

Dissent Summary

Dissent from the status quo. This was the primary instruction for participants in the Dissent track. Participants gathered in a screening room where they watched a 30-second video that encouraged participants to “get riled up...think big...dissent dramatically.” They were then given instructions to split up into small groups and find their assigned tables in the lobby. Each group was challenged with the task of imagining the future of education. A facilitator at the table guided each group through an exercise that asked them to consider a reality wherein “in the year 2050, education no longer has...” classrooms, tests, teachers, grades, and other seemingly essential elements. Participants picked one to focus on and then engaged with questions about how such a change would affect the delivery and reception of education and what implications it would have beyond educational systems. They contemplated whether or not this change would be a good one and if so, what barriers might exist in realizing this reality. They got riled up; they debated with each other; they dissented. In the end, they condensed their ideas into a single statement to share. By the end of the day the lobbies were filled with posters showcasing enthusiastic, constructive, forward-looking expressions of dissent.

Dissent Session Instructions

The session requires the following materials:

- One large poster (e.g., 24” wide x 30” tall) with these prompts:
 - In the year 2050, education no longer has _____.
 - How does this change education?
 - What are the consequences beyond education?
 - Back in 2018... What barriers do you see to making this change? What opportunities do you see?
- A second poster of the same size with the following ‘mad lib’:
 - In 2050, education will no longer have _____ [blank space the same size as stickers, below]. The biggest effect this will have is _____ . To make it happen, we could start today by _____ .
- Stickers listing the following educational elements with brief definitions (each table only needs to receive approximately 5 to work with):
 - Classrooms - rooms in which classes are held
 - Test - sets of questions, problems, or the like, used as a means of evaluating the abilities, aptitudes, skills, or performance of an individual or group; examinations
 - Grades - letters, numbers, or other symbols indicating the relative quality of a student’s work in a course, examination, or special assignment; marks
 - Teachers - people who instruct
 - Books - handwritten or printed works of fiction or nonfiction
 - Degrees - academic titles conferred by universities and colleges as indications of the completion of a course of study

- Selective admissions - only a percentage of applicants are admitted as students; the lower the percentage, the more selective the school
- Colleges or universities - institutions of higher learning
- Semesters - divisions constituting a portion of the regular academic year
- Research - diligent and systematic inquiry or investigation into a subject in order to discover or revise facts, theories, applications, etc.
- Credits or credit-hours - units of measuring educational credit, usually based on the number of classroom hours per week throughout a term
- Majors - subjects or fields of study chosen by students to represent their principal interest and upon which a larger share of their efforts are concentrated
- Academic departments - sections of a school or college dealing with a particular field of knowledge
- Tenure - status granted to an employee, usually after a probationary period, indicating that the position or employment is permanent
- Courses - institution or instructor-designed systems for structuring learning over a set period of time
- 9-month academic year - the restriction of standard instructional periods to nine months of the year, excluding summers
- Tuition - payment for educational services
- Blank stickers for write-your-own
- Work materials:
 - Post-it notes
 - Sharpie markers
 - Any additional materials you think would help your participants be creative (stickers, glitter pens, etc.)
- Blue tape or something for hanging up finished posters so that all can see what other groups have done
- Instructions are provided below - we printed each step of the instructions on a card so that they could be read in succession, which is particularly helpful if you do not have a facilitator for every table during the session

The session requires enough tables for participants to divide into groups of 4-5, ideally with one facilitator per group. The tables should be large enough for working on the posters and having supplies handy. The instructions given below are intended for the facilitators; their second page shows the step-by-step instructions given directly to the participants. Following these is a script we used to introduce the activity after showing a short video framing the idea of dissent.

Set up the tables with appropriate space and seating. Provide the necessary materials on each table with the posters, stickers, and instructions all face-down so that they are only revealed at the appropriate times. When the session begins, we recommend gathering participants all together to frame the activity, perhaps using our statement below. Divide participants among the tables; we distributed seating cards to spread people out. Facilitators should follow the same schedule in walking participants through the steps so that everyone finishes at about the same

time. In addition to/instead of the gallery walk, a large-group discussion might be an interesting way to finish the activity.

Dissent Track Student Volunteers

On the back of this page are the instructions given to the participants. Please review them.

Your tasks:

- Deliver instructions at appropriate times. Keep track of the time, present the next instruction on schedule, and encourage the group to move on to the next part of the activity. In particular, try to limit the selection of which element to work with to five minutes: a potential failure mode is spending most of the session arguing over which element to discuss and then having no time for the rest of the activity. Be respectful and gentle, of course, but there is more opportunity to be firm with timekeeping than with your other responsibilities
- Help them understand what they're supposed to be doing. Particular points to pay attention to include whether they're reluctant to disagree with each other or express strong opinions, and if they're unsure what to do with the supplies provided. Help them feel free to engage.
- Keep the conversation roughly on track. Use your judgment to decide if a tangent is a productive part of the conversation or if the group is truly going in a different direction (e.g., talking about the weather). Remember that you are only a facilitator, not an instructor or authority; gently encourage them back toward the conversation at hand, but don't force it if they really don't want to participate.
- During the gallery walk, stay by the poster you facilitated and answer questions from other participants. We'll have fifteen minutes for everyone to circulate and see what the other groups have worked on; you'll function as a representative of the conversation you just facilitated. However, don't make a presentation to everyone who comes to the poster. Only answer questions if they arise.
- After the gallery walk, help with the reflection survey. We'll need to distribute the survey link to every participant and we want to encourage them to spend at least a few minutes completing the survey. Let them know that all responses are anonymous and we'll be reviewing them all, so we greatly appreciate their participation.
- After each session is complete, help us move the finished posters to the display area and reset supplies for the next session (or for transport back to Olin after the last session). Each table gets:
 - One of each kind of poster, face down
 - Five printed stickers
 - One blank sticker
 - One set of supplies (post-its, sharpies, etc.)
 - One set of instructions

WELCOME

You have been given five slips with elements that are currently assumed by many to be necessary parts of the educational system. You also have a box of supplies that includes sticky notes and sharpies.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION (10 min)

Introduce: Take a moment to introduce yourself to the people at your table.

Think: Hand around the sticky notes. For the next minute, think individually about the five educational elements. For one or more, think about what they are meant to do, what they do well, what they don't do well, and what might be changed about them. Write your ideas on sticky notes, using one sticky note for each idea.

Discuss: Now as a group, sort the table's sticky notes and element choices and spend five minutes choosing which element you will focus on for the rest of your discussion. If you agree to choose an element that is not already printed on a sticker, write it on your blank sticker with the Sharpies provided. Don't spend more than five minutes deciding.

PART TWO: BRAINSTORM (15 min)

Flip over poster #1.

In the blank space, write the element that you have chosen. (*Do not affix your sticker here.*)

For the next 15 minutes, tackle the first set of questions:

How does this change education? What would it take to make this happen?

Start by spending one minute thinking on your own and writing thoughts on sticky notes. Share these ideas with the group. Remember that you're thinking about 2050. Talk. Argue. Dissent.

Use the provided supplies in any way you like to facilitate your discussion and express your ideas on the poster.

PART THREE: BRAINSTORM (10 min)

Unfold the bottom of poster #1.

Spend 10 minutes on the remaining questions:

What barriers do you see to making this change? What opportunities do you see?

Start by spending one minute thinking on your own and writing thoughts on sticky notes. Share these ideas with the group. Remember that you're back in 2018. Talk. Argue. Dissent.

PART FOUR: SHARE (10 min)

Turn over poster #2.

Affix your sticker in the designated space.

For the next 10 minutes, work as a group to complete the poster. Posters will be hung up in the "gallery" on the lower levels for everyone to see.

PART FIVE: SHARE (10 min)

Thank you for dissenting! Spend about 10 minutes walking around the space and seeing the posters created by other groups. Think about how they inspire your own dissent. After viewing all the posters, return to your table so your facilitator can give you one last instruction.

Introduction

Dissent is the refusal to accept norms. Higher education is in transition. Doing things the way they've always been done is not an option. Please leave your norms at the door.

What would higher education look like without classrooms, tests, grades, or some other element embedded in the status quo? With changes in work, relationships, communication patterns, civic life, and politics, what is the purpose of higher education today and to what extent are these elements helping us to achieve it?

You'll be working with a small group of other attendees to dissent from the status quo and explore what that means for the future of education, work, life, and everything. Specific instructions will be given to you as you go. And student volunteers will help keep you on track.

This is your chance to get riled up. Let yourself think big. Let yourself dissent dramatically. You can be critical, positive, enthusiastic or distraught - however you choose to dissent, do it actively.

When you came into this room, you were given a table assignment. Now, please go find your table and we'll get started!