Dartmouth Partners with StoryCorps’ One Small Step to Model Authentic Dialogue on College Campuses

Three-Year Collaboration with Dartmouth is StoryCorps’ First-Ever Institution-Wide One Small Step Partnership with a College or University, and a Cornerstone of the Dartmouth Dialogue Project

Hanover, NH, February 20, 2024 - Dartmouth and StoryCorps today announced a three-year partnership to bring StoryCorps’ acclaimed One Small Step (OSS) initiative to campus. OSS pairs people of opposing political beliefs for a conversation—not to debate politics—but to get to know each other as human beings. Inaugurated in a fraught election year, when tensions on college campuses are at an all-time high, the collaboration is central to Dartmouth’s new Dialogue Project, which aims to create a national model for higher education by equipping students, faculty, and staff with training in the development of essential collaborative dialogue skills—fostering a community that cultivates the respectful and open exchange of ideas.

The partnership kicks off with a public event at Dartmouth’s Cook Auditorium, Feb. 28 at 4:30 p.m., featuring Dartmouth President Sian Leah Beilock and StoryCorps Founder and President Dave Isay.

"We are excited to be partnering with StoryCorps and taking advantage of their time-tested methodology for promoting respectful conversation and connection, even in the presence of strong political disagreement," says Beilock, who announced the partnership in her inaugural address last fall. "The Dialogue Project is designed to strengthen dialogue skills on campus and ultimately in the world as Dartmouth graduates become the next generation of leaders across fields and disciplines."
Dave Isay said, "With every passing day, toxic political polarization tears more deeply at the fabric of our nation. As a country, we are up against a multi-billion-dollar hate industrial complex that profits from turning us against one another. It's not a problem that Dartmouth and StoryCorps can solve alone, but given the moment, we feel a moral obligation to give it everything we've got. We are deeply grateful to have Dartmouth and its visionary president, Sian Beilock, as partners in this crucial work."

At Dartmouth, OSS will be integrated into student, faculty, and staff initiatives as well as programming for alumni. StoryCorps staff will directly lead and oversee the program, with advisory direction from the Dialogue Project's Co-Directors—Dean Elizabeth F. Smith and Kristi Clemens—and Steering Committee. The collaboration will include various StoryCorps-led recording engagements as well as training programs for Dartmouth community members to recruit for—and facilitate—OSS conversations between other students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members. StoryCorps will produce select recordings into short-form stories for distribution on campus and beyond, and will also provide training to Dartmouth cohort members to produce their own OSS stories.

The collaboration between StoryCorps and Dartmouth is the first institution-wide OSS partnership with a college or university. In January 2024, StoryCorps announced that the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University would be a community partner in Wichita, Kan., one of the four Model Anchor Communities where OSS has been concentrated to date. Previously, the University of Virginia initiated a DIY version of One Small Step, using training and tools provided by StoryCorps.

One Small Step aims to reduce animosity and dehumanization across political divides by forging new bonds of connection and trust. The initiative brings people who disagree together, two at a time, to record a 50-minute conversation about their lives. Over 4,800 people across 40 states have taken part in One Small Step interviews, and recent research reveals that among many benefits, most participants become more empathetic and willing to engage with the political “other.” Currently, OSS is working intensively in four Model Communities, with a plan to scale the initiative nationally this year.

The Dialogue Project, announced in January, is a centerpiece of President Beilock's Dartmouth Dialogues rollout to foster respectful discussion across differences. The Dialogue Project provides intentional training in the development of essential collaborative dialogue skills. Programming for students, faculty, and staff builds skills in such topics as empathetic listening, managing emotions, navigating conversations, and finding points of connection.
About StoryCorps

Founded in 2003, StoryCorps is a national nonprofit dedicated to helping us believe in each other by illuminating the humanity and possibility in us all, one story at a time. The organization has given over 655,000 people, in all 50 states, the chance to record interviews about their lives. StoryCorps helps people believe in each other by illuminating the possibility and humanity in all of us—one story at a time. The award-winning organization preserves the recordings in its archive at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the largest single collection of human voices ever gathered, and shares select stories with the public through StoryCorps’ podcast, radio broadcasts, animated shorts, digital platforms, and best-selling books. These powerful human stories reflect the vast range of American experiences, engender empathy and connection, and remind us how much more we have in common than what divides us. StoryCorps is especially committed to capturing and amplifying voices least heard in the media. The StoryCorps MobileBooth, an Airstream trailer that has been transformed into a traveling recording booth, crisscrosses the country year-round gathering the stories of people nationwide. 2023 marked the 20th anniversary of StoryCorps. Learn more at storycorps.org.

About Dartmouth

Founded in 1769, Dartmouth is a member of the Ivy League and consistently ranks among the world's greatest academic institutions. Dartmouth has forged a singular identity for combining its deep commitment to outstanding undergraduate liberal arts and graduate education with distinguished research and scholarship in the Arts and Sciences and its four leading graduate schools—the Geisel School of Medicine, the Guarini School of Graduate and Advanced Studies, Thayer School of Engineering, and the Tuck School of Business.

About The Dialogue Project

Dartmouth’s Dialogue Project provides intentional training in the development of essential collaborative dialogue skills—fostering a community that cultivates the respectful and open exchange of ideas. Programming for students, faculty, and staff builds skills in such topics as empathetic listening, managing emotions, navigating conversations, and finding points of connection. Learn more at dialogueproject.dartmouth.edu.
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