

Final Report of the Working Group on Civil Discourse

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Working Group on Civil Discourse

Terms of Reference

- ensure that through consultations there are opportunities for all members of the U of T community to contribute their views to this important initiative;
- seek to elicit a working definition of “civil discourse” as it may apply to U of T activities;
- work with the Provostial Advisor to propose programming and other capacity-building initiatives that address and foster “civil discourse” at the University;
- may participate in, engage with, and model “civil discourse” in initiatives that follow from the activities of the group and of the Provostial Advisor;
- make suggestions and propose guidelines to foster an environment that is conducive to “civil discourse” across various realms of research, scholarship, and learning; and
- convey the results of the consultations, along with any working definitions, suggestions, guidelines, recommendations and other concerns or issues emerging during the course of the working group’s term in a final report, to be delivered to the Provost by the end of June 2025.

Timeline

January 2024 – June 2025

Winter, Spring, and Summer 2024

- Appointment of Provostial Advisor on Civil Discourse
- Establish working group (faculty members and graduate and undergraduate students)
- Develop a working definition of “civil discourse” to guide consultations

Fall 2024

- Consult staff, students, faculty and librarians across all three U of T campuses

Winter, Spring, Summer 2025

- Develop themes (“what we heard”) and recommendations [Jan. and Feb.]
- Share themes (“did we miss anything”) and draft recommendations with University community for feedback [Mar. and Apr.]
- Final report submitted to Vice-President and Provost, April 28, 2025

Summary of consultation activity

First consultation period (October 1 – December 6, 2024)

- Approximately 1,500 people engaged directly in the consultation process
 - 31 by-invitation consultations with staff, faculty, and student groups
 - 3 days of open in-person meetings (one day on each campus)
 - 6 online sessions
 - 574 responses through online form

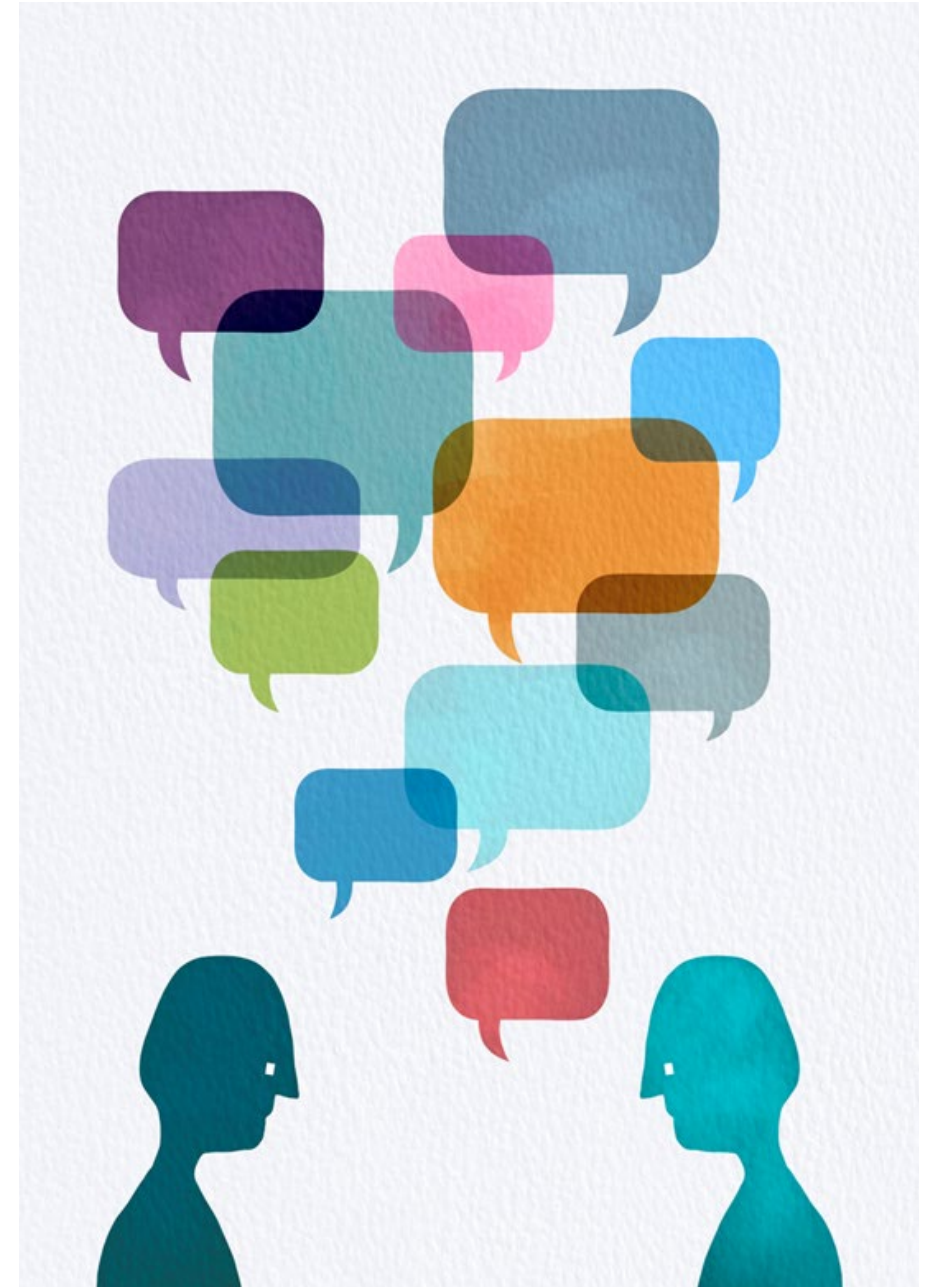
Second consultation period: What we heard + preliminary recommendations (April 6 – 22, 2025)

- 111 responses to online form

What we heard

Main themes

- Seven main areas of concern/interest
 1. Definition of civil discourse
 2. Programming
 3. Classroom environment
 4. Faculty/division/departmental environment
 5. Perception of University administration and leadership
 6. University structure and culture
 7. Broader factors negatively impacting civil discourse



Recommendations

- R1:** Make an institutional commitment to civil discourse in the research, teaching and co-curricular activities of the University
- R2:** Provide ongoing institutional support for activities and initiatives that foster civil discourse
- R3:** Encourage familiarity and experience with civil discourse in the classroom
- R4:** Enhance and improve opportunities for civil discourse within individual divisions and departments



Recommendations

R5: Offer training on facilitating civil discourse across constituencies and encourage the formation of local networks and communities of practice to generate ongoing grassroots engagement in discourse opportunities, best practices, and problem-solving

R6: Improve transparency, visibility, and approachability of University leadership and senior administration and encourage engagement with the whole University community

R7: Create channels, spaces, and events to promote civil discourse across the University and develop incentives for facilitating, engaging in, and modeling civil discourse within the university community

R8: Deepen engagement with the broader external community beyond U of T



Administrative Response

to the Final Report of the Working Group
on Civil Discourse



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Responses to the Recommendations

- Six-month extension of Provostial Advisor to facilitate implementation of the action items
- Work to begin immediately in two main areas:
 1. Enhancing Civil Discourse Education
 2. Promoting Best Practices



Enhancing Civil Discourse Education

Action Items

- Entering students should have a meaningful opportunity to engage in learning the skills of civil discourse, generally within their first year
- Creation of a Learning & Education Advancement Fund Plus (LEAF+) for projects that foster civil discourse, to provide seed funding of between \$5,000-\$10,000
 - Also, SGS Sponsorship Fund and the Graduate Education Innovation Fund

Promoting Best Practices

Action Items

- Office of the Vice Provost, Faculty & Academic Life and CTSI will offer opportunities and resources for faculty and instructors to develop and practice skills to teach and facilitate dialogue across difference
- Develop a resource to share best practices for civil discourse at U of T
- Bring faculty and staff together to establish communities of practice, including for individual disciplines

“Broadly and locally instilling and sustaining cultures of generous engagement and productive inquiry is an ongoing, shared effort that will require generosity and intentional commitment from the entire U of T community.”

- Final Report of the Working Group on Civil Discourse