



HARVARD

Office of the Vice Provost for Advances in Learning



HILT CONFERENCE

Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching

2024

2024 HILT Conference: “Open Minds in Dialogue”

Friday, September 20, 2024, at Harvard Graduate School of Education

The thirteenth annual HILT Conference, “Open Minds in Dialogue,” underscored the importance of integrating emotional and analytical skills in teaching, navigating the complexities of speech-related pressures, and fostering inclusive environments for open dialogue. Key discussions revolved around how educators can balance personal narratives with academic rigor, the dynamics of speech-related pressures, and the role of faculty in creating neutral and trustworthy classroom environments. The following insights from the event are meant for educators and institutions aiming to enhance academic and professional development through effective communication and inclusive practices.

Key Takeaways from...

Plenary 2: “What Would You Do?”

Session Description: *This interactive plenary session will examine techniques for promoting classroom dialogue by featuring experienced teachers who will engage audience participants on how best to handle classroom scenarios involving difficult conversations. Moderated by Vice Provost Bharat Anand, the session will use brief cases to explore real-life dilemmas where the stakes are high, and the answers are not always clear. Whether it's addressing controversial topics, managing student disagreements, or navigating institutional pressures, the panelists will reflect on strategies for fostering constructive dialogue in even the most difficult situations.*

- **Navigating Complex Student Dynamics and Sensitive Topics:** The discussions highlighted the challenges educators face when students bring personal experiences and beliefs into classroom discussions, especially when those views may contain factual inaccuracies or are potentially controversial. Different strategies were suggested, such as inviting other perspectives within the group or directly intervening to correct misunderstandings, emphasizing the need to balance welcoming personal narratives with maintaining academic rigor and inclusivity.
- **Debating Pedagogical Decisions and Professional Responsibilities:** One significant dilemma revolved around whether to accommodate student requests to avoid discussing certain sensitive topics, especially in professional schools like law where argument and debate are crucial skills. The panel's diverse responses illustrated the tension between respecting individual student sensitivities and adhering to the educational goals of preparing students for their professions. It was clear that these decisions often involve complex ethical considerations and potential institutional support.
- **Integrating Emotional and Analytical Skills in Teaching:** The session discussed the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning into curricula focused on

argumentation and disagreement. One approach is through modeling and implicit teaching within the course, while another more involved approach might include retooling the curriculum to explicitly address emotion regulation and effective disagreement. The effectiveness of allowing students to work through controversial topics as a group was highlighted as a practical method to foster both analytical rigor and emotional understanding.