

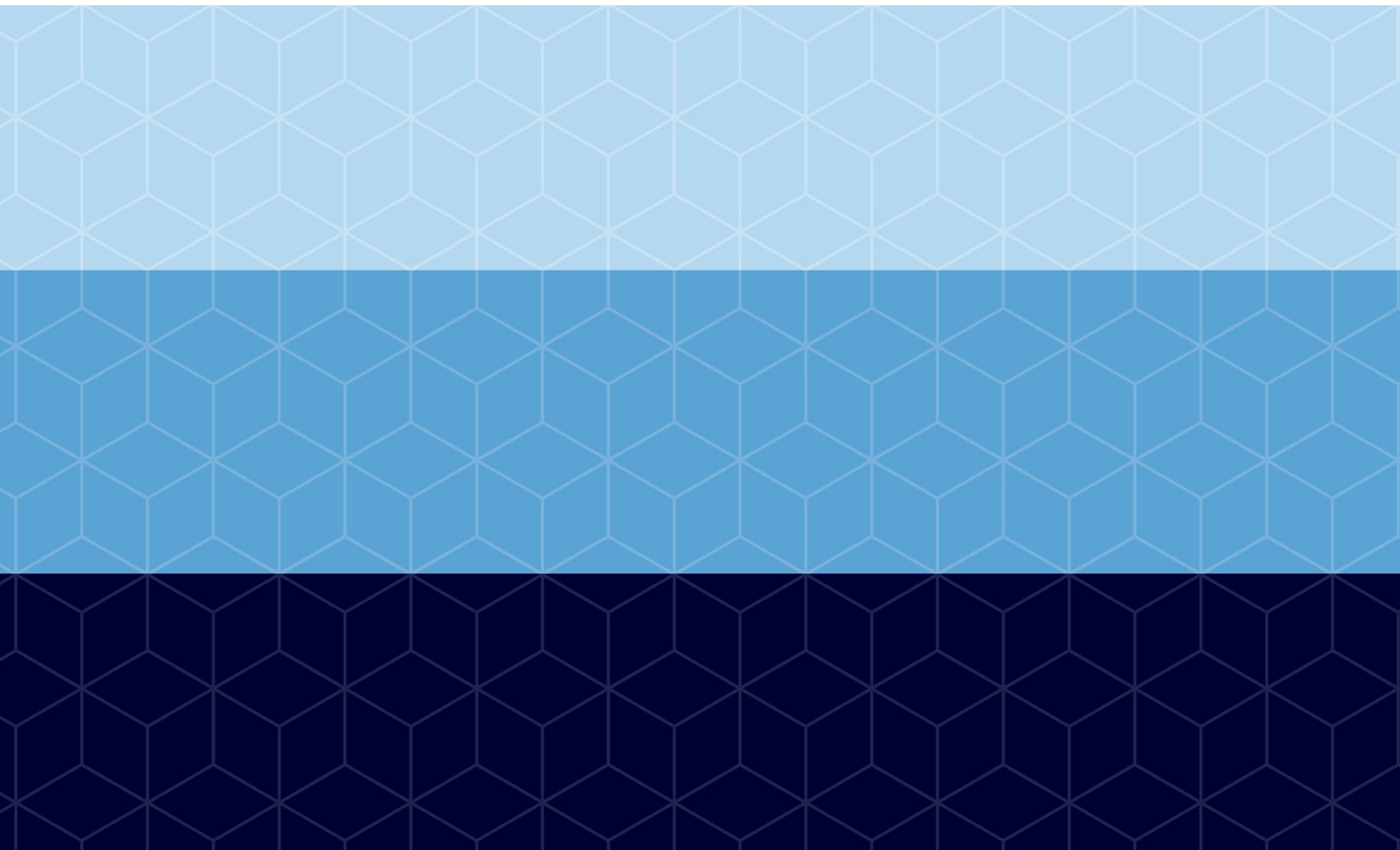


COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Program for Public Discourse

Promoting Civic Virtue, Fostering Civil Debate

2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Overview

During the 2022-2023 academic year, the Program for Public Discourse (PPD) hosted a diverse array of events, including the Abbey Speaker Series, faculty workshops, and student-focused gatherings. PPD also forged partnerships by co-sponsoring events with other programs at UNC.

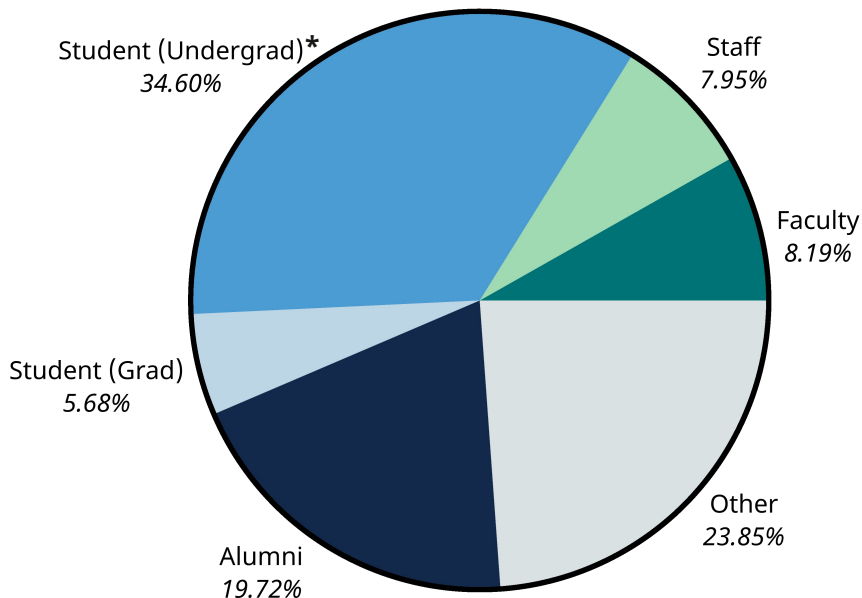
The Abbey Speaker Series showcased four captivating events: a panel discussion focused on intellectual diversity in higher education; a conversation between former NC State Senator Cal Cunningham and Senator Thom Tillis about nurturing and sustaining friendships across political lines; an in-depth exploration of the future of affirmative action in higher education; and an examination of the relationship between faith and abortion.

PPD made significant progress in faculty and student development by collaborating with various institutions and organizations, offering workshops, lectures, and consultations to empower faculty and students for effective discourse in and out of the classroom. The Program for Public Discourse also partnered with a new campus organization, the Heterodox Heels, which serves as an open forum for faculty across disciplines to discuss topical issues in a salon-style format and gatherings funded by the Heterodox Academy.

Students consistently constituted the largest segment of PPD's audience and interacted with invited panelists during Q&A sessions or over pizza after the events. This year, the Agora Fellowship, led by Kevin Marinelli since its inception, expanded significantly in scale and programming for students. Marinelli hosts bi-weekly meetings with the Fellows to discuss pressing topics. Undergraduates, chosen through a selective application process, joined two graduate student fellows in facilitating discussions and debates among their peers and received a stipend for their dedicated participation in PPD events throughout the year.

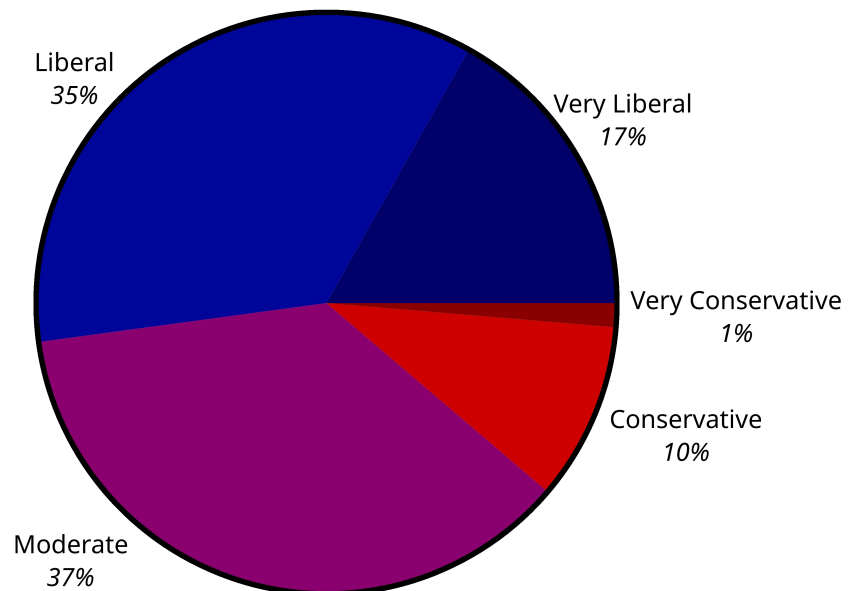
In summary, PPD has experienced sustained growth over the past year. The program's newsletter reaches more than 2,500 subscribers and its YouTube channel, which features event recordings, has over 40,000 views.

Over 1,600 Attendees Across All Public Events



UNC Affiliation

Political Self-Identification



*Poll does not reflect in-person attendance, for which undergraduates account for a significantly higher rate.

46,000 Total Views on
our YouTube Channel

2,500 Subscribers to
the PPD Newsletter

90% Rated Events
as "Good" or Better

ABB EY SPEAKER SERIES

Intellectual Diversity in Higher Education October 6, 2022

PPD and the UNC General Alumni Association held a hybrid Abbey Speaker Series on intellectual diversity in higher education, moderated by William Sturkey, associate professor of History at UNC. Panelists included Rob Henderson from the University of Austin, Amna Khalid from Carleton College, and Wesleyan University President Michael S. Roth. They discussed censorship, academic freedom, and free speech from various viewpoints. Following the event, panelists engaged with students over pizza.

Conversation with Cal Cunningham & Thom Tillis November 10, 2022

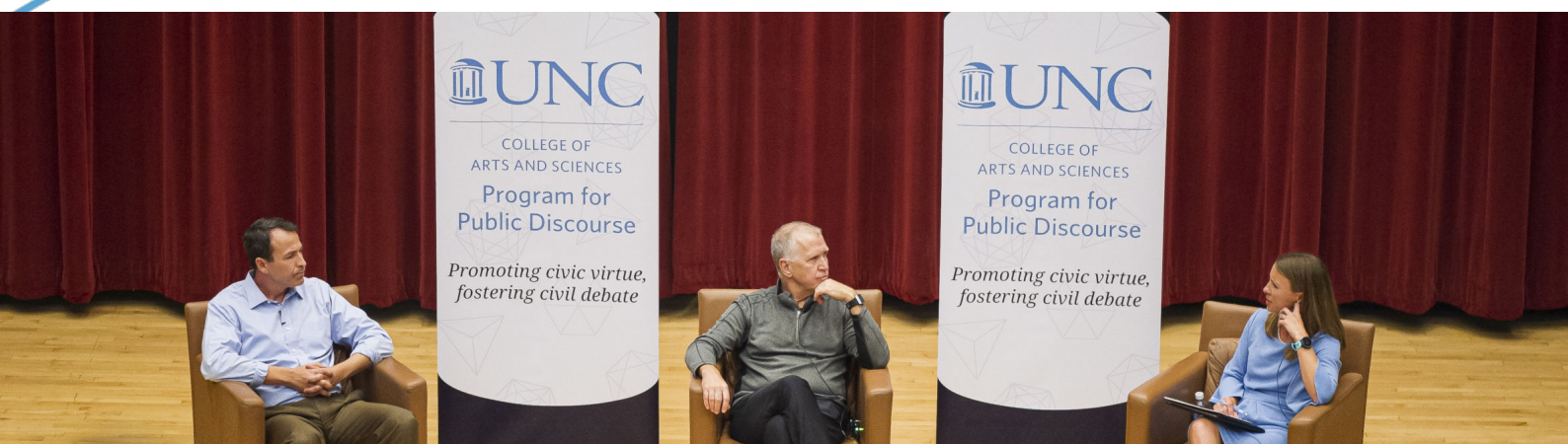
PPD and the Institute of Politics hosted a "fireside chat" with former NC State Senator Cal Cunningham and Senator Thom Tillis, who defeated Cunningham in the most expensive Senate race in NC history. Moderated by Sarah Treul Roberts, PPD Faculty Director and UNC Bowman and Gordon Gray Term Professor of political science, the event had over 500 attendees, making it the largest in PPD history. Tillis and Cunningham discussed bipartisan friendships, reflected on the 2020 election, and participated in a Q&A session with students and the community.

The Future of Affirmative Action February 24, 2023

PPD and the UNC GAA co-sponsored an Abbey Speaker Series event on affirmative action. The panel featured Glenn C. Loury, Merton P. Stoltz Professor of Economics at Brown University, John McWhorter, an associate professor of Linguistics at Columbia University and contributing opinion writer at the New York Times, and Rachel F. Moran, Distinguished and Chancellor's Professor of Law at UC-Irvine. With guidance from moderator Theodore M. Shaw, the Julius L. Chambers Distinguished Professor of Law at UNC Law School, the panelists debated affirmative action's past success and future prospects in light of the Supreme Court's upcoming ruling.

Faith & Abortion March 22, 2023

PPD's last Abbey Speaker Series of the spring semester featured speakers from Jewish and Christian backgrounds discussing abortion's moral and theological context. The panel included Orthodox Jewish clergy Maharat Ruth Friedman, Lauren Reliford, political director at Sojourners magazine, and Leah Sargeant, a Catholic writer and the author of *Arriving at Amen*. Moderated by Mara Buchbinder, an associate professor of Social Medicine, the event encouraged respectful dialogue on a complex issue.



Student Engagement



Agora Fellows

The Agora Fellows program hosts bi-weekly meetings and facilitates training in public discourse. Undergraduates and graduate students are selected through a competitive process and receive a stipend for their participation. The Fellows participated in the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Ithaca National Student Dialogue Conference at the University of Delaware, and hosted events such as Political Speed Dating, a role-playing activity called the Debate Balloon, and a public student forum on abortion using the debate format developed by Braver Angels. These events promoted open and respectful conversations between individuals with different viewpoints, allowing students to wrestle with pressing public debates and develop critical thinking and decision-making skills.

Student Events

UNC held two public student-focused events in the fall of 2022. The first event, "Can We Talk? Student Thoughts on Free Expression at UNC," was a panel discussion featuring four UNC students and moderated by Mark McNeilly, a professor of the practice of Marketing at Kenan-Flagler Business School. The students discussed free expression on campus. Over 100 students attended in person, and many more watched over Zoom. The second event was PPD's inaugural Speech Competition. The topic was "How Can UNC Educate a Global Citizen?" Twelve students delivered original speeches focused on how UNC can encourage students to think and act as global citizens. The competition, held in the Nelson Mandela Auditorium in the FedEx Global Education Building, was co-sponsored by UNC's Global Studies program and the Department of Communication.



Testimonials from Agora Fellows

"Being an Agora Fellow has been a truly unique opportunity to exercise and stretch the brain in ways that we often don't get in our modern environments that are often, if not nearly always, closed feedback loops of information and lone perspective. I love that the Program promotes responsible and respectful discourse, even if it is immensely difficult—even quixotic—and that other Fellows continue to challenge, evolve, and better my own opinions and ideology. I've had some of the most insightful conversations in the spaces that this program creates and often feel as though I come out of these discussions having had a moment of significant, if not radical, perspective shift. I'm so excited to continue being a part of this program and the fellowship, and I can't wait to see where the political circumstance and new Fellows take us."

-Willow Yang '25 (American Political Economy)

"My time as an Agora Fellow has provided an invaluable experience as a UNC undergraduate student to "live dangerously" in the academic sense. Beliefs and notions I hold have been challenged by my peers, and I have had the opportunity to challenge the beliefs and notions of others not for the sake of being right, but for the sake of pursuing knowledge. My time as an Agora Fellow has allowed me to realize, even more so than before, what is at the heart of a great democracy: civil discourse. It is not enough to debate. As a community, we must lean into curiosity and challenge the thoughts of others as well as our own to reach collective understanding and foster productive outcomes. I thank the Agora Fellowship under the UNC Program for Public Discourse for providing such insights and demonstrating a deeper way to engage with what is different, oppositional, or simply new."

-Christopher Lee Williams '25 (Peace, War, & Defense and Public Policy)

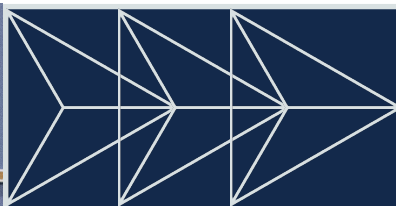
"My expectation going into the Faith and Abortion debate was skeptical. I wasn't sure how this event could possibly be civil. As I settled into my seat with my popcorn in hand, I sat prepared for an all-out brawl to occur between the two sides of this discussion. I anticipated Leah Seargent and Lauren Reliford to go toe-to-toe over the legal right to abortion. Oh, how fun it would be to see haymakers thrown in the Mandela Auditorium! I waited and waited...no fighting. The debate (as well as the informal event that took place a day earlier) was not seeking to smack anyone around or heckle those who held slightly different views. Rather, the speakers provided nuanced and respectful perspectives that had one simple goal: understanding. This event didn't waste time arguing overloaded or trick questions. Overall, I found the varying experiences of religion and abortion to be incredibly insightful. Even without the boxing match."

-Samuel Geist '25 (Public Policy and Econ)

Faculty Engagement



Over the past year, PPD collaborated with UNC faculty and colleagues from other institutions nationwide. Supported by Heterodox Academy, PPD held a virtual symposium on deliberative pedagogy in January of 2022, focusing on constructive disagreement. The event featured 18 scholars and practitioners from various universities, who participated in four panels discussing civic discourse in higher education. Drawing on contributions from the participants, PPD's Executive Director, Kevin Marinelli, created a resource manual that is now accessible on PPD's website. Later, the Center for Faculty Excellence and PPD held a three-part virtual workshop series on "Wicked Issues in the Classroom," offering strategies for handling complex, divisive issues. Over 30 faculty members attended to learn how to better address wicked issues in their classrooms and promote nuanced thinking. Recordings of the series are available on PPD's YouTube channel.



Community Outreach

PPD collaborated with the Kidzu Children's Museum in Chapel Hill and other local organizations to host a program called "Let's Talk About It." Inspired by conversations overheard at Kidzu between children and their caregivers about the varying perspectives on mask-wearing and immunization, this project grew into an effort to provide civil discourse tools to families seeking to tackle difficult topics in ways that promote understanding and connection in respectful ways. Kevin Marinelli also collaborated with Orange County Commissioner David Delaney to explore opportunities to involve UNC students in facilitating deliberative forums across the community. He also participated in a symposium on "Executive Leadership on Discourse Across Difference" at Texas Tech University.

Leadership

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