

# CONNECTIONS

An Annual Journal of the Kettering Foundation | 2022

**The Work of the Kettering Foundation: Challenges and Changes Ahead**

By Sharon L. Davies p. 2

**On the Formation of Citizens**

By Elizabeth Gish and Camryn Wilson p. 18

**Breaking the Mold: Journalism Reimagined**

By Paloma Dallas and Paula Ellis p. 62



**INNOVATING FOR DEMOCRACY**

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

*Connections* is published by the Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459. The articles in *Connections* reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its directors, or its officers.

© Copyright 2022 by the Kettering Foundation  
ISSN 2470-8003

**Executive Editor**  
Melinda Gilmore

**Editor**  
Maura Casey

**Copy Editors**  
Laura Carlson  
Amy Dragga

**Design and Production**  
Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

**Illustrations**  
Long's Graphic Design, Inc.



# CONTENTS

- 2 **The Work of the Kettering Foundation:  
Challenges and Changes Ahead**  
Sharon L. Davies
- 10 **The Citizens' Accord Forum:  
Building a Shared Society in a Sustainable  
Democracy**  
Phillip D. Lurie and Udi Cohen
- 18 **On the Formation of Citizens**  
Elizabeth Gish and Camryn Wilson
- 26 **Learning Exchange: A Democratic Way  
of Working**  
Sarah L. Murphy and Brad Rourke
- 32 **The Battle to Preserve Our Democracy:  
An Interview with Sharon L. Davies**  
Scott London
- 39 **Deliberative Pedagogy in Elementary Schools**  
Mindy LaBreck and Stacie Molnar-Main
- 47 **Humanities Councils: Working For and  
With the Public**  
Joni Doherty and Melinda Gilmore
- 54 **Deliberation Tackles Tough Issues on Campus**  
Alex Lovit
- 62 **Breaking the Mold: Journalism Reimagined**  
Paloma Dallas and Paula Ellis
- 70 **Reimagining Public Service, Professionalism,  
and Public Institutions: Fostering Democratic  
Practices**  
Valerie Lemmie and Kara Lindaman

# Deliberation Tackles Tough Issues on Campus

By Alex Lovit

In 1982, the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) published its first three issues guides, intended to promote deliberative conversations about public problems. In the four decades since, NIFI and its partners have published hundreds of issues guides on a wide variety of topics and convened thousands of forums for citizens to discuss public concerns.

Throughout this history, NIFI's deliberative issue guides have found a receptive audience in higher education. Deliberation in college classrooms has developed into a



ISTOCK.COM/VLADIMIR VLADIMIROV

full-fledged field of scholars studying the theory, practice, and effects of deliberative pedagogy. But until recently, deliberation on college campuses has mostly been practiced in academic contexts, focusing on topics of broad national concern rather than on any issues specific to the university environment.

What would happen if universities convened deliberative forums not as an academic exercise in building deliberative skills or in exploring government policy, but as a community conversation about issues affecting campus life? During the last three years, the Kettering Foundation and NASPA, a national member organization of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, have been working together to answer this question.

### **FRAMING AND TESTING CAMPUS ISSUE GUIDES**

NASPA is the largest association of student affairs professionals in the United States, with more than 15,000 members at more than 2,100 campuses. When most people think about universities, it is their academic departments—which concern core research and teaching functions—that come to mind. But higher education institutions could not function without the diverse field of student affairs, which embraces everything



**What would happen if universities convened deliberative forums not as an academic exercise in building deliberative skills or in exploring government policy, but as a community conversation about issues affecting campus life?**

---

from housing and dining to student programs and offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion. If academic faculty's research and teaching are higher education's *raison d'être*, student affairs professionals are the ones responsible for developing and maintaining a functional, cohesive campus community.

For student affairs staff to hold deliberative forums about campus issues, the first step was to develop issue guides on these topics. The process of selecting issues and framing them for an issue guide was itself deliberative, with teams of NASPA staff and associates

convening concern-collecting and test sessions involving hundreds of student affairs professionals and students across multiple campuses. In the 2020 issue of *Higher Education Exchange*, NASPA's associate director of policy research and advocacy, Diana Ali, described the challenge of developing a framing that reflected the diversity of thought and experience among these contributors: "We worked collaboratively in tying together similarities and differences experienced in the threads of participants' stories. . . . We pulled from our disparate skill sets to identify the sticking points and created deliberation options representative of our findings."



**The 10 campuses that piloted the NASPA issue guides found that students were interested in engaging, and that deliberative conversations prompted by the guides were civil, diverse, and deeply reflective.**

NASPA's framing team has now developed three guides on campus issues relating to free speech, fraternity and sorority life, and systemic racism. Each of these guides focuses on a topic that has provoked controversy on college campuses, and each of them presents participants with a range of options for how universities might respond that prioritizes different values.

For members of a campus community, these issues are not abstract academic exercises, nor are they broad concerns with marginal relevance to campus life. Questions about how to balance freedom of discourse against the risks of offensive speech, or how Greek-letter organizations can provide camaraderie and fun while remaining safe and equitable, are immediate concerns for higher education institutions. They are also wicked problems, in the sense that they can never fully be solved and contain inherent value tensions that must be continually renegotiated. This is all the more true for campus communities with ongoing turnover of students matriculating and graduating each year. As the university representatives most directly responsible for fostering campus community, student affairs professionals are well-suited to convene deliberative conversations on these topics.

## NASPA ISSUE GUIDES FOR DELIBERATIVE FORUMS

*In partnership with the Kettering Foundation, NASPA developed three issue guides for use by higher education institutions. Following the model established by the National Issues Forums Institute, NASPA issue guides are designed for use by groups with differing and diverse perspectives around a central question that does not necessarily have a predetermined “right” answer. Deliberative forums introduce participants to multiple options for addressing a central issue or question and allow time for each option, and its trade-offs or drawbacks, to be discussed by participants.*

*All three NASPA issue guides are available online at <https://naspa.org/project/issue-guides-for-deliberative-dialogue>.*

### **Free Speech and the Inclusive Campus**

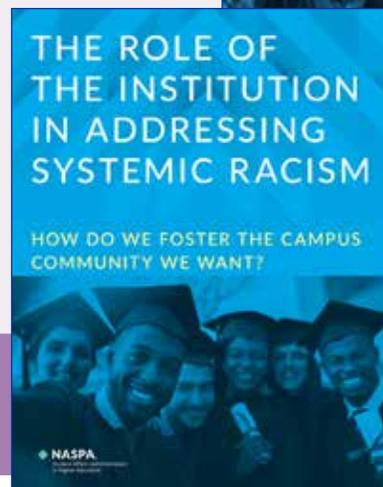
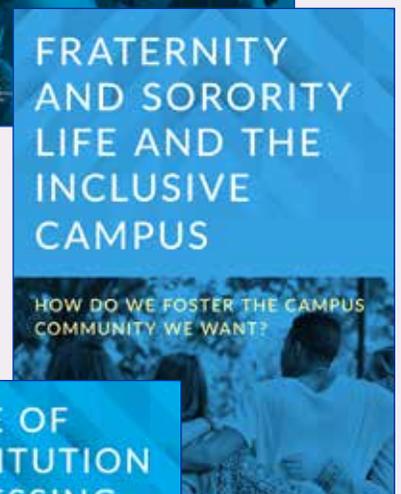
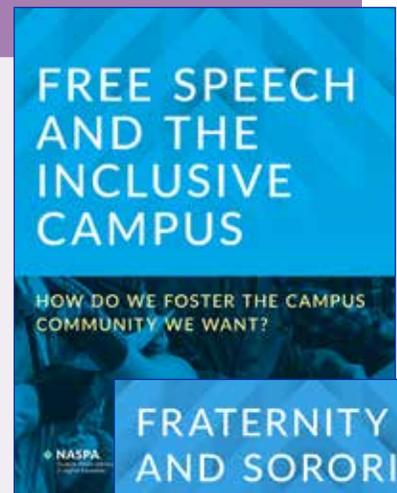
- OPTION 1** ▶ Prioritize student safety and well-being
- OPTION 2** ▶ Affirm the educational value of intellectual curiosity and engaging with ideas across difference
- OPTION 3** ▶ Uphold the ideals of free speech

### **Fraternity and Sorority Life and the Inclusive Campus**

- OPTION 1** ▶ Prioritize safety and well-being
- OPTION 2** ▶ Focus on community engagement and leadership
- OPTION 3** ▶ Ensure equity and access

### **The Role of the Institution in Addressing Systemic Racism**

- OPTION 1** ▶ Address systemic racism through academic inquiry and shared learning
- OPTION 2** ▶ Address systemic racism through cocurricular programming and workforce development
- OPTION 3** ▶ Address systemic racism through a sense of belonging and thriving





to these formal partnerships. In July 2022, at the most recent Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement conference, 118 participants attended a moderator training workshop, preparing to convene deliberative forums on their home campuses. And since *Free Speech* was published in 2020, it has been one of the top five most-downloaded issue guides from NIFI's website (not including downloads from NASPA's website, where it is also separately available).

As it turned out, 2020 was a difficult time to launch a new deliberative initiative in colleges and universities. The COVID-19 pandemic closed down many campuses, causing students to attend classes and extracurricular activities virtually. Unsurprisingly, participation in "campus" programs tended to decline

### COVID-19 PUSHES FORUMS ONLINE

Student affairs professionals on 10 campuses participated in a partnership with Kettering and NASPA to pilot student forums using these issue guides. But interest in these guides has been by no means limited

during this time, with wide-reaching implications for student experience. For example, the National Survey of Student Engagement found that both first-year students and seniors reported significantly fewer discussions with diverse others in 2021, as compared to prepandemic years.

The pandemic also affected NASPA's process of issue guide development. To solicit diverse perspectives and test drafts of the issue guide on free speech, NASPA had convened members at conference sessions. But for the second and third issue guides, much of this had to be done virtually. Facilitators reported that discussions at the virtual sessions were somewhat less robust, but the online meeting format also enabled a more diverse range of individuals and institutions to participate. In particular, developing these issue guides through virtual meetings may have been more equitable as it allowed representatives from less-resourced institutions to participate without paying for conference fees or travel. The pandemic also affected deliberations in another unexpected way: the issue guides had been designed to prompt reflection and conversation about common issues typical of college experiences, but the pandemic had caused unforeseen disruptions to typical experiences. Several moderators who convened deliberations about free

speech during the 2021-22 academic year noted that, unusually, many students had never experienced protests over a controversial speaker's presence on campus.

Convening deliberative forums on college campuses continued to be difficult during the 2021-22 academic year. The pandemic had disrupted traditions of campus gatherings, and ongoing safety restrictions meant that, in many cases, convenors could not rely on that traditional motivator to bring college students to events—free food. The student affairs offices convening these forums often had to go the extra mile to attract participants, partnering with student organizations or with academic partners who offered extra credit or other incentives for attendance.

Despite these challenges, the 10 campuses that piloted the NASPA issue guides found that students were interested in engaging, and that deliberative conversations prompted by the guides were civil, diverse, and deeply reflective. For example, Amy Koeckes, associate director for student engagement at the University of Nevada, Reno, noted that it was common for students to complain about the 90-to-120-minute schedule for deliberative forums, “but by the end, attendees were staying longer, wanting to continue to talk about the topic even after the forum was over.”

In many cases, the issue guides developed by NASPA elicited deeply reflective conversations informed by students' values and experiences. In forums at The University of Alabama, students with diverse political beliefs shared experiences applying for campus speaker permits—and found common ground about the importance of considering a wide range of perspectives. At Oklahoma City University, Talia Carroll, vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and Lilly Bermúdez, associate dean of students, reported that forums helped to defuse conflict by giving students opportunities to both understand and influence campus policies. Intriguingly, Oklahoma City University students tended to express more heterodox opinions later in forum conversations, suggesting that “perhaps, as a result of the guide and our facilitation, students believed and trusted that their voices mattered and that we did want to hear from them.” (Alongside the NASPA-developed guides specific to campus issues, some universities also made use of another issue guide, NIFI’s *COVID-19 and Vaccines: How Should We Keep Our Communities Safe?*, which prompted emotional conversations directly relevant to students’ recent experiences.)

The impacts of deliberation on individual psychology, group

identity, and political behavior are notoriously difficult to measure, and Kettering’s partnership with NASPA did not include a full-scale academic study. But this experiment with issue guides on college campuses did nevertheless produce many examples of students incorporating deliberative democratic principles into their speech and behavior. In forums on both free speech and fraternity and sorority life, participants recognized and wrestled with tensions. Students recognized that protecting peers from feeling dehumanized or unsafe also meant limiting the free exchange of ideas, and that the feelings of community belonging and social exclusion prompted by Greek-letter organizations are two sides of the same coin. This is core to deliberation’s democratic power. When citizens recognize shared values and the trade-offs necessary to balance them, people with different perspectives are drawn into shared conversation, rather than seeing one another as illegitimate or alien. Even criticisms of the issue guides—some participants argued that Greek-letter organizations are too diverse to be governed by a single model, or that the ideal of a neutral moderator could not apply to the topic of systemic racism—demonstrated the power of deliberation. Forums provided the opportunity for individuals to

civily express these carefully considered opinions among groups of diverse peers.

Deliberative experiences can influence how students make decisions democratically in a variety of contexts. Rae Joyce Baguilat, director of student leadership and civic engagement at the University of Illinois Chicago, described how student government leadership at an institution where she'd previously worked had internalized deliberative practices, using traditional forum questions like, "Who's not in the room?," "What's the third option here?," and "What's the trade-off?" to expand their considerations when discussing student issues and funding.

Perhaps the most important outcome of NASPA's and Kettering's initial experiments with campus deliberation was simply their contribution to building campus communities—a particularly important goal in the aftermath of pandemic-related disruptions. Feeling included and respected in conversation with a group is a powerful way to feel like a full member of that group. As Kathryn Cilano, director of the center for leadership and civic engagement at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) put it, "When we set out to pilot a deliberative dialogue program on RIT's campus, I anticipated



**Perhaps the most important outcome of NASPA's and Kettering's initial experiments with campus deliberation was simply their contribution to building campus communities—a particularly important goal in the aftermath of pandemic-related disruptions.**

that students would leave with an increased likelihood to have difficult conversations with their peers and staff at our university. What I did not expect was the unintended outcome of increasing students' sense of belonging within our campus community. In very similar ways, this research exchange has provided me with a deeper sense of belonging within the field of higher education and specifically within the community of educators who focus on meaningful civic engagement initiatives." ■

---

*Alex Lovit is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached at [alovit@kettering.org](mailto:alovit@kettering.org).*



200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459; (937) 434-7300  
444 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 434, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 393-4478  
[www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org)

---

Kettering Foundation  
200 Commons Road  
Dayton, OH 45459



CONNECTIONS2022