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In PLACE: March 12, 2018

PLACE

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IN *PLACE*

March 12th, 2018

Welcome back to the PLACE newsletter! We will send out semi-monthly emails during the 2017-18 academic year to keep you informed about everything PLACE-related. We'll try to keep these relatively short and focused, while also providing useful information about PLACE activities happening throughout the Linfield community and ways to bring the program into your classes.

Want a primer on PLACE? Check out the description [here](#). If you want more frequent updates, follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

Spotlight On: Leadership And The Liberal Arts Skills Development Series

Today, it can be difficult to communicate due to varying backgrounds and opinions. These challenges serve to increase a sense of alienation and polarization, causing many to feel overwhelmed and discouraged in political discussions. Many have opted to unplug from the discourse completely. To help address these challenges, PLACE is sponsoring a workshop series where Linfield faculty and special guests help students develop the dynamic skill-set required to be effective in complex and diverse social settings. Becoming an effective communicator is vital to reclaiming our democracy, and requires citizens who are willing to engage in civil political discourse and be able and willing to engage with everyone, regardless of their political viewpoint.

This past week, “How to Talk Politics without being a Jerk” became the latest entry in this series. Guest Speakers Alexis Bonogofsky and Mike Scott are community organizers from Montana. Alexis began the lecture by discussing what is currently wrong with communication between people disagree. She gave all-too-relatable examples: people talking about their positions and scarcely waiting to hear an opposing view before they continue to explain why they are right. Alexis then provided data comparing the polarization today to polarization during the civil war. “It used to be you shared some of your parties values and voted on issues you cared about, now people seem to share every opinion of their party and vote based on the ideologies of candidates. Political opinions are like a bag of fast food now, your party pre-packages all of their opinions and do the thinking for you.” Her husband, Mike, went onto say that this zero-sum polarization is, “really good for politics and bad for policy” because it leads to policy that is replaced as soon a Democrat or Republican is voted in, instead of fostering durable policy intended for broad-based support.

Mike underlined the importance of active listening and trying to understand the other. They shared their experience in getting ranchers, Amish, and Native Americans to rally against having a coal mine created in their city. “Did the ranchers care about climate change? No. Could we change their minds about it? No. But you know what they did care about? Air quality, water quality, eminent domain. We found issues they cared about and used that to rally them behind our cause.” Alexis closed with the importance of having a large diverse network to effect real change: “when we first started our campaign against coal mines, our senators didn’t know who we were, but by the end they were scared of us because we had a group of people from all ends of the political spectrum bound together and ready to fight.”

This week’s feature was written by Amelia Warnock

Upcoming Events

Monday, March 12th: Pizza & Politics, Gender in the Age of Trump Join faculty members Jamie Friedman, Dimitri Kelly, Lindsey Mantoan, and Dawn Nowacki for a discussion of recent trends in the politics of gender in the US. What do we make of the effects on US politics of the rise in women's activism, as well as the backlash among some men's groups? The faculty members will give their views in brief, and then we will have smaller group discussions of specific questions.

6-8 PM, Riley 201

Wednesday, March 14th: Faculty Lecture Series: Patrick Cottrell, Political Science Department

Many have called the 2003 decision to invade Iraq the greatest strategic blunder in American history. Even President Bush conceded that it was his “biggest mistake.” Yet for the last decade, most debates surrounding the war have centered on events set in motion once the war began--a botched occupation, the relative success of the “surge,” and the rise of ISIS. Drawing from his personal experience working on Iraq WMD issues at the US Department of State during the Clinton and Bush administrations, Patrick Cottrell returns the focus to the decision to go to war itself. By putting the audience in the shoes of those responsible for making Iraq policy in the years prior to the invasion, he identifies often overlooked contours of this fateful decision and reveals lessons of contemporary relevance that have been obscured or forgotten in the fog of war.

7-8:30 PM, Fred Meyer Lounge

Wednesday, March 21st: Black Mirror Screening, People against Fire Join PLACE for a discussion on performing gender in the military and the culture of Othering. An episode of Black Mirror, "Men against Fire," will be viewed, and then subsequently discussed by Professors Friedman and Nowacki.

4:30-6 PM, *Check Our Twitter for Updates on Location!*

The Last Weeks In PLACE:

Pizza & Politics: Listening, Speaking, and Effective Civic Engagement.

How did the last argument you had go? Did you win? If not, what happened? How did your opponent manage to beat you? These all seem like normal questions to me today, living in a highly contentious political environment. But perhaps these are the wrong questions. The words “opponent” and “beat” invoke the imagery of battle, but if we are going to war every time we argue, we can only win or lose. In defeat, we do not necessarily learn anything, and in victory we will congratulate ourselves. Professors Hillary Crane, Pat Cottrell, and Dave Sumner shared their approaches to discussion in the event Listening, Speaking, and Effective Civic Engagement, offering several alternative approaches to discussion, instead of treating discussion like a battle.

Though anthropology is the study of disparate cultures, Professor Crane of the anthropology department asked if we, isolated as we are by political party, are starting to develop distinct, separate cultures in America today. With this suggestion in mind, the anthropological tool of cultural relativism could be worthwhile to consider. If one tried to view the world like the Trump supporter they were talking with, would their ability to have a productive discussion be improved? Professor Cottrell would later reaffirm this point, emphasizing the steps that need to be taken to better practice empathetic cultural relativism: the suspension of agenda and judgment in order to learn what someone believes, why they believe it, and what common ground the two of you might share.

Professor Sumner concluded the event by reframing these, the best practices of argument, as inquiry. If argument is viewed as a conflict, it is counterproductive. In a battle, best practices are frequently abandoned for ad hominem attacks—because a battle must be won at all costs. But if

you consider argument inquiry, it is far easier to be empathetic and employ cultural relativism and suspend your agenda. So, in short, stop fighting and begin inquiring.

Watch for future newsletters to learn more about PLACE events, teaching resources, and details on your PLACE Faculty/Student Fellows! Thanks for reading, and please feel free to send me questions and suggestions at pcottre@linfield.edu.