many aspects of an individual's life. Traditionally this is an area where individuals struggle to understand and appropriately support individuals with disabilities. Randall Butt, Wyoing Office of Civil Right coordinator will assist with this session.

All issues sessions will provide participants with strategies and resources for understanding and discussing the needs and concerns of the specific community, resources available at LCCC and in the community, how to advocate for these groups – or individuals within these groups, and the current

legislation and LCCC policy impacting organizational requirements and support for these groups and individuals.

Innovative Aspect of the Project:

The strength of this project is that it creates a cadre of personnel trained in dialogue techniques that will have the ability improve campus communication as whole through their everyday work, their participation on committees and task forces and by serving as a resource as needed. While much of the issue session training is currently offered in “lecture” format, the LED Talk’s presentation and guided dialogue creates a more effective learning cycle akin to Kolb’s Learning Theory. By directly applying these techniques to contemporary issues and clearly articulated LCCC group and individual needs, current organizational processes can be more effectively assessed and addressed.

Goals and Objectives

- Goal: Promote more productive interpersonal and inter-group communication on campus
 - *Objective: Provide campus employees and students skills and tools to have conversations and dialogues in a more productive manner to promote mutual respect in times of disagreement.*
 - Outcome: Workshop participants will have improved interpersonal communication skills and through application of these skills will assist in fostering more effective discussions and dialogues
- Goal: Increase awareness and understanding of difference on campus
 - *Objective: Provide campus employees and students educational opportunities to learn about cultural and diverse topics that affect under represented populations.*
 - Outcome: Workshop participants will have a more meaningful understanding of marginalized populations and the issues that affect them.

Evaluation: Participants will be given pre and post assessments to measure the impact the workshops have on them. Additionally, qualitative assessment can be conducted in the form of short interviews to determine how they felt about the workshops and if they deem value in going through them. Statistics from Campus Clarity and other existing surveys (i.e. CSSE) assessments will monitored for aspects that align with this training.

Project Budget

Crucial Conversation Workshop: \$300.00 per participant to pay for course and course materials for 30 participants on campus = **\$9000.00**

-These participants having gone through the course would be excellent facilitators for campus workshops in civil discourse and deliberative dialogues.

Materials/Literature for Workshops conducted by staff and faculty on campus = **\$4000.00**

Funds for food and refreshments at workshops = **\$2000.00**

Funds to bring speakers to campus relative to workshop topics = **\$15,000**

Funds to provide opportunities for professional development for project team=**\$5000.00**

Total Funding Estimate: \$35,000

Timeline

This project would take place over the next two years with the hopes that the workshop series could continue and grow after the second year. The funding above is indicative of the first two years. The majority of the first year would be a dialogue skills and issue planning and research year in which the following would take place:

- Develop research based practices on how to workshop topics such as:
 - Civil Discourse
 - Deliberative Dialogue
 - Crucial Conversation Training
 - History of Equality
 - Diversity and Privilege
 - Cultural Sensitivity
 - Examining values and biases
 - Cybershaming and Cyberbullying
 - Safe Zone Training
- Assess Campus Community on what modes of training they would like to participate in
- Research existing models and best practices for covering topics of a controversial nature
- Develop a calendar and timeline of when to roll out workshops for the following year
- Develop content for workshops based on research and assessment.
- Research and price speakers and programming that would align with the topics of the workshops.
- Work on getting other staff and faculty trained to assist and eventually lead workshops, so more can be offered.

The second year would consist of offering the workshops to the campus community as well as inviting community members and businesses to participate. If successful, in the third year these workshops lead by LCCC faculty and staff could be marketed and offered to agencies and institutions throughout the state of Wyoming and surrounding regions.

Project Team

Project Lead: Zeke Sorenson, Program Manager for Campus Activities and Multicultural Engagement
He has an extensive background in multicultural education and working with diversity issues. He studied communication with an emphasis on multicultural education at Minnesota State University Mankato for his bachelor's degree. There, he participated heavily on the speech and debate team and performed speeches and argumentative literature pieces on topics of LGBT inclusivity, representation of minorities in media, cultural appropriation and assimilation, and developing empathy for the Other. Zeke continued his studies at Kansas State University where he taught public speaking, coached for the speech and debate team, employed by the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, and served as a board member for the Flint Hills Human Rights Project. His studies focused primarily on multicultural and gender communication. Examples of work he has done in these areas include the following:

- Assisted and facilitated focus groups and discussion in town hall style meetings in which community members discussed local controversial legislative issues.

- Presented and spoke to the Manhattan City Council regarding the Human Rights Ordinance lack of inclusivity of certain populations.
- Project Coordinator on qualitative research focusing on the diverse multicultural population of Garden City, KS and efforts made to improve cross cultural relations.

Project Members:

Holly Manning: Communication Faculty. Also has experience using deliberative dialogue in her classrooms.

Victoria Steel: Director of Grants and Special Projects.

Nathan Huseman: English Faculty, Student Allies for Equality advisor

Rebecca Reese: Senior Instructional Designer, Student Allies for Equality advisor

Karen Reynolds: Fine Arts Administrative Assistant

James Miller: Special Assistant, Vice President of Academic Affairs

Chrissy Renfro: Academic Advisor

Brynn Elliott: Disability Support Services

Mindy Falkner: Counselling and Wellness

Lisa Trimble: LCCC Foundation

Supplemental Materials

<http://www.scottlondon.com/reports/dialogue.html>

<http://www.projectcivildiscourse.org/>