

Deliberative Dialogue Topics and Prompts

This document contains deliberative dialogue discussion topics and resources that faculty can integrate into courses. The prompts below provide a framework for incorporating discussions about the influence of policy, elected officials, and the importance of voting into the curriculum. Discussion participants also learn to listen and understand those with diverse perspectives.

Each topic includes discussion prompts, issue stances, and supplemental resources.

This resource is part of the [deliberative dialogue discussion voting module](#). For examples of how faculty have used these resources, please see our database.

How to search this document

There are two ways you can search this document to find a topic that works for your class:

1. **Use the Table of Contents on the following page to look through topics.**

The Table of Contents includes all 16 topics with the disciplines connected to each one. Click on the topic to jump to the topic you'd like to see!

2. **Search for the discipline using the search function on your device.**

Use CTRL+F or ⌘+F to search for the discipline you're interested in to see related topics. The disciplines included in this document are:

Anthropology, Architecture, Art, Art History, Biology, Business, Communications, Computer Science, Criminal Science, Ecology, Education, Economics, English/Literature, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Geography, Health Sciences, History, Law, Math, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology, Statistics, Women's and Gender Studies.

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Student Loan Forgiveness	Economics, Education, History, Political Science, Sociology
Substances Use Disorder (SUD) Treatment in Prisons and Jails	Criminal Science, Economics, Health Sciences, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Social Work
Sugary Beverage Taxes	Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology
Wasted Food	Biology, Economics, Environmental Studies, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology
Youth and Economic Opportunity	Business, Economics, Education, Environmental Studies, Philosophy, Psychology, Political Science, Sociology

Artificial Intelligence and Government Regulations

Disciplines: Computer Science, Engineering, Philosophy, Political Science

Discussion Prompt: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a growing field with potentially tremendous influence over our everyday lives. Regulating autonomous vehicles and investing in machine learning technology are important areas that the government has influence over, but are often researched by powerful private corporations. Congress passed the H.R. 6216, National Artificial Intelligence Act of 2020 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act in the beginning of 2021. The National Artificial Intelligence Act authorizes billions of dollars in funding to push AI research and development. The applications of such technology could be nefarious or beneficial. To what extent should the government have a responsibility in regulating AI? Is funding the responsibility of the government?

Issue Stances:

- AI research and technology should be completely privatized
- The government should regulate all AI research and technology
- Only certain aspects of AI research and technology should be regulated by the government: if so, what?

Supplemental Resources:

- Brookings Institute: [How the National Science Foundation is taking on fairness in AI](#)
- Brookings Institute: [The Three Challenges of AI Regulation](#)
- Harvard Law Review: [Co-Governance and the Future of AI Regulation](#)
- Lexology: [Debate continues over pros and cons of regulating artificial intelligence](#)
- NCSL: [State Legislations on Autonomous Vehicles](#)
- White & Case: [AI Policy Tracker - United States](#)
- New York Times: [If You Don't Trust A.I. Yet, You're Not Wrong](#)
- Science House Committee: [H.R. 6216, National Artificial Intelligence Act of 2020](#)

Censorship Legislation and Free Speech

Disciplines: Anthropology, Art, Art History, English/Literature, Political Science

Discussion Prompt: Public influencers, art, and texts can often be divisive or offensive. Justice John Marshall Harlan said, "one man's vulgarity is another's lyric." In [Brandenburg v. Ohio](#), the Supreme Court held that the government cannot punish inflammatory speech unless it intentionally provokes a crowd and immediately causes unlawful/violent action. A public institution must regulate free speech/censorship as it pertains to the constitution. However, private institutions have more control over their regulations. How should campuses (public and private) respond when a group of people want to ban a speaker/art/text from campus, but isn't technically immediately dangerous? How should the government respond to requests for censorship of private property?

Issue Stances:

- Private institutions should ultimately decide what is censored.
- Private institutions should be held accountable to the same first amendment free speech standards as public institutions.
- There should be other ways to regulate free speech/censorship.

Supplemental Resources:

- ACLU articles:
 - [Freedom of Expression in the Arts and Entertainment](#)
 - [Speech on Campus](#)
- CBS News: [Texas governor backs law to prohibit Facebook and Twitter from banning users](#)
- Forbes: [Clarence Thomas Slams Qualified Immunity For College Officials In First Amendment Case](#)
- Journal of Dispute Resolution: [Private Universities and the First Amendment](#)
- The Journal: [Is it possible for free speech and democracy to co-exist in the social media age?](#)

Endangered Species Protections

Disciplines: Biology, Ecology, Economics, Environmental Studies

Discussion Prompt: The bipartisan bill, H.R. 1569 – Critically Endangered Animals Conservation Act of 2021 was introduced on World Wildlife Day in 2021. The bill underwent the subcommittee process but did not make it to the floor. If passed, it would have supported conservation efforts for highly endangered species around the world. H.R. 1569 would have established funding for the Critically Endangered Animals Conservation Fund, which would've been administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This would've pushed the U.S. to the forefront of global conservation efforts. However, the Act would've authorized \$5 million per year for conservation efforts through 2027. Should the U.S. contribute such a large sum toward the cause during this time? What responsibilities do elected officials have to protect endangered species? How should the government protect endangered species, if at all?

Issue Stances:

- Re-introduce and pass the Critically Endangered Animals Conservation Act
- Maintain our current protections as outlined in the Endangered Species Act
- Pledge less money to the cause
- Protect endangered species in a different way

Supplemental Resources:

- ABC News: [Rep. Huffman re-introduces endangered animals conservation bill on World Wildlife Day](#)
- Environmental Protection Agency: [Summary of the Endangered Species Act](#)
- Royal Society Publishing: [Climate Change and Ecosystems: Threats, Opportunities and Solutions](#) (Contributed by Suryatapa Jha, Claremont-Mckenna College: Plant Biology and Society Spring 2022)
- Wall Street Journal: [Conservation Markets Can Protect Endangered Species](#)

*Funding a Climate Friendly Future

Disciplines: Ecology, Economics, Environmental Sciences, Political Science

Discussion Prompt: How should we invest in the climate solutions our nation needs? The effects of climate change threaten society with infrastructure collapse (roads, bridges, electric grid), food/water scarcity, and economic insecurity. During President Biden's presidency, the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law were passed, funding the rebuilding of America's infrastructure over eight years and incentives for individuals to switch to more sustainable energy options. Policymakers have proposed the "Green New Deal" which aims to make the U.S. carbon neutral within 10 years. However, these plans cost trillions of dollars, initially pushing the nation further into debt. Is that the way to go? Or should we explore additional ways, such as carbon taxes, to help fund the ambitious projects necessary for our global warming?

Issue Stances:

- Enact a project like the American Jobs Plan, which focuses on upgrading America's roads, bridges, public transportation, and energy efficient buildings, thereby creating new jobs as well.
- Implement a nationwide resolution, like the Green Deal, to significantly reduce carbon emissions and start new job training programs for communities that rely on fossil fuels.
- Expand existing fiscal programs that address climate change, such as increasing certain taxes which would provide funding for new projects (examples: carbon taxes and carbon tariffs) or increasing financial incentives/tax reliefs for investing in climate-friendly infrastructure.

Supplemental Resources:

- Business Insider: [There's a blatantly obvious way for the U.S. to fight climate change and pay for new infrastructure: a carbon tax](#)
- CNBC: [Biden infrastructure plan would cut U.S. debt, add to GDP: Wharton study](#)
- Committee for a Responsible Fiscal Budget: [What Would the American Jobs Plan Mean for the Debt?](#)
- Covering Climate Now: [Home Page/ Database with Articles from Diverse Sources](#) (Contributed by Doron Tassig, Ursinus College: Media Ethics, Spring 2022)
- New York Times: [What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained](#)
- Intergovernmental Plan on Climate Change: [Reports — IPCC](#) (Contributed by Rachel O'Brien, Allegheny College: Physical Geology, Spring 2022)
- Joule: [A Federal US Carbon Tax: Major Design Decisions and Implications](#) (Contributed by Rachel O'Brien, Allegheny College: Physical Geology, Spring 2022)

- Royal Society Publishing: [Climate Change and Ecosystems: Threats, Opportunities and Solutions](#) (Contributed by Dr. Suryatapa Jha, Claremont-Mckenna College, Spring 2022)
- Scientific American: [Nature's Goods and Services Get Priced](#) (Contributed by Katherine Moccia, Wagner College: Microbiology, Fall 2021)
- Slate: [Folks, the Infrastructure Bill is Way Better than You Realize](#) (Contributed by Sandy Marshall, Elon University: Foundations of Peace and Conflict Studies, Spring 2022)
- Teen Vogue: [The Red Deal Is an Indigenous Climate Plan That Builds on the Green New Deal](#) (Contributed by Sandy Marshall, Elon University: Foundations of Peace and Conflict Studies, Spring 2022)
- The White House: [Fact Sheet: The Inflation Reduction Act](#)
- Associated Press: [Trump administration cancels clean energy grants as it prioritizes fossil fuels](#)

*Gerrymandering/Redistricting

Disciplines: Computer Science, Geography, Math, Political Science, Sociology, Statistics

Discussion Prompt: Gerrymandering helps to ensure that one political party wins a district over another with an unfairly drawn district, essentially denying the other party any true political power. However, the biased boundaries created by gerrymandering gives many politicians who would otherwise go unheard an opportunity to make their voices heard. There have been talks about who should decide how boundaries are drawn that have escalated all the way up to the Supreme Court. Many are calling for the Biden Administration to take a proactive step against gerrymandering for the sake of strengthening America's democracy. H.R. 1 - For the People Act, was introduced in January 2021, and would ban partisan gerrymandering for Congress and would make congressional redistricting a more transparent process. Some think that the drawing of districts should be done by politicians, while others believe an unbiased/non-partisan committee or automated machine should control these boundaries. How should districts be drawn?

Issue Stances:

- Allow elected officials to control the drawing of boundaries
- Let an unbiased committee draw lines
- Let data from automated machines, mapping, census data, etc. control the drawing of boundaries
- Pass the [H.R. 1 For the People Act](#), which would implement anti-corruption measures in the voting process

Supplemental Resources:

- [Auto-Redistrict](#): a free and open source computer program that automatically creates “fair and compact electoral districts” using census and election data and a genetic algorithm
- Ballotpedia: [State by State Guide to Redistricting Procedures](#)
- Brennan Center for Justice: [The Biden Administration's Opportunity for Change](#)
- Princeton University: [A New Automated Redistricting Simulator Using Markov Chain Monte Carlo](#)
- The Washington Post: [DC Protest: Rally for voting rights and passage of For the People Act](#)

Incarcerated People's Right to Vote

Disciplines: Criminal Science, History, Law, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompts: Under section two of the Fourteenth Amendment, states can legally deny the right to vote to anyone with a criminal conviction. Currently, 48 states deny voting rights to current inmates, and many states bar parolees and probationers from voting. A common belief is that incarcerated individuals and ex-offenders renounced their civil liberties. However, many others also believe that allowing that group of people to vote could bolster major change in the U.S. incarceration system. In what ways would letting incarcerated people vote affect the political system and/or mass incarceration issues?

Issue Stances:

- Allow prisoners in every state the right to vote
- Ban prisoners in every state from the right to vote
- Let states decide

Supplemental Resources:

- Brennan Center for Justice: [Felony Disenfranchisement Laws \(Map\)](#)
- National Conference of State Legislatures: [Felon Voting Rights](#)
- The Economist: [Why the restoration of felons' voting rights in Florida is a big deal](#)
- The Sentencing Project: Locked Out 2024: [Estimates of People Denied Voting Rights Due to a Felony Conviction](#)

*Minimum Wage Determination

Disciplines: Business, Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompt: The 2021 federal minimum wage rate is \$7.25 an hour, a rate that has not changed since 2009. While many states have set their own wage rates, none currently exceed \$15 an hour. Many feel that the minimum wage rate should not be increased, as there are many drawbacks, like possible lay-offs, slower hiring, a shift towards technology, or an outsource of jobs to other countries. Many, however, argue that with higher wages comes a better quality of life, lower unemployment rates, and a possible reduction in government spending for social programs for the poor, which would reduce taxes. In what ways should the minimum wage be changed, if at all? Would that be different in your campus town vs. your hometown?

Issue Stances:

- Raise the minimum wage
- Do not change the minimum wage
- Let states/cities decide what to do with minimum wage rates

Supplemental Resources:

- Ballotpedia: [Minimum Wage on the Ballot \(by state\)](#)
- CNBC Article: [Amazon Raises Minimum Wage](#)
- National Conference State Legislature: [State Minimum Wages](#)
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: [Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity 2023 BLS Reports](#) (Contributed by Debasmita Basu, The New School: Quantitative Reasoning I, Spring 2022)¹

¹ The version contributed referred to the 2020 report. We have updated it to the most recently available version so you can use up-to-date resources in your classrooms.

*The National Debt, Inflation, and Stimulus

Disciplines: Business, Economics, Political Science, History

Discussion Prompt: The United States government now has over \$28 trillion in gross federal debt and in the last year alone the US Treasury has borrowed more than \$4 trillion. Most of the additional borrowing done in the last year has been spent on COVID recovery and economic recovery plans. This injection of capital into the market has no doubt jump-started the US economy. The Congressional Budget Office predicts that the economy will grow 6.7 percent during 2021, after adjusting for inflation, which is the fastest annual growth in the United States since 1984. However, because the economy has grown so quickly and wages have not kept up, many economists worry about inflation. Inflation is the decline of purchasing power of a given currency over time and is commonly measured by the Consumer Price Index. The Consumer Price Index tracks the average change over time in prices paid by urban consumers and in recent months consumers have seen higher costs for common items and services. In fact, between early and mid-2021 the Consumer Price Index jumped by 5.4 percent, as reported by the Labor Department, this is the largest year-over-year gain since 2008. Inflation isn't inherently good or bad. When kept in check, it's the sign of a healthy economy. What should we do about the potential risk of inflation, if anything? Would it be wise to stop COVID recovery spending in order to stop injecting money into the economy? Should we continue spending in order to help the economy continue to grow and wait until prices fall naturally? Or should the Federal Reserve change interest rates to de-incentivize borrowing which can help slow the economy?

Issue Stances:

- Stop stimulus spending plans, which would stop injecting money into the economy and decrease the amount that we need to borrow
- Continue spending as planned in order to continue to bolster the economy. This might lead to further costs in household goods and services leading to more risk of inflation and would continue to contribute to the national debt
- Increase interest rates to discourage additional spending, help slow the economy and inflation rates.

Supplemental Resources:

- Bloomberg - [Two Big Things You Need to Understand About Inflation: If the Fed is forced to cool an overheating economy, there are only painful choices.](#)
- CrashCourse: [Deficits & Debts: Crash Course](#)
- Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget - [Real or Inflated? What to Make of Inflation Concerns?](#)
- Forbes - [Government Deficits, The Debt, Money And Inflation](#)

- National Issues Forum: ["A Nation in Debt"](#)
- Peter G. Peterson Foundation - [What is Inflation and Why Does it Matter?](#)
- Peter G. Peterson Foundation: [Key Drivers of the National Debt](#)
- Simon Johnson & James Kwak (Book): [White House Burning | The Founding Fathers, Our National Debt, and Why It Matters To You](#) (Contributed by Pushkala Prasad, Skidmore College: Foundations in the International Environments of Business, Spring 2022)

?Percent for Art Government Funding Programs

Disciplines: Architecture, Art, Art History, Business, Economics

Discussion Prompt: Nearly half of all U.S. states have implemented a government issued program called Percent for Art, where any public building in that state must allocate no less than 1% of the building's construction cost to works of art for permanent placement in that building. Arguments have been made that art in public buildings generally makes the community safer, more vibrant, and healthier. However, building developers say that the tax increases the cost of the entire project and serves as more of a threat, since developers will be denied a certificate of occupancy if they do not meet the art tax requirement. To what extent should art be integrated into the community? Should it be mandatory?

Issue Stances:

- Percent for Art should be implemented in cities
- Public art should not be imposed by the government
- Public art should be funded by the government in a different way (be specific)

Supplemental Resources:

- National Assembly for State Arts Agencies: [State Percent for Art Programs](#)
- New York Times: [Developers Fight Efforts to Make Them Pay for Public Art](#)

*Plastic Bag Ban

Disciplines: Business, Ecology, Economics, Environmental Studies, Law, Public Health, Sociology

Discussion Prompt: For the past 40 years, plastic bags have become standard practice at grocery stores and food stores. Plastic bags endanger wildlife, cause flooding, and litter land. Six states and five U.S. territories have banned single-use plastic bags. People in cities with these bans used less plastic bags, which contributed to 40 million fewer pounds of plastic trash per year. However, as a result of plastic bag bans, people are buying thicker, garbage bags for picking up after their dog or lining trash cans which wastes more plastic. Some areas such as Washington D.C. have taken a fee-only approach to reducing plastic bags. Under-resourced communities are also disproportionately affected by the plastic bag ban. For example, people who take the bus to travel to the grocery store are not afforded the same luxury as people who can store reusable grocery bags in their car. Are plastic bag bans classist? Are they effective for the environment? Is it better to charge a fee? Should states pass bans or should it be left to cities?

Issue Stances:

- Plastic bag ban ordinances should be passed
- Plastic bag bans should not be put into law
- Consumers and stores should pay plastic bag fees rather than being banned from using plastic bags

Supplemental Resources:

- National Conference of State Legislatures: [State Plastic Bag Legislation](#)
- National Geographic: [Plastic bag bans are spreading. But are they truly effective?](#)
- NPR: [Are Plastic Bag Bans Garbage?](#)
- The Guardian: [Inequality of Environmentalism: Is Green Movement Exclusionary by Nature?](#)
- The New York Times: [What to Know About N.Y.'s Plastic Bag Ban](#)

*Reducing Hyperpartisanship

Disciplines: Communications, History, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology, Law

Discussion Prompt: In the United States, there is a sense of a deep political divide. These dichotomies are harmful to working through our country's most pressing issues. Major problems, including the national debt, immigration, health care, and Social Security continue year after year. Yet, we appear unable to confront these urgent problems because of hyperpartisanship. One strategy to combat hyperpartisanship is making sure citizens have access to unbiased, nonpartisan information and news. Knowing that, should we require multiple viewpoints be addressed in the media and online? Or would that stifle free speech? Does that give media and internet companies too much power? Or should media companies be persuaded to provide multiple viewpoints without requiring them to do so?

Issue Stances:

- Require all media and internet companies to provide opposing views on controversial issues.
- No requirements of television networks to provide opposing views
- Suggest, but do not enforce, media and internet companies provide opposing views

Supplemental Resources:

- Database of Past and Current Legislative Activities: [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) | [Library of Congress](https://www.libraryofcongress.gov) (Contributed by Reese Glassman, Spelman College: Legislative Process, Spring 2022)
- Five Thirty Eight: [Our Radicalized Republic](https://www.fox38.com)
- National Issues Forum: [A House Divided: How Do We Get the Political System We Want? Summary Guide](https://www.nifonline.org)
- The Los Angeles Times: [Reagan's Veto Kills Fairness Doctrine Bill](https://www.latimes.com)

*Rising Healthcare Costs

Disciplines: Business, Economics, Health Sciences, Philosophy, Political Science, Public Health, Sociology, Psychology, Women's and Gender Studies

Discussion Prompt: The COVID-19 pandemic, much like other countries, has strained the U.S. economy and healthcare system. As we emerge from the pandemic and start an economic recovery, the high costs and low quality of care of our healthcare system remain serious issues. In 2019, the United States spent about \$11,100 per person on healthcare—the highest healthcare cost per capita among wealthy countries; and the average U.S. resident pays \$1,122 out-of-pocket—ranking second highest. In addition to this, the funds which support Medicare are predicted to run out by 2024 if not sooner. Medicare's Hospital Insurance (HI) Trust Fund, which finances health care services related to hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and other forms of care will become insolvent in the next few years. This means that Medicare Part A claims submitted by providers would not be fully reimbursed. Policymakers might be forced to consider adopting broader changes to the program that could include both reducing benefits and payments or increasing revenue for the program. Despite this high spending by individuals and through government programs, the U.S. performs worst on common health metrics like life expectancy and infant mortality. The current system is undermining our economy and fundamentally is not serving the needs of all people. What should we do to lower costs and improve healthcare outcomes? How should we pay for rising healthcare costs in the United States? Should we institute a government healthcare scheme similar to the United Kingdom or Canada? Or does that undermine individual choice? Should the affordable healthcare act be expanded? Or should the affordable healthcare act be repealed?

Issue Stances:

- Institute a government-run single-payer program or Medicare-for-all style healthcare scheme, providing universal healthcare coverage but eliminating a private marketplace.
- Expand the affordable healthcare act and provide additional tax incentives helping individuals afford healthcare in a private marketplace and/or expand the qualifications for individuals to become eligible for those tax credits.
- Repeal the affordable healthcare act and provide no federal government support for healthcare, risking millions of Americans lapsing in coverage but keeping it an entirely privatized industry.

Supplemental Resources:

- CNBC: [France's health-care system was ranked as the world's best—Here's how it compares with the US'](#)
- Forbes: [Why COVID-19 is driving up the cost of healthcare in retirement and what you can do now to prepare](#)

- Investopedia: [Why Do Healthcare Costs Keep Rising?](#) (Contributed by Catherine Miller, University of Central Arkansas: Math and Science Strategies for K-6 Majors, Spring 2022)
- MIT News: [What has the pandemic revealed about the U.S. health care system — and what needs to change?](#)
- National Center for Children in Poverty: [Children's Mental Health: What Every Policymaker Should Know – NCCP](#) (Contributed by Catherine F Miller, University of Central Arkansas: Math and Science Strategies for K-6 Majors, Spring 2022)
- Peter G. Peterson Foundation: [How Does The U.S. Healthcare System Compare To Other Countries?](#)
- Physicians for a National Health Program: [Physician's Proposal Home Page](#) (Contributed by Susan Rucker, Queens University of Charlotte: Health Administration, Spring 2021)
- Science Direct: [Interpreter Assemblages: Caring for Immigrant and Refugee Patients in US hospitals](#) (Contributed by Bernadette Ludwig, Wagner College: Crossing Borders: Immigration and American Identities, Spring 2021)
- TEDMED Video: [Why your healthcare costs so much - YouTube](#)
- The Brookings Institution/Khan Academy: [Introduction to the U.S. health care system](#)
- The Commonwealth Fund: [U.S. Health Care from a Global Perspective, 2019](#)
- United States Department of Health and Human Services: [The Effect of Health Care Cost Growth on the U.S. Economy](#) (Contributed by Catherine F Miller, University of Central Arkansas: Math and Science Strategies for K-6 Majors, Spring 2022)

Supplemental Resources for Discussing the intersection of Rising Healthcare Costs and Gender-Inclusive Health Care:

- American Sociological Association: [The Struggle to Save Abortion Care](#) (Contributed by Bernadette Ludwig, Wagner College: Sociology of Gender, Fall 2021)
- Qualitative Sociology: [Cosmetic Surgery Beauty as Commodity](#) (Contributed by Bernadette Ludwig, Wagner College: Sociology of Gender, Fall 2021)
- Taylor & Francis Group (Book): [The Business of Being Made I The Temporalities of Reproductive Technologies, in Psychoanalysis and Culture.](#) (Contributed by Bernadette Ludwig, Wagner College: Sociology of Gender, Fall 2021)
- The New York Times: [For Transgender Youth, Stigma Is Just One Barrier to Health Care](#) (Contributed by Bernadette Ludwig, Wagner College: Sociology of Gender, Fall 2021)
- Women Make Movies (Short Film): [A Normal Girl](#) (Contributed by Bernadette Ludwig, Wagner College: Sociology of Gender, Fall 2021)

*Student Loan Forgiveness

Disciplines: Economics, Education, History, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompt: College can be a very important four years of most people's lives, but it can also prove to be financially draining and stressful—particularly in terms of student debt. The idea of forgiving student debt is garnering popularity and would impact the lives of 45 million Americans with student debt who, combined, owe more than \$1.7 trillion (as of 2021). Forgiving student debt may seem to be a personal issue only impacting the individual who borrowed money. However, forgiving student loans would affect the economy in many ways. What should we do about the prevalence of student debt? Should the government forgive all student debt, or is it an unfair burden on taxpayers who do not go to college? Should we expand debt federal forgiveness plans for those students who choose careers in public service?

Issue Stances:

- Implement a plan to forgive all student debt, which would impact 45 million Americans and become the most expensive selected income support program costing \$1.7 trillion.
- Expand federal debt forgiveness plans—for example, implementing a program forgiving up to \$50,000 per borrower; or only relieving debt after the borrower has completed a certain amount of public service.
- No changes to current student debt repayment policies.

Supplemental Resources:

- Association of American Colleges & Universities: [Snowballing This Summer: Recent Data on the Accelerating Student Debt Crisis](#)
- Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget: [Partial Student Debt Cancellation is Poor Economic Stimulus](#)
- EducationData.org: [Research and Resources to Tackle Critical Issues in Education](#)
- Forbes: [Student Loan Debt Statistics In 2021: A Record \\$1.7 Trillion](#)
- NBC: [Democratic Plan to Forgive Student Loans Could Raise Tuition and Hurt Those at the Bottom](#)
- Inform Students on Managing Loans, Refinancing them, and More Tools: [Student Loan Hero: Manage & Eliminate Student Loan Debt | Student Loan Hero](#) (Contributed by Inger Daniels, Florida A&M University: Investment and Portfolio Analysis, Spring 2021)
- The Brookings Institution: [Putting student loan forgiveness in perspective: How costly is it and who benefits?](#)
- The Brookings Institution: [Student Debt Forgiveness Would Impact Nearly Every aspect of People's Lives](#)
- The Brookings Institution: [Student loans, the racial wealth divide, and why we need full student debt cancellation](#)

- Research and Resources to Tackle the Rising Costs of Higher Education (Database): [Education Data Initiative: College Costs & Student Loan Research](#) (Contributed by Inger Daniels, Florida A&M University: Investment and Portfolio Analysis, Spring 2021)
- Education Data: [Average Cost of College \(2025\)](#)

Substances Use Disorder (SUD) Treatment in Prisons and Jails

Disciplines: Criminal Science, Economics, Health Sciences, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Social Work

Discussion Prompt: According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 65% of the United States prison population has a history of Substances Use Disorder. During their incarceration, inmates typically experience severe withdrawal symptoms. Upon their release, many begin taking high doses of drugs again, not realizing that their body can no longer handle it, which leads to increased overdose and death rates among the previously incarcerated. Medical treatment for SUDs can help inmates with their withdrawal symptoms. Treatment options have the potential to change the perception of SUDs by providing a way to overcome addiction, however, they are expensive and time consuming. Should we implement Substances Use Disorder treatment in all prisons and jails? Should we prohibit the utilization of SUD treatment? Or should SUD treatment implementation be decided by individual prison facilities?

Issue Stances:

- Implement substances use disorder treatment in all prisons and jails
- No implementation of substances use disorder treatment in all prisons and jails
- Substances use disorder treatment implementation should be decided by individual facilities

Supplemental Resources:

- ABC NEWS: [Spike in drug, alcohol related jail deaths puts spotlight on fallout from 'war on drugs'](#)
- ACLU: [How the Failure to Provide Treatment for Substances Use in Prisons and Jails Fuels the Overdose Epidemic](#)
- Journal of Substances Abuse Treatment: [Access to substances use disorder during COVID-19: Implications from reduced local jail populations](#)
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: [Criminal Justice Drug Facts](#)
- New York Times: [Opioid Users are Filling Jails. Why Don't Jails Treat Them?](#)
- PEW: [This State Has Figured Out How to Treat Drug Addicted Inmates](#)
- The Atlantic: [The Repurposing of the American Jail](#)
- Prison Policy Initiative: [Addicted to punishment: Jails and prisons punish drug use far more than they treat it](#)

Sugary Beverage Taxes

Disciplines: Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology

Discussion Prompt: Sugary drinks such as soda and juice are linked to obesity, diabetes, and other adverse health effects. After a few years without much attention, four states are considering statewide sugary drink taxes. The extra taxes may help the consumer make a “healthier” choice and generate more tax revenue, but the tax also hurts businesses and disproportionately affects people of lower socioeconomic status. Should elected officials be able to tax what citizens privately consume? Would a sugary drink tax be a net positive or negative?

Issue Stances:

- Implement sugar taxes.
- Ban the implementation of sugar taxes.
- A sugar tax should be implemented in certain situations/communities. If so, who would get to decide?

Supplemental Resources:

- The Washington Post: [D.C.'s proposed soda tax sounds sweeter than it is](#)
- Urban Institute: [Information on Soda Taxes](#)
- USA Today: [Philadelphia Soda Tax](#)

Wasted Food

(Topic and resources contributed by: Brienne Berry at Ursinus College)

Disciplines: Biology, Economics, Environmental Studies, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology

Discussion Prompts: Our dominant, industrial food systems cause significant harm to our environment, and to the people who power them. At the same time that they produce massive amounts of food, there are still widespread issues with food insecurity in the United States. These compounding problems are even more vexing because we throw away nearly one third of the food that was produced for human consumption. How do environmental, economic, and social forces shape what we eat, and who has access to food? What are some of the problems associated with our dominant methods of producing, consuming, and disposing of food in the United States? How are people working to solve the problems associated with food production and disposal in the United States?

Issue Stances:

- **Promote and Balance Composting and Food Donation Efforts:** through strategies including implementing community composting programs, providing incentives for households and businesses to compost, integrating composting education into school curriculums, creating policies that support both food donation and composting, ensuring surplus food is efficiently distributed to those in need before composting, and developing infrastructure that facilitates both processes.
- **Promote Sustainable Food Systems:** through strategies including educating communities on the interconnectedness of food systems with environmental, economic, and social issues, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, and supporting local food initiatives.

Supplemental Resources:

- [How Native communities have maintained their culinary traditions despite settler colonialism](#)
- The Union of Concerned Scientists: The Equation: [Why We Can't Separate Justice and Sustainability in the Food System](#)
- Public Health Nutrition: ['It's just so much waste.' A qualitative investigation of food waste in a universal free School Breakfast Program](#)
- Via Campesina: [Food Sovereignty, a Manifesto for the Future of Our Planet](#)
- Navdanya International: [Manifestos of the International commission on the future of food and agriculture](#)

Youth and Economic Opportunity: What should we do for future generations to thrive?

Disciplines: Business, Economics, Education, Environmental Studies, Philosophy, Psychology, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompts: What should we do to address the unprecedented challenges that hinder future generations from leading economically and socially secure lives? There are many factors—systemic racism, educational access, and debt, among others—that play a significant role in the lives of young people. Should we expand resources to young people by expanding education access and mental health services? Should we make community college free and increase minimum wage? Perhaps we should focus on the economic viability of the U.S. in the long-term by switching to renewable energy and investing in new bridges and roads—or will that be too late for young people now?

Issue Stances:

- Equip Young People to Succeed—through strategies including reducing K-12 class sizes, forgiving college debt, and expanding mentoring and mental health services.
- Address Biases by Giving Everyone a Fair Chance—through strategies including increasing minimum wage, eliminating standardized testing, making community college free, and rethinking K-12 U.S. history curricula by acknowledging historically excluded people.
- Focus on Long-Term Economic Security—through strategies including addressing the national debt, switching to renewable energy sources, investing in building roads and other infrastructure, and providing incentives to do business with U.S.-based companies.

Supplemental Resources:

- CNBC: [\\$15 minimum wage won't cover living costs for many Americans](#)
- Forbes: [Just How Good An Investment is Renewable Energy?](#)
- National Center for Children in Poverty: [Children's Mental Health: What Every Policymaker Should Know](#)
- National Issues Forum: ["Youth And Opportunity" Deliberative Dialogue Guide](#)
- NBC: [Democratic plan to forgive student loans could raise tuition and hurt those at the bottom](#)
- New York Times: [Does Free College Work?](#)
- The Brookings Institution: [A conversation about racial wealth gap – and how to address it](#)
- The Brookings Institution: [Educator bias is associated with racial disparities in student achievement and discipline](#)
- Vox: [Why does it cost so much to build things in America](#)

Supplemental Resources for Discussion Focusing on Race and Social Mobility:

- KPBS Public Media: [Frontline: Growing Up Poor In America](#) (Contributed by Debasmita Basu, The New School: Quantitative Reasoning I, Spring 2022)
- National Library of Medicine: [Health and Human Rights Journal- The Disproportional Impact of COVID-19 on African Americans](#) (Contributed by Debasmita Basu, The New School: Quantitative Reasoning I, Spring 2022)
- The Equality Trust: [Social Mobility and Education](#) (Contributed by Rita Reynolds and Vanessa Smith Washington, Wagner College: RFT Reflective Tutorial, Fall 2021)
- The New York Times: [I Wanted to Know What White Men Thought About Their Privilege. So I Asked.](#) (Contributed by Rita Reynolds and Vanessa Smith Washington, Wagner College, Fall 2021)
- [The Seattle Times: To Understand Structural Racism, Look to Our Schools](#) (Contributed by Rita Reynolds and Vanessa Smith Washington, Wagner College, Fall 2021)
- Youtube: [Is America Dreaming?: Understanding Social Mobility](#) (Contributed by Rita Reynolds and Vanessa Smith Washington, Wagner College, Fall 2021)