

# Working Group on Civil Discourse Terms of Reference

## Context and Mandate

Over the past months, attention has been keenly focused on how various parts of society – including universities – are addressing rhetoric and behaviour pertaining to the current conflict in the Middle East. At the December 2023 meeting of Governing Council, President Gertler addressed the challenge of civil discourse among those with radically differing viewpoints:

*Disagreements on our campuses can and will be heated. But they cannot be allowed to descend into hateful, demeaning, or harassing behaviour. Our university must demonstrate to the world how civil, informed debate about difficult issues can be conducted.*

To support the University in sustaining an environment in which robust dialogue, academic curiosity, and civil engagement on difficult and demanding questions can thrive, the Provost appointed Professor Randy Boyagoda as Provostial Advisor on Civil Discourse. Professor Boyagoda's appointment is for an 18-month term, effective January 1, 2024.

One of Professor Boyagoda's responsibilities in this role is to chair a working group on civil discourse. This group will contribute advice, suggestions, and insights towards strengthening a culture of civil discourse on campus, including the cultivation of dialogue across different points of view and the discussion of challenging subjects, in pursuit of truth and in service of shared understandings and the greater good. The group's work will consider activities both in and beyond the classroom, and also within and across programs, departments, divisions, and the institution itself. Members of this group will also be invited to participate in consultations about civil discourse in a variety of settings and formats, involving diverse constituencies.

## Scope of Mandate

Recognizing the great range and diversity of perspectives across our institution, the working group will ensure that through consultations there are opportunities for all members of the U of T community to contribute their views to this important initiative. This shall include faculty and librarians, undergraduate and graduate students and postdoctoral scholars, administrative staff and members of our alumni community.

In addition to the consultations, members of the working group:

- will seek to elicit and develop a working definition of civil discourse in relation to University of Toronto activities;
- will work to propose programming and other capacity-building activities that address and foster civil discourse at the University;
- may participate in, engage with, and model civil discourse in programming and activities that follow from the activities of the group and of the Provostial Advisor;
- will make suggestions and proposals to sustain an environment that is conducive to civil discourse across research, scholarship, teaching and learning; and
- will convey the results of the consultations, along with any working definitions, suggestions, guidelines, and recommendations, in a final report, to be delivered to the Provost by the end of June 2025.

## Timeline

Call for nominations: February 9 – 23, 2024  
Working group meetings: March 2024 – April 2025  
Delivery of report: June 2025

## Membership

### Chair

- Professor Randy Boyagoda, Provostial Advisor on Civil Discourse

### Senior Assessors

- Professor Sandy Welsh, Vice-Provost, Students
- Professor Joshua Barker, Vice-Provost, Graduate Research and Education and Dean, School of Graduate Studies

### Faculty Members

- Professor Eyal Gruntman, Department of Biological Sciences, UTSC
- Professor James John, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts & Science, UTSG
- Professor Melanie Newton, Department of History, Faculty of Arts & Science, UTSG
- Professor Nasim Niknafs, Faculty of Music
- Professor Gurpreet Rattan, Department of Philosophy, UTM
- Professor Alison Thompson, Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy
- Professor Brian Silverman, Rotman School of Management
- Professor Robert Wright, Daniels Faculty of Architecture and Landscape Design

### Graduate Students

- Haidy Giratallah, Temerty Faculty of Medicine
- Noah Khan, OISE
- Emmanuel Taiwo, UTSC

### Undergraduate Students

- Valentina Bravo, UTM
- Hugh Considine, Faculty of Arts & Science, UTSG
- Lydia Dillenbeck, Faculty of Arts & Science, UTSG
- Sam Guevara, Faculty of Arts & Science, UTSG

### Project Support

- Alexis Archbold, Executive Director, Strategy, Programs & Operations, Office of the Vice-Provost, Students
- Justine Cox, Executive Assistant to the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life
- Andrea Kwan, Senior Writer and Special Projects Officer, Office of the Vice-President and Provost