Community Conversations 2016
Themes and Action Steps

CAMPUS CLIMATE

Virtually all Community Conversations groups discussed issues of campus climate; several themes emerged most frequently:

*Improving Physical and Mental Health of Students*

Students expressed concern about the availability and training of mental health counselors at Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) and the lack of racial/ethnic diversity among SHAC staff. They asked for further discussions regarding mental health, stress, anxiety, depression, healthy eating, etc. More broadly, participants raised what they viewed as a culture of stress at Carleton, including the challenges presented by a ten-week term, and the sometimes-complicated intersections between home and College life.

To address these issues, the College will commit to the following actions:

- Hire a new psychologist in SHAC, bringing the total to four full-time therapists;
- Expand psychiatric services by hiring a psychiatric nurse consultant.
- Provide additional cultural competency training for SHAC staff.
- Create a Health Promotion office and hire a director to work proactively with students on stress management, time management, mental health, and nutrition.
- Provide additional support for Student Wellness Advocates (SWAs), with the new director of Health Promotion serving as a permanent advisor.
- Shift Alcohol and other Drug Programs under the Health Promotion umbrella to coordinate programs and services.
- Create additional collaborations among and education for Resident Assistants (RAs), SWAs and other peer leaders.

All these new staff members will be at Carleton before the start of Fall Term 2016. Finally, in order to identify additional short- and long- term physical and mental health needs of students, an external review of this area will be conducted in 2016-17, with its final report and recommendations expected by the end of Spring 2017.

*Sexual Misconduct*

The topic of sexual misconduct emerged during some of the Community Conversations. While some participants lauded much of the work being carried out on campus, they expressed confusion about policies and processes. Many students asserted that there was still more to do, particularly with respect to prevention efforts, awareness of the increased number of community concern forms being filed, and sharing investigatory and disciplinary outcomes.

Participants desired clarification of the Spring 2015 Campus Climate survey’s findings on sexual misconduct, with some students unaware that a summary of the results had been published on the Institutional Research and Assessment’s website in Fall 2015.
Carleton’s sexual misconduct policies and procedures have undergone significant changes in 2010 and in 2014-15. While this topic will always require vigilance and reevaluation, the College will commit to the following actions:

- Enhance education for students regarding Carleton’s sexual misconduct policies and procedures.
- Provide additional financial resources to expand student Green Dot Training.
- Provide Green Dot training to more faculty and staff.
- Re-vamp training processes for the Community Board on Sexual Misconduct.
- Continue utilizing the recently-created Title IX Student Visioning Team to refine policies and processes.
- Provide sexual misconduct training to more faculty and staff.

**Socioeconomic Challenges**

A prominent recurrent theme was the difficulty of discussing class-based differences and privilege on campus. Several groups, such as Interfaith Social Action and TRIO, already hold such conversations on a regular basis. However, some individuals do not feel comfortable having class-based conversations with others with whom they do not have an existing relationship.

Students felt that Carleton has many policies and practices that seek to “equalize” socioeconomic differences and class-based privileges, such as the required meal plan and the same cost for all residential housing. However, privilege still manifests itself in various ways: additional costs associated with some academic majors (e.g., supply or equipment fees); the ability to take advantage of co-curricular opportunities and unpaid internships; differences in term break and vacation plans; the ability to incur (non-tuition) off-campus studies expenses; and the ability to travel to and from home in an emergency situation, among others. Students clearly do not want to have assumptions made about them based on socioeconomic status and/or class.

To address these issues, the College will commit to the following actions:

- Create New Student Week programming that emphasizes socioeconomic diversity;
- Identify and reduce hidden curriculum costs.
- Provide better and more transparent information regarding resources available to low-income students.
- Review access to dining and housing for students whose finances require them to remain on campus during breaks.
- Consider a laptop loaner program
- Consider increasing print quotas.
- Seek as part of its fundraising to endow internships and externships for students who cannot afford to work for free or low pay.
- Similarly seek support for summer research opportunities on and off-campus.

Further, the report of a 2015-16 Working Group on low-income and first-generation students at Carleton will be shared with the campus community this summer.
#BLACK LIVES MATTER

There was general interest in and a desire to engage more deeply with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Participants wanted more information and felt uncertain as to what people at Carleton could do to effect positive change in U.S. race relations. In some conversation groups, people wanted to talk about how they could be an effective ally. Several students asked, “What does it mean to be supportive? What does it mean to contribute? How can we be allies?”

This topic generated the greatest feelings of sadness and disappointment among students. #BlackLivesMatter was difficult to discuss for many persons of color (POC). Some of our POC community felt uncomfortable with an unstated expectation that they contribute to the Conversation. Students from areas and communities impacted directly by police brutality and racial tensions talked about a deep disconnect between their lives at Carleton and their lives in their hometowns.

While this topic will continue to affect our community, the College will take these next steps:

- Expand current ally workshops based on the model promoted through the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC).
- Hire two tenure-track faculty positions, one in the area of American Politics, with a focus on the struggle for representation and power by minority groups in American politics; the other in Africana Studies, with a focus on African-American issues.
- Increase programming in the residence halls regarding issues of race relations and social justice with the collaboration of the Office of Intercultural and International Life (OIIL), GSC, and TRIO.
- Seize opportunities to bring to campus prominent speakers who address these topics.

FREE SPEECH

This topic was selected for discussion by a somewhat smaller number of Conversation groups. The general consensus seemed to be that although free speech should be and is valued at our College, words can still hurt. Many students discussed the level of toxicity of online social media platforms and expressed concern that some of their peers used social media, rather than face-to-face interactions, as a primary mode of communication. Some participants described the culture of harsh and fast judgment that exists when comments that are deemed inappropriate or offensive are made on social media.

A significant number of groups identified a separate concern about the importance of resisting political orthodoxy in campus discourse. Many students felt that voices and opinions that were not of the left or far left were marginalized. If political moderates and conservatives feel cowed or engage in self-censorship, which diminishes honest exchanges and learning. One way students felt that a wider variety of voices could be heard was by diversifying Convocation speakers.

Since the conclusion of the Community Conversations, further discussions of free speech have been occurring on campus, partly in response to a provocative Convocation speaker who is a free
speech purist and partly because of open sessions regarding the possible creation of a Bias Concern Response Team at Carleton.

This set of issues will require further exploration. Such dialogue will be spurred and enhanced by the Conversation Fellows and the “Civil Discourse on a Diverse Campus” Living/Learning Community (LLC) described below.

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS/ISLAMOPHOBIA

These topics were seldom discussed during the Community Conversations, perhaps because many participants found them far removed from the context of their daily lives. Participants most often asked for background information about these issues. The limited discussion focused on the danger and harm of stereotypes and how people think about Islam in the world today.

To help address these issues, the Chaplain’s Office has hired a part-time Muslim Chaplain who joined our community in 2016. The Chaplain’s Office and the Muslim Student Association have also provided expanded programming around the issue of Islamophobia and will continue to do so.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS RAISED

A variety of other important issues emerged during the Community Conversations, such as:

- Staffing in Disability Services (The College is in the process of hiring a new director, which will result in a 2-person office by Fall Term 2016).
- Student diversity training and inclusion (a report is forthcoming from the Dean of Students (DOS)-appointed Working Group on Creating an Inclusive Community at Carleton).
- A possible Bias Concern Response Team (the DOS-appointed Working Group on this topic has submitted its final report to the Dean, which will be reviewed and discussed by the College Community in early Fall 2016).
- Off-Campus Studies (OCS). The Conversations reinforced that exploring a curriculum and life outside of Northfield is a defining moment in many students’ college experience. There was a call for continued attention to students’ readjustment to campus following an OCS sojourn.
- Externship and internship programs. As previously noted, students value how Carleton alumni and parents support these career exploration opportunities. It is important that the College seek to “even the playing field” for students who seek such experiences.

CONTINUING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

The survey data confirmed the desire to continue discussions among faculty, staff, and students about these and other difficult topics. Students appreciated having faculty and staff present to
offer a different perspective and share their personal stories. Indeed, for some participants, this was the first time they had met with faculty and staff in a non-classroom setting.

Participants valued being exposed to a range of views, feeling that the conversation was a safe space in which to share and be heard, learning that they were not alone in their thoughts, and conversing with community members with whom they typically did not interact. That said, some participants reported feeling uncomfortable. They were concerned about making inadvertently inappropriate comments and running afoul of a culture of judgment in this unfamiliar setting.

Several common observations were made regarding group dynamics. Groups that were composed primarily of first-year students found it difficult to begin, particularly around the issue of campus climate. Participants preferred groups of twelve to fifteen members and found it advisable to focus on only two topics (as opposed to the overly-ambitious slate of five potential topics). Some students who regularly engage in discussions of these issues felt that the Community Conversations lacked depth, but those who had not previously discussed these types of questions found the experience meaningful. Some students did not like that attendance at Community Conversations was expected.

To capitalize on the momentum of this year’s Community Conversations, the College will introduce the following programs to facilitate further dialogue on campus:

• Create a new “Civil Discourse on a Diverse Campus” LLC of twenty first-year students who will live together in the same residence hall and enroll in a two-credit course, co-taught by a faculty and staff member. Participants in the LLC will make the increasingly-diverse Carleton community an explicit subject of study and reflection.

  The LLC will link the academic study of diversity to the residential experience of living in and with that diversity, and engage faculty and staff as both resources and co-learners with students, thereby encouraging a deeper and more holistic culture of civil discourse. Participants will also involve the wider community via major speakers and faculty-staff workshops. This pilot program has been made possible through the generosity of the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation.

• Create a Conversation Fellow/Leader program beginning Fall Term 2016, which will begin with twenty students who will go through an extensive training program to continue Community Conversations each term and discuss campus climate, community building, and Carleton values.

  These Fellows will lead at least one conversation each term with faculty/staff and students and will also work with the LLC community, Intergroup Dialogue facilitators, peer leaders, and student organizations.

This communication is intended to convey themes and actions related to the Community Conversations. Additional work has been accomplished by Working Groups and Task Forces during the 2015-16 academic year; an email update this summer will share this progress on these initiatives.