

## Promoting Democratic Practice<sup>1</sup>

“Colleges and universities are ideal venues to explore and learn approaches to intergroup dialogue. Dialogue is used to, (1) change individual behavior and attitudes, particularly to increase intercultural understanding and tolerance, (2) confront and address historic and contemporary social injustice, (3) increase civility and respect, (4) build community and networks, (5), change institutions such as governments and workplaces, (6) change the way public policy decisions are made.

Democratic dialogue might best be viewed as a means to an end, to a more deliberative democracy. As noted above, democratic dialogue is grounded in certain principles. It is **inclusive, respectful, and governed by ground rules, facilitated, reflective, and expressed through personal experience and perspectives.** This kind of dialogue is the essential characteristic of a strong deliberative democracy.”

“Sometimes, public reasoning is linked to debate or advocacy work, and always in a political context. We propose a slightly different employment of the term – a process that is not only designed to shape political decisions but that can be used to **promote social action and build communities in ways that are cooperative, not adversarial. It is a form of respectful and open-minded inquiry that leads to individual and common commitments to shared solutions.**”

“Colleges and universities need to make inclusive dialogue, public reasoning, conflict transformation, and social policymaking and action across difference central to the curriculum and to student activities. Campuses must also create ‘safe’ spaces for study, dialogue, and collaborative action on pressing social, ethical, economic and political issues. They need to study and address persistent barriers of race, class, ability and gender. **They need to understand the difference between inclusive dialogue that is transformative and everyday conversations. They need to be attentive to the interpersonal dynamics of a group, and they need to identify common ground before moving to action.**”

*“How higher education does its business must reflect more closely the ideals of an actively engaged and informed citizenry that it seeks to instill in its students. We call for study, dialogue and change with respect to how decisions are made, who decides, and how power is distributed and exercised. “*

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Catalyst Paper #1, by permission of the Democracy Imperative at the University of New Hampshire, a national network of scholars, academic leaders, and practitioners dedicated to strengthening public life and advancing deliberative democracy in and through higher education. Learn more at <http://www.unh.edu/academic-affairs/democracy>.