



Sustained Dialogue Campus Network

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SDCN History Sheet

Part I: The Origins of Sustained Dialogue

The International Institute for Sustained Dialogue is an organization founded to promote the process of Sustained Dialogue for transforming racial, ethnic, and other deep-rooted conflicts in the United States and abroad.

The Institute's founder and president, Dr. Harold 'Hal' Saunders, played a central role as a senior U.S. diplomat in the Arab-Israeli peace process after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Working with a team headed by Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter that mediated five agreements, 1974-1979, he learned three lessons: (1) the power of a continuous political process to change the political environment; (2) the importance of the human dimension of conflict; and (3) the importance of the relationship between whole bodies politic – citizens outside government as well as those inside government. "The peace process," he wrote later, "was a series of cumulative agreements that gradually changed the political environment and gave citizens a sense that peace was possible." It was in that larger political process that relationships changed.

When he left government in 1981, he became U.S. co-chair of the Task Force on Regional Conflicts (RCTF) of the Dartmouth Conference—the longest continuous dialogue between American and Soviet citizens. His Soviet co-chair was Yevgeny Primakov, who after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 became foreign minister and prime minister of the new Russia. They met every six months throughout the 1980s. From that experience, Hal observed that bringing the same group together time after time creates four opportunities: (1) they develop a cumulative agenda; (2) they learn to talk analytically rather than polemically; (3) they develop a common body of knowledge—not just about positions but why problems are important to each group; (4) they can learn to work together.

He also observed that participants' relationships seemed to evolve through a recognizable pattern. In the early 1990s, he (1) developed a concept of relationship for analyzing relationships and for guiding efforts to change them and (2) conceptualized in five stages a process for leading participants through dialogue over time to create conditions in which relationships could change.

In 1993, Hal and his Russian colleague first published the five stages and started a dialogue among individuals from factions in the civil war that broke out in the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan. This was the first test of the five-stage process. The Inter-Tajik Dialogue within the Framework of the Dartmouth Conference met 35 times by their tenth anniversary in 2003.

In 2002, David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation where Hal was director of international affairs, proposed creating IISD to provide separate space for SD to develop and extend its reach. "Deliberative and collaborative processes are for people who are able to talk with each other," he said; "Sustained Dialogue is for people who have been killing each other or whose relationships are so destructive that they can't talk." IISD was formed in October 2002.

IISD currently conducts dialogues between democratic reformers of the Muslim-Arab heartland, American and European ex-diplomats, and NGO representatives in an Arab-American-European Dialogue which focuses on the relationship between Islamic and Western countries; an all-Iraq

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Dialogue involving Iraqi parliamentarians from across the political spectrum; dialogues between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno Karabakh, as well as a dialogue in Tajikistan. It also partners with the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) and the University of Zimbabwe to support both community and campus sustained dialogues on issues such as politics, economics, human rights, gender relations, race and ethnicity.

Part II: Formation of the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network (SDCN)

In 1999, before the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network existed, a small group of students who were frustrated with race relations at Princeton University approached the administration with their concerns. They explained, “Voices can be heard describing racial difficulties...those voices have inspired innumerable programs, forums, student groups, and the like over the years, but issues of race remained largely ignored by the majority of students.” The Dean of Student Life connected them to Dr. Harold Saunders, a Princeton Trustee and alum who founded IISD. With the help of Dr. Saunders, this group of students created the first Sustained Dialogue groups in a university setting. One of the groups later involved President Shirley Tilghman of Princeton and renowned Professor of Religion Cornel West. By the end of the 2001 school year, Sustained Dialogue at Princeton was awarded *The Daily Princetonian Award* for most outstanding contribution to the campus community.

Meanwhile, at the University of Virginia in 2001, student Priya Parker expressed sentiments quite similar to those felt by Princeton students. “Although a University composed of a diverse community, racial and ethnic groups on campus maintained a segregated distance [due to] a lack of communication and interaction.” A relative of Priya introduced her to an acquaintance, Dr. Saunders, and another opportunity was born. Dr. Saunders and a team of students from Princeton helped Priya and fellow student Jacqueline Switzer introduce SD to UVA. Since its inception, SD at UVA has grown every year, displaying the flexibility of Sustained Dialogue. Beyond the student-only race dialogues, they have created the Jewish Arab Sustained Dialogue (JASD) group, a First-Year Program of freshmen-only dialogues, and two faculty-only Sustained Dialogue groups. Finally, Student Council honored Sustained Dialogue at the University of Virginia as “The Best Student Organization” for three consecutive years.

A new pattern emerged in 2002, when President Bill Durden of Dickinson College and interested administrators learned about SD from Dr. Saunders at the reunion of his wife Carol, a Dickinson alumna. They collaborated with students from both Princeton and the University of Virginia to begin dialogue groups. “Sustained Dialogue has given a platform from which the students of this campus can use to voice their cares and concerns, in an environment that is supportive, proactive, and engaging.”

An official network of Sustained Dialogue practitioners has since formed, connecting students at colleges, universities, and high schools across the country. In January 2002, the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network (SDCN) found its institutional home within the recently incorporated International Institute for Sustained Dialogue.

SDCN represents a budding movement of passionate students deeply engaged in changing the dynamics of their campus climate. SDCN supports and connects groups of students interested in initiating, moderating, and institutionalizing Sustained Dialogue, an organic process that addresses strained relationships to improve communities. Students at the following schools comprise SDCN as of 2009: *Princeton University, University of Virginia, Dickinson College, University of Notre Dame, Colorado College, Denison University, Stevenson High School, University of Alabama, Northwestern University, Vanderbilt University, St. John Fisher College, Cornell College, University of Georgia and Roger Williams University.*