

INITIATIVE BRIEF

RESPECTFUL DISCOURSE



A university-wide framework that provides the UTSA community knowledge, tools and skills to engage in serious, respectful and productive exchanges of views.

INITIATIVE LAUNCH May 2019

THE CHALLENGE

Recent research demonstrates that the vast majority of Americans feel that disrespect in public life is a growing societal problem. With the rise in use of social media and the influence of web filter bubbles, Americans are increasingly isolated—intellectually, culturally and politically—from those with different worldviews. Disagreements on first amendment rights and what constitutes factual information indicate a real epistemological crisis that breeds disrespect. Recent incidents at UTSA and across the nation highlight these challenges. Left unchecked, disrespectful behavior threatens the open exchange of ideas, inquiry into different perspectives, and ultimately, the transformation of lives – a core purpose of the university.

THE IMPACT

This initiative will lead the campus to address discourse, whether written or spoken, as not only a matter of rights, but of responsibilities and values. Curricular integration, co-curricular programming, faculty and staff training and community outreach will better equip the UTSA community to:

- » Engage in more productive and appropriate debates
- » Focus on the issues rather than on the individuals supporting them
- » Support interpretations using verified information
- » Seek sources of disagreement and points of common purpose
- » Assume a need to compromise and a willingness to do so
- » Treat the expressions and ideas of others with respect
- » Understand the legal aspects of free speech and their applications on the university campus
- » Avoid escalation to verbal, emotional or physical harm

OVERVIEW

The President's Initiative on Respectful Discourse establishes a framework to provide the UTSA community with the knowledge, tools and skills to engage in serious and productive exchanges of views. Integrating legal, cultural, political and philosophical issues tied to free speech, this initiative promotes graduating world-engaged civic leaders of tomorrow, and creating an institutional culture built upon respect for others.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Dean Hendrix
Dean of Libraries
210.458.4889 | dean.hendrix@utsa.edu
utsa.edu/respectfuldiscourse