

# Old Dominion University

## Dine & Dialogue: A CommUNITY Conversation (Summary)

September 7, 2017

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### OVERVIEW:

On Thursday, September 7, 2017, over 200 ODU students, staff, and faculty participated in a 90 minute-event to discuss the Charlottesville incident and share proactive strategies that could be taken if similar events occurred, locally.

There were 177 individuals who signed up to attend the conversation. Although 40 were unable to attend, there were 42 walk-ins, and 24 facilitators, **totaling 203 participants**.

- Students = 87 (Graduate and Undergraduate)
- Employees = 116 (Faculty and Staff)

To ensure a diversity of perspectives during the conversation, five to nine individuals were assigned to tables based on their role at ODU, gender, and race/ethnicity. Each table included a trained facilitator to ensure that all attendees had an opportunity to participate in the conversation and to keep the conversation moving toward responding to two key questions:

1. *What impact has the Charlottesville incident had on you?*
2. *Now, take a moment and consider the definition of civility. If something like this happened in Norfolk or at ODU, what actions would you take while staying true to civility?*

Each of the participants had a 3x5 index card that included these two questions on one side and definitions of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civility on the opposite side. The table of participants were given 15 minutes to share their responses to question one, and 20 minutes to share their responses to question two. Scribes were appointed by the facilitators to provide written summaries of the comments gathered from their respective tables.

With nearly 400 comments resulting from these two questions, the following is a brief overview of the common themes that emerged from the conversations.

### SUMMARY OF RESPONSES:

#### Question #1: What Impact has the Charlottesville incident had on you?

There were six (6) themes that emerged from the comments that included the following:

1. A sense of helplessness along with strong emotions related to fear, sadness, and anger.

These primary “types” of emotions also included disappointment, embarrassment, frustration, depression, terrifying, anger, shock, disgust, outrage, uncertainty, and horrified.

2. Awareness and Knowledge:

- Opened their eyes to fact that we (the country) hasn't made as much progress as was perceived.

- Hate groups feel empowered to be more vocal and escalate their hate towards others.
- Protecting free speech means protecting hate speech
- Some common behaviors were believed to be unacceptable such as Nazis, now they're not so sure.
- Awareness: Mistakes made on both sides, including police force. Neo-Nazi groups should not be shut down, but should be controlled.
- Many were disappointed, but not surprised. Racism still exists.
- Saw the confederate statues in the park as "just a park."
- Does the president (of the U.S.) support the actions of white supremacists?

### 3. Questions about How Do We Move Forward?

- How do we engage in the conversations that move us forward?
- How are we still here? What can we do to move forward?
- Why aren't we listening to each other?
- Did we learn anything from history?
- Where do we go from here? What actions can we take?
- How do we find middle/common ground?
- How do we show support for students and faculty with incidents like this, DACA, and the Travel Ban?

### 4. The ODU Bubble.

- The diversity at ODU allows for some on-campus conversations, but not when people leave the campus.
- More critical thinking conversations are needed in the classroom.
- Students need to have objective conversations in the classrooms.
- We need to talk to each other and have the difficult conversations
- We need to listen to each other.
- Will people see me like the people in Charlottesville?

### 5. Avoidance/Silence:

- Avoided the experience
- Created a silence
- Looking for opportunities to speak

6. The Immigrant Experience:

- Came to this country so my children wouldn't have to see this [kind of behavior]
- Shared experience as an immigrant, interfaith marriage, and new home in America.

***Question #2: Now, take a moment and consider the definition of civility. If something like this happened in Norfolk or at ODU, what actions would you take while staying true to civility?***

The comments from this question revealed primarily four (4) key themes that emerged.

1. Demonstrate Civility:

- Show care, respect, co-exist, tolerance, empathy
- Participants would also be shocked and outraged
- Confront hate with love
- Recognize that to be silent is to be uncivil
- Go with an intent to understand
- Keep cool
- Respect freedom to speak but not violence

2. Engage in Counter-Protests:

- Organize others for a peaceful response
- A silent chain around the protest group
- Have a procedure for response, pay attention to details
- Make sure they can't carry firearms
- Hold the line with guns
- Why does civility have to be the standard? Are there times to be uncivil?

3. Promote Advocacy/Build Tradition:

- People need to be more proactive
- Engage in the hard conversations
- Invite a former White Supremacist for a different perspective
- Create [an] avenue for safe expression. Create comfortable settings for discussions
- Build security
- Educate and acknowledge our own prejudices/American has trained us to view black people as negative

- [We have a] responsibility to act to help prevent violence and negative behavior
- We don't have to accept this.

4. The ODU Factor:

- The ODU president is setting the standard for what it means to be a Monarch and [we should] carry his vision
- As a student leader, be more vigilant/SGA should offer more forums
- What must we do to make sure this does not happen?
- This happens at ODU in smaller ways, everyday
- What are our values as an institution. If we stand by something we have to stay true to that
- What can I do and not lose my job?
- Teaching love and other lessons of equality/Promote general welfare of others
- Honest and respectful communication
- Stand up "Not going to happen on my campus"
- "See everyone as people" Get to know someone to understand.