

STUDENT ORGS - JOIN THE CONVERSATION



START A CONVERSATION

Many people would like to talk about issues of race/ethnicity, but don't have the opportunity to do so. Sometimes these conversations don't happen because people are uncertain about how to start talking; often people are worried that others won't understand or will be *unintentionally* offended by what they have to say. Commitment and Good Advance Planning can overcome these challenges.

ORGANIZE A CONVERSATION ON A TOPIC RELATED TO RACE/ETHNICITY –

Set Ground Rules that will encourage dialogue, mutual respect, hearing what others say, and recognize that talking about race will be challenging, and can be discomfiting: SEE BELOW

Open the Conversation with “Conversation Starters” – begin with a few of these questions to help everyone get to know and feel comfortable with one another: SEE BELOW

Deepen the Conversation – once you're all comfortable, get serious and deepen the conversation using one of the following: SEE BELOW

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Set Ground Rules that will encourage dialogue, mutual respect, hearing what others say, and recognize that talking about race will be challenging, and can be discomfiting:

- Everyone should understand the purpose of the conversation is to hear and learn from each other (not to declare others to blame, guilty, ignorant; nor to all agree or to find a solution to the race problem) [if you do all agree on a workable solution to the race problem, please apply for the Nobel Peace Prize]
- People should be relaxed and comfortable with one another, but not assume that everyone shares their own ideas, beliefs, or experiences. A key for successful discussion is to be interested in and “hear” (openly acknowledge) what others have experienced and what they think.
 - * Thus, saying “I’ve never thought of that before – could you explain why you think that?” is a lot better than “I don’t believe it; that’s never happened to me.”
- Recognize that people of good intent can mis-speak or say things that unintentionally offend others. Letting others know how their words affect you or might be understood by others is healthy and constructive; ascribing malice or stupidity to their words is not.
 - * Thus, saying “I feel frustrated (or I feel disrespected) when people say.because....” is a lot better than “That pisses me off; that’s such a stupid (or racist) thing to say”
- Establish a way for everyone to participate and be heard (inviting those who are more quiet to share their thoughts and/or questions AND ensuring that the most talkative give space for other voices)
- Announce a strategy for brief “breather breaks” and “hit the restart button” in the event that the conversation veers into too conflicted or angry words.
- Select a discussion moderator(s) responsible for helping everyone abide by the ground rules, that everyone will acknowledge and respect.

Open the Conversation with “Conversation Starters” – begin with a few of these questions to help everyone get to know and feel comfortable with one another:

- What is the most memorable advice from your grandparents or other elders?
- What do you consider to be the most valuable thing you own: when you were a child/teenager/now?
- If you could have any job in the world, what would it be?
- If you were to get a (new) tattoo, what would it say or what would the graphic be?
- If you were in a talent competition, what would your talent be?
- Are you a listener or a talker?
- What award would you love to win - and for what achievement?
- If you won a lottery ticket and had a million dollars, what would you do with it?

Deepen the Conversation – once you’re all comfortable, get serious and deepen the conversation using one of the two approaches below:

- Watch one of the “Featured Stories” digital stories created by a UWW student.
<http://www.uww.edu/diversity/conversation-on-race/featured-stories>
 - * Allow a minute or two after the story ends for silent reflection, then open the floor to inclusive discussion of questions such as –
 - * Do you think this is a story about a “problem”? or a “success”?
 - * How do you think individual ideas or values or character affected how this story played out?
 - * In what ways did things beyond the control of the people in the story affect what happened?
 - * What, if anything surprised you about this story? What, if anything didn’t surprise you?
 - * What might account for different responses between the people discussing this digital story?
 - * What insight does this story provide on issues of race? other identities (eg: gender/ class/ religion...)?
 - * What insight do differences or agreements between the discussion group provide on issues of race? other identities (eg: gender/ class/ religion...)?
- Use one of the question sets below to focus the Conversation on:
 - * How race matters, and different perceptions of race (questions 1-8 below) &/OR
 - * Race at UWW (questions 9-14 below)
 - * One strategy would be to print out the questions selected, cut them into individual question strips, and place them in a hat or box. Pass the hat, let each person pick a question, and then go around the circle letting discussants ask their question and the entire group discuss it before going to the next person/question.

1. Do you feel conscious about your race or ethnicity?
2. Do you feel conscious about discrimination?
3. What aspect of your race makes you the most proud?
4. In what ways does being white/ White Ethic/ Latino/African American/ Asian/ Native American impact your personal life?
5. Have you ever experienced a situation where your “race” or background seemed to contribute to a problem or uncomfortable situation?
6. Does race or ethnicity enter in your process of making important or daily decisions? If so, how?
7. Have you ever felt “different” in a group setting because of your race/ethnicity? How did this affect you?
8. Do you ever feel like you might be acting unfairly toward somebody because of his or her race?
9. Do you think that UWW is racially/ethnically diverse?
10. What do you think is the “campus climate” for students of color at UWW? (in general? In specific spaces: Classrooms? Dining halls? Dorms? Student orgs? Library? Athletics? Other campus spaces?)
11. Would you characterize UWW as an “integrated” or a “segregated” campus – or something different from either of these?
12. Have you ever seen or experienced a situation at UWW that might have been “racially charged” or created discomfort or anger around race? If so, how did people react?
13. If you could change one thing at UWW related to race, what would it be? (and, how might that be done?)
14. Do you think that the campus climate or experiences related to race are similar to, or different from what’s happening in the city of Whitewater? Other local towns?