

Student Diversity Initiative creates discussion-based events

The Berry Student Diversity Initiative has created Community Conversations, a discussion-based event for students to discuss topics such as how to be an ally and intersectional feminism.

The idea for Community Conversations had been discussed since last spring. However, after the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor as well as the dialogue that their deaths sparked across the country, SDI began discussing things that needed to improve and be discussed on campus.

Senior Melody Creamer, office coordinator for SDI, said when students came into this semester with the events of the summer and what happened on campus, we knew we wanted to directly address a lot of these issues in a new way that actually engaged students and allowed them a space to process what was happening," Creamer said.

While most educational events on campus usually consist of a lecture and a question and answer following the lecture, Community Conversations allow the participants to engage in open dialogue with each other.

While one of the goals for Community Conversations is to educate students on matters such as white allyship and intersectional feminism, Creamer wants students to be able to walk away from these events feeling heard and knowing that this is a safe space for them to talk about issues. While discussions in classroom settings are usually focused around the big picture of a concept or an issue, there isn't often discussion about how students are affected by the issue personally.

"A lot of these topics are very difficult to talk about in a classroom setting," Creamer said.

Meredith Johnson, assistant dean of students, hopes that students that are not usually prone to attending events such as Community Conversations will choose to come and engage in conversations that give them an opportunity to listen and learn.

The SDI is also hoping to collaborate with other groups on campus for future community conversations next semester.

"We're really going to push other organizations, whether they're student organizations like clubs, departments, or offices, to push for them to host these conversations," Creamer said.

SDI also plans to publish an open letter to the Berry community encouraging groups on campus to host community conversations on their social media page.

At the beginning of each Community Conversation, guidelines on how students are to conduct themselves are read by the person leading the discussion.

"Sometimes the guidelines can feel cheesy or corny, but they come in handy because you set the stage for what the expectations are for your dialogue," Johnson said.

Even though students are allowed to express their opinion and thoughts on an issue, the moderator has the power to mute a person if they believe their behavior is detrimental to the larger conversations.

“That’s the facilitator’s job, to help hold the space and hold the participants accountable,” Johnson said. “It can be a difficult thing to do, but that’s just a part of the facilitator’s job.”

While there are no more community conversations planned for this semester, the SDI is excited to plan more for next spring.

The SDI will also be hosting events called “Let’s Talk about It”. The next “Let’s Talk about It” will focus on the Black Lives Matter organization and it will be hosted on Zoom at 4pm this Thursday.