

A Call for Leadership: Political Polarization and Civil Discourse at Duke University  
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Americans are more politically polarized than ever, and college campuses are no exception (Dimock 2021). In 2017, the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute's yearly freshman survey found that more students identified as liberal or far-left and conservative or far-right than ever before (Eagan et al 2016).<sup>1</sup> Although increased partisan identification amongst college students is not inherently negative, this phenomenon becomes problematic when it is accompanied by a breakdown in civil discourse and increase in affective polarization, or dislike and distrust toward those from the other party (Druckman 2020).

Most recently, breakdowns in effective communication can be observed through what some have coined as "cancel culture," or calls to take away a person's social status because of controversial statements or problematic behaviors (Romano 2019). Campus protests against controversial speakers are frequently criticized as an example of this phenomenon (Romano 2019). For example, in October of 2021, protests at MIT resulted in the university revoking their invitation to have a scientist speak about climate change (Mounk 2021). The scientist had previously made comments criticizing affirmative action, which was not the topic he was invited to speak about (Mounk 2021).

Discourse surrounding whether a person has actually committed a "cancellable" act is often rife with intolerance and insults directed away from the "cancelled" person. Instead, people who disagree about whether or not the person should be cancelled often attack each other viciously. This breakdown in effective communication should be of concern for university administrators: it is reflective of broader trends in national political discourse focused on insults, half-truths, lies, and intolerance. This lack of civil discourse has fostered distrust between partisans and toward government, ultimately culminating in eruptions of violence like that seen during the January 6<sup>th</sup> riots protesting the outcome of the 2020 election of Joe Biden.

To help reverse these trends, college campuses should be places of free and open discourse (barring that which threatens the well-being of others or demeans on account of identity or status). Duke University enshrined the importance of promoting "an intellectual environment built on a commitment to free and open inquiry" in its mission statement; yet, many students report self-censoring on political topics around their friends in Professor John Rose's Political Polarization class, Political Polarization (Rose 2021). Duke College Republicans has also disbanded, at least partially because conservatives at Duke fear being ostracized for their views

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<sup>1</sup> Three national surveys from 1970 to 2015 found that more college students identify as very conservative or far right than previous generations, while the percentage of students identifying as far left has remained about the same (Twenge, Honeycutt, Prislín, and Sherman 2016). However, a majority of students identify as liberal overall (1368). The share of college students in each generation from 1970 to 2015 identifying as middle-of-the-road has also decreased, showing an increase in political polarization (1372). Although the share of college students identifying as extremely liberal or extremely conservative has increased since 1970, the share of adults identifying as independent has increased (1381).

(Blackburn 2020). It is an imperative that Duke University and other educational institutions prioritize free and open discourse to set a new political norm for the century.

Historically, severe political polarization has weakened democracies across the world by threatening social cohesion and subsequently support for democracy itself (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). As the next generation of leaders, however, young adults on college campuses are in a unique position to normalize civil discourse on controversial political topics. Using principles of psychology and conflict studies, Duke University can promote a campus culture which prioritizes civil discourse and reduces political polarization. After defining civil discourse, this report will outline 1) a civil discourse pilot program for first-years, 2) principles for the classroom, and 3) principles for extracurricular programming.

### **What is Civil Discourse?**

Inspired by Paolo Freire's critical discourse theory, this paper defines civil discourse as a tool through which to orient yourself to others (Freire 2004). Civil discourse is not the end goal; rather, it is a means through which citizens can effectively express their identities, ideas, and commitment to democracy.

The following principles can increase the effectiveness of civil discourse:

1. *No violence.* Civil discourse cannot begin with physical, verbal, or emotional attacks toward other people based on their identity (Leskes 2013, 3). It is essential that all parties demonstrate a respect for and a commitment to enabling discourse between one another. Personal attacks only disrupt free and open discourse and solidify hostility between parties. One way to avoid violent discourse is to center discussions around issues rather than people. Individuals engaging in civil discourse must respect each other for their commitment to dialogue. What is up for debate is ideas and opinions, not individuals' attributes, social groups, or identities.
2. *Listen.* Listening thoughtfully to others' ideas is as important to civil discourse as reasoned, vibrant discussion (Schwartz and Ritter 2019). While not all ideas deserve to be heard (violent ideas, false ideas), practicing active listening is an essential tool for testing one's knowledge and understanding complex topics. Listening also enables participants engaging in civil discourse to meet one another at the true meaning of each other's arguments, rather than arguing over a misunderstanding. It is especially important to listen when you do not understand an issue. This will promote learning, growth, and reasoned discussion (University of Texas at San Antonio, hereafter UTSA).
3. *Amplify key stakeholders.* Civil discourse must center the voices of those most affected by the topic being discussed. People do not have the time nor capacity to listen to all perspectives on a given issue, and not all perspectives are as relevant as others (Schwartz and Ritter 2019). The perspectives of students who are directly affected by the issue at hand must be heard to ground discussion in relevant experience.
4. *Use facts.* Civil discourse thrives when individuals speak knowledgeably on a topic and contest grey areas (areas where the literature is not conclusive, interpretations of

existing literature). Using this reasoned inquiry to probe complex topics through fact-based discourse can foster a reasoned exchange of ideas (Leskes 2013, 3).

5. *You can be passionate* – civil discourse is not synonymous with politeness. The Harvard Kennedy School of Public Policy distinguishes between civility-as-politeness and civility which strengthens political discourse (Delaney 2019). Civil discourse in this sense is an active participation in and commitment to democracy as a cooperative project. This means that passion and robust argumentation are important, given that the other principles of civil discourse are followed. Calls for politeness may be used to silence marginalized viewpoints instead of amplifying them when they are key stakeholders.
6. *Agreement is not required*. Civil discourse is an exercise which represents a shared commitment to democracy and representative government, rather than a shared worldview. Schools and universities are one of the few institutions where constituents can experience democratic values by participating in the creation of programs and voting on rules within their institutions (Crosby 2018, 2). Thus, the practice of civil discourse in schools promotes democratic habits in political life. Constructive discourse also promotes positive interactions between competing groups (Cleven and Saul 2021, 122) and reduces prejudice (Crisp and Beck 2005, 173). Therefore, civil discourse is an important tool beyond agreement and disagreement.

Although robust civil discourse is an essential component of democracy, there are legitimate criticisms of its practice. Some fear that a commitment to civility will platform harmful views. However, the above principles of civil discourse explicitly ban views which target other people on the basis of their identity. Nevertheless, marginalized groups can be subject to microaggressions, or comments which unintentionally communicate a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a minority group (“Microaggressions” n.d.). To reduce the frequency of microaggressions, discussions surrounding sensitive or highly polarized topics should be moderated by students or teachers who are trained using principles of transformative conflict mediation, which will be discussed below.

Others fear that civil discourse equally legitimizes divergent perspectives. This phenomenon, coined “both-sides-ism,” argues that perspectives on “both sides” have equal legitimacy simply because they are different. Civil discourse, as defined above, should not face this problem. Discourse grounded in research and consensus will prioritize collective truths over amplifying divergent perspectives. When those engaging in civil discourse are primarily key stakeholders, the likelihood that any idea gets traction simply because it is different is reduced. Civil discourse should mainly surround the perspectives of those who are most impacted by the issue in question, rather than an exploration of all opinions on a given issue. Though civil discourse is an imperfect tool, it is necessary to preserve American democracy and can be improved to do so.

### **Why Civil Discourse**

The United States is one of the most politically polarized nations in the world (Dimock 2021). Compared to other nations, for example, partisans in the United States experience more affective polarization (Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro 2020). Affective polarization is defined as

a feeling of greater dislike for another political party than a feeling of affection for one's own party (Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro 2020, 2). Tension between political parties has reduced government compromise, fostered distrust in government, prevented friendships, and erupted into violence (Weber et. al 2021).

Jennifer McCoy, Tahmina Rahman, and Murat Somer found that severe polarization, or polarization between two groups with mutually exclusive interests, historically has eroded democracy (2018, 18). When interests become united under a single identity, factions form which threaten social cohesion (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018, 18). This process is driven by rhetoric which homogenizes the outgroup as a threat to the wellbeing of the ingroup (18). Subsequently, compromise is perceived negatively, resulting in political gridlock, the decline of non-partisan civil institutions, citizen distrust in government, and the justification of authoritarianism (19).

Many of the above characteristics already exist in the United States. Severe polarization threatens American democracy and is driven by discourse which demeans, amplifies threats, and speaks in moral absolutes. However, civil discourse can act as a tool for democracy to flourish (Leskes 2013, 2). Political discourse that is constructive, fact-based, and accompanied by thoughtful listening may help reverse these trends. It can reduce rhetoric which exaggerates threats and demeans on the basis of identity. Higher education institutions have an obligation to teach their students how to practice civil discourse to protect democracy (5). Using these tools, students can enter the political arena prepared to counteract dogma and revitalize compromise and trust in government (5).

### **Pilot Program Proposal**

Duke University has the capacity to implement a robust, science-based first-year program which instills norms of civility and reduces political polarization on campus. This program will be aimed at teaching the above principles of civil discourse while reducing intergroup conflict. It will culminate in a debate as an exercise in civil discourse characterized by reduced political polarization. An analysis of existing social psychology principles and peace and conflict studies reveals the following program may be most effective.

#### *Overview:*

Duke University freshmen should participate in a three-day retreat dedicated to reducing political polarization by instilling a norm of civility on campus. This program can take place as a mandatory or optional pre-orientation program.

#### *Step 1: Preliminary Information*

Freshmen fill out a form to indicate their political leaning. This information will be used for program structuring only. Upperclassmen will be sent a survey to determine if they would like to serve as peer leaders in programming. Questions should revolve around whether

upperclassmen believe in the above principles of civil discourse and have a desire to reduce political polarization to improve our democracy. Students should also be asked their preferred debate topic for later activities.

### *Step 2: Group Students*

A meta-analysis of conflict reduction strategies found that peers, or ingroup members, can influence the social norms or accepted behaviors of the ingroup (Paluck, Porat, Clark, and Green 2021, 545). Thus, students should be divided into groups led by upperclassmen peer leaders of the same ideological background. Leaders will set a norm of civility toward people with opposing political ideologies. These leaders should teach their group members about the importance of civil discourse for democracy and other issues that their group members find important.

Peer leaders should use principles of transformative mediation to guide discussions. They must have an intimate understanding of the political landscape at Duke and the sentiments of their ingroup members about conflict between groups (Cleven and Saul 2021, 113). While working within groups of the same political ideology, peer leaders should center student voices and perspectives to build an understanding of the conflict. For the purposes of this exercise, the students' perspectives should trump those of the peer leader's (115). Peer leaders must understand that political conflict is complex and cannot be defined by one central contention, for example (114). The content of discussions will be controlled by the students; however, peer leaders will help students clarify their opinions prior to discussion between ideologically divergent groups (120).

### *Step 3: Peer Leaders Guide Student Groups Through Exercises*

The first exercise peer leaders should conduct is an affirmation of attitudes and values. Peer leaders should discuss the importance of reducing prejudice and encouraging civil discourse to support democracy. Increasing the salience of these values will increase likelihood that students experience cognitive dissonance, or a general state of discomfort, if they do not uphold these values during later interactions with political partisans (Festinger 1957, 2). Students will be motivated to reduce that discomfort, and thus will be more likely to try to uphold these values in conversation (Festinger 1957, 2).

Next, students should write an essay from the perspective of someone of the opposing political ideology. Daniel Batson's empathy-altruism model theorizes that perspective-taking can increase empathy toward outgroups and incentivize altruistic behavior (Batson 1997, 518). This theory has been supported through various experiments which result in improved outgroup attitudes (Berthold, Leicht, Methner, and Gaum 2013, 1035). This process may also result in increased identification with the outgroup, reducing hostility (Berthold, Leicht, Methner, and Gaum 2013, 1035).

Third, students should write down similarities between the two political parties and engage in a discussion about group diversity. One driver of stereotyping and intergroup conflict is the tendency to believe that all members of the outgroup are the same. This phenomenon is called outgroup homogeneity (Judd and Park 1988). A study by Richard J. Crisp and Sarah R. Beck (2005) found that thinking about characteristics which are shared by participants' ingroup and outgroup results in reduced ingroup favoritism (173). Although this strategy worked best for participants who identify weakly with the ingroup, a meta study of strategies to reduce prejudice found that modifying ingroup boundaries by emphasizing common features or identities shared between groups does have a moderate effect size of  $d = 0.37$  (Paluck, Porat, Clark, and Green 2021, 546). Specifically, peer leaders should emphasize students' common Duke, American, and/or global citizen identities. This approach resonates with Matthew S. Levendusky's (2017) finding that increasing the salience of partisans' common American identity increased positive feelings toward the opposite party (63).

#### *Step 4: Intergroup Contact: Service and Debate*

Finally, groups of opposing political parties should be paired together to engage in a service task. This service task should be chosen by the faculty in charge of programming and be based on North Carolinians' needs. Ideally, service projects will culminate in the completion of some sort of project or deliverable to concretize the impacts of collaboration for students.

Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis theorizes that intergroup contact characterized by equality between groups, extended contact with multiple members of the outgroup, and pursuit of common goals reduces intergroup prejudice (Allport 1954). The Robber's Cave experiment famously demonstrated how working toward a common goal can reduce prejudice between polarized groups (Sherif 1961). A 2019 meta-analysis of experiments based on the contact hypothesis found that contact "typically reduces prejudice," but that effects vary based on the type of prejudice and conditions for positive contact (Paluck, Green, and Green 2019, 129). Another 2006 meta-analysis of over 500 contact hypothesis studies found that intergroup contact best reliably reduces prejudice and that effects typically generalize beyond the immediate, present outgroup (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, 766). Thus, engaging in a service project with students of different political ideologies may help reduce outgroup prejudice beyond Duke's campus.

Work by Jeffrey Lees and Mina Cikara (2020) has also found that negative meta-perceptions, or negative beliefs about how other people perceive us, can increase intergroup hostility (284). Interventions which highlight the inaccuracy of these assumptions can reduce such bias, however (Lees and Cikara 2020, 279). Thus, positive intergroup contact such as that conducted through the service program can also reduce hostility by highlighting the inaccuracy of partisans' meta-perceptions.

After the service project is completed, the paired groups should engage in a debate based on previously surveyed preferences. Ideally, the resolution or topic chosen will invite a wide variety of perspectives amongst the students. These debates should be modeled after Braver-

Angels<sup>2</sup> debates, in which peer leaders will serve as “chairs” toward whom questions and comments are directed (Sprei 2021). Braver Angels debates have a parliamentary structure (Sprei 2021). Students choose a resolution which will be debated, and the debates begin with one affirmative and one negative speech. After each speech, the floor is opened for questions for the speaker, but questions are directed toward the chair. According to Doug Sprei, leader of Braver Angels’s College Debate Program, this format opens inquiry for all those participating in or listening to the debate, instead of targeting the speaker. It reduces passion and emotion and encourages people to widen their perspectives and think more deeply about the chosen topic. In a conversation with Mr. Sprei, he indicated that there are no winners in Braver Angels debates; rather, the debates are a “collective exploration or search for the truth.”

Peer leaders serving as chairs during debates should utilize principles of transformative mediation to facilitate quality discussion, rather than ensure agreement or reconciliation (Cleven and Saul 2021, 119). At the beginning of the debate, peer leaders should remind students of the principles of civil discourse, the identities students share with their classmates, and their commitment to democracy. If discourse devolves into insults or hostile communication, peer leaders should again remind students of the importance of civil discourse and direct discussion back to the content of their opinions and ideas. In our conversation, Mr. Sprei indicated that chairs should work to make speaking inviting and include as many perspectives as possible into the debate.

It is essential that all those who desire to speak are heard. In the classroom, students often feel they must self-censor on controversial political topics at Duke). In 2021, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education surveyed and ranked 159 colleges based on a survey of 37,000 students to determine which institutions best protected free speech (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education 2021). Of students surveyed, more than 80% of students reported self-censoring their views some of the time. In the United States more broadly, about four in ten Americans reported self-censoring in 2019 (Gibson and Sutherland 2020). Thus, debate is an opportunity for students to engage in open discourse which would not necessarily happen in their classrooms or in broader society. Ideally, this debate will serve as a model for future class discussions.

Although this program will only last 3 days, it will expose students to a diverse array of ideologies and encourage friendships between political partisans. Allport’s contact hypothesis theorizes that contact needs to be sustained to reduce prejudice in the long term (Paluck, Green, and Green 2019). Thus, this program will act as a springboard through which long-term relationships can form at Duke.

### *Potential Obstacles*

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<sup>2</sup> Braver Angels is an organization working to “bridge the partisan divide and strengthen our democratic republic.” They host workshops, debates, and one on one conversations to depolarize participants. You can find more information at [www.braverangels.org](http://www.braverangels.org).

Generation Z—or people born after 1996—fill higher education institutions today. The typical undergraduate college population consists of 18 to 22 year-olds. In Generation Z, most have traditionally liberal political views (Parker, Graf, and Igielink 2019). Gen Z was twice as likely to vote for Biden than Trump (Parker, Graf, and Igielink 2019). As a result, it is likely that liberals are over-represented in the undergraduate population at Duke. Thus, it may be impossible to have a near-equal number of liberals and conservatives interact during intergroup activities. If necessary, conservatives can be divided into smaller groups to interact with more liberal students. However, peer leaders must be careful to emphasize the importance of equality to positive intergroup contact. Large majority groups may have additional influence or perceived power which will prevent positive ingroup contact.

### **Suggestions for Classroom Settings**

#### *Lectures*

Many of the above principles can be utilized in lecture-hall settings to promote civil discourse. First, professors should teach their students the definition of civil discourse to establish norms for discussion. It is important that students understand what civil discourse is, how they can practice it, and why civil discourse is important. Teaching these values can promote civil discourse in and beyond the classroom. If students internalize civil discourse as an important norm for discussion, they will likely attempt to practice it in many areas of their lives (Etzioni 2000, 166).

If lecture permits for in-class discussion of contentious topics, students should utilize the Braver Angels debate technique with the professor serving as mediator. Students should address their questions and concerns toward the professor. They should discuss ideas and opinions rather than the merits of people who hold those opinions. Professors should require students to present arguments grounded in evidence and reasoning.

Professors should also emphasize students' shared identity as Duke students and global citizens to reduce the salience of partisan group boundaries (Levendusky 2017, 63). As was previously mentioned, increasing the salience of shared characteristics and identities between groups reduces prejudice between groups (Crisp and Beck 2005, 173; Levendusky 2017, 63). Additionally, Professors should remind students of Duke's commitment to rigorous inquiry using civil discourse (Duke University 2001). If students are reminded of why they came to Duke—to learn with their peers through rigorous inquiry—they may be more likely to utilize civil discourse to achieve that goal. If they are not reminded of that shared commitment, they will continue to see themselves as competing partisans attempting to win an argument, rather than as students collaborating to achieve a shared goal. Commitment to shared goals through intergroup cooperation can reduce prejudice (Paluck, Green, and Green 2019, 129).

If time permits, professors should leave time for students to get to know one another to promote sustained positive contact with ideologically diverse peers (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis theorizes that intergroup contact characterized by



sustained, positive contact with multiple members of the outgroup can reduce prejudice (Paluck, Green, and Green 2019, 130). This positive interpersonal contact can also highlight the inaccuracy of negative meta-perceptions, or beliefs about what people of the opposite party believe about one's own party, which are a key driver of polarization (Lees and Cikara 2020, 279). By promoting sustained, positive contact over the course of the semester, professors can reduce outgroup bias and thus promote civil discourse.

### *Seminars*

Small classrooms (18 people or less) provide more opportunity for in depth discussions and debates on contentious topics. They are unique in that professors typically have greater discretion to choose the content of their lectures. Seminars can be structured to encourage student investment in the course and in civil discourse as a tool to facilitate their learning. For example, students can be given ownership over particular lectures or class discussions, which will be discussed in more depth below (Crosby 2018). Increasing student investment in the course may create a shared identity amongst students as classmates tackling course material. As was previously mentioned, increasing the salience of a shared group identity can reduce intergroup bias (Gaertner et. al 1993). When given ownership over course content and material, students may feel greater commitment and dedication to the skills which will facilitate their learning, such as civil discourse.

One way to achieve this type of investment is to structure the seminar using principles of the democratic classroom. The democratic classroom is founded in the idea that schools are one of few institutions through which citizens can experience democratic principles external to participation in government (Crosby 2018, 2). William G. Wraga (1998) theorizes that democratic classrooms must promote popular sovereignty, freedom, equality, individualism, and social responsibility (4). To achieve these values, students must be able to participate in decisions affecting them; be able to reflect and inquire freely; receive equal treatment and have equal opportunities; practice self-control and self-driven action; and commit to the class and collaboration with other students (Crosby 2018, 2).

The most important aspect of the democratic classroom for fostering civil discourse is a shared sense of and commitment to community (Crosby 2018, 2). Enabling students to make decisions about what will be taught in class and empowering them to teach chosen topics can increase their investment in the course. Using this "jigsaw classroom technique," students learn to work together to discuss complex, polarizing topics (American Psychological Association n.d.). Jigsaw classrooms have been shown to increase empathy through perspective taking, reduce stereotyping, and promote cooperation (American Psychological Association n.d.).

Enhancing student feelings of community and belonging within the classroom will promote their use of civil discourse as a tool through which to promote learning in the course. However, students should still be reminded of the above principles of civil discourse before contentious discussion. As previously mentioned, establishing class norms can promote productive discussions (Etzioni 2000).

During contentious discussions, professors should encourage evidence-based reasoning and teach principles of critical literacy. According to Lina Bell Soares, critical literacy centers an understanding that no individual text or perspective can tell the entirety of a story (Soares 2013). By promoting an awareness of voice and power in text, professors can develop student awareness of how disagreements emerge over contentious issues. Although stories and evidence may point to a single conclusion, the opposing perspective is often not represented. Promoting this open-mindedness during discussion and debate is essential to fostering civil discourse in the classroom.

Classrooms can also host Braver Angels style debates using the professor as a chair (Sprei 2021). Using a similar format to that described in the pilot program section, students can choose a resolution and give speeches in the affirmative and negative. However, professors have more latitude to structure their debates to include more of the above principles of civil discourse. They can assign debates in advance and require students to prepare a timed speech using evidence-based arguments. They can also require everyone to speak, which is not possible in a larger setting. Regardless, it is always important that chairs remind participants of what civil discourse is and why it is important before proceeding.

### **Suggestions for Extracurricular Programming**

Extracurricular programming should follow the various suggestions listed above. Given that extracurricular programming includes a wide array of activities, administrators should incorporate the various suggestions in this report as they see fit. Below are several suggestions which would generally benefit extracurricular programming involving political discussions.

*Peer Leaders:* If extracurricular programming involves discussion of contentious topics or exercises that require teamwork, utilizing peer leaders may be beneficial for establishing norms of behavior which facilitate the exercise. Peer leaders, or prominent ingroup members, can influence other group members' perception of the types of behaviors and attitudes which are acceptable for the group (Paluck, Porat, Clark, and Green 2021, 545). Peer leaders have promoted tolerance toward immigrants or LGBT individuals amongst evangelical Christians, for example (Paluck, Porat, Clark, and Green 2021, 545). This type of intervention utilizes research on the psychology of conformity and social influence to promote changes in behavior. Typically, ingroup members will desire to conform to their ingroup after learning that their peers hold different views than they do (Paluck, Porat, Clark, and Green 2021, 545).

*Establish Norms:* Reminding participants of the importance of reducing prejudice and practicing civil discourse can encourage healthy interactions in extracurricular activities. Ideally, these attitudes should already be held by participants. If participants already believe in the importance of reducing prejudice and practicing civil discourse to strengthen democracy, they are more likely to prioritize behaviors which uphold those values (if those values are made salient). Reminding participants of the importance of these attitudes will encourage behaviors which affirm those attitudes. Otherwise, participants will experience a state of discomfort

called cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957, 2). Discomfort will motivate participants to practice their values during the activity.

*Shared Identities:* If extracurricular activities include teamwork or contentious political discussions, administrators should remind participants of their shared identities as Duke students and global citizens. Matthew S. Levendusky (2017) found that increasing the salience of a shared American identity amongst partisans increased positive feelings toward the opposite party (63). This common ingroup identity theory hypothesizes that cognitively recategorizing ingroups and outgroups as one common group can reduce ingroup favoritism (Gaertner et. al 1993, 5). Samuel L. Gaertner et. al (1993) found that increasing the salience of shared identities and reducing ingroup/outgroup boundaries increases positive evaluations of outgroup members (14). Gaertner et. al (1993) also argue that intergroup cooperation may reduce prejudice by reducing the importance of intergroup boundaries (15). Thus, reminding participants of their shared identities should be conducted in conjunction with structured intergroup contact as discussed below.

Administrators can also lead participants through exercises and encourage them to either a) think of characteristics they share with opposing political partisans or b) discuss with a partner to find shared characteristics. As discussed previously, outgroup homogeneity, or the tendency to believe that all outgroup members are the same, drives stereotyping and bias (Judd and Park 1988). Crisp and Beck (2005) found that considering shared characteristics between groups reduces ingroup favoritism (173). A meta-study of conflict reduction strategies found that these “social categorization” interventions tend to reduce intergroup bias (Paluck, Porat, Clark, and Green 2021, 546).

*Structured Intergroup Contact:* Extracurricular activities involving contact between political partisans must be structured to promote positive rather than negative outcomes. Gordon Allport’s contact hypothesis states that intergroup contact must include equality between groups, extended contact with multiple members of the outgroup, pursuit of common goals, and institutional support (Paluck, Green, and Green 2019, 130). Several meta studies have found that structured intergroup contact reduces prejudice beyond the present outgroup (Paluck, Green, and Green 2018; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Extracurricular programs should take care to develop programming that facilitates positive intergroup contact using the above criteria.

*Debate Norms:* If extracurricular activities include formal or informal debates between partisans, administrators should structure interaction to promote positive intergroup contact. If debates are informal, discussion-based, and/or in small groups, administrators should use the above suggestions on norm setting, discussion of civil discourse, and peer leaders to promote productive discourse. If, however, debates are formal and observed by an interactive audience, facilitators should use Braver Angel’s methods to promote a positive debate environment (Sprei 2021).

## **Conclusion**

As a higher education institution, Duke University is in a unique position to normalize civil discourse amongst the next generation of leaders. American democracy today faces the dire threat of severe political polarization, but negative outcomes are not inevitable. Division is currently driving political gridlock, the decline of civil institutions, and distrust in government (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018, 19). However, colleges and universities can encourage civil discourse on their campuses to mitigate the negative effects of polarization. Despite this need to depolarize American citizens, none of Duke's peer institutions have set out to make civil discourse a priority on their campuses. Thus, Duke University is in a unique position to become a leader in normalizing civil discourse on college campuses.

"Civil discourse does not just happen; it is cultivated and encouraged, often relying on institutions and models that afford people opportunities to discuss public issues that tap into the deeper philosophical views that ask people to consider how they see themselves as political actors in relationship with others" (Shaffer 2019, 189).

Duke University must take concrete steps to depolarize its students through the normalization of civil discourse on campus. Using principles of social psychology and peace and conflict studies, Duke can revolutionize political norms for the next century.

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