

CARLETON UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

SOCI 4860/ANTH 4215: Theory and Practice of Difficult Conversations

Spring 2024 – Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:35 to 2:25

Instructor: Dr. Deborah E. Conners
Email: Deborah.Conners@carleton.ca
Office hours: By appointment. My phone number is on Brightspace.
Prerequisite(s): Third-year status or permission of instructor
Learning Management System: Brightspace
Method of delivery: Synchronous online requiring active engagement with camera on. If this will be an issue for you, please contact the instructor to discuss options.
Access: This is an interactive course where our learning about engaging in difficult conversations will involve hands-on experiences of engagement with each other. Students must attend class and be on camera regularly to be successful in this course. NOTE: The first class will run from 11:35 to 2:25.

Carleton University acknowledges the location of its campus on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin Nation. For more information see: <https://carleton.ca/indigenous/resources/territory-acknowledgement/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Engagement changes us because it constructs a different world within which we live.
– Leanne Simpson, 2017

Conflict in communities, families and among friends can be painful and conversations about disagreements challenging. Would you like more understanding and skills for engaging in difficult conversations? This course will introduce you to frameworks for understanding conflict and strategies to expand your capacity to listen and engage across difference. We will explore how personal and community experience affects beliefs about conflict and how we can work with these beliefs to engender more flexibility and comfort with uncomfortable engagements. We will investigate the impact of historical events and social structures on opportunities for intervention in conflict situations and how we can support community resilience during social moments of reckoning such as that in relation to racism and colonialism. Finally, we will learn skills as we practice remaining open to deeper understandings and possibilities toward resolution.

This course will allow you to develop your own learning objectives and to evaluate the growth in your intellectual, emotional and practical capacities against those objectives. Thus, your learning in the course will rely on active in-class participation and commitment to the goals that you set for yourself. I am certain that those who are prepared to put in the effort will have an extremely rewarding experience.

HOW WE WORK TOGETHER

This course explores how we can engage people in making the world a better place. To that end, I ask that we model inclusive and non-oppressive behaviour in our work together in the course. While the course content focusses more on “how” we can engage with others rather than the content of issues of homophobia, colonization, racialization, ableism, and other exclusions, I trust that you will bring your knowledge in these areas acquired in other social science courses and life experience to bear on the topics we cover here.

If you need support to think through how to engage with others on a particular issue, what words to use, how to intervene in a situation, how to respond to someone else’s questions or comments, how to set a boundary, or if you are hurt by someone else’s comments or behaviours, I invite you to talk to me for coaching, to provide feedback or to request that I address a situation. Our society does not often model equitable relations; we are all learning together. We can do so with compassion while being direct in our engagement with issues that may arise. It is my hope that we can use this time to learn more about how to create and sustain inclusive and safer environments.