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12–14
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13–15
Region VI Conference
University of Michigan–Ann Arbor

15–17
Region V Conference
Marquette University

20–21
Region VIII Conference
University of Limerick
(International Experience, November 17–19)

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9–10
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9–11
2026 Next Up: Leading Forward: Women's Leadership for What's Next
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YEMI GBAJOBI
UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON

PUTTING A MAN ON THE MOON: MAKING MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES EVERYONE'S JOB

There's a story about President Kennedy visiting NASA in the early 1960s. Walking the halls, he stopped and asked a janitor what he did. The janitor didn't say he mopped floors or emptied bins. He said he was helping put a man on the moon.

We may never know if that story is true, but it's an important lesson in how we connect our people to our purpose. If you stopped anyone in your building tomorrow, not just your director or your VP, but your student staff on the front desk or your custodians, and asked them what their job was, would the answer connect back to your mission or would they tell you their job description?

We spend a lot of energy, rightly, talking about the importance of having a mission, vision, and values. But I want to focus on the harder question we often devote less energy to: How do we make sure they are actually alive and in use across the whole organization, not just recited by the people who wrote them?

It matters more now, not less. We are operating in an increasingly polarized environment, on campus and well beyond it, where it can feel like everyone is being asked to pick a side on everything. In that climate, a clear mission, vision, and values become more valuable, not less, because they give staff, students, and stakeholders a shared answer to who we are and what we do, independent of whatever the argument of the week happens to be.

If I asked you and a friend to travel to the next town over without Google Maps, you'd probably still arrive, but slower, after a couple wrong turns, and probably with a few arguments on the best route to take. When our organizations don't have a clear sense of purpose, we end up having the same argument on a loop, except it costs staff time, student trust, and institutional relationships. A shared mission and set of values won't settle every debate, but they settle how we have it.

Still, we sometimes get strategic planning wrong. In trying to take mission, vision, and values seriously, we over-engineer the process of producing them. We treat it as a big set-piece exercise, run every three to five years, that ends in a beautifully designed document that lives on a shared drive, and then we wonder 12 months later why nobody outside the senior team can quote a word of it.

Currently, there is divergence on the best way to approach creating the strategic plan, which often houses our mission, vision, and values. Some organizations are questioning whether the traditional long-form, multi-year strategic plan is even the right instrument in an environment changing as quickly as ours. Others are moving from five-year plans to three-year plans to keep the document live while still building a structured approach. Neither approach suggests that we don't have a plan. It means the plan is a means, not the point. The real test isn't whether the document is well written. It's whether people who never open it can still tell you, in their own words, what your union is for.

So if the document isn't the point, what is it? Listening, properly and structurally. Whose voices do you hear during a planning process, and whose don't you hear? Student government and senior staff are, rightly, in the room. Student staff, caretakers, casual and part-time colleagues, and the students who never set foot in your building are less likely to be there. What does their absence from the conversation mean for how they experience the values you've written down without them?

Some of the strongest recent examples from across our sector are really examples of listening, deliberately. The University of Alberta's Students' Union spent two years gathering feedback from students, student leaders, managers, staff, and executives before creating its latest strategic plan. University of Nevada–Las Vegas's new president built his strategic planning process around what he called a listening tour, explicitly designed to reach the voices on campus that are often underrepresented in these conversations. Curtin Student Guild's in Australia newest plan describes itself as rooted in the guild's values and its history of student-led action, with student voice built in as a strategic pillar rather than a consultation afterthought. Students' Union UCL in London formulated its current strategy jointly with elected officers and staff, following extensive consultation with students. Our own ACUI board, in developing the plan that guides this Association today, gathered member assessments, financial data, and focus group input, ran an environmental scan, and revisited ACUI's mission, vision, and values before finalizing the plan. None of this is radical but a structural commitment to hearing from the full width of an organization, not just the top of it, shows in plans people actually recognize themselves in.

At Arts SU, we build that into our routines rather than leave it to a poster in reception. Our values statement puts it plainly: "At the heart of everything we do are our values." They give us our identity, guide how we make decisions and conduct ourselves uniquely to the Arts SU because we believe how we act every day is as important as what we do. We try to make that statement alive rather than a series of words. In our annual staff review process, colleagues are asked to give real examples of where they've lived our values in practice. When we build our yearly operational plan, every proposed activity has to answer the question, "How does this link to our mission and our values?" If we can't answer that question clearly and concisely, the activity doesn't survive, however good an idea it might otherwise be.

Creating a mission, vision, and values doesn't always need a task force or a consultant. They needed a decision that mission, vision, and values are something our people use to make decisions and judge their own work, not something they hear once at induction and never again. Which brings me back to that janitor at NASA. Could your student staff or your custodians, the person unlocking the doors at 7 a.m., tell you how their job connects to why you exist? If the answer is yes, your mission, vision, and values are doing their job. If what you get is a job description, you know exactly where your next planning conversation needs to start—not with a bigger document but with better listening.



ACUI CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
JOHN TAYLOR, ED.D.

WHAT'S NEW, AGAIN

I'm always excited for ACUI's annual "What's New" edition in *The Bulletin*. By sharing new ideas, new programs, and new services, college union professionals are essentially sharing new creative ideas and best practices. In fact, we've been asking what's new in college unions since the Association was founded. When Case Western, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio State, Purdue, and Wisconsin sat down together in 1914, they wanted to know what each was doing on their campuses to advance campus community. They wanted to learn from each other, and 112 years later, we're still asking, and subsequently finding, new ways to improve our college unions and create a sense of belonging for students. Let's take a look at some examples.

Post World War I, in 1920, delegates from 21 schools visited the University of Michigan for the Association's annual convention. The architects of the Michigan Union noted that the design of a college union needed to be forward thinking, indicating that a building frozen in an old style would "chain the living institution to the dead past," instead of letting it grow into whatever its students needed. Sound familiar? A “what's new” issue I consistently hear today was also raised at this earliest of meetings: What campuses were doing to generate new revenue? Sources mentioned included the restaurant and cafeteria, soda bar, cigar and candy store, billiards, lodgings, bowling alley, and barber shop. Operas and vaudeville shows were also noted as money-makers at the time.

AS COLLEGE UNION PROFESSIONALS, WE MUST REGULARLY ASK "WHAT'S NEW" TO AVOID BEING STAGNANT, TO REMAIN FORWARD-LOOKING, AND TO PROVIDE THE BEST PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO SUPPORT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SUCCESS. AT THE SAME TIME, WE REFLECT ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF WHY UNIONS EXIST, THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGE UNION, AND, AS WITH THE CENTENNIAL BLUEPRINT PROJECT, DELIBERATELY ASK WHAT SHOULD DEFINE A COLLEGE UNION FOR THE NEXT 100 YEARS.

Following World War II, the GI Bill sent veterans to college by the millions, which catapulted the building of new college unions. Porter Butts documented more than 60 new union buildings under construction in just a few years, most of them built as war memorials. There is no doubt as buildings were being built that lots of "what's new" questions were being asked, trying to make the best and most current options available to students.

The 1960s brought the Higher Education Act of 1965 and a new wave of students onto campus, just as the civil rights movement and Vietnam reshaped what those students expected from their college experience—and from their college union. *The Bulletin* covered it in real time, noting changes for professional staff in doing their job. "Because of the problems of sit-ins, demonstrations, etc.," one 1968 article reported, "union directors have more, even day to day, contact with the dean's office, the disciplinary office, security officers, the university president," adding that students were "demanding and receiving a greater voice in the operation of our union buildings" and "becoming less inclined to take advice from union administrators."

Across time one of the most frequent areas to ask "what's new" is with technology. Look at any union floor plan across the decades, and you can watch technology rewrite the building, room by room. Assembly halls built for lectures and concerts doubled as movie theaters once films became a campus fixture in the middle decades of the 20th century. By the 1990s, unions were wiring their buildings with ethernet and building computer labs, until 1999 when Carnegie Mellon became the United States' first campus-wide wireless network. Wireless became a necessity, and unions were moving as quickly as possible to add Wi-Fi access points. And banks of phone booths lined the college union halls for decades until cell phones made them obsolete in the early 2000s. In the 2010s, bulletin boards were retired at many unions, replaced with display monitors to announce meetings, events, and campus programs. And game room arcades that once ate quarters by the roll gave way to today's eSports spaces. Technology will continue to advance, and we will continue to ask "what's new" as we strive to meet student needs through state-of-the-art technology.

So, what's new today? Besides what you will read about in this issue, what comes to mind for me is the Centennial Blueprint, a project being led by the Wisconsin Union in partnership with ACUI. The goal of the initiative is to define, validate, and advocate for the enduring touchstones and evolving roles of the college union, culminating in a professional toolkit that ensures the relevancy, sustainability, and impact of college unions into the next century. It is hoped that they will guide our efforts to remain relevant, student-centered, inclusive, and aligned with our evolving institutional and societal context.

As college union professionals, we must regularly ask "what's new" to avoid being stagnant, to remain forward-looking, and to provide the best programs and services to support student engagement and success. At the same time, we reflect on the foundations of why unions exist, the role of the college union, and, as with the Centennial Blueprint project, deliberately ask what should define a college union for the next 100 years. We need to embrace what's new while remaining centered on our values and what's always been the case for advancing campus community.

USING COMPASSION ON CAMPUS – TWO STUDIES

BELONGING ON CAMPUS: FINDING YOUR PEOPLE IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE

In "Find Your People: A Division Wide Collaborative to Improve Student Belonging," published earlier this year, a team of authors from Mississippi State University research the ties between student sense of belonging and retention, persistence, graduation, and well-being. The authors—Regina Young Hyatt, Andrew Rendon, and Jacqueline Mullen—argue that belonging is not built by a one-time intervention. It takes sustained effort and shared institutional responsibility.

Several Mississippi State University data sources pointed out the same, including results from the National Survey of Student Engagement and Healthy Minds Survey, which showed that up to 30% of students lacked a sense of belonging. A fall 2022 campus climate survey found that 20% of respondents had seriously considered leaving the school, and 48% of them named lack of belonging as the main reason. The student affairs division framed its work around T. L. Strayhorn's definition of belonging, which centers on feeling connected, cared about, and valued on campus, that he references in "College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for all Students."

Four primary components constituted the division's efforts:

- **Students as partners.** Student government leaders reviewed the data and helped name the campaign, "Find Your People." Many were surprised that a quarter or more of their peers felt disconnected.
- **Staff capacity.** Small internal grants paid for two-part workshops. These helped staff interpret the climate data and redesign programs for minoritized students.
- **Restructuring.** The Division of Student Affairs added an assistant vice president for student experience. That role coordinated student activities, fraternity and sorority life, leadership and community engagement, and the student union around the campaign.
- **Campaign launch.** Departments and student organizations tagged events "Find Your People" in the event management system and used #findyourpeople on social media. Every event had to include a meet-and-greet component.

Grant funding focused the effort on first-time-in-college students who skipped Mississippi's two main onboarding routes, the New Maroon Camp pre-college program and fraternity/sorority recruitment. That group was about 1,550 students, nearly half the entering class.

From 3,772 incoming students, the team formed comparison groups. The intervention group was 751 FTIC students with no involvement in any "deep engagement" program, such as athletics, band, or the cultural and scholar programs. In November 2023, staff called, texted, or emailed each of them to ask how they were doing, what plans they had to get involved, and why they had skipped pre-college programs. A separate group of 33 students (21 after exclusions) attended a "Find Your People" resource session. It offered one-on-one consultations with staff and student leaders, lunch, and referrals to matching organizations. Returns from fall to spring were measured on the tenth day of the spring term.

What they found in the results was that 92% of the "Find Your People" session attendees returned for Spring 2024, and that the 751-student outreach group returned at 89%, compared with 93% for all first-time-in-college students.

Their "Find Your People" session attendance was not a significant predictor, and GPA was not included in the model, so the authors could not draw firm conclusions about the outreach. They did note, however, that only

individual meetings appeared to help. Finally, students' reasons for skipping New Maroon Camp included family time, work, cost, scheduling conflicts, and a missed deadline. Students most wanted more information on parking, advising, dining, and housing, plus study and time-management help.

Conclusions

Mississippi State did go on to run a Transfer Student Mixer, a transfer-student focus group, a revived Transfer Student Association, and signage at shuttle stops for commuters. It also added a "Find Your People" speed-dating event in its late-night series and a two-day Transfer New Maroon Camp in 2024. More than 75 events carried the campaign label in academic year 2025.

Looked at together, the team came away with four lessons:

1. Lasting belonging takes a coordinated, institution-wide response.
2. Useful belonging data often already exists on campus.
3. Student leaders are essential partners.
4. Transfer students need more study.

Citation:

Find Your People: A Division Wide Collaborative to Improve Student Belonging
Mullen, Rendon & Hyatt, Mississippi State University. *New Directions for Higher Education, 2026, pp. 45–50*

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF CARING ON CAMPUS

While this study is based solely on university faculty input, the question it asks, "What is the growing emotional work of caring for students costing college faculty?" correlates to the same costs for professional staff on campuses.

The term "compassion fatigue" was first described and coined among social workers and healthcare workers as a way to combine burnout and its symptoms—exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced effectiveness—with secondary traumatic stress, which is the strain of taking in other people's trauma.

In the paper, "The Hidden Curriculum of Care: Emotional Labor, Burnout, and Compassion Fatigue in Higher Education," it is noted that the opposite outcome is "compassion satisfaction," the sense of reward that comes from helping others. The authors argue that with a focus on student success taking a more holistic approach, faculty are now carrying more of this "care labor" burden. The authors point to the pandemic, a student body with more trauma histories and outside responsibilities, and the push toward student-centered, trauma-informed teaching. Most faculty have never been trained for this work.

The study uses a Job Demands–Resources model that treats well-being as a balance between the demands a job places on people and the resources available to meet them. The three demands studied using the model were exposure to student trauma; student-related stressors, such as arguing, criticism, unrealistic expectations and entitlement; and emotional dissonance: hiding negative feelings like irritation or performing positive feelings like enthusiasm and empathy that one doesn't feel.

The resources were perceived organizational support and five types of self-care: professional support, professional development, life balance, cognitive awareness, and daily balance.

The team—Carrie Boden (Texas State University), Angela Girdley (Baylor University), Amy Benton (Samford University), and Kandi Pomeroy (Alamo Colleges)—recruited faculty with at least one year of teaching experience at regionally accredited institutions, mainly through LinkedIn. The final sample was 468 faculty. Of these, 83% were full-time, 59% were women, and 75% were White, with an even split between tenure-line and non-tenure-track faculty. Using hierarchical regression, the authors added age, then each demand, then organizational support, then self-care. They tested how each step predicted burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion satisfaction.

It turned out that demands did hurt overall well-being, as student-related stressors were the strongest single demand. They predicted more burnout and secondary traumatic stress and lower compassion satisfaction.

Also of note, trauma exposure works in an unexpected way. On its own, supporting students through trauma predicted more burnout, but once student-related stressors were accounted for, trauma no longer predicted burnout. It became a modest positive predictor of compassion satisfaction. In other words, the difficult interactions surrounding trauma drive exhaustion more than helping traumatized students does. The authors call trauma a "challenge demand," meaningful and motivating but draining if sustained without recovery.

They also found that when faculty suppressed negative emotions, it raised burnout and lowered satisfaction. So masking emotions costs faculty; performing positive emotions was the strongest predictor of secondary traumatic stress and raised burnout.

Resources help, but only partly. Organizational support reduced burnout and increased satisfaction. Among the self-care types, professional development and life balance reduced burnout, and cognitive awareness also raised satisfaction. Neither organizational support nor self-care reduced secondary traumatic stress. That gap suggests individual coping and general institutional goodwill can't fully offset the effects of absorbing students' trauma.

Implications

The authors warn of "mission creep," as institutions mandate student-centered and trauma-informed care without adding training or structural support to match.

They recommend:

- Trauma-responsive resources for staff, such as counseling, secondary-trauma training, and peer support networks
- Fair workload distribution and stronger leadership development
- Less reliance on student evaluations in personnel decisions
- Training in boundary-setting, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation
- Transparent grievance procedures
- Student orientation programs that set expectations for academic civility

Relevance to Student Affairs and Professional Staff

The study surveyed only faculty, but its findings apply directly to student affairs. The trauma-exposure measure was adapted from Lynch and Glass's scale of secondary trauma among student affairs professionals. That scale comes from earlier research showing that staff in advising, residence life, conduct, case management, and campus activities face the same exposure. Several recommendations also fall to student affairs divisions, including orientation norms on civility, counseling capacity, and peer-support structures. Faculty increasingly direct struggling students to these offices, and some of the same strain lands there in turn. The finding that self-care and organizational support didn't reduce secondary traumatic stress is a caution for divisions that rely mainly on wellness programming to sustain their own staff.

Citation

The Hidden Curriculum of Care: Emotional Labor, Burnout, and Compassion Fatigue in Higher Education
Boden, Girdley, Benton & Pomeroy. I*nnovative Higher Education, 2026*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-026-09882-9



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Building a Shared Language for Constructive Dialogue is a Strategic Imperative

BY
MICHAEL KUSH, SUNY-ONEONTA,
& ROBB THIBAULT, SUNY-ONEONTA

THE STATE OF THE COLLEGE UNION

EDITOR'S NOTE: *For the third straight year, ACUI will introduce a series of topics with the intent to inform members on the most relevant issues affecting student unions and the campus community.*

Stories That Build Belonging:"Real Talk" as a Scalable Model for Connection, Reflection, and Leadership

In this issue, how a campus community, or any community for that matter, fosters belonging can be a challenge at the personal, the neighborhood, and the national level. This State of the College Union article examines how a shared language can be developed between students and professionals, using a clear and replicable model to engage and assess belonging.



Shakespeare asked, "What's in a name?" suggesting names are mere labels or arbitrary markers with no bearing on the thing itself. But students are proving him wrong. In their stories, you can find not just identity but also belonging and the recognition that their names, their narratives, their "becoming" matter. When we create space for students to share their stories, we're not just collecting anecdotes; we're building the conditions for deeper connection, transformation, and leadership.

College can often be framed as a proving ground, a place to demonstrate competence, earn credentials, and validate yourself. But the stories students in the Real Talk program at SUNY–Oneonta tell us suggest something different. They're claiming college as a place of becoming: a space where transformation isn't just possible, but expected, invited, and even celebrated. And that shift from proving to becoming doesn't happen by accident. It happens when institutions deliberately make room for students to name who they are and imagine who they're growing into.

SUNY–Oneonta developed Real Talk: Stories of Connection, an online training module in Brightspace where university leaders share their stories. Students are able to watch, reflect, and, at the end of the module, draft their own Real Talk script and consider how they can integrate the pedagogy of Real Talk, developed by Dr. Paul Hernandez, into their lives—either as leaders in organizations or in their personal lives when they need to have an important conversation with family, friends, or fellow club members and are unsure how to begin. Hernandez is a nationally recognized leader in college access, student success, pedagogy, and in creating and fostering a sense of belonging. With a doctorate in sociology with a specialization in education, social inequality, and intersectionality, Hernandez has extensive experience as a faculty member, nonprofit administrator, and higher education administrator.

At SUNY–Oneonta, the collaboration supporting Real Talk includes working with WIRE TV, the student television production club; the Office of Student Life and Leadership through the LEAD@Oneonta program; and members of the Professional Equity Institute to develop the curriculum and use it as a tool for belonging intervention.

This article is an effort to share how Real Talk can be duplicated as a scalable co-curricular pedagogy for working with student leaders in and outside of college unions. And while college unions have long been designed as places of connection, the work of helping students feel connected requires intentional pedagogy. The early results from Real Talk assessment activities were notable and highlighted how valuable this could be not only for students but also for university employees.

Theoretical & Pedagogical Foundations of Real Talk

Hernandez's book, "The Pedagogy of Real Talk," is grounded in the belief that learning is not only cognitive, but shaped by story, identity, and the relational contexts in which individuals make meaning of their experiences. Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of information, this framework situates them as narrators of their own development. In doing so, it draws from narrative identity theory, constructivist learning principles, and developmental approaches to belonging, while remaining accessible, and relational.

At its core, Real Talk treats storytelling as pedagogy. This form of storytelling is not intended to be performative, but instead, used as a method of sharing meaningful experiences. Participants are invited to critically engage in their lived experiences, not to present a "finished" version of self, to examine how their stories are still developing. This distinction is essential. When stories are used pedagogically, their power lies not in their completeness but in their tension and openness. Stories without perfect endings signal that growth is ongoing, and they model reflection rather than resolution and invite participants into deeper engagement with their own stories.

This approach is closely aligned with narrative identity development, which suggests that individuals construct a sense of self by integrating past experiences with present understanding and future aspirations. Real Talk creates structured opportunities for this integration. Participants are not simply sharing stories; they are considering how those stories shape who they are becoming. Reflection becomes applied to learning. The pedagogical arc intentionally moves learners through a cycle of consumption (hearing a story), reflection (making personal meaning), creation (articulating their own narrative), and application (translating insight into behavior or decision-making).

Belonging, within this framework, is also redefined. Rather than being treated as a fixed feeling or personality trait, belonging is understood as a developmental process and a practiced skill. Students learn how to engage, contribute, and locate themselves within community through guided reflection and relational interaction. Real Talk supports this by normalizing vulnerability, while maintaining clear boundaries. When these boundaries are created, participants can practice authentic engagement in ways that feel significant. It can be said that a sense of belonging emerges not from similarity or comfort but from listening and storytelling.

Real Talk asks the facilitator to utilize coaching and advising to engage participants. Advising focuses on giving answers, directing choices, or transferring

knowledge. Coaching centers on facilitating reflection, asking questions, and supporting individuals in accessing their own insights. The Real Talk pedagogy assumes that individuals already hold the keys to their growth; the role of the facilitator is to create the conditions where this information can be discovered and developed.

Ultimately, Hernandez offers a framework that is both conceptually grounded and deeply practical. It elevates storytelling from a communicative act to a developmental tool, positions reflection as a method for applied learning, and makes belonging something learners actively build in their own spaces. Learning and communication are now authentic, and self-awareness is on full display.

Designing the Real Talk: Stories of Connection Module

In 2025, participants in the Professional Equity Institute proposed transforming workshop-developed scripts into short video narratives that could foster connection and create teachable moments for students. The concept evolved into a structured learning experience in which students would engage with these stories, reflect on them, and ultimately craft their own "Real Talk" script.

Within a few months, the initiative moved into production. The team partnered with WIRE TV, the campus student television organization, to film narratives in the studios using teleprompters built from finalized scripts. These videos were intentionally designed for integration into Brightspace, SUNY–Oneonta's learning management system, allowing the experience to function as an asynchronous, scalable module. The experience for Wired TV students also offered a powerful experiential learning moment.

The module, titled *Real Talk: Stories of Connection*, follows a clear and replicable structure. Students begin by viewing a series of short video narratives delivered by university professionals. Each video is paired with objective comprehension questions to ensure engagement, along with guided reflection prompts that encourage students to connect the stories to their own experiences. The module culminates in a developmental assignment: students create their own Real Talk script using a provided template. The template asks students to identify a universal theme (e.g., failure or imposter feelings), develop a compelling hook, share a personal narrative, invite reflection, and conclude with a takeaway or call to action.

A central design principle is authenticity with intentional boundaries. These stories model vulnerability while avoiding oversharing. As Hernandez notes, effective storytelling "writes from the scar, not the wound," reinforcing that stories should promote connection without causing harm. The goal is to share a processed experience that can teach and connect without placing emotional responsibility on the audience or unintentionally rekindling trauma.

Integration into existing systems was critical to the model's success. In collaboration with the Student Life and Leadership Office, the module was embedded within the LEAD@Oneonta program. LEAD@Oneonta is SUNY–Oneonta's co-curricular leadership development and microcredentialing program. Students who complete the module with a score of 75% or higher earn LEAD credit in the values and ethics category—an area where opportunities are often limited. This alignment both incentivized participation and reinforced the module's connection to institutional learning outcomes.



In this video, Anna Legname, SUNY–Oneonta's program director for Advancing Completion through Engagement, shares some of her thoughts and experiences about belonging as part of the Real Talk series.

REAL TALK: STORIES OF CONNECTION MODULE

Each video is paired with objective comprehension questions, below, to ensure engagement.

Question 3 (1 Point)

Listen

What is the central life lesson Jason Shares?

- ◯ Never judge a book by its cover
- ◯ Trust first impressions
- ◯ Only connect with people similar to you
- ◯ Avoid vulnerability in friendships

Question 6 (10 Points)

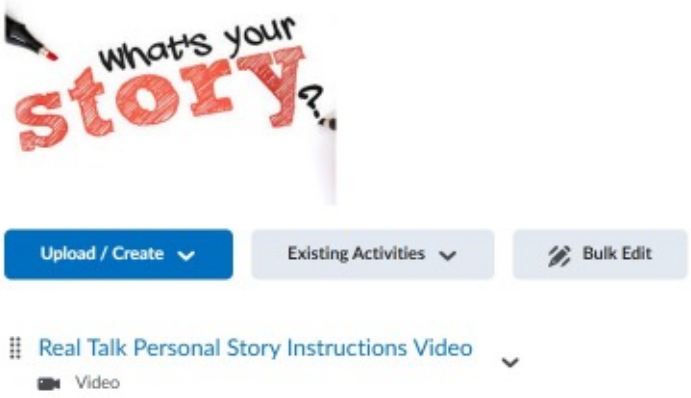
Listen

Think about a time when a first impression you held turned out to be wrong. What changed your perspective, and what did you learn about yourself? *75–125 words*

Question 8 (1 Point)

Listen

If you could ask Jason one question, what would it be?



Connecting Real Talk to LEAD@Oneonta gave students a meaningful incentive and allowed the module to become part of an established student-development system rather than remain in a stand-alone program.

STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Before submitting, double check:

- ◯ Did I clearly state a universal theme?
- ◯ Does my hook grab attention with a strong question?
- ◯ Is my story personal and relevant to the theme?
- ◯ Did I invite the listener to reflect on their own experience?
- ◯ Does my conclusion include a clear takeaway or call to action?
- ◯ Is my script authentic and respectful?
- ◯ Am I comfortable with the details I shared (anonymity check)?

A pilot launched in January 2026, with student employees providing early feedback on the module's structure and impact. While students noted that the experience was somewhat lengthy (approximately 90 minutes), they consistently highlighted the value of hearing authentic stories from campus professionals. Feedback indicated that the narratives helped humanize the institution, flatten perceived power dynamics, and demonstrate appropriate, real-world vulnerability. Drawing from Hernandez's concept of "belonging-center leadership," the module encouraged students to see leadership as relational, reflective, and connected to how they help others feel seen, supported, and valued.

Based on this feedback, the team streamlined the number of reflection questions, refined assessment tools to capture more meaningful data, and adjusted the overall flow. The module launched campus-wide in February 2026 through Engage, social media, student employee training, and a Resident Student Organization (Hall Government) leadership retreat. More than 100 students began the module, and 80 completed it for LEAD credit. Early lessons included the need to manage module length, to recognize that personal writing may create discomfort, and to ensure diverse representation among storytellers. Because the first four videos featured men, we acknowledged that limitation in the module and recorded additional voices for inclusion later in 2026.

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL:

"I enjoyed hearing stories from the people that are in charge; it's nice to know students aren't the only ones to make mistakes. It gave me confidence to write about my own experience, where I was vulnerable also. It was challenging to find the words but easier once I remembered how open everyone else was."

Moving from Story to Practice: Facilitated Reflection & Integration

The opportunity to facilitate a Real Talk session with Resident Student Organization leaders focused less on storytelling itself and more on what those stories reveal about who they are as leaders. Participants came in having completed the module, and the session intentionally shifted the work from sharing stories to unpacking them, connecting personal experiences to values, ethics, and a broader sense of belonging.

Core ideas framed the experience: First, leadership begins with authenticity. Students were challenged to see vulnerability not as a weakness, but as a strategy to build trust and connection within their communities, while emphasizing the importance of boundaries and professionalism. Second, with empathy at the center, leaders were encouraged to lead with connection before correction and to listen, not to respond, but to truly understand others' lived experiences.

A significant portion of the session focused on belonging. Student leaders explored how environments can be created where individuals feel seen, accepted, and supported, and how their daily interactions can either remove barriers or reinforce them. Through small group reflection and values mapping drawn from the module, participants identified the core lessons within their stories and considered how those lessons translate into action in their campus roles.

Importantly, the session honored participant choice. Students had agency in what they shared, if anything, and were encouraged to think intentionally about how their stories might serve others by helping someone feel less alone, guiding their own actions, or reinforcing a personal value.

A simple but important message closed the session: Students didn't write their stories to impress anyone; they wrote them because their experiences have value. The professional educator's role was to help them see how those experiences can inform their leadership,



shape their communities, and foster a stronger sense of belonging for others.

In March 2026, this framework was used again in a workshop with the Alpha Phi Delta fraternity, and the results affirmed a strong foundation of belonging, empathy, and values-based leadership within the chapter. Sixty percent of members completed the pre-work, so the group entered relatively prepared to engage, and the outcomes were uniformly positive. Members reported full agreement on connection with fellow members, improved values awareness, and a notable sense of psychological safety feeling comfortable being themselves. Sharing can be difficult, but the discussion framed vulnerability as a driver of trust and reinforced leadership as relational and grounded in shared values. It also pointed to one clear area to grow: listening more intentionally. Everyone who responded to the evaluation felt a positive impact in those areas, which is powerful given how hard it can be to move the needle on connection and values in a short experience.

In short, the Real Talk module and facilitation reinforced some of the chapter's existing strengths in belonging, empathy, and leadership culture while revealing a practical next step was to keep holding guided conversations like this one so members can practice listening and speaking openly with each other.

What the Data Tells Us: Early Assessment & Student Voice

As post-module assessments were examined, several things became clear. Even though the length of the module was perceived as somewhat high, 70% of respondents indicated it was a positive experience. The data suggests the module is landing well in terms of understanding and intent but more modestly in building confidence. Learning outcomes cluster between 3.8 and 4.2 out of five, with students broadly indicating they will carry this work forward, which is promising for persistence. However, confidence in doing so still lags behind understanding.

Moving toward examining and implementing a pretest in the next version of the module, an effort will be made to explore confidence and comfort in participating in the module more deeply. Students seem to understand why this matters and value the experience, but they are not yet consistently indicating that they can lead this work with confidence.

Demographic data indicated a strong balance: 47% female, 46% male, and 5% non-binary. Class year distribution included 34% juniors, 27% freshmen, 21% sophomores, and 18% seniors. Respondents by race/ethnicity showed 55% white, 19% Hispanic, 12% Black/African American, and 4% Asian. At this time, no significant data variation across demographic groups was observed. In terms of how students found the module, 26% learned about it from their advisor, 18% from faculty, and 17% from email.

Perhaps most revealing in the review of the data was the analysis of all student stories from the module, totaling more than 35,000 words. Using both Copilot and Claude to identify trends across the responses, the stories students described on leadership and personal experiences were communicated through empathy, vulnerability, connection, reflection, and support. They were far less likely to frame leadership around authority, image, or being performative. What was



LEARNING & INTENT OUTCOMES (5-POINT SCALE)

OUTCOME ITEM	MEAN	% AGREE	n
Q4 Stories can be used as tools for leadership	4.19	84%	100
Q9 Intend to strengthen belonging in my community	4.12	78%	98
Q8 Likely to apply learning when leading groups	4.03	76%	98
Q7 More confident using storytelling to connect to leadership	4.01	80%	98
Q5 Connected my experience to learning & leadership goals	3.97	77%	100
Q2 Comfortable participating in reflections	3.79	64%	100
Q6 More confident facilitating authentic conversations	3.79	67%	96

particularly striking was how students described college as a space for growth and becoming, rather than as a proving ground.

The top three themes identified through these stories included:

1. **Belonging, loneliness, and "finding your people"**
   In these stories, students described arriving at college feeling invisible, out of place, or unsure if they belonged. The narratives indicated that loneliness can persist even when students are surrounded by others. Students conveyed that belonging is not immediate; it develops gradually through connection, involvement, and some level of risk-taking. There is a clear contrast between forced proximity (such as in high school or living in residence halls) and genuine connection. Students frequently described the shift from trying to "fit in" to being accepted for who they are! The stories also suggest that a single relationship, a club, or a supportive figure such as a resident advisor can serve as a turning point toward meaningful connection.

   One student noted: "Connecting my own personal story really helped me with my Real Talk script since as an RA, you really have a lot of stories to connect with this."

2. **Growth through discomfort and taking risks.**
   In many of the stories, students expressed that growth often occurs when they do something uncomfortable—when they have to "walk through the fire." Examples include speaking up for themselves, introducing themselves, reapplying for opportunities after being denied, asking questions, or attending events alone. Many stories center on a small decision that led to a significant impact. Fear of embarrassment or rejection commonly holds students back at first, but over time, students reframed discomfort as necessary rather than harmful. Repeatedly, we see the idea that just one small step can be a powerful driver of growth.

   One student noted: "The most meaningful was the module where he spoke about feeling like an imposter at college. I related to that one a lot as that's how I felt at one point."

3. **Vulnerability, asking for help, and using resources.**
   Students' stories often begin by equating independence with strength, while also indicating that silence, self-reliance, and simply "pushing through" can lead to burnout, academic decline, or emotional distress. Turning points typically occur when students seek help. They identify support systems such as counseling services, professors, resident advisors, mentors, academic advisors, and supervisors as playing a critical role. While fear of being judged or perceived as weak often prevents students from asking for help, these stories show that once students open up, they commonly experience relief and improvement. Although campus resources are frequently described as available, they are sometimes underutilized. Still, student stories demonstrate persistence and grit as they navigate toward finding their people and a sense of belonging. Our students aren't just processing their own experiences, they're thinking about future students.

One student said, "Trying to format my story in a way that could relate to others and make them feel seen," and another noted that, "I wanted to share a story that could have the chance to help someone in the future."

Implications for College Unions & Student Affairs, Why It Matters, and Where Real Talk is Going Next

The future of Real Talk on a campus is not solely focused on expanding dialogue opportunities, but on institutionalizing belonging as a central educational and developmental outcome. Building upon the "Pedagogy of Real Talk," which emphasizes authentic relationships, trust, vulnerability, and meaningful connections, the next phase of Real Talk is moving from an individual practice to a strategy that impacts the greater campus community.

The emerging assessment data from SUNY–Oneonta suggests that Real Talk is producing outcomes that align closely with current priorities in student affairs and the university's Forward Momentum Agenda. Participants report a clear ability to apply Real Talk principles in leading and strengthening belonging within organizations. They also demonstrate strong gains in reflection, storytelling, communication, and intentional application of learning. Equally important, participants show a high comfort level with vulnerability and belonging-centered dialogue. These outcomes indicate that Real Talk is not simply a discussion technique; it is becoming a leadership development model that cultivates the interpersonal skills necessary for thriving campus communities.

To implement on your campus, identifying goals and deliverables are critical in providing a direction toward this evolution. The Real Talks Engagement Series expands traditional Real Talk conversations through complementary programming that deepens learning and strengthens campus-wide connection. For college unions, the integration of films, speakers, performances, and facilitated discussions creates a high-impact engagement model capable of reaching diverse student populations. Rather than existing on the margins of learning, Real Talk becomes part of a broader developmental ecosystem. Partnerships with academic affairs can connect classroom learning with leadership development, career readiness, civic engagement, and life purpose. This aligns with contemporary student development theories that emphasize integrated learning experiences. When students are able to connect academic content with personal meaning and future aspirations, engagement and persistence are strengthened.

The most promising innovation is the proposed Real Talk First-Year Belonging and Success Experience. First-year belonging has emerged as one of the strongest predictors of retention and student success. While the current



MICHAEL KUSH

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assessment data suggests it is too early to definitively claim retention outcomes, there are encouraging correlations between Real Talk participation, belonging, and persistence. Embedding Real Talk dialogues into orientation, residence halls, social media engagement, and co-curricular programming creates multiple touchpoints through which students can construct meaningful relationships during the critical transition to college. These experiences help students move from simply attending an institution to feeling connected to its people and purpose.

The implications for professionals are substantial. Staff members must increasingly become facilitators of reflection rather than solely providers of services. Future implementations should therefore preserve depth while creating accessible formats that meet students where they are. Digital storytelling, facilitated conversations, podcasts, video reflections, and peer-led dialogues may become important extensions of the Real Talk model.

When looking to explore this work, be prepared to engage data and accountability to determine the long-term sustainability of the initiative. Higher education is increasingly asking departments to demonstrate measurable impact on belonging, equity, retention, and student success. By creating a Belonging and Equity Assessment Report and implementing a campus-wide designation for Real Talk programming, institutions can systematically track outcomes and communicate value to stakeholders. This data-informed approach moves Real Talk from a promising practice to an evidence-based institutional strategy.

Looking ahead, the next generation of Real Talk will likely focus on scaling without losing authenticity. As colleges and universities continue to face challenges related to student well-being, polarization, engagement, and retention, students will increasingly seek spaces where honest conversations can occur across differences. The future of Real Talk lies in creating these spaces intentionally and consistently throughout the student experience.

For college unions and student affairs, the message is clear: Real Talk is evolving from a pedagogical intervention into a campus culture strategy. By leveraging dialogue, storytelling, reflection, vulnerability, and belonging-centered engagement, institutions can build leadership capacity, strengthen community, and create conditions that support student success. While retention outcomes require further study, the current evidence suggests that Real Talk is already accomplishing something equally important—helping students feel connected, valued, and empowered to contribute to the campus community. In an era where belonging has become a strategic imperative, Real Talk may represent one of the most promising pathways forward.

> ***"One of the things I appreciate most about this work is that it gives students a meaningful opportunity to think about who they are, what they have experienced, and how those experiences can shape the way they lead. Michael, Robb, and their colleagues at SUNY–Oneonta have created a thoughtful leadership experience that helps students recognize the value of their own stories while learning how to connect with and support others. This is at the heart of the 'Pedagogy of Real Talk,' and I look forward to seeing how this work continues to grow."***
>
> ***—Dr. Paul Hernandez***

Conclusion: From Space to Story to Belonging

The *Real Talk: Stories of Connection* module is one tool among many for forging belonging and connection between students and the professionals who serve them—and among students themselves. But for those working in college unions and student affairs, the deeper value of Real Talk, as Hernandez frames it, is that it does not stop with the student. It turns the lens back on us.

Throughout this work, belonging has been treated as a developmental skill—something students build through reflection, risk, and relationship. That remains true. But belonging is co-produced: students can only build on what our systems make available to them. Many of our students care deeply about their education and still face real barriers—time, money, work schedules, transportation, caregiving, and unclear processes. Belonging cannot take root when a student does not feel welcome, respected, or seen in our spaces; and it cannot take root when the door is functionally closed before they reach it.

This is where union and student affairs professionals hold particular responsibility. Student-facing units: unions, activities offices, auxiliary services are gateways to jobs, leadership, community, and campus life, and the policies put in place quietly determine who can walk through them (office hours, event timing, event procedures, hiring practices, training requirements, application timelines, etc.). Every operational decision either narrows or widens the opportunity gap; the distance between what students need to succeed and how accessible our systems make those opportunities. Real Talk's insistence on being asset-driven rather than deficit-driven applies as much to how we design our operations as to how we hear a student's story.

Hernandez's notion of a beginner's mind is the discipline this requires—and it is easy to lose. As this program has facilitated training colleagues across student affairs, some have responded, in good faith, "That's what we do. We already do this." That response, however well-intentioned, is a beginner's mind that has quietly closed. Real Talk provides a structured way to reopen it: to critically re-examine services, access, and support with a genuine growth mindset, and to assess honestly whether the systems in use are as open as many believe they are. That re-examination is what makes an institution more whole.

This module at SUNY–Oneonta is one single, scalable instrument and an example of the way work is being done to engage and assess belonging in the campus community. It will not close every gap, and it was never meant to. What it has provided is a shared language: a way for students to name who they are and who they are becoming, and a way for professionals to examine whether campus spaces are ready to receive them.

College unions have always been places of connection. But connection does not happen simply because the room has been built. It happens through deliberate design within the pedagogy and in the everyday operational choices that decide who belongs. The students who moved through this module kept saying the same thing in their own words: college is not a proving ground where they must earn the right to be here. It is a place of becoming.

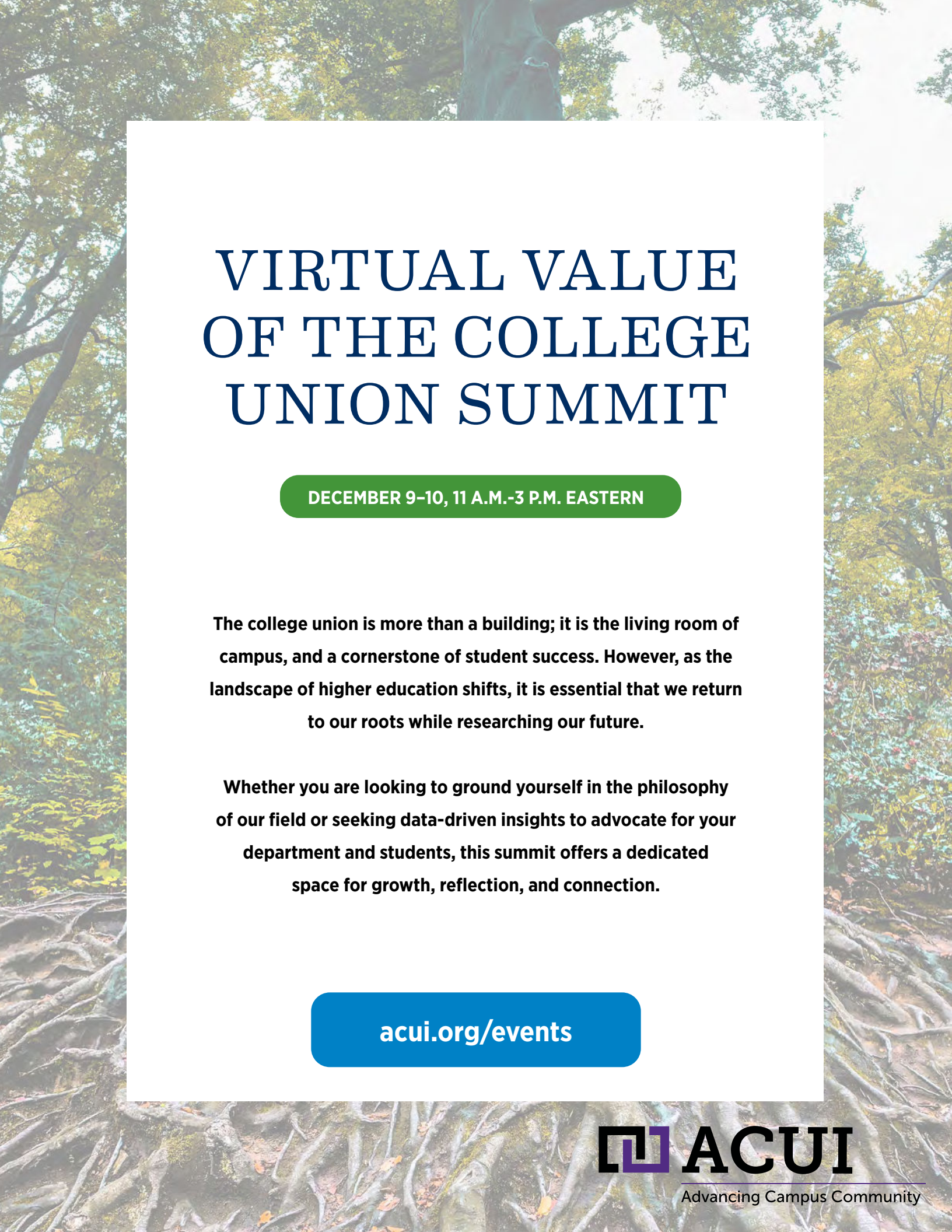
If taken seriously, for our students and for the institutions still being built, framing college as a place of becoming rather than proving is not a nice sentiment. It is the whole point.



ROBB THIBAULT

Robb Thibault has served 25 years as director of student life and leadership and the Hunt Union at SUNY–Oneonta, where his work has focused on creating spaces of connection, leadership, and belonging. His career has brought together student union operations, campus programming, leadership development, assessment, and community-building, all rooted in the belief that students thrive when they feel seen, heard, and connected.

***** The authors would like to acknowledge their appreciation to Abigail Vesperman, LEAD@Oneonta coordinator, for their contributions in designing the Brightspace module.***



VIRTUAL VALUE OF THE COLLEGE UNION SUMMIT

DECEMBER 9–10, 11 A.M.-3 P.M. EASTERN

The college union is more than a building; it is the living room of campus, and a cornerstone of student success. However, as the landscape of higher education shifts, it is essential that we return to our roots while researching our future.

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STAYING ACTIVE IN DIALOGUE

Building the Self-Awareness, Curiosity, Connection, and Courage to Engage Across Difference



BY
NICK A. SMITH

This article is based on the ACUI Active Dialogue program developed collaboratively with Stacey Givens of ACUI's Central Office, and Rigo Gutierrez, University of Texas.

Picture a conversation around a table that suddenly takes a turn. Someone raises an issue people care deeply about and shares a perspective you were not expecting. You see it differently. Maybe you have another experience to share, a question to ask, or a perspective that has not yet been heard. You think about speaking up but hesitate. Will this make things awkward? What if I'm misunderstood? Is it worth getting into this right now? A few seconds pass, someone changes the subject, and the moment is gone.

Nothing necessarily went wrong. In fact, the conversation may have stayed perfectly comfortable. But something was missed. That difference in perspective might have helped the group see the issue differently, challenged an assumption, led to a better idea or creative solution, or surfaced feedback that people really needed to hear. Instead, it went unexplored.

These moments happen every day across our campuses as students and colleagues who bring different experiences, backgrounds, beliefs, values, ideas, and perspectives to the table. That difference is part of what makes campus communities interesting and dynamic. It can also make conversation harder. Sometimes disagreement quickly leads to polarization. Other times conversations are avoided altogether because someone is worried about saying the wrong thing, being misunderstood, damaging a relationship, or making an already difficult situation worse.

This could be viewed as a communication problem with the focus on finding better words. But what if the challenge is bigger than that? What if we need to get better at staying in conversation when the conversation gets difficult? That takes more than knowing what to say. It means understanding what we bring into a conversation and how that shapes our response; to stay curious about perspectives we may not understand; to look for connection without expecting agreement; and to have the courage to stay engaged when it might be easier to disengage. That is the work of active dialogue.

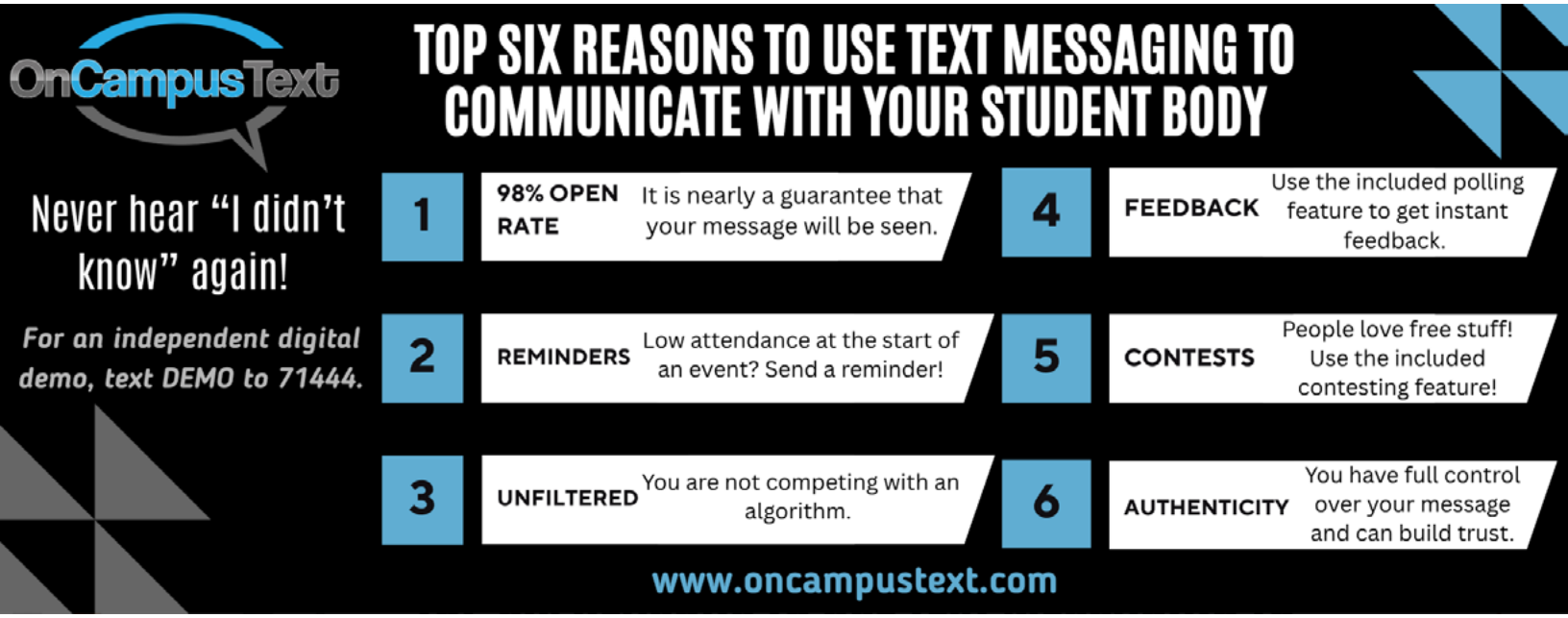
A Tradition of Engaging Difference

The exchange of ideas has always been part of the college union story. The deepest roots of the student union include debating societies where students gathered outside the classroom to talk about issues, challenge ideas, and hear perspectives different from their own. Those early spaces helped establish an important role for the college union as a place where people and ideas come together.

Active dialogue builds on that tradition and on work already underway within ACUI. In 2019, an ACUI Active Dialogue Working Group described active dialogue as an approach to open communication centered on learning from one another, hearing different perspectives, and creating space for difficult discussions, not persuading or convincing others. The group's work emphasized moving beyond assumptions toward greater understanding of others' values, concerns, and motivations. Dialogue and debate are not opposites. There are times when we need to advocate for an idea, challenge an assumption, or make a case for what we believe. Active dialogue also asks us to make room for something else. Active dialogue asks us to be curious about the experiences, values, and perspectives behind what someone is saying.

Dialogue may support, but does not replace, decision-making, civic participation, advocacy, lawful protest, accountability, or other forms of action. It shifts some of our attention from "How do I make my case?" to "What am I missing? What matters to this person? What could I better understand?"

The goal is not to avoid disagreement or expect every conversation to end in consensus. It is to get better at staying engaged when individuals see things differently, to listen, ask better questions, and understand more before deciding what comes next. For a profession with



deep roots in bringing people and ideas together, active dialogue is a continuation of our history.

A Strategic Commitment for ACUI

This work also connects directly to where ACUI is headed. Active dialogue and civic engagement is one of the four pillars of ACUI's 2024–29 Strategic Plan, with a focus on creating resources that help members engage in dialogue, navigate contentious situations, and build community around difficult conversations. That commitment is already taking shape through efforts such as the Active Dialogue self-assessment tool and the continued development of educational resources for members.

There is a practical reason for the work. Dialogue is already part of what college union and student activities professionals do every day. It happens when advising student organizations, supervising employees, working through disagreements with colleagues, responding to students who feel unheard, navigating organizational change, or supporting a campus program, speaker, or demonstration. The college union creates the opportunity for the encounter, while active dialogue shapes its quality. These moments may not always be called dialogue, but they ask many of the same things—to listen, to understand what is happening, to manage reactions, and to figure out how to move forward with others.

Active dialogue cannot be something we turn to only when a conversation becomes contentious. The ability to engage in differences is part of how we lead. At a time when many of our campuses are navigating disagreement, uncertainty, and questions about how we remain in community across difference, that capacity feels particularly important. What would it look like if dialogue became part of how we lead, not simply something we facilitate or make time for when things become difficult? That question has shaped the continued development of active dialogue.

Active Dialogue Within a Broader Dialogue Landscape

The continued development of active dialogue has also been informed by a rich history of research and practice on dialogue, learning, leadership, and how people engage across difference.

Several well-established approaches contribute to this work. Intergroup dialogue brings people with different backgrounds and experiences together through a structured process to build relationships, examine identity and questions of inequality, engage difficult issues, and consider individual or collective responses, according to the 2007 ASHE Higher Education Report and later in the 2013 book "Dialogue Across Difference." Sustained dialogue, as noted in the 2011 book "Resolving Community Conflicts and Problems," similarly unfolds over time but focuses particularly on transforming relationships that contribute to conflict or impede change. Deliberative dialogue approaches, such as National Issues Forums, invite participants to work through complex public problems by considering different approaches, underlying values, consequences, and trade-offs. Restorative practices emphasize relationships, community, meaningful voice, and approaches to addressing harm and conflict, according to the International Institute for Restorative Practices, and Singleton's Courageous Conversation Compass, developed specifically for conversations about race, offers a navigational tool that helps participants notice emotional, intellectual, moral, and relational ways of processing dialogue.

Reflective structured dialogue, developed by Essential Partners, offers another relational approach. It uses intentional structures, including reflection, carefully constructed questions, communication agreements, and opportunities for genuine curiosity, to interrupt polarized patterns and strengthen understanding and trust. While it can be used as a formal facilitated process, its principles can also inform meetings, classrooms, planning, decision-making, and other everyday interactions.

The growing field of constructive dialogue is particularly relevant to this work. The Constructive Dialogue Institute describes constructive dialogue as conversation in which people with different perspectives seek to understand one another without giving up their own beliefs so they can work together. Its Perspectives program develops practices and capacities like intellectual humility, perspective-taking, curiosity-driven questioning, awareness of cognitive biases and assumptions, emotional regulation, listening for underlying values, and constructive conflict navigation. Research on the program has found improvements in outcomes including intellectual humility and conflict-management responses. Evidence about how dialogue education transfers across settings, persists over time, and affects institutional culture is still developing. The Constructive Dialogue Institute also encourages colleges and universities to integrate dialogue practices across curricular and co-curricular experiences and institutional culture.

Active dialogue shares important ground with these approaches. Listening, reflection, curiosity, relationship-building, and the willingness to engage across difference are not new ideas, nor is active dialogue intended to replace established approaches. Instead, our work asked a more immediate question: What does engaging across difference ask of us in the moment?

Our thinking has also been shaped by scholarship on what happens within and between people when they encounter difference. Reflective practice encourages us to examine our own thinking as we navigate complex

situations, while transformative learning helps explain how encountering perspectives that challenge our assumptions can create opportunities for learning. Relational leadership emphasizes leadership as a process of people working together toward positive change, and research on psychological safety helps explain why speaking up, asking questions, admitting uncertainty, and expressing disagreement can feel risky.

We were less interested in developing another process for conducting dialogue than in helping people orient themselves when differences appear. *What am I noticing in myself? What am I trying to understand? What is happening between us? What might this moment require me to say or do?* As the ACUI program was developed, four interconnected dimensions were drafted—Self-Awareness, Curiosity, Connection, and Courage—that were then refined through collaborative discussion to what became the Active Dialogue Compass.

The compass recognizes that engaging across difference does not always require the same response. While Singleton's Courageous Conversation Compass identifies emotional, intellectual, moral, and relational ways people may process conversations about race, the Active Dialogue Compass serves a different purpose. Active dialogue's four dimensions identify capacities we can draw upon as we decide how to engage across difference. Sometimes staying active means listening longer or asking another question. Sometimes it means sharing a perspective that has not been heard, challenging an assumption, or acknowledging that something said was wrong. At other times, it may mean recognizing that there needs to be more time before responding or that continuing a particular conversation is no longer productive.

Active dialogue does not define success as agreement or even continued conversation. It asks one to remain thoughtful and intentional about how engagement takes place. Discomfort is not necessarily harm, and productive dialogue often involves uncertainty, tension, or challenge. At the same time, threats, harassment, coercion, and other prohibited conduct should not be treated merely as opportunities for dialogue. Roles, authority, relationships, and potential consequences all matter when deciding how to respond.

The four dimensions help make those choices. Self-awareness means asking what is being brought to an interaction. Curiosity invites one to seek greater understanding. Connection focuses attention on relationships and the conditions that allow engagement to continue. Courage asks us to speak, question, challenge, acknowledge uncertainty, or remain present when doing so may be difficult.

Active dialogue is not another formula for conducting dialogue. It is an orientation for the moment difference appears. Active dialogue is a common language for noticing what is happening within us, seeking to understand what is happening around us, attending to our connection with others, and finding the courage to choose how we will respond.

The Active Dialogue Compass

The Active Dialogue Compass gives us four dimensions to consider when we encounter difference:

- **SELF-AWARENESS**
  Know where you start from.
- **CURIOSITY**
  Ask to understand.
- **CONNECTION**
  Build empathy and shared humanity.
- **COURAGE**
  Stay engaged in discomfort.

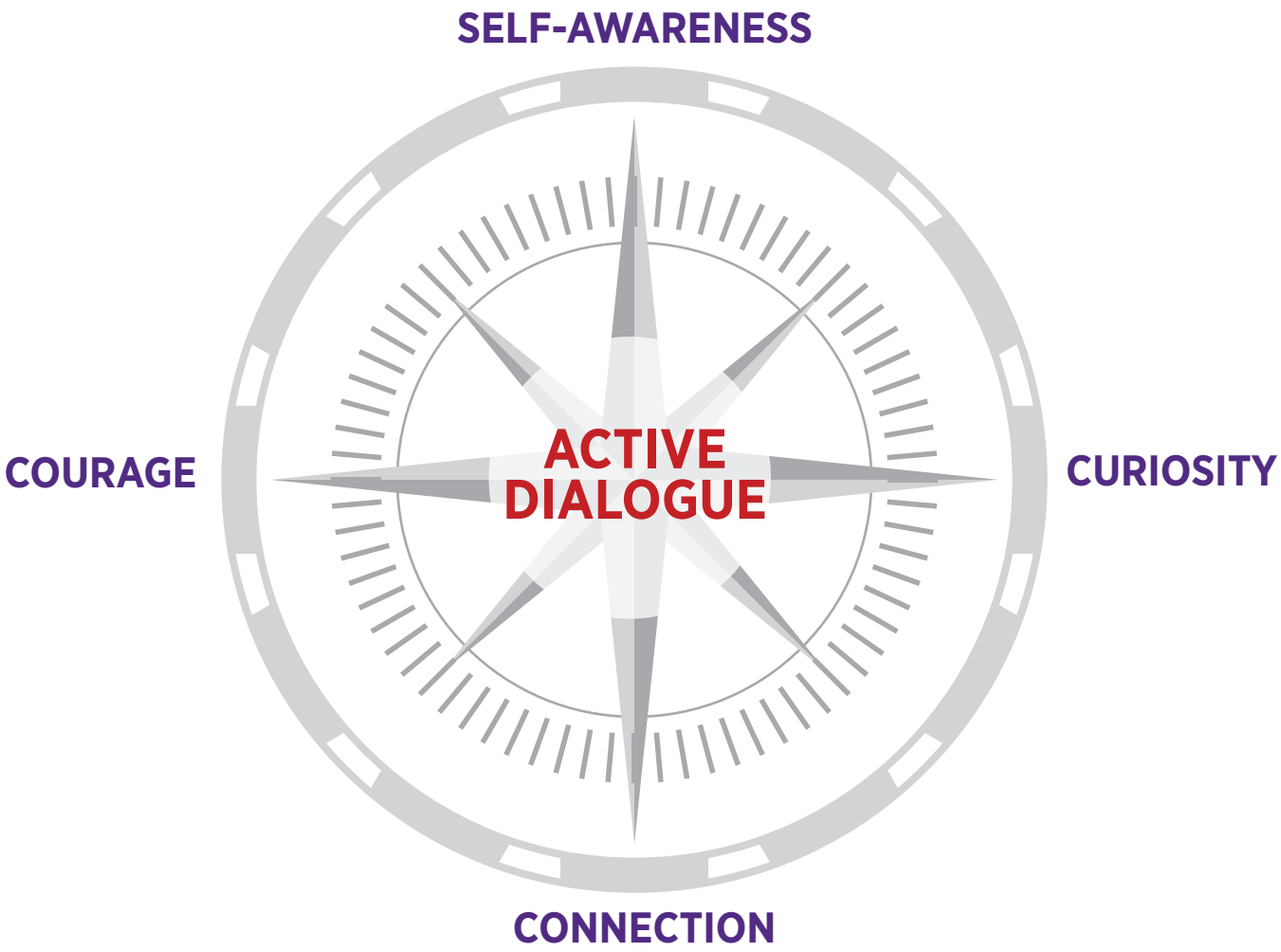
It is called a compass intentionally. Dialogue does not follow a straight path, and people do not always move neatly from Self-Awareness to Curiosity to Connection to Courage. Instead, the compass provides places to return to when uncertainty exists about what a conversation needs.

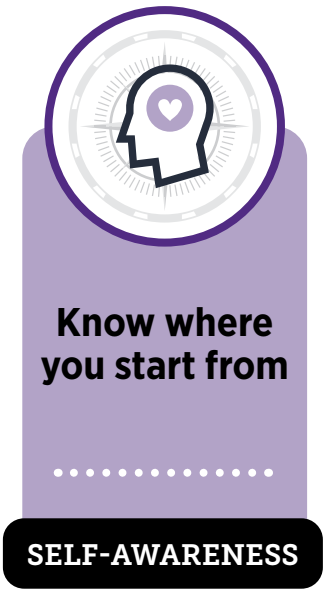
It also invites us to consider the North Star, which is something that can be returned to when help finding direction is needed. That might be a deeply held value or commitment, or it may change depending on the situation. The compass does not instruct exactly what to say or where a conversation should end. It helps people

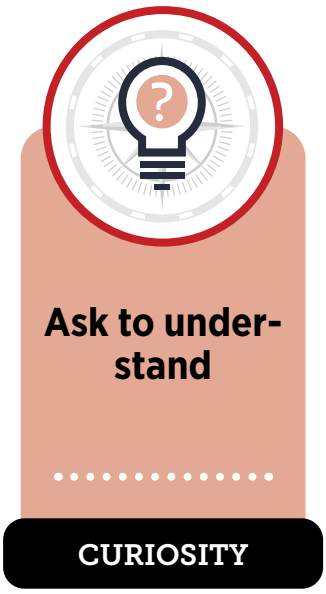


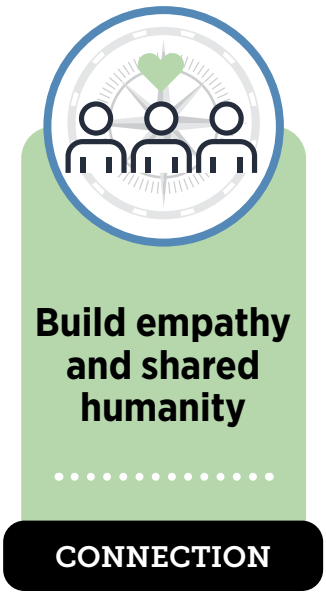
NICK SMITH
Nick Smith is the senior associate director of University Unions and director of the Center for Campus Involvement at the University of Michigan. With 22 years of higher education experience, Smith leads efforts to integrate student involvement, campus spaces, and campus services to foster community and belonging. His research interests include student learning across cultures and difference in co-curricular campus spaces, such as the college union. Smith currently serves on the ACUI Education Council.

ACTIVE DIALOGUE COMPASS











TAKEN TOGETHER, THE COMPASS PROVIDES A SIMPLE WAY TO THINK ABOUT HOW ACTIVE DIALOGUE IS PRACTICED. SELF-AWARENESS HELPS US UNDERSTAND OURSELVES. CURIOSITY HELPS US UNDERSTAND OTHERS. CONNECTION HELPS US UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER BETTER. COURAGE HELPS US STAY ENGAGED, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE CONVERSATION GETS DIFFICULT.

stay oriented and make more intentional choices about how they want to show up.

SELF-AWARENESS – KNOW WHERE YOU START FROM

Everyone enters conversations shaped by experiences, backgrounds, values, assumptions, responsibilities, relationships, and the different levels of authority or influence experienced. Self-awareness asks us to notice how those things shape what is heard, how we react, and what we might be missing. Self-awareness also includes considering not only how our experiences shape what we hear, but also how our position may affect another person's freedom to speak, disagree, or leave the conversation.

In the Active Dialogue Workshop, this is called Home Base—the experiences, values, and perspectives that shape how you see and make sense of the world around you. Home Base grounds one, but it can also shape what we notice and how we respond when someone sees something differently.

Imagine sitting in a debrief after a difficult event when a colleague says, "We really could have handled that better." You immediately think about everything your team was managing at the moment, the decisions you had to make with limited information, and all the things your colleague may not know. Before they finish, you are already preparing your response. Self-awareness asks you to notice that reaction. Why am I feeling defensive? What am I assuming about their intent? What might I hear if I stop preparing my response and listen?

The goal is not to leave Home Base behind. It is to understand where you are starting from so you can be more intentional about what happens next.

CURIOSITY – ASK TO UNDERSTAND

Curiosity moves one from reacting to wondering. Instead of starting with, "How do I respond?" we begin with, "Help me understand." That shift matters. Transformative learning reminds us that encountering different perspectives can challenge the assumptions we bring with us, but that can only happen if there is a willingness to hear the unexpected.

Imagine a student tells you that a policy your team administers is unfair. You know the policy well. You know why it exists, the history behind it, and the problems it is intended to prevent. It would be easy to start explaining. Curiosity asks us to hold off for a moment and ask, "Can you tell me more about what feels unfair about it?" Their answer may not change the policy, but it may change your understanding of how the policy is experienced.

Curiosity does not require us to have fewer answers. It asks to make room for another perspective.

CONNECTION – BUILD EMPATHY AND SHARED HUMANITY

Connection reminds us that understanding someone does not require agreeing with them. It asks you to see the person behind the perspective and look for what is shared, even when people may approach the work differently.

Imagine you are working with colleagues from another campus unit on a new initiative. Your team is focused on making the experience accessible for students, while your partners are focused on compliance, risk, and what it will take to implement the idea at scale. After a few meetings, frustration starts to build. Why are they making this so complicated? Don't they understand what we're trying to do for students? Of course, your partners may be sitting across the table wondering why your team doesn't understand the risks they're trying to manage. Connection asks us to step back from our positions and consider what we might share. You may discover that everyone wants the initiative to succeed and serve students well. You just bring different responsibilities, experiences, and concerns to the table.

Connection can be as simple as communicating: I hear you. I want to understand. And I want you to understand me, too.

COURAGE – STAY ENGAGED IN DISCOMFORT

Courage may be the hardest part of active dialogue. When a conversation becomes uncomfortable, it can be easier to defend our position, change the subject, withdraw, or simply say nothing. Research published on psychological safety by Harvard University business professor Amy C. Edmondson reminds us that speaking up, disagreeing, asking questions, and admitting uncertainty can all involve interpersonal risk.

Courage asks us to remain willing to engage even when doing so feels uncomfortable. That does not mean having the perfect response or staying in a conversation that has become harmful. It means being willing to listen a little longer, speak honestly, ask another question, or admit when we do not understand.

Imagine you are in a meeting and your supervisor proposes a direction you have concerns about. Everyone else on the team seems ready to move forward, and you start wondering whether it is worth saying something. It would be easier to stay quiet. Courage might mean saying, "I understand where we're headed, but I have a concern I think we should talk through before we move forward." You may not change the decision, but you have raised something that might otherwise have gone unsaid. Sometimes courage is simply choosing to stay in the conversation when it is easier not to.

Taken together, the compass provides a simple way to think about how active dialogue is practiced. Self-awareness helps us understand ourselves. Curiosity helps us understand others. Connection helps us understand one another better. Courage helps us stay engaged, especially when the conversation gets difficult.

Practicing Active Dialogue

In August 2026, colleagues came together at the University of Wisconsin–Madison for a full-day active dialogue workshop where a goal was to have participants spend the day simply talking about dialogue; to practice active dialogue.

Participants explored their Home Base and North Star, practiced listening differently, worked through real situations, and paid attention to what happens when conversations become more challenging. Through reflection, conversation, case studies, movement, and even a little improv, they practiced asking better questions, listening to understand, finding connection across different perspectives, and staying engaged when it might be easier to withdraw or defend. The experience reinforced evidence that people need opportunities not only to learn about dialogue, but also to practice what engagement feels like when curiosity becomes harder, connection feels less certain, or speaking up requires courage.

There is no script for every difficult conversation, and that is precisely why practice matters. Active dialogue provides opportunities to notice your instincts, try different approaches, and become more intentional about how you show up when those moments happen. Participants also leave with an active dialogue strategy tool to consider how dialogue might strengthen their team or organization.

Continuing the Conversation at #ACUI27

Active dialogue will continue to evolve through opportunities for ACUI members to learn, practice, and contribute to the work. At the 2027 ACUI Annual Conference, a four-hour preconference session called "The Active Dialogue Compass: Leading with Self-Awareness, Curiosity, Connection, and Courage" will be offered.

The session will give ACUI members an opportunity to explore the compass, reflect on how they show up when conversations become difficult, and practice ways to listen, engage in difference, and stay connected even when agreement may not be possible. One hope is that participants leave not only with a better understanding of the compass, but also with practical tools, new ways of approaching difficult conversations, and ideas they can bring back to their teams and campuses.

The next difficult conversation will come. And when it does, rather than asking, "What is the right thing to say?" consider a different question: "How do I want to show up in this conversation?"

WHAT'S NEW AROUND THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Sustainability, affordability, safety, adaptability. None are new concepts within the campus community. In fact, they are staples in the everyday functionality in student-facing offices on campuses across the world. It is how those ongoing issues are addressed with fresh creativity, heightened importance, or when new challenges present themselves that matters in the day-to-day journey toward creating a successful and thriving campus community. New ways to meet student needs, to attract new students, to improve retention, and in the end, to graduate a successful citizen. Here are a few examples of what's new around campuses in that day-to-day journey toward success.





REUSABLE FOOD CONTAINERS REDUCE WASTE

Reusable food container pilot programs were introduced at Northeastern University's Curry Student Center and by University of Colorado–Boulder Campus Dining in ongoing sustainability efforts to reduce food and container waste. Both campuses reported high container return rates, some reaching as high as 99%.

CU–Boulder began a USEFULL Reusable Takeout program in August when campus dining launched app-based stainless steel reusable takeout containers that are returnable within three days at any station. Every container is equipped with a QR code linked to an app that gets scanned when a student leaves a dining facility, kind of like taking out a library book. The app manages checkouts, sends return reminders, ensures smooth tracking, and just like a library, charges a small fee when containers are not returned on time.

FIND OUT MORE

When you visit **Northeastern**'s Curry Student Center and dine at either Choolaah Indian BBQ or the Kigo Kitchen, food service team members first ask customers what form of payment they are using, as those using cards are automatically assigned a reusable container linked to their card by a QR code at the bottom of the container. Customers are allowed to keep the container for seven days, after which they are charged a $6 late fee. This is an app-free system with containers provided by the company Re:Dish and operated through the student body's Reduce, Reuse, ReNU pledge to lower single-use waste. The containers are made in the United States of BPA-free polypropylene (#5 plastic), a durable, FDA-approved food-safe material recognized for its safety and low environmental impact.

FIND OUT MORE

WHEN "LEAVE NO TRACE" BECOMES A STUDENT COMPETITION

Baylor University introduced food sampling stations in dining halls across campus as a plan to reduce plate waste by allowing students to test unfamiliar menu items before committing to a full portion. The campus dining operation, Baylor Eats, launched "Sic 'Em Sampling" along with a tablet-based waste tracking program and went on to recover 2,000 pounds of food. Sampling was determined to be an important tool in helping reduce uneaten food, which helps dining services continue to offer all-you-care-to-eat experiences in dining halls. Food waste is tracked using a digital system that allows kitchen staff to record discarded food and monitor patterns in waste production.

The Sic 'Em Sampling program was created through a partnership between Baylor Office of Sustainability and Chartwells Higher Education. After this pilot, it will be assessed for possible expansion to 60 or more universities in the United States..

The collaboration was made possible through Baylor's University Innovation Fellows, a highly selective program funded by the National Science Foundation which trains teams of students to survey the entrepreneurial landscape at their schools and identify opportunities for impact. Fellows were selected to partake in direct mentorship and hands-on learning before deploying the skills they gathered back at their universities to create structural change.

The University Innovation Fellows project includes two other components that together make up a Leave No Trace campaign sustainability initiative to curb dining waste. In addition to Sic 'Em Sampling, there is Sic 'Em Scales, which tracks back-of-house kitchen data by weighing uneaten food scraps before they go to composting to analyze mealtime trends, and Sic 'Em Stats, which uses digital dashboards and dining hall screens to educate students by displaying live waste data, turning conversation into a friendly campus competition.

FIND OUT MORE





AI, DATA THE FOCUS OF NEW MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HIGHER ED ADMINISTRATION

The **University of Miami** announced what may be the first Master of Science in Higher Education Administration focused on AI. It goes beyond traditional curriculum as each course in the program integrates machine learning, AI tools, and actual institutional data. Taught by University of Miami faculty, the format is fully online and designed for working professionals.

It is a one-year program for 30 credits, with a core focus on merging traditional higher education administration (student affairs, policy, and leadership) with quantitative, qualitative, and computational modeling, machine learning, and AI tools. It uses a "real-world" approach by asking students to analyze actual institutional datasets rather than hypothetical case studies and concludes with a live consulting capstone project alongside an institutional, corporate, or nonprofit education partner. It is also integrated with the university's Frost Institute for Data Science and Computing for specialized AI bootcamps and hackathons.

"Our program emphasizes the use of technological advances to make informed decisions in the higher education environment, engage students, and promote their personal and academic success," said Carol-Anne Phekoo, associate professor of professional practice, when announcing the program.

FIND OUT MORE

RIDE SHARE PROGRAMS BEING CRAFTED TO MEET CAMPUS NEEDS

Whether it's pricing incentives, quicker routes, or flexible hours, ride share programs operated in part or wholly by universities have been displaying new levels of creativity, flexibility, and efficiency, all in the name of safety, sustainability, and cost. The University of Iowa, Indiana University, Florida State University, and Temple University each tweaked their ride share programs to accommodate the student market.

Uber played a part in most of the plans, partnering with campuses to offer discounts, vouchers, and unique programs like **Indiana University's** Closed Loop Share, which the university said was the first of its kind in the United States. The program offers a campus-wide transportation system 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week within a specific zone and Uber rates are lowered by 20%.

FIND OUT MORE

University of Iowa did much the same, eliminating delays created by ride-request apps by opting for a fixed-route system of shuttle buses and offering cash Uber vouchers for use during late-night riding hours. **Temple University** provides each student with three $10 Uber vouchers per semester that can be used for late-night campus rides.

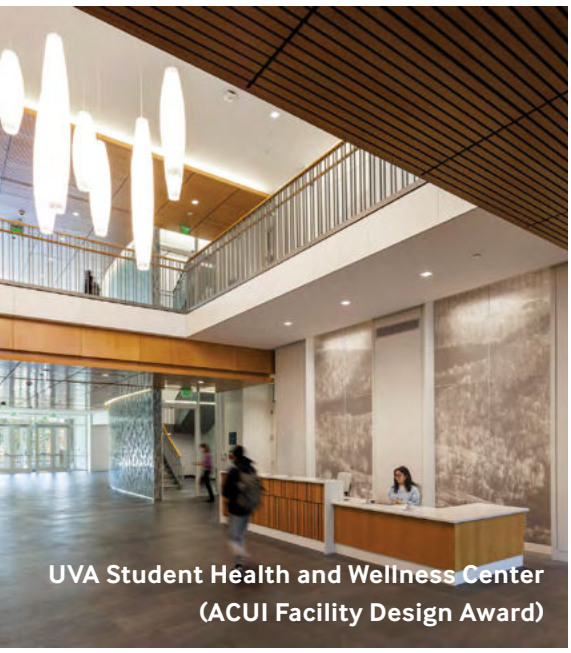
Florida State University decided to move away from partnering with traditional ride share companies, ending a contract with Lyft so it could create an all-electric microtransit service with the help of the Florida-based company Slidr. As a campus moving from Lyft and Uber safe ride partnerships in favor of dedicated microtransit programs, more focus has been placed on concerns about surge pricing, driver availability on nights and weekends, and the lack of accountability when using general-purpose rideshare for a student safety program.

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Young Harris College Rollins Campus Center



UVA Student Health and Wellness Center
(ACUI Facility Design Award)



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EXPANSION OF STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAMS LOOKS TO IMPROVE RETENTION

On one campus, the dean of students said its new mentoring program would kickoff with 500 mentors. Elsewhere, alumni were given the first-ever chance to formally participate in a student mentoring program. Then finally, a state university grabbed an opportunity to expand its outreach by creating a mentoring program with a neighboring community college. It also looks like standard one-on-one peer-to-peer mentoring is going by wayside to welcome scalded and diverse programs to better match student needs.

Cougar PUMP is what they are calling the new campus-wide mentoring program led by the **University of Houston** Division of Student Affairs, and the university began calling on 500 peer mentors to connect with a majority of the nearly 5,000 incoming students each year. The program is supported by a campus-wide partnership that includes academic affairs, the Bauer College of Business, and several Division of Student Affairs departments, including the Center for Student Empowerment, Veteran Services, University Career Services, and Student Housing and Residential Life.

FIND OUT MORE

Boise State University's Alumni and Student Mentorship Program was implemented in 2026, giving university alumni their first-ever chance to participate in a formal program designed to make one-on-one connections between students and graduates. Mentorship pairs meet once a month for one to two hours in whichever format works best (in-person or virtual), the Alumni Association and Career Services staff provide orientation sessions and are available for questions throughout the program, and participants use BroncoLink, Boise State's career and networking platform, as the central hub for the mentorship experience. Using BroncoLink, participants track milestones, access resources, and stay connected with their cohort.

FIND OUT MORE

At **New Mexico State University**, students may get paired with a mentor who is faculty, staff, administration, or other professional on campus, and each mentor can have up to five students per semester. Broadening expectations for the program this year was the announcement that New Mexico State would collaborate with Doña Ana Community College to provide mentoring services to that college's first-year students. New Mexico State has a full-time enrollment of around 16,600 students, while Doña Ana currently services around 3,600 full-time students.

FIND OUT MORE

CAL STATE SCHOOLS SUPPORT PREGNANT, PARENTING STUDENTS WITH NEW MICROGRANTS

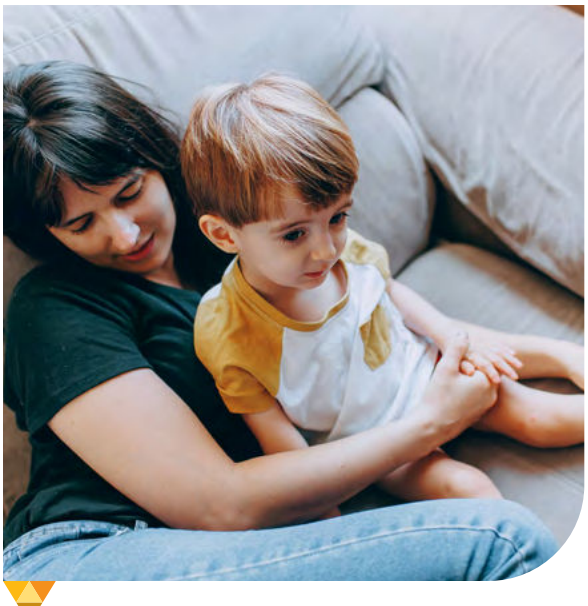
As part of the **California State University**'s systemwide Pregnant and Parenting Students Initiative, 11 campuses were awarded $5,500 grants each to launch innovative projects that strengthen belonging, expand access to resources, and help student parents persist to graduation.

Funded by the Michelson 20MM Foundation and administered through the CSU Basic Needs Initiative, these one-time microgrants recognize efforts across the CSU system to address the unique needs of student parents as they navigate higher education while balancing caregiving responsibilities, employment, and financial obligations.

The microgrants support innovative, campus-designed strategies for student parents and are being implemented during the 2026–27 academic year. Some examples of how the funds will be spent include welcome kits for student parents, family resource fairs and community celebrations, wellness and parent engagement programming, basic needs distributions for student families, family education workshops, student parent storytelling campaigns, expanded resource navigation, recurring parent scholar gatherings, and new family-friendly infrastructure such as campus changing tables.

FIND OUT MORE





FREE TUITION, NEW PARENTAL SUPPORT IS FUNDED FOR ADULT LEARNERS AT SUNY

State University of New York launched a targeted micro-grant program to assist campuses in creating family-friendly infrastructure that will include establishing child-friendly lounges and study spaces, providing direct assistance with childcare costs, and offering dedicated training for financial aid staff to better support parents.

The micro-grant program builds on previous investments, including a $10.4 million funding allocation designed to eliminate childcare deserts and expand hours/capacity across SUNY campuses. In December 2025, SUNY also announced it would provide free tuition, books, and supplies for adults ages 25–55 who don't already have a college degree and want to pursue an associate degree in a high-demand field.

Additional efforts announced for adult learners alongside the micro-grants include expanding evening and weekend course offerings and extending funding programs under the SUNY Reconnect program to help adult students earn degrees in high-demand fields. Beginning in January 2027, the SUNY Reconnect program will offer free associate degrees for adult learners.

FIND OUT MORE

CINCINNATI RECOGNIZES COMMUTER STUDENT POPULATION WITH EXPANDED SERVICES

After opening its first commuter student lounge in December 2024 and recognizing its first-ever registered commuter student organization earlier that same year, 2026 provided another opportunity for the **University of Cincinnati** to improve services for what are most of the university's student population.

With over 84% of Cincinnati students—about 19,000 student—commuting, the university Center for Student Involvement, through collaborations in the Division of Student Affairs, works constantly on expanding resources, developing new programming initiatives, and creating opportunities to instill a stronger connection between commuter students and the campus community.

Most recently, a full agenda of weekly activities and support services were implemented into ongoing programming in the Commuter Student Lounge. One example is the Campus Connections and Conversations event, a segment of a three-part series asking for feedback and suggestions, while other new programming includes organized study drop-ins, new networking spaces, and commuter student-specific social hours. The space, open now for less than two years, is located on the sixth floor of the Steger Student Life Center and provides comfortable spaces, lockers, printers, televisions, whiteboards, study tables, tech, and microwaves.

FIND OUT MORE





UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX COMMUTERS RECEIVE AMENITIES ADDRESSING AFFORDABILITY

In April, the **University of Essex** launched a wide-ranging commuter package that includes lounges with kitchen facilities, free breakfasts, a commuter society and a new student representative position, an off-peak gym pass, cheap overnight stays, and a shuttle to local rail stations. Promoting a message that students don't have to move away from home to move forward, the new amenities are part of a growing trend for United Kingdom students choosing to live at home while studying. The comprehensive package of measures, developed in partnership with students and the Students' Union, could benefit the 30% of Essex students classified as commuters.

FIND OUT MORE

PROPOSED MERGING OF CULTURAL CLUBS CAUSES STIR, NEW PLANS AT MILWAUKEE

A proposal to combine identity centers inside the student union at the **University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee** had some students worrying about a loss of services while administrators reported a mission to meet the needs of more students.

The original plan was to merge eight support centers into one space in the student union, including the Black, Hispanic, veteran, first-generation, and commuter centers. After student protests, leaders paused the plan in May 2026, which was followed by an announcement that the centers would keep their names and will move into the union in 2027.

While the exact timing has yet to be determined, the plan is for most of the centers to move to the ground floor of the student union. Because of their required specialized support, including the military benefits office and federally provided vocational counseling, the Military and Veteran Services offices will be relocated to the first floor of the union. Student centers retaining individual spaces within the new center include Black Student Cultural Center, LGTBQ+ Resource Center, Roberto Hernández Center, Southeast Asian American Student Center, and Women's Resource Center. The center will now also serve first-generation and off-campus students, replacing those former distinct centers.

FIND OUT MORE





OUTDOOR EVENTS LOOK DIFFERENT AFTER CHARLIE KIRK SHOOTING

After Charlie Kirk was killed in September 2025, campuses hosting controversial speakers added stadium-style security, which has affected how unions book, staff, and secure some events with speakers. Those have included no-bag policies, metal detectors, no re-entry, sworn police instead of private guards, and indoor venues.

Formal reviews and statewide standards have changed policies at **Utah State, Montana State University, University of North Dakota, University of Oklahoma,** and **University of California–Berkeley**. In September, during an outdoor speaking engagement hosted by the **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** student chapter of Turning Point USA, at least six people with rifles were reported on three rooftops overlooking the quad next to the student union, with the university noting it had to "plan for all scenarios."

FIND OUT MORE

Since the Charlie Kirk shooting at **Utah Valley University**, the Utah System of Education approved more than 25 recommendations from a third-party review of the incident, including standardized event security, better sharing of threat information, and regular safety training. It plans to ask the legislature for at least $5 million, including funding for a statewide campus safety coordinator.

The report also found that "at no time during the events leading up to the shooting or in its aftermath did any employee or agent of the university act in bad faith or in willful and wanton disregard for the safety of others."

FIND OUT MORE

NEW STANDARDS RELEASED BY THE COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (CAS)

The **Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)** released its updated 2026 CAS Standards for Civic and Community-Engaged Learning Programs, an accompanying Self-Assessment Guide that provides an updated framework, and an updated Cross-Functional Framework for Advancing Health and Well-Being designed to help departments collaborate on student health, mental health, and thriving communities. The revisions are designed to help higher education practitioners, student affairs leaders, and faculty develop, evaluate, and scale civic engagement initiatives, with a core emphasis on connecting student learning and development directly with meaningful civic engagement, sustainable community partnerships, and measurable local or global community impact.

Grounded in recent higher education research and input from active civic engagement scholars and student affairs professionals, it includes an additional self-assessment guide that provides actionable criterion measures, rating scales, work forms, and structured instruments to audit their existing programs for accreditation, review, or continuous quality improvement. Both the revised standards and the standalone self-assessment guide are available directly through the CAS Store.

FIND OUT MORE



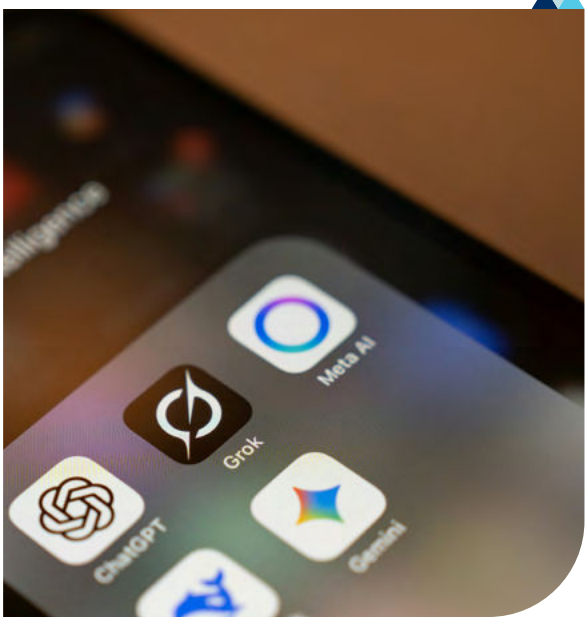
BELONGING, INTENTIONAL AI USE MORE IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS, NEW SURVEY FINDS

A report based upon the surveyed responses of 1,007 U.S. college students recommends the development of more "hub" student centers that bring academic, career, and well-being support under one roof. The report was developed by British professional services firm Buro Happold Limited and Qualtrics.

Developed to better understand what students value in higher education and where colleges and universities have the greatest opportunities to improve, the report found a clear value imperative: institutions that cultivate belonging, personal growth, student agency, and intentional AI adoption are creating stronger student experiences and stronger institutional advocates.

The “bottom line” economic return ranked last in the survey, as the strongest predictor of overall value was not institutional investments in academics, facilities, or technology per se. It was students’ perception that they were growing as individuals.

FIND OUT MORE



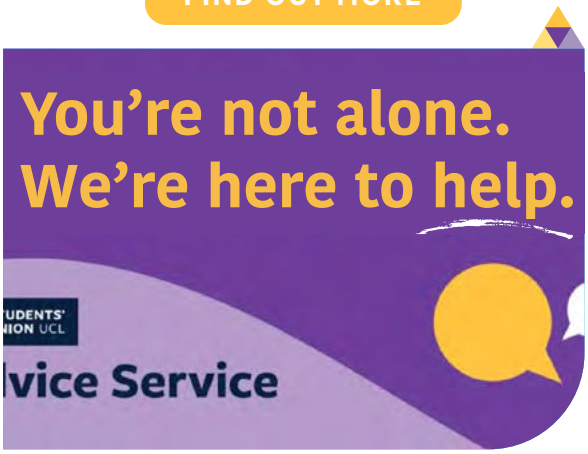
SEXUAL VIOLENCE LIAISON OFFICER POSITION CREATED AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

In January 2026, the **University College London's Students' Union** launched a first-ever sexual violence liaison officer service, which will remain confidential and separate from the university, so students receive support without making a formal report.

The dedicated service gives students access to independent, confidential, and trauma-informed support. Key details about how the service operates:

- **Confidentiality & Independence:** Because the service is operated through the students' union rather than university administration, seeking support does not trigger an automatic institutional investigation or formal disciplinary report.
- **Student-Led Options:** The liaisons work at the student's pace, focusing on options rather than pressure. They assist whether the incident occurred recently or in the past, and whether on or off campus.
- **Practical & Academic Support:** The liaisons can help secure academic adjustments (like extension requests or deferrals), liaise with academic departments on a student's behalf, assist with housing concerns, and connect students to external specialist services or medical care.
- **Reporting Guidance:** If a student does decide at any point to file a report with the university or police, the liaison can guide them through what to expect.

FIND OUT MORE





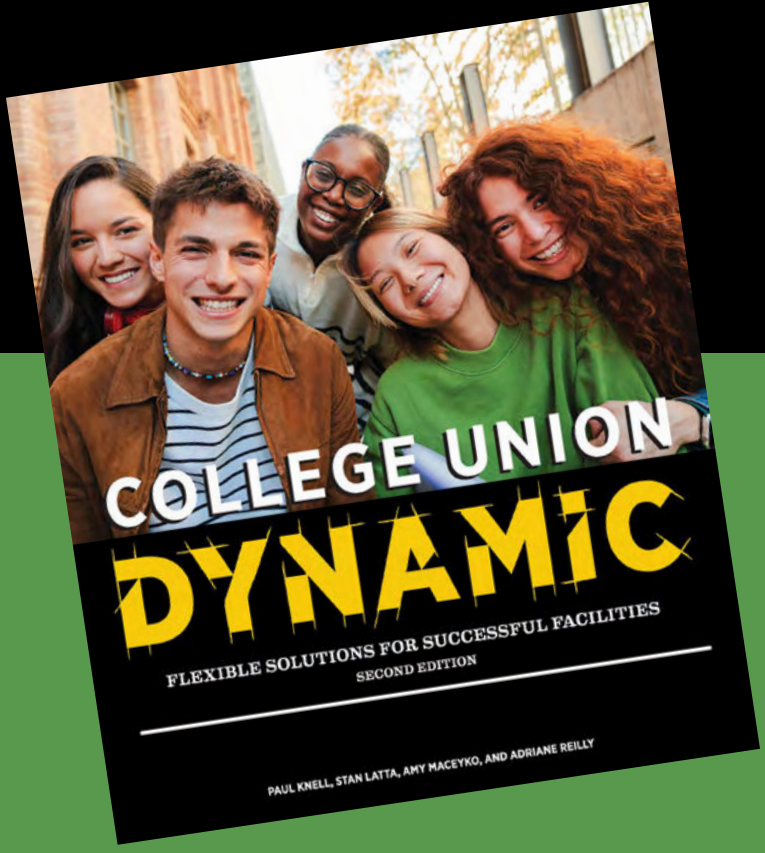
FREE SPEECH RULES, FORMAL COMPLAINT PROCESS CHANGES IN ENGLAND FOR NON-STUDENTS

University staff, applicants for academic posts, visiting speakers, and certain other individuals in England must take a new route to complain when they believe a university or college has failed to protect their lawful freedom of speech. The new process falls directly to the Office for Students to evaluate whether a university or constituent college has breached its legal duty to secure freedom of speech within the law. The Office for Students is an independent regulator for higher education in England.

Universities and colleges were required to prepare their administrative and regulatory infrastructure ahead of implementation, including reviewing and updating institutional codes of practice, staff induction materials, and application processes to ensure compliance with free speech principles.

Institutions must also have met ongoing obligations following the September 1 cutoff, including mandatory public promotion of the change. Providers are required to prominently advertise the free speech complaints route across communications as soon as reasonably practicable, and no later than January 1, 2027.

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COLLEGE UNION DYNAMIC, SECOND EDITION NOW AVAILABLE

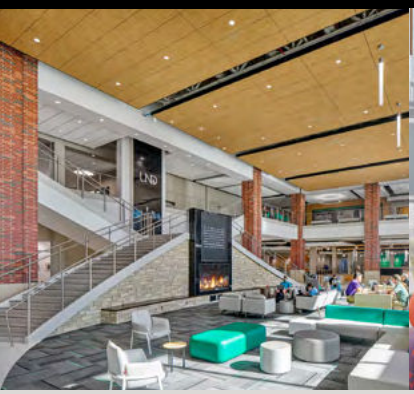
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"College Union Dynamic: Flexible Solutions for Successful Facilities, Second Edition" reflects the profound cultural, social, and architectural changes that have shaped the higher education landscape. The freshly articulated version adds new content and updated commentary in each section, new images and drawings, and current references.

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- Understanding Students (new chapter in second edition)
- Foundations of Union Planning
- Campus and Site Relations
- Facility Programming
- Campus Life and Student Programs
- Bricks and Mortar Planning (new chapter in second edition)
- Meeting and Event Spaces
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A Partnership between ACUHO-I, ACUI, NASPA, NIRSA

What is the PRC?

The Program Review Collaborative (PRC) is a joint venture between the Association of Colleges and University Housing Officers - International (ACUHO-I), the Association of College Unions International (ACUI), NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), and the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA). The PRC offers external reviews for departments/programs often positioned within a student affairs division.

What makes the PRC distinct?

This collective approach allows us to leverage the skills and talents of our extensive membership to provide expert reviewers identified and vetted through professional organizations. Review services are not "one size fits all," rather they account for an institution's mission, culture, identity, and history in order to utilize processes and generate outcomes that best serve one's respective department/unit/functional area.

Overview

The PRC provides external reviews to departments/programs within student affairs with the primary focus on the health and functioning of a unit—its strengths, opportunities, and strategic areas for enhancement. PRC reviews are designed to be applicable to departments, programs, and services regardless of institutional mission, size, function, organization, and budget. PRC services are not a form of accreditation process or a set of standards. External reviews provide peer-to-peer assistance from seasoned student affairs officers and subject matter experts which results in meaningful insight and valuable recommendations.

For more information, visit **acui.org/prc** or email **schaplin@acui.org** to discuss how the PRC can support you.