

Deliberation Dinners

Year One Evaluation Executive Summary | 2023-24



7

Deliberation Dinners



125

Students Participated



87%

Retention Rate



63%

Attended 6 or more
Diners

A diverse group of undergraduate students participated in deliberations on controversial issues, facilitated by UW-Madison instructors. They received background materials and had opportunities to build community with peers and facilitators. Evaluation findings show that students grew their deliberation skills, sense of belonging, and ability to engage with a diverse group of people and ideas.

The Deliberation Dinners Pilot is housed in the Discussion Project at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with the goal of providing “students the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with other students about important public issues in a setting that exposes them to multiple and competing ideas” (Deliberation Dinners, 2023). The Deliberation Dinners team (DD) partnered with the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research to conduct an external program evaluation focusing on the implementation process and emerging outcomes for participating undergraduate students. The evaluation was completed using mixed

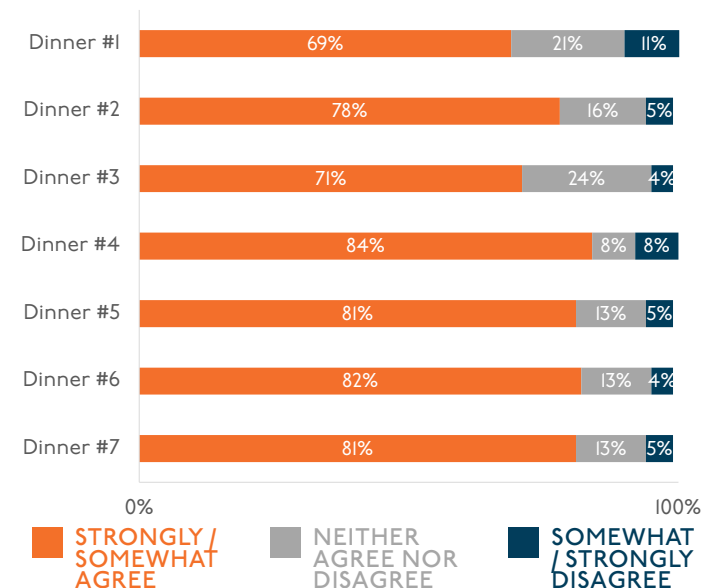
methods and drew on a number of data sources including student and facilitator interviews and student surveys. This summary highlights key findings from the evaluation.

Deliberation Skills

In interviews and surveys students noted the Deliberation Dinners Pilot had broad impacts on their deliberation skills. Listening, critical thinking, and soft skills were highlighted by students.

FIGURE I

Ability to use new deliberation skills during the Deliberation Dinner Pilot



The following quote highlights how students' deliberation skills grew over the course of the Dinners.

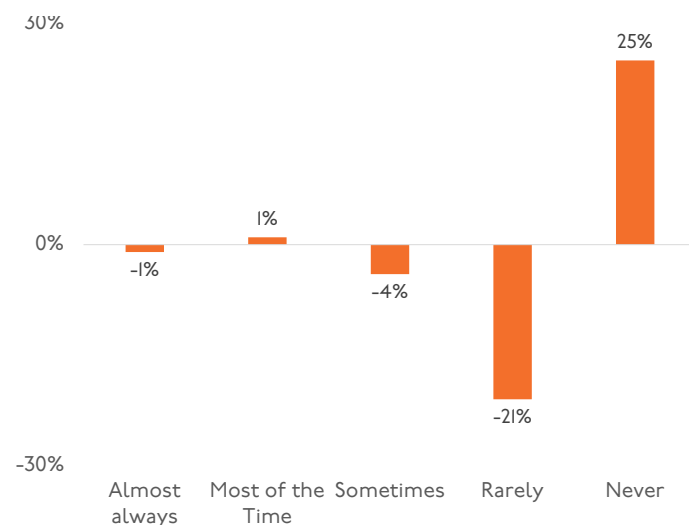
"So I've hadn't gotten into the habit of asking them for greater clarification on their ideas, asking them, where do you come from? What do you think? What exact experience leads you to believe this, leads you to argue this? Or, like, when we're reading books, for instance, when it comes time for interpret, like a line or passage or whatever, I interpreted it differently than they do, perhaps. So it's a little bit like, "Okay, why?"

Sense of Belonging

Across surveys and interviews, students reported an increasing sense of belonging at their table groups. Figure 2 showcases a positive change of +25% in students feeling they "Never" worried about their peers getting angry if they shared their true opinions. Students reported that facilitators and fellow students played a role in creating inclusive conversations and developing a sense of belonging at their tables. There were some notable differences between student subgroups on the pre- and post-survey.

FIGURE 2

Change in student opinions about how often they worried about their peers getting aggrry if they shared their true opinions from pre-survey to post-survey



One student shared their sense of belonging as....

"I felt like I was welcomed. I felt like I was valued. And people wanted to hear what I had to say. Or wanted to hear the questions I asked."

Engage with a Diverse Group of People and Ideas

The data indicate positive outcomes for Deliberation Dinners Pilot participants' ability to engage with others on controversial issues and their ability to engage with a diverse people and ideas. Additionally, there are promising trends regarding perceptions of the impact on engaging with individuals who hold differing opinions.

FIGURE 3

By the completion of the last dinner, students overwhelmingly agreed that the deliberation helped them understand opinions different from their own.

