

TIMES TALK TOOL KIT

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INTRODUCTION

This guide provides a template for setting up and administering a Times Talk program at your college or university. It is based on the experience at Georgia College which was the first institution of higher learning in the United States to institute Times Talk on campus in 2005 by Political Science faculty member Gregg Kaufman.

Times Talk is a weekly discussion/conversation series on current issues and events. At Georgia College faculty, staff, students, and local community members meet at noon on Wednesdays in the campus library to share pizza while engaging in a 50 minute lively dialogue about important issues reported in the *New York Times (NYT)*. Each conversation is facilitated by one or more faculty, staff, students, or local community members who choose the topic and background reading article(s). One or more articles in the *NYT* or other relevant credible information sources provide a starting point for each discussion. Our Times Talks are open to all campus and local community members, though your college or university will set your own guidelines based on your individual goals and constraints.

TIMES TALK AND INFORMED CITIZENSHIP

Times Talk has become an integral part of the Georgia College experience, rooted in the liberal arts and based on the fundamental value of the pursuit of knowledge and truth for the public good. See a short video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlvCnaQM7wo> . Our institution provides a complimentary digital *NYT* subscription to all current faculty, staff, and enrolled students. Times Talk is one of our flagship co-curricular civic engagement programs administered by our campus chapter of AASCU's American Democracy Project, a network of 296 state colleges and universities focused on higher education's role in preparing the next generation of informed, engaged citizens for our democracy. Now more than ever, digital information literacy is a necessary and fundamental skill for responsible citizenship and having a Times Talk program on campus has been a great way for us to implement our institutional mission and reach across differences and into the community beyond our campus. The best thing about Times Talk is that everyone is there because they want to be! There are no grades, no papers, and no expectations other than abiding by the norms of good conversation and contributing to the spirit of inquiry and perspective sharing (while sharing pizza). Enjoy your experience!

TEN BASIC STEPS TO GET STARTED

Choose a coordinator to organize and administer the program and promote the series.

Determine a schedule, place, and time. Weekly, semi-weekly, monthly? Your location should be central, accessible, conducive to conversation (allow for circular seating), and have access to parking if you are inviting people from off-campus. We have found the campus library best meets our needs. In terms of timing, keep it to 50-60 minutes ideally and think about what times of day/week there might be the fewest conflicts for the people you want to attend. Because we wanted to maximize staff and local community member access, we chose noon-12:50 for our weekly discussions, which also fit into class session times on Wednesdays.

Recruit faculty, staff, and students to facilitate discussions at the beginning of each semester. Prospective student facilitators may be drawn from specific courses or student organizations. Facilitators choose a topic and send one or more articles from the *Times* to the Times Talk coordinator ahead of their session.

Promote and disseminate the week's topic several days before the scheduled Times Talk. Use email, social media, and other university communication outlets. Include a URL link to the background article(s).

Create and strategically place Times Talk signs, posters, and banners around campus in places where they will be widely seen.

Free food helps! Arrange for food and/or beverages to nourish participants.

Provide copies of the background article(s) at the venue for those who might not have had a chance to read in advance.

Welcome the participants and announce the day's topic.

Launch the discussion. If necessary, assist the facilitator(s) in drawing as many people as possible into the conversation with a particular focus on student contributions.

End promptly. Thank the facilitator and participants and announce the next session's facilitator.



50 MINUTE TIMELINE TEMPLATE

1. The coordinator/host takes 2-3 minutes to a) welcome the participants, b) review discussion etiquette (silence devices, be present, actively participate, listen to understand, hear each other out, disagree respectfully, be brief), and c) introduce the day's discussion topic, the background NYT articles that will be referred to during the discussion, and the day's facilitator(s).
2. The facilitator(s) typically take(s) 10-15 minutes max to share their perspectives and insights on the topic question, integrating information from the background articles to set up a shared context or frame for the group discussion. The more interactive the facilitator can be the better, as Times Talk is designed to be a conversation rather than a lecture. When you meet FTF, I recommend you set up the seating in a circle (or use circular tables) to encourage participation.
3. As much as possible of the 50 minutes should be devoted to eliciting participant comments, perspectives, questions, and dialogue.
4. The host should give a 2 minute warning and hand it back to the facilitator(s) for their closing remarks, after which the host will thank everyone, invite them to stay for one on one conversation if they would like, and encourage everyone to attend the next scheduled Times Talk.
5. It is imperative to strictly adhere to the time limit and make sure to let everyone go at the designated end time, as people will need to get to classes and back to their offices on time.

Facilitator pre-discussion preparation tips

- 1.** We recommend that Times Talk discussion topic titles be composed to end with a question stem, so that participants are primed for a conversation and exploration of a variety of perspectives and insights rather than a lecture. For example: "Should the U.S. make college tuition free?"
- 2.** Prepare a brief well formulated summary or key quotes from each background article. Be sure to define any necessary terms and explain any confusing aspects. If you have questions about anything in the article, more than likely everyone else does too. A good summary gets everyone on the same page. Odds are not everyone has read the article and a concise summary will help clarify terms and definitions and get the group thinking.
- 3.** Bring prepared discussion questions and/or interactive breakout activities: Have a set of questions to ask to keep the discussion moving. Your questions should be a) about the article and/or issues surrounding it, b) help move the discussion/keep it going, c) be open-ended (who/what/when/why/how/where...) rather than yes/no. Try to have at least

five prepared open-ended discussion question prompts. You might also use a mini-debate or breakout pair-share or small group format at any time to respond to the discussion questions and increase participant involvement. *Note: A good first question to ask is if “anyone has any initial responses, comments, or concerns relating to the article?”

DISCUSSION MODERATING TIPS

1. Limit your intro/summary to 10-12 minutes max and leave 35-40 minutes for the participants to interact and contribute.
2. Be comfortable waiting 20 seconds for a response to any question you throw out before you speak again. This is very hard but very necessary. Research tells us it takes up to that long for the receiver to process the question asked and formulate a response in their head, so make yourself count silently to 20 in your head while smiling and waiting for someone to respond. They will if you give them time, trust me. The rookie mistake is for the facilitator to move on or say something too quickly because they are uncomfortable with silence. Silence is your friend more often than you think for promoting good discussion.
3. Listen to each response and let the discussion develop authentically by encouraging piggybacking on previous comments and asking spontaneous follow-up questions. Trust the room. Odds are the discussion won't go exactly the way you planned and that is the beauty of a good conversation, you dive in and end up with unanticipated insights you hadn't imagined beforehand because of the variety and diversity of participant's contributions. As long as there is meaningful, lively, and relevant discussion it is a success!
4. If more than one person has an immediate response they would like to make to a particular prompt question, tell participants to raise their hand (virtually if not in ftf mode) and then “stack” them by giving each a number or noting their name if you know it so that they can put their hand down knowing you will get to them for that question.
5. If you are using a virtual platform like Zoom, set up the chat box options so that participants can only chat with everyone (disable the private chat function), and encourage them to respond with comments, questions, resource and article links in the chat box, and bring those questions and comments into the discussion.
6. Draw from any examples below that may help you in the moment:

Questions to stifle a dominator and/or enhance more participation:

- Thank you. What do others think about that?

- How would anybody else respond to the concerns just expressed?
- I'd like to create some space for those of you who have been quieter. Someone else?
- Would anyone we haven't heard from yet like to weigh in on this?
- What ideas haven't been expressed yet?
- Does that bring up anything for anyone?

Transition questions as you move from one issue/topic to the next

- Is there anything else anyone would like to add or respond to concerning this issue or point before we move on to the next?
- Let's have one more comment on this issue, and then we have to move on to a new topic.

Questions that re-direct misinformation from a participant

- Does anyone have a different perspective on that?
- (use the article) "the article states....How does that fit in with the information you just gave us?"
- Would you give us a specific example to help clarify your point?

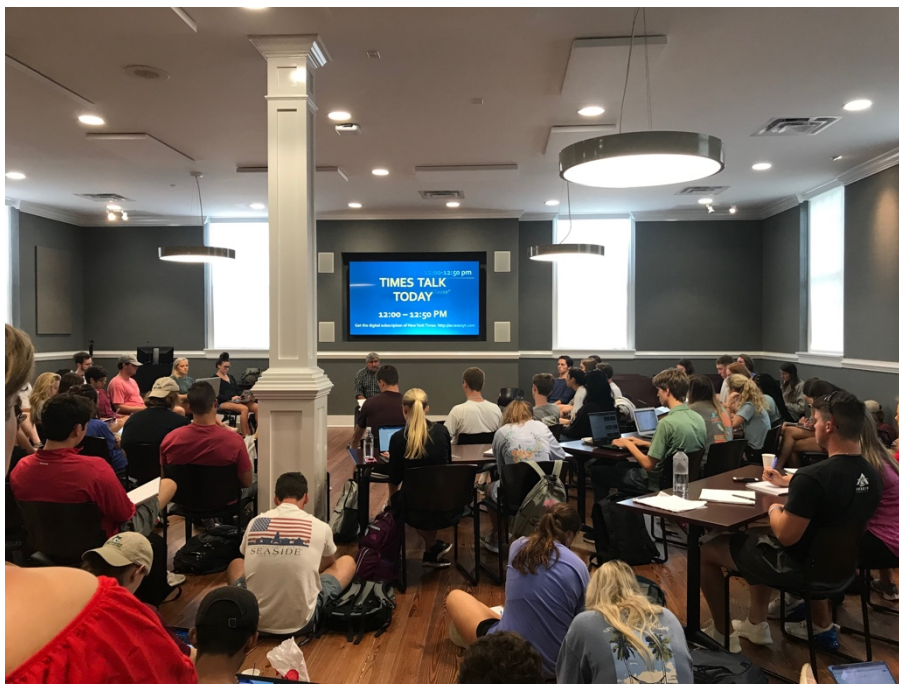


SAMPLE TEMPLATES

Sample call for volunteer facilitators:

The American Democracy Project at Georgia College requests your support for another semester of engaging, lively weekly discussions on current events and topics of local and/or global public interest in any discipline or field. Times Talk is celebrating its 15th year as a GC campus tradition and a nationally innovative civic engagement program by providing a space in the GC library for interested community members to gather from noon-12:50 pm every Wednesday to eat free pizza and discuss a chosen topic of that week's volunteer facilitator who spends a few minutes providing perspective and insights on the topic, uses a New York Times article for factual background/context, and encourages participants to share their perspectives, observations, insights, and questions. Become part of the tradition by volunteering to facilitate a discussion on a topic of interest to you or your class. Co-facilitator teams of faculty, staff, and/or students are encouraged.

To volunteer, send your name (and co-facilitators names if any), topic idea (in question format if possible) contact info, any preferred date if you have one (Wednesdays noon between Sept. 4th and Dec. 4th) to jan.hoffmann@gcsu.edu who hosts and serves as timekeeper/moderator for each program. You will be contacted as soon as possible for follow-up. Times Talk facilitation dates are filled on a first come first serve basis.



Sample reminder template

TO: all facilitators. CC: host

Thank you for volunteering to facilitate a Times Talk conversation. Can you please confirm the accuracy of the details below regarding your upcoming Times Talk? (Insert topic title, facilitators and article links if sent). If you have any changes to make to this information, please send them to me by the Friday prior to your scheduled date. Please note that we still need a link to the article(s) you plan to discuss. Please reply at your earliest convenience and thanks again!

Sample campus digital publicity announcement:

Join us for this week's Times Talk on Wednesday Sep. 25 at noon-12:50 in the Pat Peterson Museum Education Room in Russell library (Clarke St. entrance) facilitated by English Dept. faculty member Dr. Hali Sofala-Jones, noted Samoan Poet who will facilitate a discussion entitled "Power to the Poets: Can Poetry Save Us During Times of Social and Cultural Upheaval?" The following background articles which will be referenced in the conversation

"Political Poetry is Hot Again"

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.nytimes.com/2018/12/10/books/review/political-poetry.amp.html>

"Room for Debate: Does Poetry Matter?"

<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/07/18/does-poetry-matter>

Listen to the Podcast preview of "Why This Times Talk" at <https://soundcloud.com/wrgc/why-this-time-talk-podcast-power-to-the-poets>, and tune in to 88.3 FM WRGC our local NPR station Tuesday evening at 8 pm for a half hour interview with our facilitator conducted by station manager Daniel McDonald.

Join the conversation via twitter ([#gctimestalk](https://twitter.com/gctimestalk)) and Facebook. Times Talk is celebrating 15 years of informed, insightful, and lively campus-wide discussion of current events as reported in the New York Times. Brought to you by the American Democracy Project at Georgia College and the Ina Dillard Russell library. Just bring your brain! Free pizza while it lasts...

TIMES TALK SCHEDULES



Times Talk Schedule Fall 2019

Join us every Wednesday
12:00-12:50 in the Pat Peterson Museum
Education room

Free Pizza

Just Bring your Brain!

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Aug 28	Should the US ban hate speech?
Sept 4	Do we still need nuclear weapons?
Sept 11	The Hong Kong Protests: What's at Stake?
Sept 18	Marijuana and the Supremacy clause (constitution week)
Sept 25	Power to the Poets: Can Poetry Save Us During Times of Social and Cultural Upheaval?
Oct 2	Medicare for All: What does it Really Mean?
Oct 9	The 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising
Oct 16	Should the U.S. make college tuition free?
Oct 23	Dinosaurs, Donors, and Determining Science Content: Presenting Climate Change in the new Dinosaur Hall at the Smithsonian.
Oct 30	How has Habitat for Humanity affected local housing needs?
Nov 6	Globalization: Promise, Peril... Prevail?
Nov 13	Fifth Estate or Fifth Column? How social media and dark money are killing our democracy in the name of free speech
Nov 20	Why is Colombia Going Back to War, and Why Should We Care?
Dec 4	"Resurgent Anti-Semitism and White Nationalism: How will you respond?"

Access to the NYTimes.com for Georgia College faculty, staff, and students is provided by the Office of Academic Affairs

Directions to get the digital subscription of New York Times:

1. Visit <http://accessnyt.com>
2. Select Georgia College
3. Use your Bobcats email to create an account
4. Confirm your email
5. Receive an incredible all access, complimentary resource!



Times Talk Schedule Spring 2020

Join us every Wednesday
12:00-12:50 in the Pat Peterson Museum
Education room
Free Pizza
Just Bring your Brain!

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Jan 15	Community Health in Georgia: How Can We Build Inclusive Communities?
Jan 22	Celebrating Civic Engagement in Action: How Can We Help Bobcats to Vote?
Jan 29	How effective is academic advising?
Feb 5	Should there be a financial commitment to keep the U.S astronomical community at the forefront of exploration?
Feb 12	Food Insecurity: Is Food the Key to Breaking the Poverty Cycle?
Feb 19	What defines Paraguay and how does that relate to the rest of the world?
Feb 26	Access to Higher Education
Mar 4	The Rhetoric of Prejudice: Why do the sexist and racist narratives persist?
Mar 11	Historical and modern suffrage movements

*Times Talks from March 25 through April 22 cancelled due to campus closure

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Directions to get the digital subscription of New York Times:

1. Visit <http://accessnyt.com>
2. Select Georgia College
3. Use your Bobcats email to create an account
4. Confirm your email
5. Receive an incredible, all access, complimentary resource!

Other Tips

Protect against “Zoombombers”. If you deliver Times Talk remotely via Zoom, Webex or other remote conferencing platforms, use all the security measures provided to make sure you don’t have unwanted attackers or distractions. Suggestions include using the manual registration procedure, requiring valid school email addresses for attendees, restricting screen sharing to hosts/cohosts only, and turning off the private chat function.

Align with other events. Hold Times Talks in coordination with related events on campus. At Georgie College, we hold a special constitutional Times Talk to coincide with Constitution Week.

Coordinate with all your campus media programs. We have a campus radio station, a local NPR affiliate radio station, a student-run television station and a student-run newspaper. We are able to provide half hour programming to our regional state-wide NPR radio audience via pre-recorded podcast interviews of our facilitators that go out the evening before our live Times Talks, which includes a 3-4 minute preview teaser via soundcloud we send out with our live event announcements.

Be flexible. Sometimes local, national, or global events will dictate shifting the schedule to allow the time and space to discuss issues that are timely and relevant. Be prepared to revise the schedule as needed.

Look for unexpected facilitators. Faculty, staff and students are obvious choices as facilitators. Don't forget both alumni and the local community have a wealth of talent to draw upon too.



Provide food. Have we said this before? Like it or not, free food is a great incentive!