

**Program Plan for the:
Public Deliberation Initiative (PDI)**

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I. Statement of General Purpose of the Unit

The Public Deliberation Initiative (PDI) at Baylor University will be an initiative of critical deliberative democracy, activism, interdisciplinary collaboration, pedagogical research, student involvement, and training for ongoing community engagement. The initiative will follow Dr. Martin Carcasson's model at Colorado State University (CSU) of training students for "passionate impartiality" within a "deliberative" democratic framework (versus an "adversarial" political framework). The PDI will also follow models associated with the Kettering Foundation, the National Issues Forum, and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD). Like the center in Fort Collins, the PDI at Baylor will enhance local civic culture, increase student/citizen participation in community problem solving, expand collaborative decision-making on campus and in the local community, and improve citizenship through civic pedagogy. There is currently nothing like the PDI in Waco, and as such, the primary mission of the PDI is to promote the development of vibrant deliberative democracy in Waco and the surrounding areas. This will occur by combining teaching, research, and service in the activities of the PDI in order to benefit Baylor faculty and students as well as citizens in the surrounding communities.

Initiative goals include (modified from Carcasson's model):

- Enhance student involvement and retention, academic research and development, as well as community relations and outreach
- Improve the quality of public discussion and public participation concerning important institutional, local, and national issues
- Increase civic engagement of both students and local community members
- Provide service to the university, city, county, and region by being available for special projects connected to public deliberation and collaborative decision-making
- Serve as a research laboratory for deliberative communication practices
- Develop a local reputation as fair and non-partisan facilitators of public debate and a national reputation of excellence among institutions dedicated to deliberative democracy
- Advance expertise in a wide variety of face-to-face and on-line deliberative approaches
- Contribute to the development of a "civic habit" in Waco of high quality public deliberation concerning important issues
- Improve student communication skills

- Encourage sustained interest and activism in students, faculty, and community members

Specific Initiative objectives include:

- Develop and operate at least one deliberation-related or pedagogy of engagement workshop/lecture a year for students, faculty, and/or local community members
- Train a core group of students, faculty, and community members from various government units and community organizations to be able to plan and moderate public forums and other deliberative events
- The PDI will host programs and forums designed to foster deliberation around current issues involving implications for public life facilitated by trained students, faculty, or pre-approved guests
- Develop useful materials to facilitate discussion concerning locally relevant issues
- Maintain an online undergraduate research journal specifically aimed at community engagement, deliberation, and civic pedagogy

Discussion of Goals and Objectives

Our current system of “adversarial” politics often leads to distrust, misunderstanding, disempowerment, and ill-conceived practices of “public engagement.” The PDI will offer a counter-narrative to adversarial politics by focusing on deliberation and literacy across multiple perspectives and genres and by engaging the community to improve public judgment, inclusiveness, and equality. This will occur by engaging students and the community through developing processes of “deliberative democracy,” which is an approach to politics and community issues in which citizens, not just experts, are deeply involved in public decision making.

For example, instead of tying deliberation to action in a simplistic and linear way, the initiative will emphasize what Carcasson calls deliberating by “beginning with the end in mind.” That is, he argues that multiple deliberative goals should be thought of in a more interactional way, and he suggests that improving “democratic skills/attitudes and fostering understanding of issues” on an individual level is a key part of this process but must be thought of in terms of overall institutional and community goals. One must keep in mind “the long-term end of improving community problem solving and the short-term specific ends of particular projects.”

Many citizens, including students, are disenchanted with politics and have little interest in “the issues;” scholars such as David Mathews suggest these attitudes are an expression of frustration with the current model of democratic discussion. In contrast, the deliberative democratic model of passionate impartiality prepares students, faculty, and community members to become excited about the deliberative democratic “process” itself rather than a single issue, thereby promoting sustained efficacy and empowerment. Teaching this process occurs through specific and contextual engagement within the community through deliberative events and projects. Additionally, an emphasis on researching the ways to enable faculty, students, and the community to understand democratic skills and attitudes more fully will be combined with fostering community and institutional action, sustainability, and individual/community problem-solving. As a

presence on campus and in the community, the PDI will encourage sustained interest and activism in students, faculty, and community members through actively engaging deliberative democracy, pedagogy, and facilitation strategies for multiple audiences (e.g., speaking, listening, and writing strategies).

Interdisciplinary Areas of Research and Service

The overall impact of the PDI will certainly be significant as it will encourage student involvement and excitement, enhance student retention, contribute to faculty engagement, and further establish the reputation of Baylor within the community as actively involved with community issues and interests. I have already seen first-hand the impact an initiative like this can have on a campus. The center at CSU, for example, has had a significantly influential impact on community-university relations, and it has also generated excitement among their students. I have spoken to the students individually, and they are excited about being passionately impartial and have experienced the efficacy of the deliberative democratic model. I have watched the students train others in facilitation techniques and strategies, which they gladly did on a weekend, and they were all enthusiastic, competent, and professional. In addition, not only will the PDI focus on student engagement, but it will also function to generate significant data for ongoing interdisciplinary research, which will be published and communicated primarily through academic journals and community-oriented lectures and workshops as well as through the National Issues Forum and the Kettering Foundation.

The PDI will be established between the Bobo Spiritual Life Center and Center for Community Engagement, but the Initiative clearly has broad interdisciplinary implications (e.g., Political Science, Philosophy, Religious Studies, Communication Studies, Public Affairs). Discussed in further detail below, the PDI will be maintained through an interdisciplinary Advisory Board, which will include both university (faculty and students) and community members. Currently, faculty who have given consent to participate as a board member include: Andy Hogue of the Political Science Department. These individuals were approached because of overlapping interests and/or activities associated with the PDI. So far, all individuals and entities at Baylor who have been approached – because of closely aligned goals, activities, and/or interests – have offered enthusiastic support for the PDI. They are all eager to engage in collaborative teaching, research, and/or service projects for students, faculty, and the community.

In addition, the PDI will also be working in order to establish and to operate a collaborative online student journal intended as a resource for students to publish scholarly work related to issues regarding community engagement, the public sphere, and/or religious life. The journal is tentatively titled *Religion, Public Life, and Community Engagement*, and it will be reviewed by an editorial board consisting of students and faculty, both on and off campus. This journal will focus on publishing research submitted by student scholars, and perhaps recent graduates as well, and it will serve as the primary venue for students who participate in community-engagement projects through the PDI to publish their findings, results, and scholarly reflections/interpretations of that data.

Whether working with students or with faculty, the benefit of the PDI resides in improving “democratic attitudes” alongside democratic skills that are aimed towards

improving action, literacy, decision making, and problem-solving on a variety of levels (e.g., individual, departmental, institutional, larger community). As Carcasson suggests, there are six goals of deliberation: 1) to increase awareness of the range of perspectives around public issues; 2) to improve democratic attitudes, community relationships, and interests; 3) to enhance communication, facilitation, and decision making skills; 4) to lead to more collaborative and inclusive individual and community action; 5) to improve the legitimacy and sustainability of institutional decision making; and 6) to develop community problem solving skills. The PDI will focus specifically on exploring and engaging each of these goals with students, faculty, and community members through its research as well as through its activities on campus and in the larger community.

II. Statement of Congruence with Role and Mission of University/Campus/College

****Information will be updated soon.****