

Yale GRADUATE SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

GSAA Board Community Agreements

Community Agreements are a set of principles our group designs to establish how they will creatively partner over a shared period. The Community Agreements foster a culture that will: cultivate senses of belonging and connectedness; offer all community members an opportunity to voice their needs and their expectations of themselves and others; describe how the group will use or revise the agreements if conflicts or crises occur; and nurture a culture of shared responsibility and accountability.

In November 2023, we provided our community members with an opportunity to develop the Community Agreements at our in-person board meeting. This activity included processes of reflection and discussion, in which our groups responded to a prompt to think about times when they had been a part of engaging and respectful discussions and what specifically made all feel encouraged to participate. In addition to the benefits of fostering community cohesion, the participatory process of activity created agreements can allow us to clarify how Community Agreements differ from rules or norms. Whereas rules are often imposed and enforced from above, our Community Agreements are made and maintained by everyone; and unlike norms, which are typically implicit standards that are enforced through shame and other forms of social sanction, our Community Agreements will invite all community members to explicitly identify how they want to engage together and how they will manage conflict.

We concluded our activity by thinking of ways our community agreements can be used to sustain relationships rather than police dissent in our community. In brainstorming our community agreements, we thought broadly as to how our agreements would be adaptable to many kinds of collaborations and projects, in and outside of the Board. Our Community Agreements will act as a guide to achieving a collective sense of belonging, an accountability in building and sustaining the culture we desire, and a commitment to embrace and promote equitable and inclusive practices while building life-long relations.

It is important to clarify what they are *not*: Community Agreements are not and cannot be a security measure that preempts and prevents conflict or disagreement between community members; Community Agreements also are not and should not be a disciplinary measure that can be drawn from to stifle dissent and difference within the environment. If this occurs, then they have become a policing mechanism rather than a tool that aids in the process of nurturing a setting where people can engage together. In addition, Community Agreements should not be used to guarantee obedience or impose conformity, but they can lay a foundational understanding for working through moments of conflict and crisis. Should we face circumstances that call for repair in the learning community, when the threads that hold them

together start to become frayed, we ask that community members to work together on identifying best practices for resolve of sticky problems such as: how they will engage in debate with each other; how can they make their concerns known when they feel harmed by a member of the community; how members can take responsibility for transgressions; and how the community will move forward when a person does take responsibility for their transgression. This reparative and transformative, rather than punitive, model for addressing harm, conflict, and crisis all approach Community Agreements as a tool for constructing *brave* rather than *safe* spaces: that is, spaces that encourage every member of the community to engage across difference with honesty, respect, curiosity, and vulnerability, and to trust that the space is one that can hold each person's vulnerability in learning as well. If either any member of the community recognizes that someone is not using the agreements in this way, it is time to revisit and perhaps to revise them. For support in these uncertain moments, reach out to leaders for direction and support.

Yale Graduate School Alumni Association Board Community Agreements

1. Agreement on Commitment

- We agree to actively contribute to strategic initiatives, continuous assessments, and adhering to project timelines.
- We commit to being responsible, respectful, and honest.
- We recognize that education and learning are ongoing processes, and everyone is a work in progress.

2. Agreement on Communication

- We agree to communicate with generosity, encouragement, and respect.
- We will share information and engage in active listening.
- We commit to using multiple communication channels, embracing humor, asking questions, and amplifying others' voices.

3. Agreement on Engagement

- We agree to be present, engaged, and supportive of our colleagues.
- We commit to making space for dialogue and respecting each other's time and boundaries.
- We encourage diverse perspectives and passion in all forms of engagement.

4. Agreement on Inclusion

- We agree to create an inclusive environment where vulnerability is allowed and respected.
- We commit to showing up as our authentic selves, and to being open to new ideas.
- We advocate for open-mindedness, avoiding judgment or shaming, and encouraging constructive conversations.

5. Agreement on Respect

- We agree to practice mutual respect, stepping up when needed, and stepping back to listen.
- We commit to respecting individual capacity and boundaries, practicing self-respect and compassion.
- We will appreciate others, use “I” statements in discussions, and see each person for who they truly are.

Implementation and Review

- These agreements will be integrated into the group culture through practice, communication, and inclusion.
- Regular feedback and annual reviews will ensure these agreements remain relevant and effective.
- We commit to developing in the near future a process based in the principles enumerated in this Agreement for resolving disagreements or misunderstandings in a respectful, supportive, and inclusive way.

Drafted during the 2023-2024 Academic Year