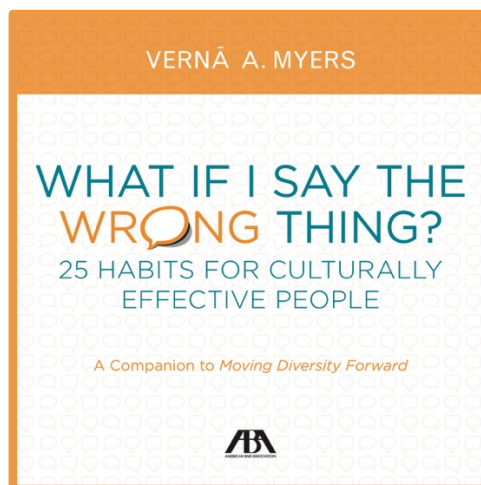




# University Equity and Inclusion

Our Beloved Community

## Spring 2022 Learning Community Book Group (LCBG) Welcome Session



## Table of Contents

1. Overview
  - a. The Goal
  - b. The Challenge
  - c. The Outcomes
  - d. The Plan
  - e. FAQ
2. Ground Rules
3. General Guidelines For Discussion
  - a. Tips for talking about identity
  - b. Behaviors that foster dignity and respect in discussion groups
  - c. Behaviors that undermine dignity and respect in discussion groups
4. Overview Of What To Expect In Each Session
5. Participant Questions
6. Breakout Room Activity (3-6 people per group)
  - a. Introductions
  - b. Ground rules worksheet
  - c. Conflict management worksheet
  - d. Self-assessment worksheet
7. Reconvene, Report Out, and End Session

### Overview.

**The Goal:** Help students, faculty, and staff improve communication across differences and create positive relationships with others in the Rutgers community.

**The Challenge:** We come from diverse backgrounds and experiences that lead to varying levels of comfort and ability to interact thoughtfully across difference. Poor interactions can be harmful, and worries about being misinterpreted can make interactions stressful. These concerns can keep individuals from engaging with others who do not share their background or lead to miscommunication when they do.

**The Outcomes:** Upon completion of the LCBG's 6 sessions, we believe that each participant will experience:

- Reduced stress when interacting with others
- Increased cultural awareness and respect for differences
- Increased sense of belonging
- Increased leadership capacity

**The Plan:** The LCBG will hold 6 weekly virtual sessions to help individuals develop skills and unpack challenges to respectful community by enabling participants to practice thoughtful interaction across difference with the book as a guide. ***What If I Say The Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People*** is a highly rated, short, easily digestible handbook of

thought-provoking tips on how to be—and how to help others become—more culturally effective. Author Vernā Myers explores the pitfalls of engaging across difference and offers solutions in powerful but accessible ways. Technical details (and links to sessions sent based on registration available on the University Equity and Inclusion LCBG website). We have organized this welcome packet to get you acquainted with what you can expect if you participate, along with worksheets related to setting ground rules, managing conflict, and a self-assessment useful for self-reflection.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### **Who is the leader of the group?**

The LCBG is a communal and democratic co-creation experience where all participants have the opportunity to learn and grow. There is no one leader—each participant will have the opportunity to moderate discussions, and to help your co-participants process the material and the related concepts.

### **What is a moderator?**

Each session, a different member of the breakout room groups will have the opportunity to serve as the moderator. They will follow weekly discussion guides to remind participants of the ground rules, introduce the sessions objectives, discussion topics, questions, and ensure turn-taking so that everyone can participate equitably in discussion.

### **What if I do not feel comfortable returning because of something that is said in the discussion group?**

Raise it in the moment when the comment is made. Remember that the purpose of this space is to figure out how to engage when you feel uncomfortable. Be mindful of your tone and pose your concerns as a question, exploring what made you uncomfortable, and ask if anyone else felt the same way. It is important that your group have time to process your reactions and share opposing views together. Use this opportunity to process the issue, and learn and build from that moment before moving on. Remember to refer to the LCBG resource about ensuring productive discussions.

### **What do I do when my opinion differs from everyone else?**

Because of the content of these discussions, there will be instances where *someone's* opinion differs from everyone else's. The goal is to learn how to manage conflict in the moment and maintain engagement.

### **If things get tense, how do we manage disagreement in the moment?**

Remember to maintain respectful communications at all times. Do not raise voices, or make pointed or accusatory statements. If tensions and tempers are rising, ask everyone in the group to pause for a moment to reflect before proceeding. Reread the ground rules, ask participants to write down their thoughts, and then continue the conversation. Disagreement is natural and acceptable, but active listening is important to move towards shared understanding. Sometimes, the goal may be respectfully agreeing to disagree.

## Ground Rules.

The University Equity and Inclusion Office has provided the following ground rules to follow to make this a space where we can have these discussions openly and without fear. We will refer to these ground rules at the beginning of each session.

- **Keep your camera on:** Please have your camera on for as much of the meeting as possible and be ready to engage in large and small group conversations.
- **Speak only *your* truth:** Share from your own experiences and do not speak for others.
- **Seek to understand:** Actively listen before responding.
- **Respect others' experiences:** We may have different OR similar stories to share, and contexts to draw from. All are legitimate.
- **Disagree without discord:** Disagreement is expected. However,
  - o Approach unexpected ideas with curiosity, not argument.
  - o If you disagree, debate and challenge ideas. Do not attack the speaker.
- **Share the air:** Make room for all voices to be heard, and do not dominate the conversation.
- **Confidentiality:**
  - o Share stories and experiences, but do not identify individual people or provide details that would allow someone in your story to be identified.
  - o Do not share the experiences you hear in this space, outside this space.

## General Guidelines For Discussion.

### Tips for talking about identity.

- Understand the purpose of the conversation.
- Acknowledge fears and concerns up front.
- Be open to learning about others' viewpoints.
- Understand how identity impacts experiences and points of view.
- Do not assume.
- Monitor yourself:
  - o Pay attention to what you are feeling and if you are starting to get emotionally distraught or upset.
  - o Be responsible not just for what you say but what your face and body communicates to others.

### Behaviors that foster dignity and respect in discussion groups.

#### 1. Moderators should set expectations.

- a. Clarify what is expected from everyone in your group.
- b. Explain the ground rules included in this welcome packet, and list them at the beginning of each week's session.
- c. Remind participants why we are in this space. Examples of what this reminder can look like are:
  - "Dignity and respect are the cornerstone of our learning community culture,"

- “Differences of opinions or concerns related to the book’s topics are welcome—if presented in a mutually respectful manner,” or
  - “In our discussions, the goal is to understand other people’s reasons for their points of view and for you to articulate the reasons for your own.”
- 2. Be respectful.**
    - a. Using the community ground rules, the moderator sets the tone.
    - b. Develop and maintain a feeling of safety in expressing ideas in this space.
    - c. Validate participants who demonstrate mutual respect when engaging in group discussions, particularly when these discussions are fraught.
  - 3. Maintain self-awareness.**
    - a. Know yourself. Think reflexively about your positions on issues. Controversy will be less likely if participants are aware of their sensitivities. Differentiate between personal beliefs and book content to ensure that the focus remains on the goals of the learning environment.
  - 4. Engage in critical thinking.**
    - a. Be thoughtful in your response to controversial or offensive statements. Help others see that it is possible to disagree respectfully and articulate views in a way that problematizes the ideas, not the person. As examples of this,
      - “Can you tell us more about this?”,
      - “Can you elaborate on that?”, or
      - “Did you mean to...?”
  - 5. Engage in active listening.**
    - a. Acknowledge the previous viewpoint before presenting your own by restating the point made by the previous speaker.
    - b. Pick up on a question that was raised.
    - c. Ask a related question that was prompted by what was heard.
  - 6. Distinguish between evidence and speculation.**
    - a. There is an important difference between opinion and evidence in these discussion groups. Use “I” statements when expressing opinions, and to point clearly to the book or supporting materials for evidence. Encourage others to do the same.
  - 7. Moderators should ensure fair and equal treatment.**
    - a. Make sure the rules are applied to everyone. Make room for diverse voices and perspectives.
  - 8. Create teachable moments.**
    - a. When discussions go awry, embrace it as an opportunity for honest dialogue. Ask participants to reflect on the discussion thus far. For examples,
      - “What do you want to change?”,
      - “How do you want to continue?” , or
      - “How can you re-enter the conversation with the goal of understanding the position or perspective of someone else, even if they disagree?”

**9. Moderators should assess and improve (and non-moderator participants should also consider the below for when they take a turn moderating):**

- a. Reflect on the discussion guide material and your moderation. Consider the following questions:
- Am I aware of my own biases?
  - How are participants engaging with these questions and why?
  - How are participants engaging with each other and why?
  - Should I adapt the discussion questions to more effectively engage with participants?
  - Do I need additional support from the University Equity and Inclusion Office to manage discussion groups?

**Behaviors that undermine dignity and respect in discussion groups.**

**1. Insensitive remarks**

- As examples,
  - i. "You're pretty good at math for a woman,"
  - ii. "Your English is so good,"
  - iii. "You're so articulate," or
  - iv. "That's so ghetto."

**2. Belittling jokes**

- Jokes that poke fun at individuals on the basis of an aspect of their social identity erode a community of respect, whether the jokes are meant maliciously or not. Upholding the dignity of others is important regardless of whether a person from that identity group is physically present.

**3. Non-inclusive language**

- As examples, using "he" or "she" when an individual has asked you to use "they" or "ze" or using "men" or "you guys" when you are speaking to a mixed group.

**4. Stereotyping**

- An over-generalization about a group. For example, assuming that a non-white member of the group cannot speak English well.

**5. Hostility**

- Overt bias or negative statement based on social identity or ideology.

**6. Silencing and humiliation**

- Not allowing someone to speak, or ridiculing them, because of their ideology or opinions.

**7. Targeting**

- Singling out groups or individuals for their perceived background, identity, or experience. For example, the only Black member of the group is put on the spot and expected to educate others whenever the topic of race comes up or women are confronted for speaking loudly during discussion when men are not.

**8. Othering & name-calling**

- Derogatory terms used to insult individuals or groups, including terms used in the past that are now considered derogatory (e.g. colored) as well as statements that broadly marginalize groups.

#### **9. Favoritism**

- People who share social backgrounds or identities with the moderator being given more attention and opportunities to speak.

## **Overview Of What To Expect In Each Session**

Each meeting, we will discuss a theme related to dignity and respect, with the conversation loosely guided by the chapters that are most relevant to this discussion. Themes and their relevant chapters can be found in each Session Guide on the Equity and Inclusion Office LCBG website. This learning community is not based on any one person having all of the answers. We will be sharing moderation ‘duties’ each week, to ensure that each person gets an opportunity to help lead the discussion. At the end of each session, a volunteer will be identified to moderate their respective breakout group at the next session. Moderating primarily involves welcoming us to the breakout room, reminding us of the ground rules, posting the questions and question objectives, and keeping time.

## **Participant Questions**

Pause for participant questions.

## **Breakout Room Activity**

Breakout rooms in groups of 3-6 people.

### **Introductions.**

Everyone should take a turn introducing themselves. We suggest including names, pronoun(s), unit, experience you feel you have with the themes in the book, and what you hope to get out of the experience.

### **Ground Rules.**

Discuss if your group would like to add ground rules to the set provided in the main room.

### **Conflict management strategies.**

Discuss if your group would like to generate conflict management strategies the group will adhere to.

### **Self-Assessment Worksheet.**

If you did not already fill out the self-assessment worksheet in advance of this session, please do so before the next session.

## **Reconvene, Report Out, and End Session**

Participants are recalled from their breakout room to the main group. Via chat, individuals will be asked to share reflections from their discussion, including additional ground rules or conflict management strategies they might want to share, if any. Remind participants of date/time/theme of next session and which habits/pages are suggested reading.



## **Ground Rules Worksheet.**

Our group's additional ground rules (optional):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

## Conflict Management Worksheet.

**Our strategies for disagreement or conflict.** We can decide right now—as a group—how we want to manage these moments when they occur, especially when disagreement escalates to conflict or overt disrespect. For example, we may opt to pause the conversation, identify the comments or ideas that are causing conflict or discomfort, and then each take a moment to write down our reactions to the comment or behavior on an index card. We can then decide collectively how we would like to continue and re-enter the conversation, and ensure that we engage—*not avoid*—that moment or behavior in a manner that all participants are comfortable with. (Pause for 8 to 10 minutes to create strategies for managing conflict)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Self-Assessment Worksheet.

*The goal of this self-assessment is for you to reflect honestly before participating in the discussion group about your goals for participation, assumptions and/or understanding you bring, and promote awareness to minimize the potential for negative interactions.*

What does it mean to see the humanity in others?

Recall a time “when you did not get it right,”? How did you know you were wrong?

What does it mean to speak across difference?

What terms, phrases, or behaviors do you react negatively to in interactions? Why?

What does it mean to learn “in community”?

What am I hoping to learn from this discussion group?