

Strengthening Deliberative Dialogue Through Faculty Development

Technical Report



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Findings in Brief

Colleges increasingly play a key role in preparing students to engage productively across areas of disagreement, yet most faculty have never been taught how to lead that kind of conversation. With support from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, ACUE evaluated how a focused, practice-oriented professional development experience could close that gap and how it could support faculty across a range of institutional contexts.

Nineteen colleges and universities across 13 states participated in the initiative. They ranged from fewer than 1,500 undergraduates to more than 31,000, and more than half were minority-serving institutions. Faculty were recruited campus-wide at most participating schools; 375 completed all five Quick Studies in the Deliberative Dialogue series, and 230 completed the survey on which this report is based.

Faculty found the series worth their time, wherever they taught.

Every respondent reported learning from the series, and 63% reported learning “a great deal” or “a lot.” The vast majority agreed that the material was relevant to their work as educators, and on average they rated their likelihood of recommending it to a colleague at 77 out of 100.

Confidence rose on every component skill, not just in general.

Faculty rated their knowledge, skills, and confidence at 3.28 out of 5 before the series and 4.28 afterward — a full point higher ($p < .001$). The gain held across all twelve skills measured spanning the preparation of a dialogue, its facilitation, and the debrief that follows. The series did not simply leave faculty more positive about dialogue in the abstract; it moved them on every discrete skill the practice requires.

Most faculty acted on or planned to use what they learned.

By the time of the survey, 27% of respondents had integrated deliberative dialogue into one or more of their courses, and another 16% had facilitated dialogues before but changed their approach because of the series, meaning more than four in ten had already altered their teaching, not merely intended to. A further 44% planned to integrate deliberative dialogue into a future course. Together, 88% of respondents had adopted the practice, refined it or committed to using it. Eighty-one percent also reported feeling prepared to facilitate deliberative dialogue across different course formats.

Faculty saw a difference in their students.

Among the respondents who had actually run a dialogue or adjusted their approach, not one disagreed with any of the seven statements about what they observed in their own classrooms. Between 73% and 84% agreed or strongly agreed that students had grown more open and more respectful toward opposing points of view, participated more constructively on sensitive and polarizing topics, and interacted more respectfully with each other during difficult conversations. The most strongly endorsed statement was that their classroom now feels more supportive of diverse perspectives.

Taken together, these findings suggest that professional development focused on a specific instructional practice can move faculty from interest to use of that practice across the full range of American higher education — research universities, regional publics, small private colleges, and community colleges alike. At a moment when campuses are under pressure to show they can host difficult conversations well; this is a promising strategy to support faculty in making this a reality.

Introduction

Supported by the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, ACUE's Deliberative Dialogue initiative was designed to promote respectful dialogue and mutual understanding on college campuses by increasing instructor participation in a new professional development series across a range of institutions. Institutions demonstrated strong interest, recognizing that campuses serve as critical spaces for learning and civic engagement. This report examines what faculty took from the series, whether they changed their teaching as a result, and what they observed in their classrooms.

ACUE was commissioned by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations in May 2024 to develop the series. It comprises five one-hour, interactive Quick Studies that help instructors integrate structured, thoughtful dialogue into their teaching across disciplines and topic areas. Through practical guidance on course design, student preparation, and dialogue facilitation, the series equips instructors to lead conversations in which students engage complex issues from multiple perspectives — building the critical thinking, active listening, and collaboration skills essential for college, careers, and civic life.

Nineteen institutions in 13 states participated, ranging from a research university to career and technical colleges serving large numbers of non-traditional students, and from fewer than 1,500 undergraduates to more than 31,000. More than half (53%) were minority-serving institutions, most commonly Hispanic-serving institutions (47%). Table 1 (see appendix) provided details on each.

Once institutions were confirmed, ACUE collaborated with designated project leads on each campus to design implementation strategies for faculty participation. Because the Deliberative Dialogue Series is hosted within the ACUE Commons, ACUE's teaching and learning community, faculty were invited to join the Commons in order to access the series. Approaches to recruitment varied: most institutions offered the series campus-wide while others targeted specific faculty groups; most sent email communications highlighting the benefits of the series, providing participation instructions, and encouraging completion; two offered a small stipend to faculty who completed the series and the accompanying survey; and another hosted a weekly lunch and learn.

Methods

Participants

The research sample consisted of 230 faculty who completed the Deliberative Dialogue series and responded to the project survey. These faculty come from 18 of the 19 participating institutions; because no faculty from Dominican University completed the Deliberative Dialogue series, no faculty at that institution were invited to complete the survey. Table 2 (see appendix) gives more information on participation by institution.

Procedures

Between March 12 and May 4, 2026, all faculty at participating institutions who completed the Deliberative Dialogue series were invited to complete a survey on their experience. The survey was sent out through SurveyMonkey, with automatic reminders sent out 2 weeks later. All except the group who received the survey initially on May 4 also received a final reminder on May 18, and the survey was closed on May 26. All those who completed the survey were entered into a random drawing for five \$50 gift cards. Some institutions also offered their own incentives for completion.

Measures

Learning and Engagement

The survey included three items on overall engagement and learning, asking participants to report on how much they learned from the Deliberative Dialogue series, relevance of the series to their experiences as educators, and their likelihood of recommending the series to a friend or colleague. Learning and relevance items used a 5-point Likert scale, while the recommendation item used a slider that converted respondents' placement into a number between 1 and 100.

Behavioral Change

Participants reported on whether they have integrated deliberative dialogue into their courses or plan to do so in the future through a multiple-choice item. They also reported the extent to which they feel prepared to facilitate deliberative dialogue across various course formats using a 5-point Likert scale.

Measures

Change in Confidence and Knowledge

To measure change in confidence and knowledge, participants responded to a set of 12 items regarding their knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement deliberative dialogue in their courses using a retrospective pre/post design, meaning that for each item they reported how they felt before the series and how they currently feel. This section used a 5-point Likert scale. Both versions of the scale showed very high reliability (pre-series $\alpha = .978$; post-series $\alpha = .959$).

Course Climate

Finally, all participants responded to six items on the anticipated impact of their participation in the series on course climate ($\alpha = .950$). Respondents who indicated earlier in the survey that they had integrated deliberative dialogue into their courses or adjusted their approach to integrating deliberative dialogue were also asked to respond to seven questions on observed impact on course climate ($\alpha = .960$). All questions in this section used a 5-point Likert scale.

Results

Learning and Engagement

All participants reported that they learned from the Deliberative Dialogue series, with the majority (63%) reporting that they learned “a great deal” or “a lot” (see Figure 1). The vast majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the series was relevant to their experiences as educators (see Figure 2). On average, respondents indicated their likelihood of recommending the series was 77.07 ($SD = 24.66$) out of 100.

Figure 1 : *Frequency of Responses on Learning*

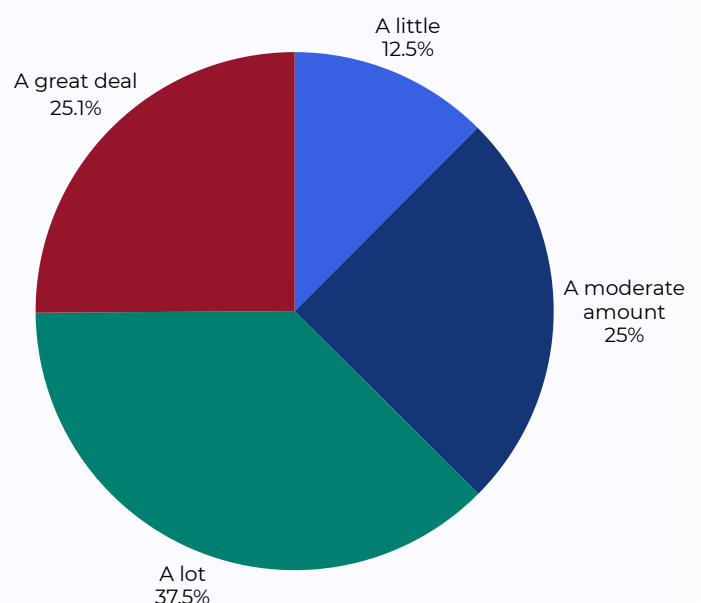


Figure 2 : *Frequency of Responses on Relevance*

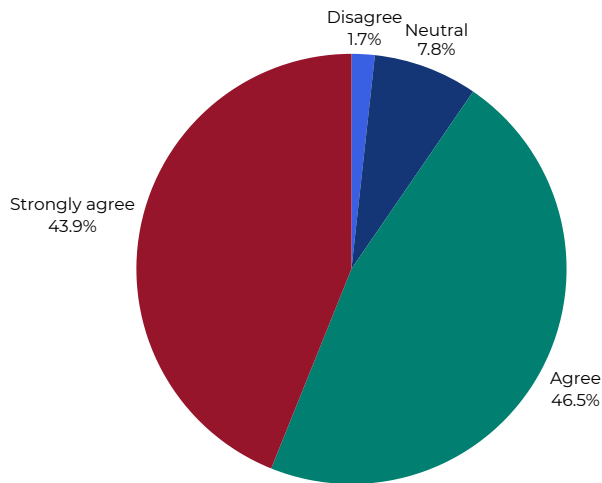
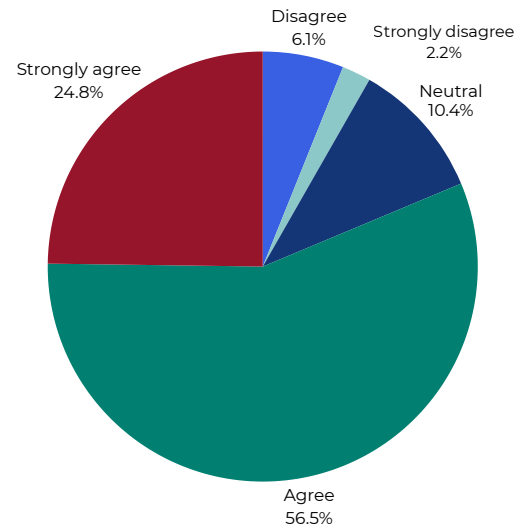


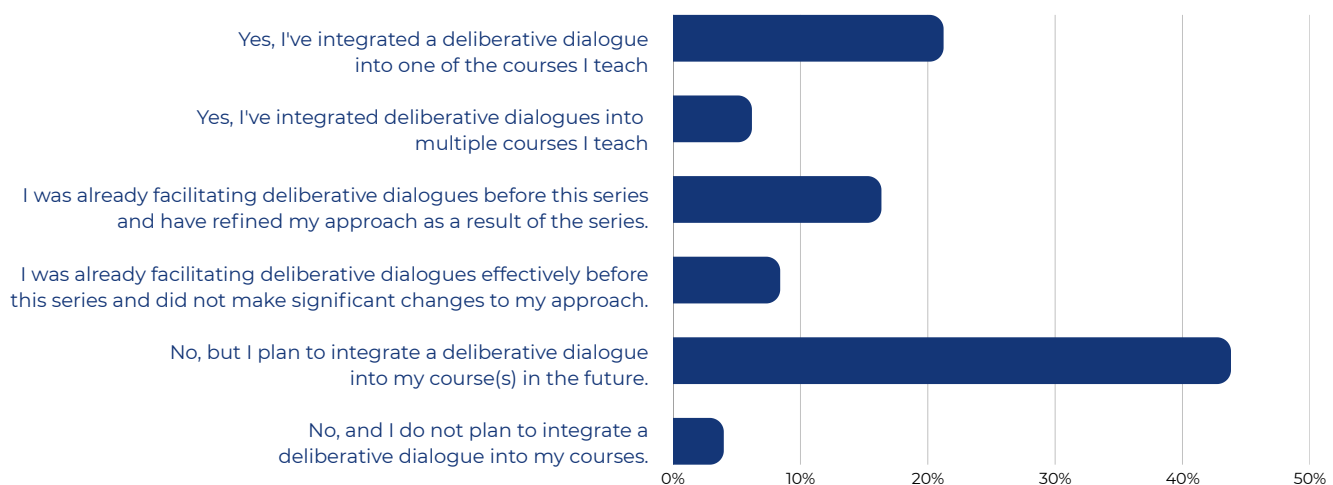
Figure 4 : *Frequency of Responses on Preparation to Facilitate Deliberative Dialogue Across Course Formats*



Behavioral Change

Just over a quarter of respondents (27.43%) reported integrating deliberative dialogue into one or more of their courses, and the plurality (43.81%) reported that they plan to integrate deliberative dialogue into their courses in the future. In addition, 16.37% reported that they had previously facilitated deliberative dialogues, but refined their approach because of the series (see Figure 3). The majority (81.30%) of respondents also reported feeling prepared to facilitate deliberative dialogue in different course formats (see Figure 4).

Figure 3 : *Frequency of Responses on Integrating Deliberative Dialogue*

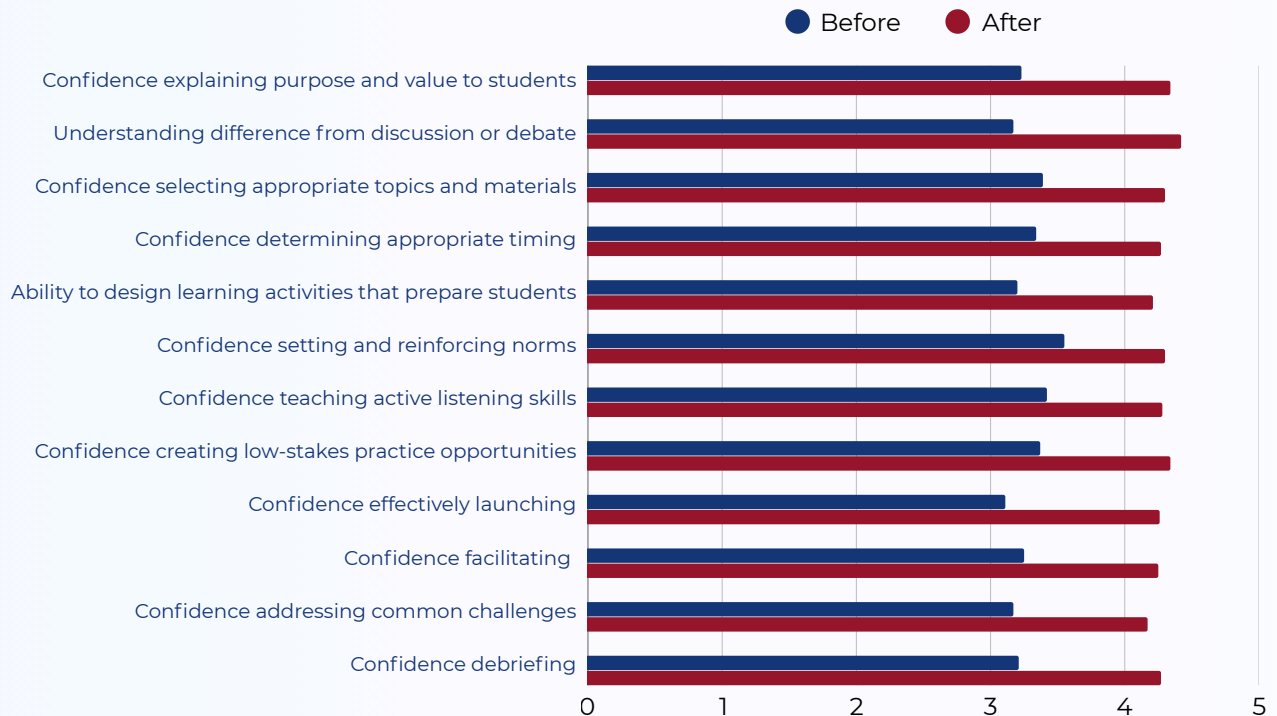


Change in Confidence and Knowledge

A repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant improvement in confidence in skills and knowledge related to deliberative dialogue, $F(1, 223) = 231.82, p < .001$, with an improvement from 3.28 ($SD = 1.10$) to 4.28 ($SD = 0.54$) out of 5. Similarly, repeated measures ANOVAs showed significant improvements on each individual item (see Figure 5).

- Confidence in explaining the purpose and value of deliberative dialogue to students, $F(1, 223) = 178.29, p < .001$
- Understanding how deliberative dialogue differs from discussion or debate, $F(1, 223) = 209.73, p < .001$
- Confidence selecting appropriate topics and materials for a deliberative dialogue, $F(1, 223) = 161.29, p < .001$
- Confidence determining the appropriate timing for incorporating a deliberative dialogue into course, $F(1, 223) = 193.73, p < .001$
- Ability to design learning activities that prepare students for deliberative dialogue, $F(1, 223) = 180.64, p < .001$
- Confidence setting and reinforcing norms for constructive conversation, $F(1, 221) = 108.54, p < .001$
- Confidence teaching students active listening skills to support deliberative dialogue, $F(1, 222) = 137.88, p < .001$
- Confidence creating low-stakes practice opportunities for students to engage in deliberative dialogue, $F(1, 223) = 152.70, p < .001$
- Confidence effectively launching a deliberative dialogue by establishing context, reinforcing norms, and outlining multiple perspectives, and facilitating a structured framework, $F(1, 222) = 213.35, p < .001$
- Confidence facilitating a deliberative dialogue, $F(1, 222) = 188.95, p < .001$
- Confidence addressing common challenges that arise during deliberative dialogue with students, $F(1, 223) = 184.62, p < .001$
- Confidence debriefing a deliberative dialogue to deepen student learning, $F(1, 223) = 185.22, p < .001$

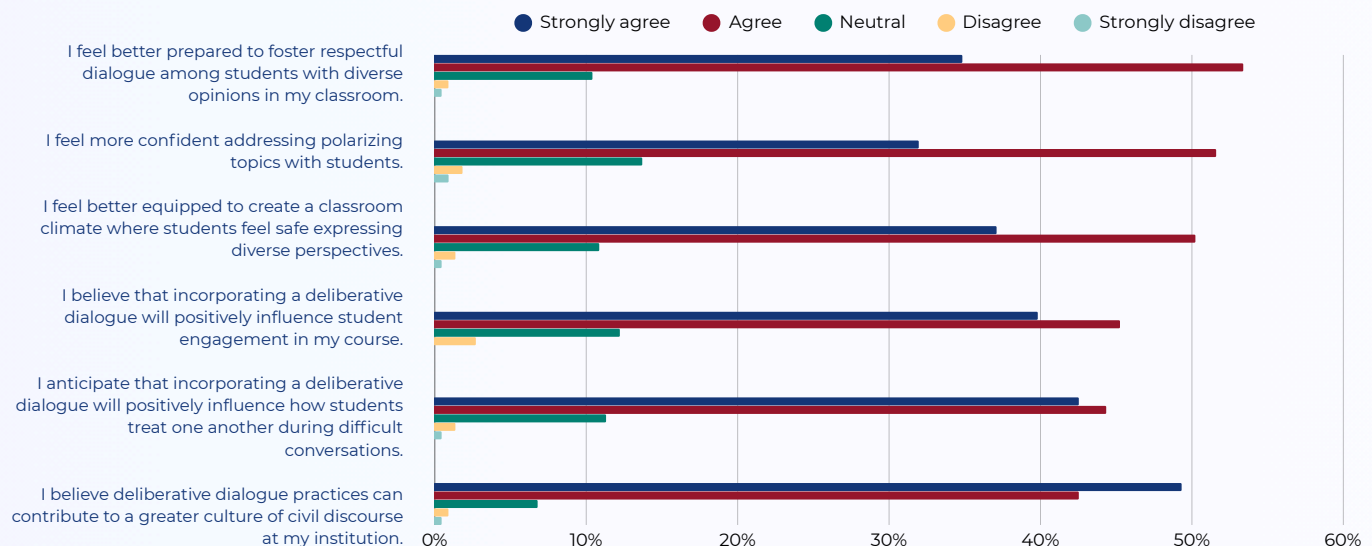
Figure 5 : Average Increases in Self-Reported Confidence in Skills and Knowledge Related to Deliberative Dialogue



Course Climate

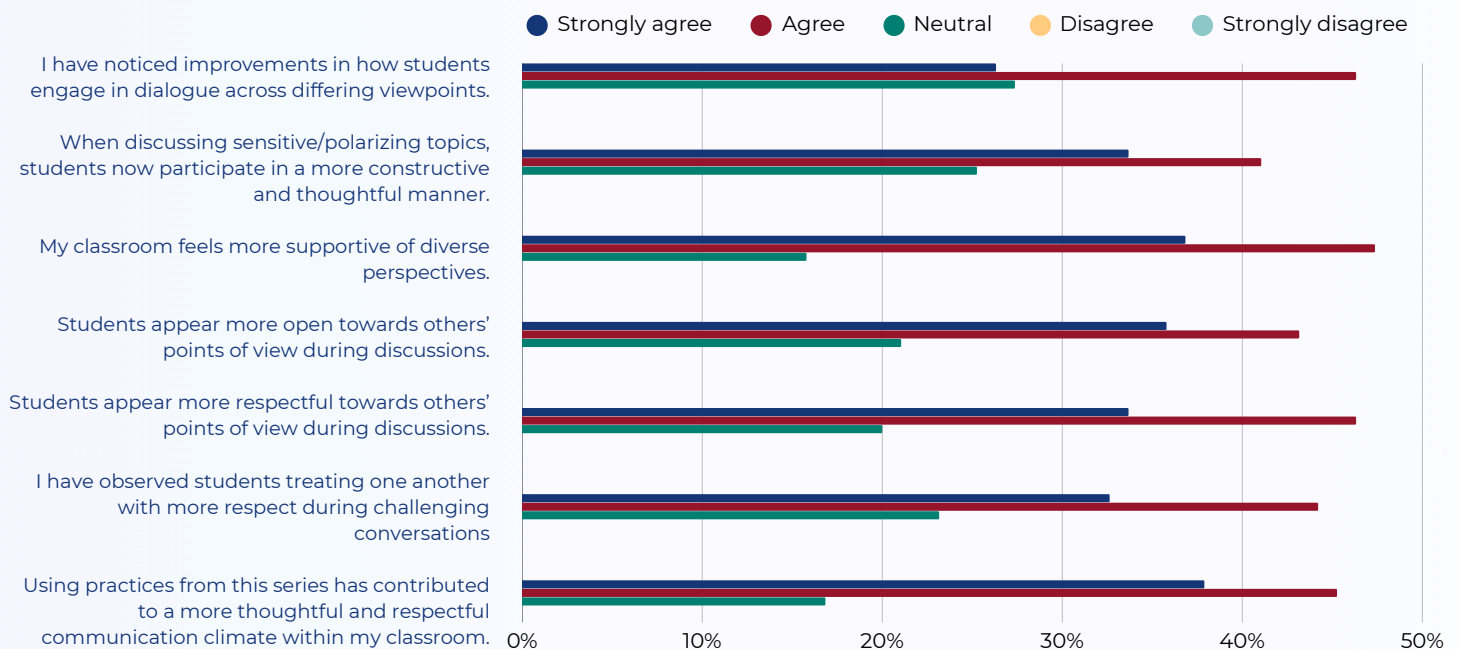
Respondents' average ratings for anticipated impacts on course climate were 4.24 ($SD = 0.66$) out of 5, with at least 80% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with each statement (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 : Frequency of Responses for Anticipated Impact on Course Climate



Participants who reported implementing a deliberative dialogue or adjusting their approach gave average ratings of 4.12 ($SD = 0.66$) out of 5 for observed impacts on course climate, with between 73% and 84% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with each statement (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 : *Frequency of Responses for Observed Impact on Course Climate*



Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reported data for measuring faculty experience and confidence, as self-reported measures can be subject to social desirability bias, where participants may respond to questions and scales in a way that they believe is more favorable or expected in their role. This bias could result in inflated reports of increased confidence, which could overestimate the impact of the Quick Study series. To mitigate social desirability bias, the survey instructions were written to encourage honest self-reflection rather than emphasizing a right or wrong answer, but it is still possible that some participants adjusted their responses based on how they thought they should respond.

Another potential limitation is the use of retrospective pre-post design to measure changes in confidence, as opposed to measuring confidence at baseline and post-Quick Study and examining change from baseline. While measuring baseline retrospectively could result in inaccurate reports, true baseline measurements of confidence before training can be inaccurate in a different way. Individuals who are uninformed about what is needed to succeed at a task tend to be overconfident in their skills (Dunning et al., 2003), but they can provide more accurate ratings of their abilities once they are trained (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

Discussion

While learning is an important outcome of faculty development, change in instructional practice is a more consequential one. At the time of the survey, 27.4% of respondents reported having integrated deliberative dialogue into one or more of their courses, and 16.4% reported having facilitated dialogues before the series but revised their approach as a result of it — 43.8% reporting some change in practice already made. An additional 43.8% reported planning to integrate deliberative dialogue into a future course. Respondents taught at 18 institutions differing in type, size, and student population. They reported finding the content applicable within their own contexts: 90.4% agreed or strongly agreed that the series was relevant to their work as educators, and the average reported likelihood of recommending it to a colleague was 77.07 out of 100.

Reported confidence increased significantly on the overall scale and on all twelve individual items. The pattern of those gains is informative for more closely considering faculty learning. The largest increases were on understanding how deliberative dialogue differs from discussion or debate (3.17 to 4.42) and on launching a dialogue (3.11 to 4.26); the smallest was on setting and reinforcing norms (3.55 to 4.30), the item on which respondents rated themselves highest before the series. Respondents thus reported the least change on a practice many instructors already employ and the most change on the conceptual distinction and opening procedure particular to deliberative dialogue. A uniform increase across items could be more attributable to a general favorable response to the series while differentiated patterns are less consistent with that explanation and points to specific learning trends on the topic of interest.

In summary, faculty had a positive experience both taking the Deliberative Dialogue series and implementing the framework taught in the Quick Studies. Despite the geographic and demographic differences between the participating institutions, the majority of faculty learned new strategies, found the content relevant in their institutional context, and were even willing to recommend it to their peers.

Implications

These findings suggest that the Deliberative Dialogue initiative has broad applicability across a wide range of higher education climates and cultures. The participants, teaching at 18 institutions from R1 universities to colleges focused on career and technical education, experienced the content as not just relevant but also impactful. Beyond increasing faculty knowledge and confidence, the number of faculty who tried deliberative dialogue activities could imply that this professional development may contribute to meaningful changes in instructional practice.

As colleges and universities continue to seek practical and collaborative approaches to foster productive classroom discussions, these findings highlight the potential value of deliberative dialogue in higher education as a means of developing respectful engagement, curiosity, empathy, and constructive discussion across differing perspectives. The reported improvements in learning and increased confidence in facilitating deliberative dialogue suggests that thoughtful, practice-oriented professional development can help instructors create classrooms that support these skills in students. When new strategies are not just learned, but practiced and refined, faculty create better course environments and student experiences.

Appendix

Table 1: *Characteristics of Participating Institutions*

School	Location	Type	Undergraduates	Carnegie classification	MSI type(s)
Adams State University	Alamosa, CO	4-year, public	1,605	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	HSI
Champlain College	Burlington, VT	4-year, private not-for-profit	2,778	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	n/a
Columbia University	New York, NY	4-year, private not-for-profit	9,164	Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity	n/a
Dominican University	River Forest, IL	4-year, private not-for-profit	2,690	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	HSI
Eastern Wyoming College	Torrington, WY	2-year, public	1,457	Associate's Colleges: High Career & Technical-High Nontraditional	n/a
Fairmont State University	Fairmont, WV	4-year, public	3,088	Master's Colleges & Universities: Small Programs	n/a
Helena College University of Montana	Helena, MT	2-year, public	1,554	Associate's Colleges: High Career & Technical-High Nontraditional	n/a
Indian River State College	Fort Pierce, FL	4-year, public	15,429	Baccalaureate/ Associate's Colleges: Mixed Baccalaureate/ Associate's	HSI
Johnston Community College	Smithfield, NC	2-year, public	5,371	Associate's Colleges: Mixed Transfer/Career & Technical-Mixed Traditional/ Nontraditional	n/a
Mississippi Valley State University	Itta Bena, MS	4-year, public	2,013	Master's Colleges & Universities: Small Programs	HBCU
Montclair State University	Montclair, NJ	4-year, public	18,712	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity	HSI
Mountwest Community and Technical College	Huntington, WV	2-year, public	1,520	Associate's Colleges: High Career & Technical-Mixed Traditional/ Nontraditional	n/a
Rutgers University-Newark	Newark, NJ	4-year, public	7,989	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity	AANAPISI, HSI
Salt Lake Community College	Salt Lake City, UT	2-year, public	27,437	Associate's Colleges: High Transfer-Mixed Traditional/ Nontraditional	HSI
State College of Florida-Manatee-Sarasota	Bradenton, FL	4-year, public	8,750	Baccalaureate/ Associate's Colleges: Mixed Baccalaureate/ Associate's	HSI
State University of New York at New Paltz	New Paltz, NY	4-year, public	6,862	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	n/a
Texas Woman's University	Denton, TX	4-year, public	10,039	Doctoral/ Professional Universities	HSI
University of Houston-Downtown	Houston, TX	4-year, public	12,622	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	HSI
Weber State University	Ogden, UT	4-year, public	31,672	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	n/a

HSI = Hispanic-Serving Institution; HBCU = Historically Black College and University; AANAPISI = Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution

Table 2: *Faculty Participation by Institution*

Institution	Faculty invited to Commons	Invites accepted	Started series	Completed series	Survey respondents
Adams State University	101	88	43	36	25
Champlain College	930	105	38	12	6
Columbia University	157	27	18	7	6
Eastern Wyoming College	47	35	31	30	12
Fairmont State University	642	91	20	11	8
Helena College University of Montana	140	63	45	25	17
Indian River State College	1055	125	34	11	5
Johnston Community College	983	753	60	51	15
Mississippi Valley State University	152	138	11	6	5
Montclair State University	3280	216	47	15	8
Mountwest Community and Technical College	68	26	8	5	1
Rutgers University-Newark	52	45	37	24	20
Salt Lake Community College	985	139	25	22	20
State College of Florida	414	60	12	2	1
State University of New York at New Paltz	1457	70	24	17	11
Texas Woman's University	552	74	23	11	6
University of Houston-Downtown	682	142	65	38	20
Weber State University	135	124	67	52	44
Totals	11832	2321	608	375	230

References

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Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(6), 1121–1134.



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