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**The Leadership in Diversity Group, LLC**

**Voices of Discovery:  
A How-To Guide for Starting  
an Intergroup Dialogue Program on Your Campus**

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# **Voices of Discovery: A How-To Guide for Starting an Intergroup Dialogue Program on Your Campus**

## **Voices Of Discovery Intergroup Dialogue Model And Program**

Based on a model developed in 1997-1999 at Arizona State University and further refined at the University of Denver, University of South Dakota, and University of Arizona, Voices of Discovery\* (VOD) is a program designed to structure interaction between students from different groups or social identities on topics of diversity. This interaction initiative falls into the category of campus intergroup dialogues which are found on many colleges and universities throughout the U.S. and are manifested using different models and approaches. Intergroup dialogues (IGDs) are prolonged (five to six weeks or more) small group discussions between different groups (e.g., African American and White students, Asian and Latino students, Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual and Heterosexual students) and led by trained facilitators who create a safe and brave place for intergroup interaction to take place (University of Michigan, 1994).

IGDs can be characterized as face-to-face discussions that are open, honest, challenging, and reflective around issues that exist between groups. The main assumption permeating intergroup dialogues is that positive interaction between people who are different is not necessarily a commonplace or natural process. The tendency of people is to belong and spend time with those similar to themselves and who make them feel safe and comfortable. This is true of White individuals as is true of Latinos, Native Americans, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, etc. Crossing into other cultures and joining other groups is not an easy task and involves considerable emotional and psychological discomfort (Winkelman, 1993). In sum, interaction between groups has to be structured, safe, and provide incentives for people to talk across their differences.

The first intergroup dialogue program on a U.S. college campus began in 1988 at the University of Michigan. Coordinated out of the Program on Intergroup Relations, the Michigan intergroup dialogue model and program employs a credit hour course approach that provides sixteen weeks of sustained structured intergroup interaction to undergraduate students. That is, undergraduate students engage in diversity dialogues for an entire semester and receive course credit for their participation. A powerful aspect of the Michigan program is the use of student peer facilitators who participate in a dialogue group during one semester followed by enrollment and training in a group facilitation course for a second semester. By the time peer facilitators lead an intergroup dialogue, they have undergone extensive experience and training in facilitation. The courses explore intergroup conflict, intergroup relations, and issues of diversity and social justice (<https://igr.umich.edu>). This is an impactful program that has yielded plenty of research attesting to the effectiveness of intergroup dialogues (Gurin, Biren, and Zuñiga, 2013).

The Voices of Discovery (VOD) Model grew out of the University of Michigan effort and therefore, shares many similarities including theoretical approaches, philosophy, purpose, and educational outcomes. There are however several differences. First, VOD is not a credit hour course initiative. Instead, students receive course points from faculty for participating in dialogues. Second, the program is shorter than the Michigan model and runs between five and seven weeks. Third, the model depends on faculty (at some universities up to 25 faculty members have supported the initiative) throughout a campus to participate in the program by making the intergroup dialogues either curricular or extracurricular. To incentivize faculty participation, attendance is taken at each of the group meetings and reported back to the instructor for grade assignments. There are several similar models at American University, University of Denver, University of South Dakota, and Gonzaga University.

Conceptually, VOD employs Gordon Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis or Intergroup Contact Theory which outlines the conditions that must be present for relations between in-groups and out-groups to improve and for

intergroup hostility or conflict to diminish. Allport posited that diverse groups that come together under the conditions of equal status contact, a common goal, and sanctioned by authority maximize their chances of reducing intergroup conflict, increasing cooperation, and decreasing prejudice and discrimination. Thus, Voices of Discovery attempts to recreate those conditions to maximize intergroup learning, growth, and development. To achieve equal status contact, the intergroup dialogues are facilitated by two graduate students each representing a social identity present in the group (e.g. Black and White; LGBTIQ and Heterosexual). Moreover, an attempt is made to equalize the groups (e.g., 10 Latino students and 10 White students). In practice, the number of participants deviates from the ideal and thus, might have 7 Latino students and 10 White students. Of course, it stands to reason that if you have one African American in a White/African American group, there will be no dialogue. The intergroup dialogues work on the common goal of achieving greater understanding of intergroup issues through dialogue. That is, participants work together to understand concepts and issues and the complexity behind them by sharing different perspectives and experiences.

### **Voices of Discovery Logistics**

The mission of the Voices of Discovery program is to organize intergroup dialogues to:

- foster meaningful, structured interaction between students from diverse backgrounds.
- increase students' understanding and awareness of themselves, the groups they belong to, and of other students who belong to diverse groups.
- increase students' understanding about the complexity of intergroup issues.
- contribute to positive intergroup relations on the campus.
- utilize diversity as an asset for creating greater intergroup understanding.

The Voices Program consists of several dimensions. First, professors are asked to consider giving course credit (course points) to their students for participating in the VOD program. One of the objectives of the project is to supplement the theoretical and research material presented by instructors in the courses with actual face-to-face dialogue regarding the issues of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, disability status, and other salient social identities. In a sense, VOD is akin to a lab where students explore issues of diversity in conjunction with a course.

Second, once faculty agree to participate in the program, students enrolled in those courses are recruited for the program. Applications (see Appendix for an example) for the program are disseminated to the students by faculty during the first day of class (or they are directed to a website with an on-line application). Although any instructor on the campus is invited to participate in Voices, courses in sociology, social psychology, communication, ethnic studies, women's studies, business, humanities, journalism, and health sciences are but a few of the courses that are ideal for participation in VOD. These courses and their students are perfect for the dialogues because the students receive theoretical and research material in class related to diversity while simultaneously participating in the out-of-classroom intergroup dialogues. Student participants receive the skills, such as active listening, conflict management, and ingroup-outgroup dynamics, to successfully participate in the program.

Third, students accepted into the program participate in a dialogue group for six weeks (two hours per week). Examples of the dialogue groups might be offered include: Inter-religious, International/US Born, Students of Color/White, Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual/Heterosexual, female/male, and Woman of Color/White Woman, Biracial, Issues of Privilege and Race in America. All groups meet on campus in classrooms, lounges, meeting rooms, and common spaces.

Incentives for student participation include a certificate of participation, free pizza served at each meeting, and course points. The incentives insure full participation for two hours a week during a six-week period.

With respect to the coordination of the dialogues, students self-select into the groups depending on their availability, interest, and social identity. For example, an African American student who is interested in the

Black/White dialogue group which meets, say on Tuesday nights from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., would have to be available during that time frame. Otherwise, they could not participate. In the application (see below), students select their top three choices of intergroup dialogues and are consequently placed in one of those groups.

For the Voices program to work, there has to be at least one individual staffing the initiative. Thus, the program might include a full-time staff member or part-time graduate student to coordinate the logistics (i.e., recruit and place students, reserve rooms, prepare facilitator materials) and maintain the initiative. Voices of Discovery has traditionally been administered by a part-time graduate assistant. Ideally, all the facilitators should receive compensation for their facilitation. However, if the budget cannot support compensation, look for other opportunities to reward graduate student facilitators (e.g., letters of recommendation, conference travel, resume citation).

With respect to facilitators, graduate students primarily, but also staff, faculty, and highly trained undergraduate students, are recruited to serve as volunteer intergroup dialogue facilitators. A counseling program psychology master's program is a great place to recruit facilitators. Students in these programs can get credit for practicing their group facilitation skills while supporting the Voices Program.

### **Facilitator Training**

As indicated above, each dialogue group is co-facilitated by a combination of volunteer trained graduate students, staff members, faculty, and specially trained undergraduate students. Most of the facilitators are selected from disciplines that have a foundation for understanding and working with groups (e.g., social work, social psychology, communication, education, counseling, etc.). All facilitators receive four hours of training in active listening, conflict management, group processes, ingroup-outgroup dynamics, and social identity theory prior to the beginning of the intergroup dialogues. The facilitators are also required to read six chapters from the book "Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues: Building Bridges, Catalyzing Change (Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, 2011).

Communication with facilitators is accomplished via a listserv. Facilitators in each group are expected to "check-in" every week and provide a short group update, share resources with other facilitators, and alert program administrators regarding problems that arise. Attendance is taken at each group meeting and then reported to the respective professor so that they can give credit to each student (assign points/obtain a grade).

### **Budget**

With respect to budget, the cost of a graduate assistant and pizza for the dialogues are the largest expenses for the program. There are some minimal material costs such as copying, markers, name tags, and print paper. Overall, the cost of Voices of Discovery is approximately \$1,800.00 per semester plus a graduate assistant or a full-time staff member to administer the program.

At Arizona State University, the dialogue initiative consisted of 250 students per semester participating across 15 different dialogue groups. The University of South Dakota's program grew to include about 300 students per semester across 17 distinct groups. In general, students in their evaluation of the program indicate that they liked the dialogues; learned about diversity and specific groups; and that they would recommend the program to other students.

In sum, the Voices of Discovery program is similar to an intergroup dialogue lab that students attend while taking classes. It can also be conceptualized as a large dialogue community that contributes positively to the campus climate of a college or university.

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\*Over the years, there are many individuals who have contributed to the Voices of Discovery Intergroup Dialogue Program. Some of these contributors include Kris Ewing, Kelly Maxwell, Kate Collins, Thomas Walker, Sarah We, Tracy Chapman, Lamont Sellers, Sarah Gibson, Kathy Wong (Lau), Brianna Huss, Mathew Barcus, Allison Crespo, and many other staff, faculty, and graduate and undergraduate students. I am grateful for their contributions.

## References

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Gurin, P., Biren, N.A., and Zuñiga, X. (2013). *Dialogue across differences: Practice, theory, and research on Intergroup dialogue*. Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

Maxwell, K. E., Biren, (Ratnesh) Nagda A., and Thompson, M. C. (2011). *Facilitating intergroup dialogues: Building bridges, catalyzing change*. Stylus Publishing: Sterling Virginia.

Winkleman, M. (1993). *Ethnic relations in the US: A sociohistorical cultural systems approach*. West Group Publishing: Egan, Minnesota.

# Appendix

## Application

Applications due: Friday Jan. 23, 2015 by 5:00 p.m.

**Program Runs: February 2 – March 15**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last) (First)

Student ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of course for which you are receiving credit:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide the following information to assist in proper group placement. **This information will be kept private and used only for the group placement. It will not be used outside the intended purpose.**

Please specify:

1. Gender (male, female, transgender): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Biracial/Multicultural: (Please Specify: Native Am./White, African/Am. White, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

5. US Born (Y/N): \_\_\_\_\_

6. Athlete (Y/N): \_\_\_\_\_

Questions can be directed to:  
Maria Villegas, Graduate Assistant

**Pizza is provided at each weekly meeting. All groups meet on campus. Bring your appetite and come prepared to dialogue.**

**STUDENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED ON A FIRST COME FIRST SERVED BASIS**

**\*\*\*We attempt to place students in their 1<sup>st</sup> group choice, but not necessarily guaranteed\*\*\***

Please **rank order** from 1-5 your group preferences and availability below. (1=First choice, 2=Second choice, 3=Third choice, etc.)

**You must be available during the date & time the group is scheduled to meet.**

### Dialogue Groups Rank

#### **GLBTIQ/Heterosexual Identified**

*This group will explore issues related to sexual orientation.*

**Date and Time** Tuesdays 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Native American/Non-Native Student**

*This group will focus on intergroup issues and cultural dynamics between Native American and non-Natives.*

**Date and Time** Tuesdays 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Microaggressions in Everyday Life**

*This dialogue focuses on the negative everyday subtle/overt comments and behaviors directed at women, students of color, LGBTIQ students, biracial, and other students.*

**Date & Time** Thursdays 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Race in America**

*This group will explore issues related to race in American society.*

**Date and Time** Mondays 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Students of Color/White Students**

*Individuals in this group will dialogue about issues, Misconceptions, and opportunities regarding race.*

**Date and Time** Wednesdays 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. \_\_\_\_\_

