

Ignatian Speech Best Practices

Draft March 24th, 2022

Introduction

Our community recognizes that as we engage in robust debate and dialogue, and invite difficult and controversial topics, some speech may do harm in the process. We also believe in developing students who are critical thinkers and brave leaders who seek the common good. Done well, the process of the exchange of ideas, particularly with people who disagree with us or engaging ideas counter to our own, can form students—and all those in our community—to those ends.

We are a community that doesn't avoid conflict, so practices for receiving critique and challenge are important to a healthy university culture where we all engage as whole people. Objections to speech, responses or reactions that may challenge or argue with the content of your speech, do not violate your rights.

Practices, ways of being and doing, that encourage a campus culture of respectful critique are a vital part of being a Jesuit Catholic University. Practice is contextual. Practice changes and adapts. What is offered here is not a to-do list, nor rules, but rather a tool kit, guiding lights, that you can apply to your context within our campus community.

None of these tools will work for every topic or every context. Discernment can help you to select practices that work the best for your context, your community of learners, and the learning outcomes you hope to achieve.

Overall Curricular Values

- Learn to analyze speech to understand whether it is harmful or controversial.
- Learn how to intervene to stop obviously harmful speech and to engage in controversy in a productive manner.
- Engage with ideas that disagree with our own positions.
- Engage in active listening.
- Invite marginalized perspectives and find ways to structure conversations to do that regularly.

- Be open to changing your position.

Tools for setting up Classrooms and Courses

- Prioritize building community throughout the semester so that when difficult topics come up the professor has an authentic relationship with each student AND students have authentic relationships amongst themselves. Some ideas for doing this:
 - Take time to do check-ins throughout the semester in class.
 - Make pair-share conversations, rotating through as many different pairs as possible, a regular practice
 - Do group projects and then use those projects for small group conversation on difficult topics
- Collectively establish classroom and dialogue norms
 - Define community values
 - Create expectations for the self, other students, and instructor
 - Define what academic dialogue looks like in the classroom
 - This can be understood as “mutual commitments”
 - Such values or practices could include: assume good intent, consider the impact of your statements, allow people to change and grow rather than freezing them in time, use “I” statements, distinguish between opinion and informed knowledge, be brave, engage in active listening, WAIT (Why Am I Talking - Do I need to be talking? Why does it need to be said? Does it need to be said by me?), take space/make space, Focus on ideas and opinions, not people. (focus on topic, not person saying it), people don’t represent groups, Don’t expect people to speak/represent groups. Don’t call out or ask someone to speak for the entire community.
- Teach the skills students need to engage in a particular course: e.g. if active listening is a part of your classroom values, don’t assume they know how to do it; spend time teaching them that skill.
- Have students reflect back or articulate the position they disagree with after a dialogue, being clear that this is not what they think the other side believes, but what that

position self-identifies as their reasoning. Even ask them to identify the stereotypes or assumptions they hold about that position in the process.

- Clarify the goals of a particular controversial or difficult conversation: Persuade? Express? Understand? If students know the outcomes they are aiming for—i.e. they are not expected to change their minds, but they are expected to better understand an opposing position—they can learn skills and manage impact.
- Find ways to de-personalize difficult topics. Some students may not have a personal position, or may not want to risk the social capital for sharing a personal position. But, if they have two opposing articles, two opposing scholars, or a case study, they can work through the ideas and learn from the process without having as much personal cost to themselves.
- Utilize the support of the Center for Teaching Excellence, the Diversity and Inclusion Teaching Academy, and the Take It On initiative.

Co-curricular Programming

Different than classroom spaces, some co-curricular spaces are affinity-based and so share a sense of assumed “agreement.” This itself can be a barrier to robust engagement and growth. Practices that provide space for diversity within groups, for testing and challenging ideas, can improve a group or program’s ability to avoid controversy or be inclusive, but also can grow a deeper and more nuanced sense of community in which internal diversity is valued and encouraged—in turn, creating a robust civic culture all over our Jesuit Catholic campus.

- Engage practices at events that ensure everyone participates. At what is usually a lecture, provide space before a Q&A to “turn to a neighbor” and share one thing that sticks with you and one question you have on the topic. This can make Q&A sessions more robust and give introverts time to process. Other options include:
 - Set expectations at the beginning of gathering—this doesn’t have to be a list of rules, but can set the tone for what the organizers hope will be the outcomes, or even name some of the guiding lights or principles of Take It On that may be useful.
 - Table conversation or table topics before or after a speaker.
 - Panel after a lecture to transition to an open Q&A.

- Turn to a neighbor to respond, naming something that you will carry away or a question you still have.
- Digital back channel for comments during a lecture.
- Engage conflict—don't avoid. Not sure how to do that? Be transparent with your advisor about the conflicts and ask for help.
- Train officers or other leaders in dialogue and bystander/upstander practices. On campus options include B.R.A.V.E. workshops, Interfaith Bridges training, sessions at the annual Student Organization Academy and more. Off campus options include visiting the Holocaust and Humanity Center or participating in their Upstander Training and Programming, programming with Beyond Civility [this is a place a Take It On town hall could contribute nicely]

Controversial Speech

- Google who you are considering inviting—have they said or done anything that will create news or buzz that is not the message you are hoping to bring to campus? Make a plan for how to manage this, and consider carefully the impact this may have on other members of our campus community.
- Provide speakers with Xavier's Principles for Ignatian Speech and any program adaptations you are making (e.g. panel, debrief, q&a afterward) to the speaker well in advance, ideally in the process of negotiating the event.
- Counter-programming/co-programming can provide additional points of view and opportunities for conversation. Consider collaborating with another department, student organization or program to offer another perspective.
- Think carefully about our own particular local context. Have you read the most recent Pulse or campus climate survey to consider the impact of this event/speech on members of our community with different identities or experiences than those people who are part of your organizing team?
- Academic departments: Engage students in decision-making process of approving speakers.
- Student organizations: Engage your advisor early and often in this process.
- Create a communication campaign on social media and other ways that both explains the "why" and engages in dialogue. Monitor social media to respond to dis- and misinformation.
- Make public statements that reinforce and restate institutional values—this could be at the introduction to the event, but also could be added to promotional campaigns on

social media, fliers, etc. Why are you holding the event you are holding? How will the Take In On values be expressed in the event?

- Host community forums.
- Support professional development in the organizing process and around related issues. This could be as simple as creating space at meetings to read the work of the invited speaker, or as complex as sponsoring attendance at conferences ahead of an event.
- Create partnership on campus in the event planning process; collaborators may be able to help the organizers recognize issues that may arise.
- Meet with other groups on campus—student organizations or leaders of student organizations (look on EngageXU.campusgroups.com or at xavier.edu/clubs, relevant academic departments across all four colleges and more.
- Invite or provide a supportive presence that is appropriate to the event—this could include counseling services, chaplains, appropriate faculty, peer support volunteers. Discern what works with those who may be impacted.

Additional Ideas

- Differentiate between safety and comfort; accept discomfort as necessary for growth; recognize that safety/comfort differ based on social position (e.g. race, class, gender, ability, etc.)
- Recognize the difference between opinion and informed knowledge
- Faculty social media?
- Local experts? Local exemplars? Places on campus where best practices are already being enacted?
- What happens when there is a power differential
- How to statements?
 - How to receive critique
 - How to stand in solidarity with another person
 - How to analyze the harm speech does
 - How to have a dialogue with other people
 - How to understand someone else's position on a public issue
- What is the role of restorative justice in repairing harm from speech? Is there support that could be offered for "repair" in a classroom when there has been an incident, or working with a residence hall floor? Are there processes that help individuals heal but also keep the community whole?
- Practice articulating your position without trying to persuade your audience
- Resources from Goa—where could we use those?

take it on

X

- There could space for the administration to be clear on who we are as an institution when a controversial speaker contrary to those values is on campus. Is it valuable to think about when and how that might happen or what triggers those actions? Plan for it?
- What is the role of the professor? How specific do we want to be in directing classroom management? How much can a professor control and for what kind of harm is a professor accountable for?

Resources

- Counseling
- Dean's Offices for each college
- Dean Jean's office
- Student Concern report
- Ethics Point