



Carnegie Mellon
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Coro Center for Civic Leadership, Pittsburgh



Report on Inaugural “Campus Conversation” November 19, 2005

I. Introduction

A. Goals and Objectives of the Program

- Raise the level of campus-wide discussions of important issues to a new level,
- Encourage students to question, expand and articulate their perspectives on their education,
- Inform students about the diversity of our student population and the opportunities for learning that this creates,
- Exemplify *campus diversity* by embedding it in students’ *deliberative activities*,
- See students become more engaged with one another across groups that otherwise seldom come into contact, and
- Showcase and assess the benefits of deliberative polling.

B. About Deliberative Polling

Students, like all citizens, are often uninformed about key public issues. Conventional polls represent the public’s surface impressions of sound bites and headlines. The public, subject to what social scientists have called “rational ignorance,” has little reason to confront trade-offs or invest time and effort in acquiring information or coming to a considered judgment.

Deliberative Polling® is a method developed and tested by Professor James Fishkin at Stanford University’s Center for Deliberative Democracy. A Deliberative Poll® gathers a representative sample of the community to discuss and respond to questions on pressing local, regional or national issues. While traditional public opinion polls solicit “intuitive” responses from people who are not well informed on the topic, a Deliberative Poll® represents “what the electorate would think if, hypothetically, it could be immersed in an intensive deliberation process” (James Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation*).

C. Our model

In our model, a scientific random sample of the campus population receives background information on an issue or set of issues. The sampled individuals then gather together (face-to-face and eventually in a mixed F2F/Online experience). In small discussion groups, students will discuss the issues and generate questions for a panel of experts. After listening to experts' responses to their questions, students reconvene in small groups to further discuss the issues and to take a survey designed to gauge their attitudes, feelings, and opinions. The result of such a process indicates what the campus community as a whole might think about an issue if the community had time to become informed about the issue.

II. First Campus Conversation (Saturday, November 19, 2005)

Our first Campus Conversation focused on two broad questions: the campus community (with a focus on campus diversity), and moral values in private and public life (with an emphasis on the legal and moral dimensions of file sharing).

With initial support and encouragement from Dan Resnick, a core group of faculty and staff met weekly to develop the topics and materials used for the background documents (Mike Bridges, Robert Cavalier, Susan Lawrence and Randy Weinsten). The University Libraries contributed staff time and resources in the design and reproduction of the final documents.

Carnegie Mellon students were randomly sampled and divided into a control group and a participant group. In preparation for the day of the event, students from Susan Lawrence's Professional Writing class, Coro Fellows, and student volunteers were enlisted to act as moderators and facilitators.

Registration began at 1:30 pm. Due to the low turnout of our random sample, ad hoc representative groups were formed to add to the total number of participants. After the welcome session, they went off into their small groups to discuss the issues, allocating about a half an hour for each topic followed by five minutes for question generation of each topic (1 question per topic). Around 3:45 pm, the participants reconvened for the expert panel session, where the questions they had generated in their small groups were asked and answered. This session lasted until about 4:45 pm. At this time, the participants went off in their small groups to talk about the expert panel session and any final thoughts they might have and then filled out a final survey. When this was completed (between 5:05 and 5:10 pm), participants were invited to attend a reception at which pizza was served.

III. Assessment

An assessment of the event will take the form of answering four broad questions:

- 1) To what extent did the actual event accomplish each of our goals?
- 2) To what extent did the actual event look like our proposed model?
- 3) How is the outcome of the event different from what we had anticipated?
- 4) What did we learn from this?

A. To what extent did the actual event accomplish each of our goals?

We were primarily concerned with six goals. An analysis of the extent to which each of these was accomplished will be based on the quantitative and qualitative data from the surveys (including – among other things – observing the change in beliefs and strength of beliefs that can be observed in the pre- and post-event surveys.

To what extent did you find participation in the deliberative poll:				
	not at all	a little	moderate	very
engaging?	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%
enjoyable?	0.00%	16.67%	55.56%	27.78%
intellectually stimulating? [exposing] You to a new or different point-of-view	11.11%	22.22%	33.33%	33.33%
provide exposure to new or different points-of-view	0.00%	33.33%	50.00%	16.67%

Even after accounting for our small sample size, we noticed some *statistically significant changes* in participants' responses.¹

1. Participants indicated significantly greater familiarity with issues surrounding diversity and copyright laws.
2. Participants indicated significantly greater value in having interactions with diverse others.
3. Participants viewed the effects of “clustering” or “hiving” on students’ social development as significantly less negative.
4. Participants viewed the university’s policy on alcohol consumption as significantly less restrictive.
5. Participants viewed illegally downloading copyrighted music as a significantly greater moral wrong

¹ See appendix for the response tables.

The rest of the results represented trends. That is, they do not demonstrate significant differences. Given the small sample size, it would be dubious to conclude that they represent real differences. However, that said, the most interesting *trend* for diversity was that participants viewed ‘being on a campus with diverse others’ and ‘discussing issues concerning diversity in classes’ as more valuable.

To the extent that students are significantly more familiar with the issues our poll covered, one can say that the way in which they discuss these issues in the future will be more informed. In this way, it is possible to say that we raised the level of campus-wide discussions of important issues to a new level.

To the extent that both statistically significant changes and interesting trends suggest the poll resulted in a greater perceived value of diversity on campus, we can say that not only were students informed about the diversity of our student population and the opportunities for learning that this creates, but that there was a tendency to come to a greater understanding of the value of this diversity at Carnegie Mellon.

To the extent that our entire population indicated that they found the event to be at least moderately ‘engaging,’ we can say that students became more engaged with one another. However, it is far more difficult to assess the degree to which this engagement occurred across groups that otherwise seldom come into contact and, in fact, it appears as if this particular goal was not met in that regard (indeed, the lack of ethnic diversity among our participants was one of the concerns that we noticed).

Lastly, to the extent that a vast majority of our participants found the event at least moderately ‘intellectually stimulating’ and ‘enjoyable,’ and a majority of participants indicated they were ‘provided exposure to new or different points of view’ at least moderately, we can say that we were relatively successful at showcasing the benefits of deliberative polling. This is the case because our participants indicated, by virtue of their answers, that the benefits of deliberative polling *really can* be realized at the campus level.

However, some goals were clearly not met. Foremost among these was the goal of exemplifying campus diversity by embedding it in students’ deliberative actions. Our randomly sampled participants were all of the same ethnicity. While this does not discount the diversity in viewpoint that each participant brings to the discussion, it does mitigate the impact that the poll could have had to foster interaction between groups that traditionally cluster.

Additionally, given our small sample size, we are unable to say confidently, “This is what the campus community thinks about these issues.” As such, the recommending force (perhaps one of the greatest benefits of deliberative polling),

is much weaker than it would have been had we garnered a sample population more representative of the campus community (more on this later).

B. To what extent did the actual Event look like the proposed model?

The agenda for the event (other than the fact that we were slightly behind schedule) followed our model exactly. However, while we were initially hoping to engage 90 randomly sampled participants in the poll, only 5 of our randomly-sampled participants showed up to the event. In order to boost participants, we converted much of our Carnegie-Mellon-based staff into participants (they had access to – and, in general, were familiar with the materials we provided beforehand). Therefore, while our proposed model sought to involve 90 randomly sampled participants, we ended up having 18 participants (12 undergraduates and 6 graduate students), only five of which (undergraduates) were members of the randomly sampled population.

Discussion of the topics began almost immediately after the door to the small group discussions closed. Moderators and participants alike reported that discussion of the issues occurred freely and was fruitful. One way to gauge the accuracy of these comments is by looking at the questions the participants generated for the expert panel session. Regarding the issue of campus diversity, questions included “What methods have proved successful in breaking down barriers between diverse groups, and how are these methods applicable in a college environment?” and “How important is communication between diverse groups and should the interactions between diverse groups be forced to change?” Regarding the issue of file-sharing, questions included “If downloading illegally precipitates legal purchasing of an artist’s music is it still morally wrong?” and “Why aren’t students more aware of the issues and rules, and what is the best way to inform students?”

Worthy of note is the fact that these questions did not necessarily arrive directly from the information provided in the distributed materials. These were not open-ended questions similar to the ones used to engage thought on the issues. These questions were the direct result of the participants coming together and talking about these issues. In this way, the engagement of the participants in the small-group discussion was exactly what our proposed model strove for. Additionally, each small group generated the two questions asked of them, and the expert panel answered the questions honestly and directly.

C. How is the outcome of the event different from what we had anticipated?

The overarching difference between what we had anticipated and what actually occurred is that, because of our response rate of randomly-sampled participants, we do not have the ability to say, “This is what the campus community would think if it had the time to become informed, deliberate with each other, and have their questions answered by experts;” rather, the most we can say is “Here is what our *participants* think now that they’ve had the time to become informed,

deliberate with each other, and have their questions answered by experts.” While we did not have the response rate necessary to be able to offer policy recommendations based on the results of the surveys, we *do* have the ability to track the relative success of the event as it seeks to inform and engage participants (note that one effect of this may be – and, in fact, *was* – a shift in the views of the participants).

D. What did we learn from this event?

More than anything, we learned that it is difficult to get students to participate. Something about attending an event acts as a significant deterrent to participation.² To this end, we learned that we need to adopt a more aggressive recruitment strategy for future polls. Among other things, this will include scheduling the poll for a weekday evening (with the hope that students will already be on campus), locating and utilizing new sources to disseminate knowledge about the event,³ and integrating the event(s) more thoroughly with student organizations and other Carnegie Mellon resources.⁴

IV. Additional Implications

By itself, the assessment of the event does not give a complete picture of the event’s implications. By creating this initiative, this program has become an important element in the agenda of the newly formed Southwestern Pennsylvania Program for Deliberative Democracy; it has solidified our working relationship with the Coro Center for Civic Leadership (and our joint program with them vis-à-vis the Coro Fellowship in Local Democracy), the participation of the University Libraries (and their interest in hosting our online tools for augmenting deliberative polling both here on campus and – through Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – the region as a whole), and a number of other departments across campus (such as Philosophy, English, Computer Science, and Design). Mara Harrell (a Professor in the Philosophy Department) would like to use the deliberative polling initiative as an innovative pedagogical tool in her classes. Susan Lawrence (the Director of the Masters Program in Professional Writing) has volunteered the time of her Professional Writing students to assist during the event, believing that experiencing a deliberative poll first hand is an opportunity that her students should not pass up.

² This is apparent upon looking at our response rates. For our participant group of 328 randomly-selected individuals, 30 agreed to participate and electronically signed the consent form. Of those 30, 5 showed up to the event. Conversely, for the control group, a total of 46 (out of 179) filled out both the baseline survey and the control survey the day of the event. These represent response rates of 1.5% and 25.7% respectively.

³ Examples of this might include securing advertising on www.facebook.com and www.myspace.com (both social-network sites popular among college students), putting up posters in high-profile locations (such as on Doherty Hall, in the University Center, etc), and soliciting active marketing via word-of-mouth by contacting the leaders of organizations, RAs, possibly Professors, etc).

⁴ For example: the Student Senate, the Heinz School, the Carnegie-Mellon members of the Young Voters Group, and the University Libraries.

We are optimistic about the future directions of this program – and of our ability to address all of the issues and concerns that have arisen through our first test case. By building administrative and faculty-oriented advocacy in the way described above, we feel we are very well positioned to tackle these concerns. None of this could have been achieved without the generous support of the President’s Diversity Advisory Council. We are deeply grateful for this support and look forward to working with the DAC as we move forward.

V. Future Directions

The future direction of Campus Conversations can be outlined by determining how we can position ourselves to most successfully accomplish our goals in the future.

More than anything else, we need to find a way to boost our response rate. While increasing the tangible incentive to participate is one option (either by providing a more alluring raffle item or securing the funding to compensate every participant), a second, and potentially more significant option is to have the poll involve two groups of participants, one randomly selected and one directly solicited. The directly solicited group (alternatively called a “convenience sample”) would allow any-and-all interested individuals to participate. Ideally, there would be some interest among each group on campus, so while the participants of this group might be self-selected, they would represent a cross-section of students’ interests and perspectives. The motivating force behind including this sample is the idea that word-of-mouth marketing will be the key factor in institutionalizing this process at Carnegie Mellon. An overwhelming percentage of participants answered favorably when asked about their impressions of the deliberative poll across a variety of different criteria (see Table on pg. 3). We believe that having more people involved, randomly selected or not, will greatly increase the degree to which students are both aware of - and think positively about - our initiative. This, we hope, will go far in boosting our response rate. Furthermore, by soliciting the leaders of campus organizations, we hope to increase the rate of interaction among diverse individuals, something that, arguably, our November event lacked (upon being asked about any changes in knowledge or attitudes as a result of the deliberative poll, one participant wrote, “We were all white kids, so there wasn’t much”).

Additionally, increasing the base number of participants should increase the rate at which the level upon which students engage and interact on important issues is raised. Simply put, the greater the number of informed individuals, the higher the average level of engagement and discussion. Moreover, we hope that students who did not participate will actively seek to become informed so that they can be active agents in a conversation with participants.

**Appendix Item A:
Qualitative Response Data:**

Question 17:				
To what extent did you find participation in the deliberative poll:				
	not at all	a little	moderate	very
engaging?	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%
enjoyable?	0.00%	16.67%	55.56%	27.78%
intellectually stimulating? [exposing] You to a new or different point-of-view	11.11%	22.22%	33.33%	33.33%
provide exposure to new or different points-of-view	0.00%	33.33%	50.00%	16.67%
Question 18:				
How informative did you find...				
	not at all	a little	moderate	very
the written material provided before the poll?	0.00%	44.44%	50.00%	5.56%
the written material available during the poll?	0.00%	64.71%	35.29%	0.00%
the group discussions?	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%
the argument diagrams?	70.59%	11.76%	17.65%	0.00%
the written material available during the poll informative?	13.33%	46.67%	40.00%	0.00%
the expert panelists?	5.56%	11.11%	44.44%	38.89%
Question 19:				
To what extent did your experience in the Deliberative Poll result in...				
	not at all	a little	moderate	great deal
your learning something new about Carnegie Mellon?	5.56%	22.22%	66.67%	5.56%
your learning something new about diversity?	11.76%	41.18%	29.41%	17.65%
your learning something new about moral issues in decision making?	38.89%	33.33%	22.22%	5.56%
your learning something new about issues concerning downloading copyrighted material?	16.67%	27.78%	44.44%	11.11%
a shift in your attitudes, beliefs, or opinions about diversity	38.89%	33.33%	22.22%	5.56%
a shift in your attitudes, beliefs, or opinions about issues concerning the downloading [of] copyrighted material?	44.44%	27.78%	27.78%	0.00%

**Appendix Item B:
Detailed Statistical Analysis of Results**

The following tables present the means and standard deviations (s.d.) for responses to the questionnaires administered immediately prior to (pre) and following (post) the Deliberative Poll on November 19, 2005. The results of paired t-test are specified for those items demonstrating significant differences in means between the pre- and post-measures.

These findings can be characterized as follows: After taking part in the Deliberative Poll,

- participants indicated significantly greater familiarity with issues surrounding diversity and copyright laws.
- participants indicated significantly greater value in having interactions with diverse others.
- participants viewed the effects of “clustering or hiving” on students’ social development as significantly less negative.
- participants viewed the university’s policy on alcohol consumption as significantly less restrictive.
- participants viewed illegally downloading copyrighted music as a significantly greater moral wrong.

<i>How familiar are you with...</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
a. issues concerning diversity at CM?	2.6 (.86)	3.2 (.71)**
b. issues related to copyright laws regulating the downloading of music from the internet?	2.8 (.79)	3.3 (.77)*

(1= not familiar; 2=a little familiar; 3=moderately familiar; 4=very familiar)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>How valuable are each of the following to you as a student at Carnegie Mellon?</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
a. Being on a campus with diverse others	3.0 (.67)	3.2 (.71)
b. Having interactions with diverse others	3.2 (.79)	3.4 (.61)*
c. Having class with diverse others	2.8 (.64)	3.1 (.79)
d. Having close friendships with diverse others	3.0 (.91)	3.0 (.77)
e. Discussing issues concerning diversity in classes	2.8 (.86)	3.1 (.87)

(1= not valuable; 2=a little valuable; 3=moderately valuable; 4=very valuable)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>How important do you believe that being on a diverse campus is for each of the following?</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
a. Your intellectual development	3.0 (.97)	3.1 (.80)
b. Your social development	3.3 (.67)	3.4 (.78)
c. Your ability to get a job	2.3 (.64)	2.4 (.71)
d. Your understanding of the world	3.7 (.46)	3.6 (.51)
e. Your earning potential	2.2 (.71)	2.0 (.59)
f. Your understanding of democracy	2.9 (1.0)	2.9 (1.0)
g. Your overall quality of life	2.4 (.78)	2.5 (.79)
h. Your appreciation of others who are different than you	3.4 (.72)	3.6 (.51)

(1= not important; 2=a little important; 3=moderately important; 4=very important)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>The term clustering or hiving describes the tendency of people to form friendships and associate with others who are similar to them.</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
How much do Carnegie Mellon students hive or cluster?	3.5 (.72)	3.6 (.71)

(1= not at all; 2=a little; 3=some; 4=a lot)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>Please indicate your beliefs about the effects of clustering on each of the following.</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
a. Students' intellectual development	2.7 (.59)	2.9 (.43)
b. Students' social development	2.1 (.66)	2.3 (.69)*
c. Students' feelings of comfort	3.5 (1.2)	3.8 (.71)
d. Students' sense of identity	3.5 (.80)	3.5 (.80)
e. Overall campus morale	2.3 (.75)	2.5 (.51)
f. Overall quality of life	2.7 (.47)	2.8 (.44)

(1= very negative; 2=negative; 3=neither negative nor positive; 4=positive; 5=very positive)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>How much responsibility do you believe Carnegie Mellon should have for each of the following?</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
a. Physical health of students	2.8 (.62)	2.9 (.58)
b. Safety of students	3.5 (.71)	3.5 (.62)
c. Emotional well-being of students	2.9 (.64)	2.9 (.58)
d. Social well-being of students	2.7 (.59)	2.7 (.46)
e. Intellectual development of students	3.9 (.32)	3.9 (.24)
f. Moral development of students	2.4 (.78)	2.6 (.61)
g. Overall well-being of students	3.1 (.73)	3.3 (.58)

(1= no responsibility; 2=a little responsibility; 3=moderate responsibility; 4=a great deal of responsibility)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>Please indicate your belief about the level of influence Carnegie Mellon currently exerts on each of the following aspects of students' lives.</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
a. academic pursuits	2.9 (.32)	2.9 (.32)
b. intellectual life	2.9 (.42)	3.1 (.54)
c. religious life	3.2 (.62)	3.2 (.62)
d. political views	3.0 (.61)	2.9 (.24)
e. social life	3.5 (.87)	3.4 (.87)
f. recreational activities	3.5 (.62)	3.5 (.62)
g. moral values	3.2 (.66)	3.0 (.71)

(1= way too much; 2=too much; 3=about the right amount; 4=too little; 5=way too little)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>Please indicate your belief about the restrictive vs. relaxed nature of Carnegie Mellon's policies regarding each of the following.</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
a. downloading copyrighted music files	2.8 (.62)	3.1 (.42)
b. downloading copyrighted video files	2.9 (.58)	3.1 (.47)
c. plagiarism	3.0 (0.0)	3.1 (.24)
d. cheating	3.2 (.51)	3.1 (.32)
e. alcohol consumption	2.7 (.90)	2.9 (.80)*
f. illegal drug use	3.1 (.68)	3.1 (.58)
g sexual harassment	3.2 (.43)	3.2 (.38)

(1= way too restrictive; 2=too restrictive; 3=about right; 4=too relaxed; 5=way too relaxed)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
Do you believe it is morally wrong to illegally download copyrighted music?	2.9 (1.1)	3.3 (1.4)*

(1=definitely not morally wrong; 2=probably not morally wrong; 3=not sure; 4=probably morally wrong; 5=definitely morally wrong)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
How important do you think it is for the university to implement a strategy to allow students to download music in a way that does not put the student in legal jeopardy?	2.9 (.80)	2.7 (1.1)

(1=not important; 2=a little important; 3=somewhat important; 4=very important)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>Please indicate the extent to which you think each of the following groups should be involved in defining the university's policy for dealing with the illegal downloading of copyrighted material.</i>	Pre mean (s.d.)	Post mean (s.d.)
a. Students	3.6 (.61)	3.4 (.78)
b. Faculty	2.5 (.70)	2.3 (.90)
c. Administration	3.3 (.83)	3.5 (.79)
d. Carnegie Mellon's attorneys	3.4 (.62)	3.4 (.70)
e. Entertainment Industry	2.3 (.83)	2.4 (.82)
f. Government	1.9(.76)	1.8 (.71)

(1= no involvement; 2=a little involvement; 3=some involvement; 4=a lot of involvement)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

<i>To what extent did you find participation in the deliberative poll...</i>	Post only mean (s.d.)
a. engaging?	3.7 (.49)
b. enjoyable?	3.1 (.68)
c. intellectually stimulating? you to a new or different point-of-view?	2.9 (1.0)
d. provide exposure to new or different points-of-view?	2.8 (.71)

(1= not at all; 2=a little; 3=a moderate amount; 4=very)

<i>How informative did you find...</i>	Post only mean (s.d.)
a. the written material provided before the poll?	2.6 (.61)
b. the written material available during the poll?	2.4 (.49)
c. the group discussions?	3.5 (.51)
d. the argument diagrams?	1.5 (.80)
e. Did you find the written material available during the poll informative?	2.3 (.70)
f. the expert panelists?	3.2 (.86)

(1= not informative; 2=a little informative; 3=moderately informative; 4=very informative)

<i>To what extent did your experience in the Deliberative Poll result in...</i>	Post only mean (s.d.)
a. your learning something new about Carnegie Mellon?	2.7 (.67)
b. your learning something new about diversity?	2.4 (.98)
c. your learning something new about moral issues in decision making?	1.9 (.94)
d. your learning something new about the issues concerning downloading copyrighted material?	2.5 (.92)
e. a shift in your attitudes, beliefs or opinions about diversity?	1.9 (.94)
f. a shift in your attitudes, beliefs or opinions about issues concerning the downloading copyrighted material?	1.9 (.81)

(1= not at all; 2=a little; 3=a moderate amount; 4=a great deal)