

JOINING CONVERSATIONS

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I. How to enter conversations?

Begin by asking, what are the conversations? The questions themselves signal an opening of a conversation OR entry into a conversation.

4 Postures in Conversations:

- Read – student newspaper – online announcements – center
- Ask – questions
- Listen – to lectures, discussions, debates
- Speak – to say what?

II. What are resources that will enrich conversations?

What are resources that give us theological and ethical dimensions to the conversations?

- A. Interview – faculty, administrators – the beginning of conversations
- B. Talk to other graduate student groups members
 - Once a month, periodically, an individual or group prepares a conversation opener for the whole group – a presentation – what is the issue? What are views? Who is thinking about it? What seem to be theological or ethical intersections?
- C. Talk with Christian faculty
 - Interview them and report back OR invite them to come and react – perhaps to the presentation above
- D. Talk with non-Christian faculty or non-religious faculty
 - What do they have to say about a debate?
 - What would they imagine religious people/Christians would think about this issue?
 - We can see overtures to non-Christian faculty as a form of evangelism, i.e., asking people to take on the persona of the Christian. Cf. the African example of the Christian student group asking a shamed professor (a “drunk”) to come and speak to them about leadership.
- E. Get into discussions with other campus groups, Christian or non-religious that care about issues – secular, religious. They may help set the agenda for Christian discussions. Christians may contribute to understandings of issues for other university groups and communities.
- F. Engage in Informal discussion.

- G. For campus events, already organized, such as the high profile Forgiveness lecture at the University of Chicago Law School given by the Dean of the Harvard Law School:
 Several Christian students and faculty attend.
 Talk about it afterwards.
 Make further connections biblical themes and theologies, theological ethics
- H. Compile a list of debates on campus – for next year – and focus in one each semester or quarter
 Find common concerns with other groups on campus
 Combine with other groups *either* in conversations (our various approaches) *or* in actions (where both agree on what should be done, even if our basis for doing it is different).
- I. Christian sources: *Sojourners* online

III. Interview Faculty

A prime source of finding conversations is from approachable, thoughtful faculty members. They might be Christians or not.

Interview a friendly professor – someone you know is kind or thoughtful or open to talk to students.

How would you begin a conversation with a faculty member? What questions would help identify and elaborate aspects of the big conversations that faculty may be willing to share?

Step 1: Ask for a meeting – coffee, in her/his office

Step 2: Try an introduction something like this

- “I’m part of a graduate student of Christians on campus. We are discussing “x” issue. What are the kinds of questions we should be considering?”
- “I’m part of a graduate student of Christians on campus. We’re seeking to discover big issues we should be thinking about. What are big debates [in your own research or writing work], [in your field], [in your discipline]?”
OR
- “My Christian graduate student group on campus wants to discover big issues in the intellectual life of the university that we can reflect upon (theologically and ethically).
- We’re interested in exciting developments, frontiers.
- We want to know about really big debates or big unsettled debates.
- We’d like to about deep divides, or where old established theories are being unsettled, challenged, and maybe reconstituted or replaced.
- We’d like to focus on issues that cross disciplinary boundaries or relate to different areas of the university.

Step 3a: Ask the professor enough questions so that (a) you can understand what s/he says, and (b) you can convey this to non-specialists, e.g., students in your

graduate group. Don't worry about sounding naïve. That can be a big advantage—you can see you need it expressed in terms that non-specialists can understand.

Step 3b: Ask, are there places online which are particularly good sources for non-specialists to read about these issues in accessible language?

Step 4: You might then ask, does this issue have any ethical or policy dimensions to it? What are they?

Step 5: You might go one step further and say: since we are a Christian group, we are interested in how we should think about 'x' or 'y' as Christians. Whatever your religious commitment, what would you encourage a Christians to be thinking about?

Step 5: Follow-up. Either in the "interview" or later you could ask: if our group explores these issues further, would you be open to meet with us?

And so on

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