

Difficult Dialogues Initiative Project Update – February 2007

Spring 2007 has brought a good deal of excitement and energy to the Difficult Dialogues Initiative as we move in new directions under the leadership of students and faculty.

Support of Campus Dialogues

DDI is offering support to campus partners who wish to host a dialogue. The proposed project must demonstrate commitment to DDI Principles:

- Freedom of expression for a wide range of viewpoints;
- Respectful attention to a wide range of viewpoints;
- Intellectually serious analysis and defense of multiple viewpoints; and
- Share findings throughout the campus community and with audiences in the wider academic and public spheres

Proposed project must deal with a DDI-Relevant Topics: questions of academic freedom and religious and cultural pluralism. Submit a short application to formally request support. For an application, please call (919) 962-4029 or email dd@email.unc.edu .

Martin Luther King Jr. Day Training on Conflict Management

In union with the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 28 faculty, staff and students participated in a day-long session on conflict management and communication skills specific to classroom controversy. The training was led by the Orange County Dispute Settlement Center and supported in partnership with the UNC Institute for the Arts and Humanities. According to the evaluations, 100% of participants either agree or strongly agree that they would recommend this training to their colleagues.

Brainstorming Sessions: What's in Store for DDI

A total of 15 people met over two sessions to discuss how they plan to use the skills obtained from the January 15 training. Faculty, staff and students participated in the brainstorming on the future of DDI and how they can actively participate in dialogue facilitation over the next semester. Topics of interest that people specifically mentioned were the perception of Christian evangelicals, the death penalty (in response to the UNC summer reading selection on the same issue), sexual orientation, the war, immigration and racism. Several specific opportunities for volunteer facilitation and participation in campus dialogue surfaced and are listed below.

Steering Committee Meetings

The DDI Steering Committee met on January 29 to review progress to date, project objectives, DDI support of external initiatives, and strategize for the final year of the grant. The committee meets again in February to discuss ongoing leadership of the project.

Campus Dialogue Opportunities

Several DDI participants seek the assistance of their fellow DDI'ers to conduct campus dialogues around particular issues of interest.

- Melanie Pace discussed her event with Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) around the **depiction of evangelical Christians** as portrayed in the documentary Jesus Camp. She is building a panel and has asked another DDI faculty member to help moderate. About 300 people are expected at this event. DDI facilitators may be needed to lead small group

discussions for this March 27 event at 6:30 PM. Are you available to co-lead a small group discussion and support Melanie's work?

- Steve May and Donna Bickford are interested in a **faculty discussion group on issues of faith in the classroom**, and how to respond. One possibility is a faculty book group to discuss the book Religion on our Campuses. Are there other faculty interested in forming such a group that would meet a few times?
- Suzanne Gullidge is interested in holding a dialogue in the School of Education on **immigration** in connection with a Maymester course she is teaching. She is also interested in partnering with other summer school courses or groups for a forum to be held between May 15 and 23, 2007. Do you know of any such groups?
- **Planning, redevelopment, health care, and public involvement through talk and technology** <http://www.americaspeaks.org/> Dr. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer, Founder and President of AmericaSpeaks will address AmericaSpeaks' principles, model and projects, related issues of citizen engagement and deliberative democracy. February 15th - 5-6 PM, Duke University: Love Auditorium, Levine Science Research Center.
- **Great Decisions** <http://ibiblio.org/grtdecns/> is a nationwide program sponsored by the Foreign Policy Association, a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan, educational organization founded in 1918 to educate Americans about significant world issues that impact their lives. Each fall at UNC-CH, a student coordinating committee plans a spring semester lecture series eight topics relevant to current world affairs. It serves as a one-credit-hour pass-fail course for 300 students, who also participate in follow-up discussions. The Great Decisions lectures are open to the public (7-8:15 p.m. on Tuesdays). Discussion sections take place after the lecture, which are led by TA's for students registered in the class, but if you wish to participate in the discussion sections without being registered please email mariumc@email.unc.edu.

Project Accomplishments to Date:

- The **Stretch Conference**, an event of the Campus Y intended to support emerging student leadership, was held November 17-18 at the Johnston Center. About 70 people, primarily freshmen and sophomores, attended. Campus Y director and DDI steering committee member Virginia Carson and DDI project manager Danielle Doughman facilitated a discussion of real-life controversial scenarios from campuses around the country.
- A Difficult Dialogues forum was held on November 13 in partnership with the **Parr Center for Ethics**. A total of 22 faculty, staff, graduate students and undergrads participated in discussing scenarios that generated controversy over the past several years. The forum was moderated by DDI co-principal investigator and law school professor Judith Wegner.
- Co-principal investigators Judith Wegner and Bill Andrews, Steering Committee member and Campus Y Director Virginia Carson, and DDI Project Director Danielle Doughman attended a conference for southeast regional Ford Difficult Dialogue grant recipients at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. Wegner facilitated a **panel on religious pluralism** with colleagues from the University of Georgia and Mars Hill College (NC). Doughman reported project highlights. The event was hosted by the Ford Foundation and The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression.

- English Professor Todd Taylor leads the DDI work with the **Teaching Fellows** (TFs) in the undergraduate writing program. This fall, veteran TFs dialogued with other TFs in their coordinating group meetings in September on the issue of handling classroom controversy. DDI collected and reviewed comments from English 101 teaching coordinators about their work with teaching fellows.
- Communication Studies Professor Julia Wood coordinates the **Chapman Fellows** (affiliated with the Institute for Arts and Humanities) segment of DDI. Fellows met three times this fall to discuss classroom conflict management and what more could be done to foster faculty engagement and provide support. The work culminated in a Difficult Dialogues forum with Chapman Fellows and selected student leaders to test the discussion guide and the framing of the issue on the role of personal faith and conscience on a public university campus.
- Steering committee member Dean Jay Smith oversees the process of developing **interdisciplinary course clusters** intended for juniors and seniors. In January, cluster proposals that relate to DDI were solicited and curriculum development grants awarded to faculty. There are three strong DDI-related clusters currently in development (clusters entitled *Knowledge at the Crossroads*, *Evolution*, and *Defining Difference/Creating Dialogue*). Each cluster has a chief organizer who develops a rationale for the cluster as a whole. Cluster proposals are currently under review for a Fall 2007 launch.
- **Carolina United** brought together 60 student leaders for a four-day leadership and networking retreat. DDI project partner Alex Kirk of Intervarsity and Danielle Doughman co-led a workshop on dialogue and religious pluralism. The event kicked off the 2006-07 school year.

For more information on the Difficult Dialogues Initiative, please contact Danielle Doughman at dd@email.unc.edu, (919) 962-4029, or 432 Greenlaw Hall, CB 3520, Chapel Hill, NC, 27599.