



Take It On 2020: Seeking Difference, Exploring Common Ground

Annual Report / January 2021 / Rachel Chrastil, Ph.D.

At the request of Father Graham, [Take It On 2020](#) launched in January 2020 as a non-partisan, values-centered initiative to proactively promote better civil discourse. Take It On creates the conditions for our campus community to seek out difference and explore common ground when discussing controversial topics so that our students may learn to engage in difficult dialogue with others in a civil, productive manner. The need for proactive engagement across difference only became sharper over the course of 2020, as our country and our campus undertook further needed steps to dismantle structural anti-Black racism, as we returned to campus and continued to live with COVID-19, and as we navigated a challenging election season.

Leadership

Take It On 2020 reports to Father Graham. It is led by Rachel Chrastil, Professor of History and Director of Accreditation, in close collaboration with Sean Comer, Government Relations Director; David Johnson, Associate Provost for Student Affairs; and Janice Walker, Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion.

Values

Take It On holds certain values as central to this project:

- **Name the problem:** We are concerned about the divisive and polarizing political and societal challenges that we face.
- **Leverage our Jesuit Catholic heritage:** We draw on the gifts and values of our Jesuit Catholic heritage, including the dignity of the human person and value of the liberal arts education.
- **Build on our resources:** We draw on and expand the [resources](#) of our faculty, staff, administrators and students, University policies, and community partners.
- **Act with humility and courage:** We know we will make mistakes but are convinced that we must speak and act on our convictions while listening to, showing respect for, and being open to learning from others.
- **Keep our community at the center:** Our students are at the center of this project; in order to support our and educate our students, faculty and staff need to be fully invested as well. This project is about our community, including the need to belong and be included, to engage with ideas that challenge, to grow in our capacity to articulate our own positions and values.



Goals and Outcomes for 2020

Goal 1: Build the campus capacity for constructive, reflective dialogue

- Developed and promoted [The Xavier Way for Dialogue: A Shared Vision to Strengthen our Community](#).
 - This document was developed in early 2020 by Marcus Mescher, Associate Professor of Christian Ethics (Theology), in consultation with the faculty, staff and students on the Take It On 2020 Council, the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, Mission and Identity, the Ethics/Religion and Society program, the Staff Advisory Committee, the Center for Faith and Justice, Residence Life and the College of Arts and Sciences Diversity & Inclusion Committee. A [short version](#) may also be used.
- Hosted workshops on February 20, 2020 with nationally-recognized facilitator Kathy Obear. Participants included 49 staff, 17 faculty, and 29 students. Participants reported that as a result of these workshops, 87% were more or much more equipped for difficult conversations and 80% more or much more willing to engage in difficult conversations.
- Disseminated [Politics in the Classroom](#) resource developed by the Center for Teaching Excellence.

Goal 2: Create spaces for engagement with difficult issues

- Launched Mission Animators grants to support campus events related to Take It On.
- Sponsored events including digital literacy, energy & environmental policy, and politics in the classroom.
- Provided space for community processing of General Election in a series of post-election events, including a restorative justice circle, a musical performance, and a community Xavier Together event. See the [Take It On website](#) for details.

Goal 3: Proactively prepare for challenges in 2020, notably regarding the 2020 election, and build capacity to be responsive to those who seek to break our community bonds

- Encouraged students to learn about candidates, vote, and serve as poll-workers.
- Held University-wide remote teaching day on November 3.
- Engaged paid fellow to support and report on student engagement.
- Created [Election Day preparation website](#) and video by Father Graham.
- Encouraged employees to serve as [poll workers](#) with paid support from the University.
- Attended private sector briefing from the Joint Terrorism Task Force and Cincinnati Fusion Center regarding potential threats surrounding Election Day.
- Prepared a communication strategy in case of need on November 3.

Goal 4: Create an umbrella structure for supporting this work

- Engaged and consulted a wide variety of constituents—students, faculty and staff—across campus in a Take It On Council.
- Created and continually developed a branded [Take It On site](#) and materials.