

## **Worksheet for Learning Exchange Leaders**

### Communication departments as hubs for teaching and learning deliberative democracy

#### Description of learning exchange:

Communication programs have always been dedicated to improving the quality of communication processes in all sorts of contexts. Augmenting courses in public speaking, argumentation and debate, small group communication, conflict resolution, intercultural communication, political communication, and rhetoric, some programs are adding courses such as "public deliberation," "communication & democracy," and "theories of deliberation and controversy." In this session, participants and practitioners will work to help further develop this relatively untapped resource. Martin Carcasson's catalyst paper on teaching deliberative democracy in communication studies will serve as a conversation starter.

#### **What innovations, ideas, opportunities, and/or action steps received the most support among your group?**

Generally, the group reacted well to Martin's review of the catalyst paper, which focused on the dual arguments that (a) the communication field is naturally a great fit with the broader deliberative democracy movement, in that a number of relevant skills and areas of knowledge are already being taught in communication programs that connect with deliberative democracy; and (b) that at this point, very few communication departments actively and specifically make those connections clearly. Said differently, communication programs primarily represent fertile but underutilized grounds for growth.

#### **In the probes (suggestions, not mandatory questions), we ask about language, assessment, and technology. Please share with us anything regarding these topics that resonated with your group.**

All three areas represent potential connections within communication programs, in particular in terms of assessment and technology. Most communication programs have both quantitative and qualitative social scientists that have a skill set that could certainly be utilized to improve the assessment of deliberative processes. Scholars adept at discourse analysis and survey methods, for example, could make significant contributions. Small group communication scholars already have many measures to empirically evaluate the quality of group interactions. Argumentation and rhetorical studies scholars trained in evaluating arguments in many forms (rational argument, narratives, values, emotions, etc.) can be helpful to both the analysis and framing of issues and the analysis of the quality of deliberative discussion.

In terms of technology, one of the subfields within communication studies in many departments is computer mediated communication (cmc). Thus once again, communication scholars could support efforts to understand the particular advantages and barriers to productive online deliberation.

The difficulty of finding the right language to describe and attract people to this work is also a dilemma within communication programs. A wide variety of terms are used as new courses dedicated to deliberative practice are developed. This aspect, however, was not discussed in detail during the learning session.

**In the probes, we ask about justice, equity, and freedom. Please share with us anything regarding these values that resonated with your group.**

This wasn't discussed at length during the session. Communication scholars, particularly argumentation scholars, however, have focused in part on the role of values in public discourse, and in particular the need to balance multiple values. Justice, equity, and freedom represent "god terms" or "ideographs" that have a powerful impact on language, and I believe communication scholars can help the broader field work through how to best address how these values work together in our work.

**Were there people in your group who were interested in working on these ideas? (If so, please be specific about who and the plans being hatched.)**

The catalyst paper for communication—which is still somewhat under development, with Laura Black now coming on as a co-author to myself—will certainly take on some of these ideas and examine how communication scholars can better connect.

**Based on the discussion, what do you think should be the top priorities for educators and practitioners?**

One of the exciting possibilities of increasing the role of communication scholars within the broader movement is that many of them can serve simultaneously as educators, practitioners, and scholars. Deliberation can become a particular focus of communication classrooms, communication research programs, and the service communication programs provide to their campus and community. A number of ongoing discussions have already been going on within the field concerning these issues, including a workshop hosted by the Kettering Foundation during the summer of 2008 that brought together 25 communication professors to discuss the role of the field in the broader movement, and a group of communication scholars, including Martín Carcasson (from the Center for Public Deliberation) and Tim Steffensmeier (from the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy), who are working to develop a conference series tied to the National Communication Association focused on deliberation.