

ICDC

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

STRENGTHENING CIVIL DISCOURSE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
icdcusa.com

NOTRE DAME

WHAT IS ICDC?

Integrating Civil Discourse into the Curriculum (ICDC) is a research project studying a novel method of teaching critical thinking and civil discourse. Funded by a \$4 million grant from the Dept. of Education, ICDC will engage 375 faculty fellows over the next 3 years as they teach and evaluate the ICDC curriculum at more than 125 colleges and universities, reaching more than 70,000 students enrolled in treatment-group courses.

ICDC is testing a coordinated approach: teach reasoning skills explicitly through **Thinker** while giving students structured dialogue practice through **Sway**. Separately, each platform has produced significant gains in independent research. Together, we think they will work even better. Both tools are provided free to students and instructors. Each is easy for an instructor to learn and integrates with standard LMS platforms.

Apply to be a fellow

- Attend a week-long workshop at UNC-Chapel Hill (June 14–17, 2027), SCiLL, with deep training in ICDC methods.
- Integrate Thinker and Sway into courses at your home institution across three academic years (fall 2027–fall 2029).
- Receive a **\$1,750 stipend** for workshop participation.
- Join a national community of fellows working at the frontier of civil discourse pedagogy.
- Applications open **November 1, 2026**, and close **March 1, 2027**; decisions **April 1, 2027**. Applications are considered on rolling review; those received by February 1 receive first consideration.

Who is running ICDC?

- Leadership: **Gary Comstock** (NC State, Project Director) and **Suzanne Shanahan** (Notre Dame, Project Manager).
- Core faculty at Harvard, Notre Dame, Texas, NC State, Camden County, and Edward Waters University.
- Ned Hall (Harvard), Suzanne Shanahan (Notre Dame), Gary Comstock (NC State), David Slakter (Camden County), Todd DeRose (Edward Waters), Reid Comstock (Texas), and Daniel Grün (Evaluation, NC State).
- Civic Institute partner: the School of Civic Life and Leadership (SCiLL) at UNC-Chapel Hill.
- Pedagogical tools deployed by **Disagree Wisely** in partnership with Heterodox Academy, and **Thinker**.



"My students at Camden County come in with strong opinions shaped by real experience — jobs, families, communities. What they often lack is a framework for turning those convictions into arguments. Thinker gives them that. By the time they get to Sway, they're not just talking past each other; they're actually listening."

— **David Slakter**, Professor of Philosophy, Camden County College

What ICDC is measuring

- Whether teaching reasoning skills (Thinker) along with guided dialogue practice (Sway) produces better outcomes than either alone.
- Gains in critical thinking, open-mindedness, and the ability to engage charitably with opposing views — measured by pre/post assessments across more than 70,000 students.
- Behavioral evidence of learning and development of virtues, not just self-report, obtained by audio recordings of actual student conversations.

[Learn more about the study design →](#)

What makes ICDC different

- Most programs teach students *about* civil discourse; ICDC gives every student hands-on, structured practice in the same course they are already taking.
- Coordinated design: reasoning skills paired with dialogue practice, a combination no prior quasi-randomized study has tested at scale.
- No extra staff time, facilitator training, or coordination required beyond initial workshop participation.
- IRB paperwork completed on your behalf. You connect us with your IRB office; we handle the rest.



"At Edward Waters, our students have every reason to care deeply about contested questions — and every reason to want to make their case well. ICDC doesn't ask them to set aside what they believe. It gives them sharper tools for defending it, and for genuinely hearing the other side."

— **Todd DeRose**, Edward Waters University ([more from instructors](#))

ICDC is the largest quasi-randomized controlled trial of civil discourse pedagogy in higher education. We welcome faculty and graduate students to apply as fellows and to coauthor publications with us about their results.

Join an ICDC committee member at weekly office hours on Zoom, every Tuesday 11:00–11:30 am ET and every Wednesday 4:00–4:30 pm ET. Ask questions about the study design, the fellow community, and how to integrate the tools into your courses. [Sign up here →](#)