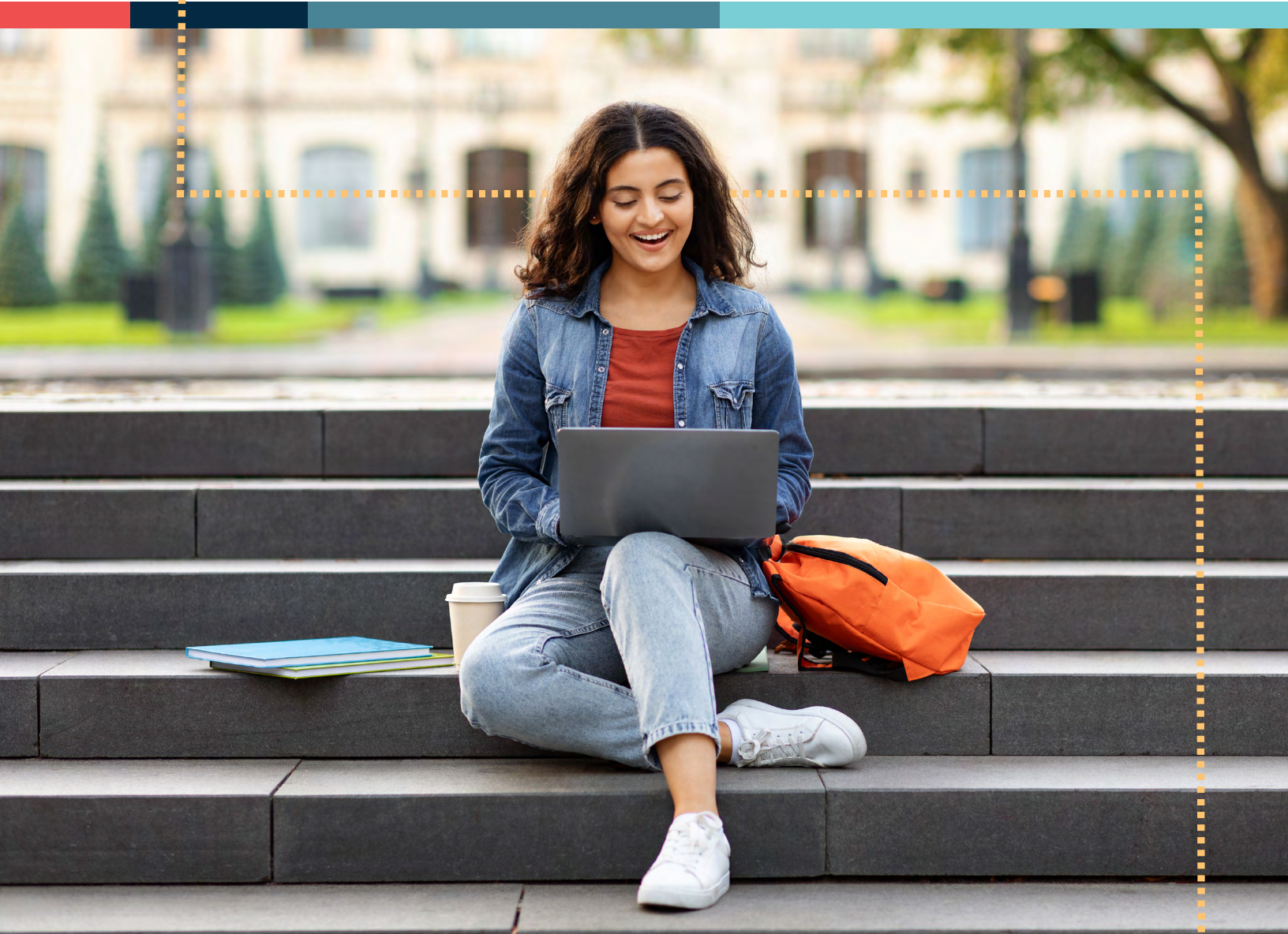




2025 Civic Gym Impact Report





2025 By the Numbers



150

higher education institutions

14,368 students participated
(out of **40,000** all time)



94%

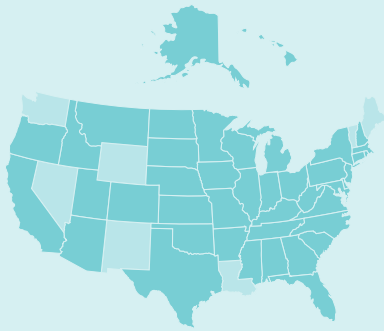
of faculty **would recommend** the Civic Gym to a colleague



Over **9,000** hours of **productive dialogue**

8.8/10

average student **satisfaction rating**



Across **40 U.S. states**



91% of faculty **recommend expanding** across campus

400

educators participated

75%

of students **gained confidence** discussing challenging topics

88.6%

of students said it built **career-relevant skills**

88%

of faculty found it **easy to integrate** across disciplines

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From the President

To our Unify America community,

We live in a time when technology increasingly mediates how we encounter one another. AI summarizes our news. Algorithms shape our feeds. Screens stand in for conversation. Technology can collapse distance and expand access, but it cannot replace human connection.

That gap is where the Civic Gym does its work.

At Unify America, we use technology to create real, peer-to-peer conversations between students who would otherwise never meet. Structured conversations that require listening, curiosity, and sustained attention.

In 2025, 14,368 students from 150 colleges and universities across 40 states participated in the Civic Gym. Integrated into over 400 classrooms, these students spent over 9,000 hours in guided dialogue with peers from different regions, backgrounds, and belief systems.

From a student perspective, dialogue experiences can land as an “eat your broccoli” message: well-intentioned and worthwhile, but not something they expect to enjoy. Civic Gym experiences tell a different story. At the end, students are invited to reflect on what happened. We have reviewed thousands of these videos. What we see is consistent: moments of recognition, flickers of surprise, students who expected conflict and found connection instead. Many say some version of the same thing: *“I did not think this would be fun.” “I did not think I would be able to do this.” “I loved this experience.”*

What these reflections reveal is not just satisfaction, but growth. Knowing how to engage across differences is not enough if you do not believe you can. The Civic Gym builds both. Students leave more able to state their own views and sit with disagreement without withdrawing, but the shift that surprises them most is not about skill. It is about the person across from them. In 2025, 75% of students reported greater ease discussing complex issues with people who think differently, and nearly nine in ten said the experience built skills they expect to use beyond the classroom. That is what 14,368 students discovered this year, and it is what gives us confidence in the work ahead.

Nearly nine in ten said the experience built skills they expect to use beyond the classroom.

Thank you to the faculty, campus leaders, field partners, researchers, and supporters who make this work possible. Most of all, thank you to the students who choose to show up fully.

With gratitude,

Michelle Sobel
President, Unify America



Our Higher Education Partners



Thank you to our partners and the 150 institutions who worked alongside us in 2025 to equip 14,368 students with the durable civic skills America's future leaders need.



What is the Civic Gym?

Our Mission

Founded in 2020, Unify America is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to **replace political fighting with collaborative problem solving**. Delivering evidence-based, interactive, and impactful experiences that encourage constructive conversations across political ideologies and backgrounds, we bring Americans together to build and exercise their civic muscles.



Why Strengthen Civic Muscles?

In 2025, colleges and universities continued to face a growing challenge: **preparing well-rounded, civically minded students to thrive in an increasingly disconnected world**. As generative AI rewrites the technical demands of every industry, the skills that remain distinctly human—active listening, adaptability, emotional intelligence—are increasingly critical. They're also most at risk. Our program is designed to give all students, regardless of major or skill level, structured practice at these lifelong skills.





Research and Academic Community



Dr. Nejlja Ašimović
Assistant Professor
Georgetown University



Dr. Samantha Moore-Berg
Assistant Professor
University of Utah



Dr. Mikelle Barberi-Weil
Assistant Professor
Weber State University



To deepen our understanding of how the Unify Challenge builds lasting civic and professional skills, Unify America partnered with academic researchers on an IRB-approved study titled *From Campus to Career: Advancing Workforce Readiness Through Virtual Cross-Partisan Dialogue in Higher Education*. The study examines the program’s impact on affective polarization, intellectual humility, and the durable communication skills students carry into their careers and communities.

The research was supported by the **Institute for Humane Studies** at George Mason University and conducted by **Dr. Nejlja Ašimović** of Georgetown University, **Dr. Samantha Moore-Berg** of the University of Utah, and **Dr. Mikelle Barberi-Weil** of Weber State University. The team brings expertise across political science, psychology, and business communication. The study drew on data from student participants at several institutions, and the full report will be released in 2026.



Academic Advisory Council

Our Academic Advisory Council brings together leading faculty and scholars who work closely with our Partnerships, Marketing, Technology, and Creative teams. They help shape strategy, provide guidance, and advance our mission of collaborative problem solving through viewpoint diversity.

Council members contribute deep expertise from higher education to ensure our programs are rigorous, thoughtful, and effective, expanding access to high-quality Civic Gym experiences for more students.

OUR ACADEMIC ADVISORY COUNCIL



Larry Schooler
The University of
Texas at Austin



Josh Young
Miami Dade College



Libby Roderick
University of
Alaska-Anchorage



Leah Murray
Weber State University



William Lyons
The University of Akron



Jeff Holm
University of North Dakota



Patrick Gilbert
Lone Star College-Tomball



John Gastil
Penn State University



Hagar Attia
Gustavus Adolphus College



Graham Bodie
University of Mississippi



Sara Mehlretter
Wabash College



Faculty Confidence, Campus-Wide

Faculty who bring the Civic Gym into their classrooms often tell us they were **surprised by how easy it was to implement**, by how much their students engaged, and by what they saw in their students afterward. The numbers reflect that:

94% of educators would recommend the Civic Gym to their peers.

88% of educators found it easy or somewhat easy to integrate Unify America into their classrooms.

91% of educators recommended expanding its use across their departments or campuses.

71% saw a greater student confidence in discussing political viewpoints.

And this is not isolated to dialogue experts or communications educators – of the educators who completed our feedback survey, **only 25% had participated in similar dialogue programs before.**

WHAT EDUCATORS ARE SAYING

What's the **best thing** about the Civic Gym?

“I would say 98% of my students who complete the Unify Challenge are **very glad they did**. Despite being nervous about it beforehand, most students who complete it feel very good about the experience.”

“It forces students to actively participate in something high impact (as in HIPs). They experience anxiety beforehand, yet almost always say **they enjoyed the conversation** after it's over.”

“One student said she had never been able to feel confident when **articulating her political views** until the challenge.”

“With few exceptions, students in their reflections on the experience said they came away more **hopeful about the state of our country.**”





What Students Experience



8.8/10

Rating across the Unify Challenge and Deep Dive



88%

of participants agree that the Unify Challenge helped them practice important skills like **communication**, **listening**, and **working across differences**, which will be valuable in their future career.

75%

of participants report that the Civic Gym **increased their confidence** in discussing complex issues with people who think differently from them.

66%

of participants would **experience a Civic Gym program** again with a new partner. How many assignments can you say that about?

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

What was the **most valuable or enjoyable** part of the Civic Gym?

“Everything, I really liked this and I think **I made a new friend.**”

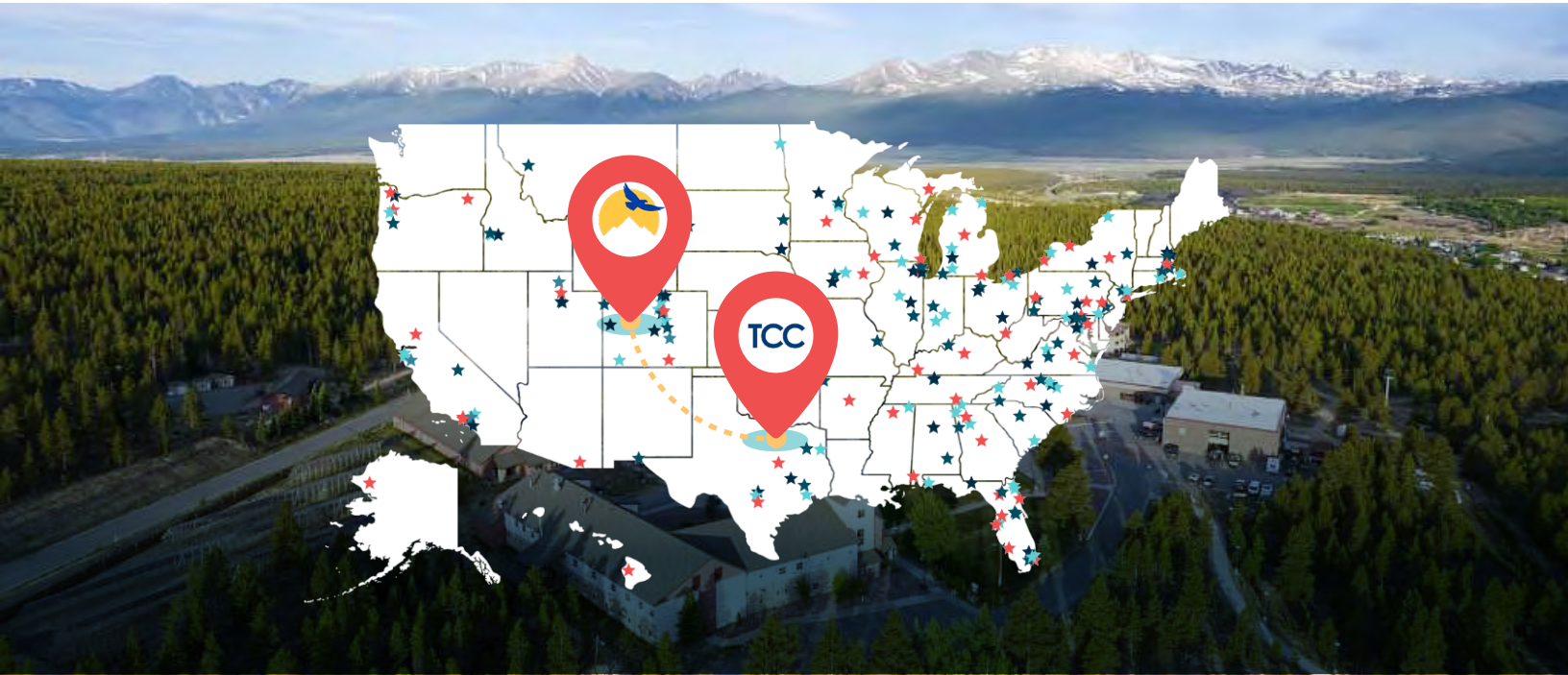
“Meeting someone new and seeing that you can find **humor and connection** even if you’re not entirely on the same side of the political spectrum. It’s also interesting to see how much closer we are in ideas than we would’ve thought.”

“I didn’t think I’d be able to sit down with someone and have a genuine conversation with them when we had differing views. I had been shown time and time again that those conversations were unsafe for me as a queer individual. This experience changed that for me and made everything seem just a bit easier. **I was given hope for the future** again thanks to this challenge.”





Stories from the Field



“ Connecting with someone I had never met before to discuss political issues turned out to be a more **meaningful and revealing experience** than I initially expected. My partner for this assignment, Cadence, is a psychology student at [Tarrant County College], a school located in southeast Texas.

Coming from different environments—geographically, educationally, and politically (less on the political side, I must admit)—gave us opportunities to explore topics from multiple angles. Because we approached each topic with **respect and genuine interest**, the conversation unfolded smoothly, even when we didn’t fully agree.

[The experience also] helped me clarify my own views. Explaining an opinion to someone new forces you to articulate not just what you believe, but why. Talking with Cadence allowed me to learn about another person’s experiences while also reflecting on my own assumptions. It showed that thoughtful political dialogue is possible—and that it can **play a vital role in building understanding** across differences.”

Student participant
Colorado Mountain College



Stories from the Field



“ Many students report feeling isolated and unable to converse respectfully with others about their political ideas. Some say they ‘don’t care’ because they feel like their view doesn’t matter, and a general sense of feeling ‘powerless’ was a common theme. I wanted to address these concerns and find ways for students to **converse and build their own political identities** and views beyond the classroom. I have found that platform in the Unify America Civic Gym programs.”

Dr. Kristin Borgwald
St. Louis Community College





Below the Surface: The Deep Dive



144
institutions

4,367
students

358
educators

Since Fall 2024

One year ago, we launched the **Deep Dive**, a complementary program to the Unify Challenge, to give students the opportunity to discuss **one pivotal topic in depth**. This program came from student and educator feedback – they requested more opportunities to practice civic dialogue and develop these critical skills, while going deeper into a few core topics. In 2025, students had the opportunity to discuss **Gun Ownership & Gun Violence, Free Speech & Hate Speech, Social Media & Mental Health** and **Voting & Representation** (in partnership with ALL IN Democracy Challenge).

EDUCATOR EXPERIENCES

What's the **best thing** about the Deep Dive?

“My students have reported that they have been pleasantly surprised to find that the conversations were not antagonistic. I think they feel **more confident about the country and our ability to work together**. At this moment, I feel this is crucial for our country.”

“The students really got to **dig into one subject**, and they seemed to enjoy the opportunity to do that.”

“That [the Deep Dive] comes after Unify Challenges so students get a **second chance to participate** in something.”





Below the Surface: The Deep Dive



78%

of students on average report that the Deep Dive made them much or somewhat **more confident discussing complex issues** with people who hold different views.

72%

of students on average **would participate in the Deep Dive again.**

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

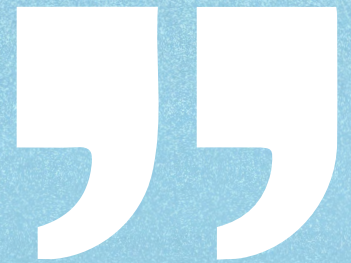
What's the **best thing** about the Deep Dive?

"Getting to speak with someone about issues that matter to me and seeing how **simple and non-confrontational** it is to communicate with them."

"Being able to talk to someone about such an important issue to me face to face with well-rounded and guided questions was fun! We didn't disagree on a lot of things, and if we said something the other didn't think about, we would **acknowledge it and learn from it.**"

"It was honestly a neat platform to have a conversation with someone who has a **different point of view.**"

"I love this initiative and I'm gonna miss doing Unify America!! Thanks for this **incredible experience** through this platform :)"





Built to Last

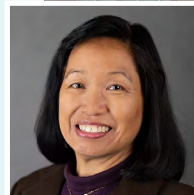
Unify America's goal is to bring civic dialogue to every college student in America. Reaching that goal sustainably means building a model that institutions can own, not just access. In 2025, we transitioned to a paid subscription model, and the response has been clear: institutions ranging from community colleges to four-year programs are making multi-year commitments and integrating the Civic Gym campus-wide.

Every subscription extends access to students at no cost to them, including students who would never seek out a dialogue program on their own. More students means more diverse perspectives and better practice for everyone.

A DEAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Our Experience with Unify America

Unify America has been a great partner for our civic engagement efforts to provide an opportunity for students to interact with other students across the nation. The positive experience from our participation in the Spring 2024, Fall 2024, and Spring 2025 Unify Challenge College Bowls was a key factor in continuing our involvement even after the switch from free participation to charging for participation.



Josephine Kershaw, PhD, MBA
Dean of Institutional Effectiveness & Innovation
Jefferson College

Why we decided to adopt the Civic Gym campus wide

[Unify America's] communication and explanation of the benefits of the Civic Gym was convincing to adopt it campus wide, rather than just for individual instructors or classes. It was a better value and allowed every student to participate. I successfully applied for a grant to pay for the 3-year subscription by citing the benefits of participation in the Civic Gym activities.

Why we think every Jefferson College student should participate

Partly due to our Unify America participation and service learning activities, we were recognized by the Higher Learning Commission as a leader in Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement in 2025, and the recipient of Insight into Education's national Civic Engagement and Community Service Award in 2026. We are continuing our efforts to increase participation and appreciate the assistance in promoting Unify America's Civic Gym.



Gratitude and Community

2025 was an incredible year filled with progress – and we couldn’t achieve this without our partners who put their faith in us. To every **student, educator, and administrator** who has given us their time, guidance, and effort – thank you.

Thank you so much to **our researchers** and the **IHS** for your work and support.

Thank you to our **Academic Advisory Council** members for your guidance and leadership.

Thank you to our **Student Advisory Council** members for helping us meet students where they are and shape the growth of the Civic Gym.

OUR STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL



Valerie Williams
Miami Dade College



Nhelia Alemo
University of Iowa



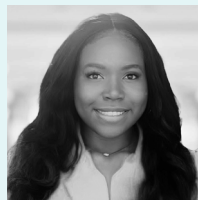
Saniaa Halliburton
Georgia State University



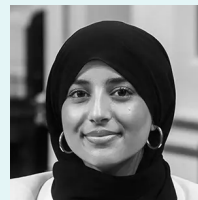
Anaya Qayyum
Barnard College



Hailey Reyes
San José State University



Victoria Nwankwo
Emory University



Laila Walid Ali
Stanford University



KC Crusoe
University of South Alabama

“ Being given the opportunity to approach political dialogue with those I disagree with in a structured and respectful way has allowed me to broaden my scope on issues and better form my own ideas. Unify America has provided me the tools to collaborate, communicate, and appreciate diversity of thought.”

Valerie Williams
Student at Miami Dade College



Partners and Peers

To our partners and peers in the space, thank you for your support. **2025 was a year of deep collaboration.** Together, we strengthened the field's capacity to deliver experiences that are rigorous, scalable, and effective.

We co-created and hosted events together. We brainstormed program design. We presented alongside each other and learned from your expertise. Together, we created educational environments for students and faculty and strengthened the field through shared practice and experimentation. **Your support, trust, hard work, and fellowship made this work possible.** We are excited to build on this momentum in 2026.





Next Up: Reaching Every College Student in America

2025 marked a year of meaningful growth for the Civic Gym. We launched a new partnership model and introduced our second program—expanding both our reach and our ability to serve educators and students nationwide. In 2026, our focus turns to refinement: strengthening the systems, processes, and resources that make the Civic Gym work seamlessly in classrooms and on campuses.

From the beginning, we built the Civic Gym to be easy to implement and scalable, designed for educators across disciplines and backgrounds, not just those focused on civics or politics. That remains our north star. In the year ahead, we'll be doing the critical behind-the-scenes work that makes scale possible: investing in the infrastructure, tools, and support educators need to bring dialogue to more students, more easily.

That means stronger resources, clearer pathways, and expanded programming to support teaching and learning across higher education.

This work also brings us closer to our most ambitious goal: reaching every college student in America. To do that well, we will broaden the range of perspectives represented in the Civic Gym, expanding beyond political beliefs to more fully reflect the communities, lived experiences, identities, and viewpoints that shape students' lives. The more perspectives we can bring to the table, the stronger and more transformative the experience becomes for everyone involved.

The more perspectives we can bring to the table, the **stronger and more transformative** the experience becomes.

Technology, and the distance it can create between people, isn't going away. Our responsibility is to ensure students still develop the deeply human skills that technology cannot replace: navigating disagreement, sharing perspectives with confidence, and working collaboratively with people who see the world differently. These are not just college skills, they're life skills that our students will rely on in their classrooms, boardrooms, and relationships. And they must be practiced now.

Whether you're new to this work or have been with us since day one, we are deeply grateful for your partnership and support. We're excited to continue this journey together.

Yours,

The Unify America team



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