

The Civic Gym

Building Durable Skills for Every Student

Students who can listen and problem-solve across differences are better prepared for the workforce and civic life. Committed to embedding experiential learning into both curricular and co-curricular programs, UND has partnered with Unify America since 2023 to prepare students not only for future careers but for engaged participation in a pluralistic world.



UND Vision

To inspire a sense of wonder, a love of discovery, and a commitment to serve.

Over the past three years, 32 UND educators and staff have had over 900 students participate in Unify America's Civic Gym, a program that pairs students from different campuses, backgrounds, and beliefs for one-on-one, virtual, guided discussions about the most important issues facing America. UND adoption across a variety of disciplines, including Social Work, Biology, Marketing, Engineering, Political Science, and Aviation, shows that competencies practiced through the Civic Gym are relevant beyond civic life.

Meet Unify America

Since 2020, the non-partisan nonprofit Unify America has developed and hosted virtual, peer-to-peer, interactive experiences to help people build and flex their civic muscles.

To date, over 41,000 student participants from 42 states have joined the virtual Civic Gym to share different perspectives and strengthen civic skills. From North Dakota to Florida, the Civic Gym is proving that repeatable, intercollegiate dialogues can build the foundational communication, listening, and collaboration skills that every student will need to navigate their relationships and their place in society.

DETAILS ABOUT THE Civic Gym



41,465

students have participated
in the Civic Gym since 2021

8.8/10

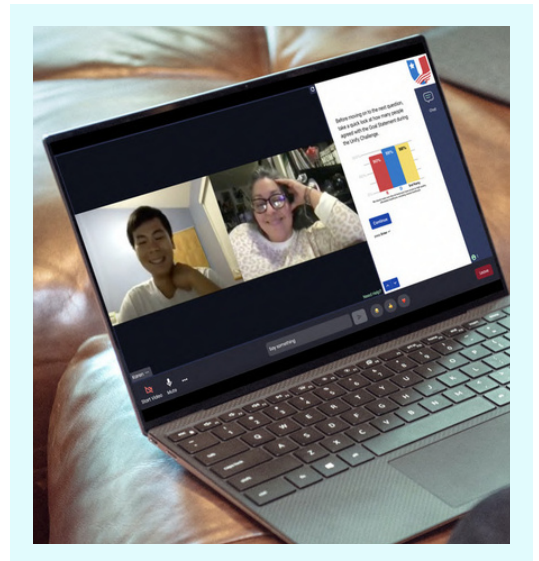
average student rating of
their Civic Gym experience

98%

of all educators surveyed
would consider using the
Civic Gym again in their
future courses

197

universities and
colleges have
participated
since 2021



Here's how it works

At the core of the Civic Gym are two evidence-based intercollegiate dialogue programs: the Unify Challenge, where student pairs explore up to 20 topics in one hour, and the Deep Dive, where students focus on a single issue to refine their dialogue skills. The programs work best combined, giving students multiple, repeatable experiences across the curriculum.

In both, students are guided through face-to-face virtual discussions that give them the space and structure to refine their civic skills, regardless of previous coursework, instruction, or background.

The process for students is easy.

- Students complete a short demographic form and select their preferred date and time.
- On the day of, they log in with a unique link and meet their partner.
- Our matching algorithm pairs students across 8-9 points of difference, including ideological and/or geographic backgrounds.
- Students then practice communicating, active listening, and problem-solving across differences in an hour-long guided conversation.



PROGRAM DETAILS FROM

The University of North Dakota

Since 2023, UND has been one of the top participating institutions in North Dakota and across the country in the Civic Gym.

908

UND students have participated in the Civic Gym since 2023

Participating UND students represent a wide range of disciplines, beyond political science.

19

UND departments used the Civic Gym in their courses

Anthropology • Atmospheric Sciences • Aviation • Biology • Biomedical Sciences • Business • Communication & Media • Criminal Justice • Education • Engineering • Entrepreneurship • Geology • History • Marketing • Nutrition • Psychology • Social Work • Sociology • Theatre Arts

32

UND professors utilized the Civic Gym in their courses

— “ —

A lot of students say they are nervous about participating but come out of it feeling more confident talking to someone they don't know, which is important in my course area, marketing.

— ” —



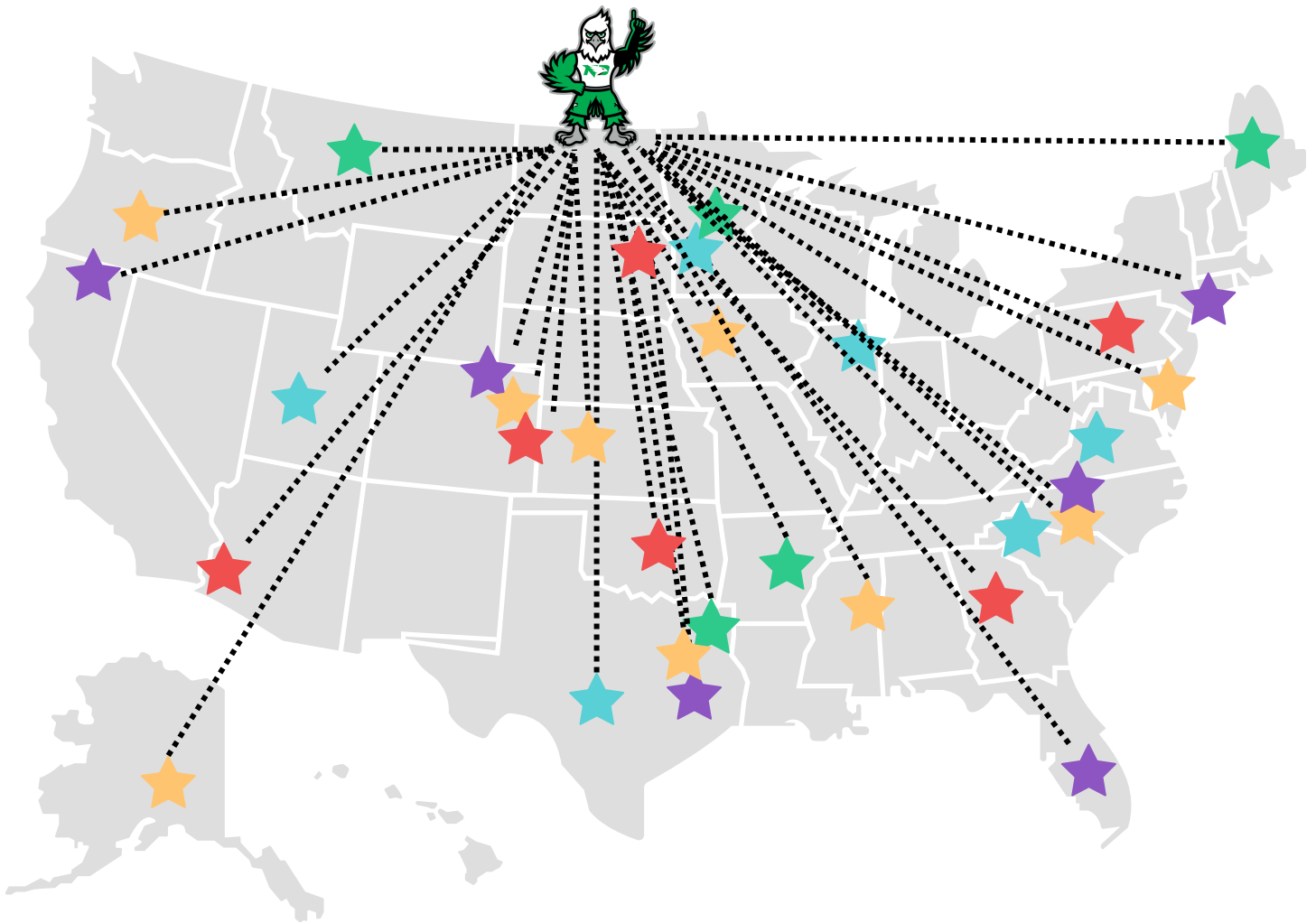
Jennifer Stoner

Associate Professor and Page
Endowed Professor of Marketing

Nationwide Conversations

Who did students connect with?

Since 2023, 190+ universities and colleges have participated in the Civic Gym – including public four-year institutions, community colleges, military academies, religious universities, HBCUs, and technical colleges from 42 states. UND students were matched into one-on-one conversations with students from over 125 of those institutions.



What do students really think?



After each Civic Gym event, we asked students how they felt before the event, and if their experience changed how they felt. We've collected years of anonymous UND student feedback:

"I think this was a great way to open means of communication and get differing perspectives"

"I really enjoyed hearing from someone that had an opposite view than me."

"I learned that people are not as split as the media and politics try to portray."

"I was really nervous at first but overall it was a great experience."

"I enjoyed talking to someone that I would probably never see or talk to in my normal day to day life. I enjoyed hearing about experiences that were different than mine."

"The most valuable part was being able to end with a smile on my face after talking about political issues."

"It allowed me to break out of my comfort zone in regards to socializing with a stranger and to me that is very valuable"

"I really enjoy getting to know new people from diverse backgrounds and talking about issues we may agree or disagree on. I feel that I always learn a lot and have a more open mind afterwards."

"I never would have met my partner and I learned a lot from his lived experience and point of view."

"I think communication is key to solving a lot of issues in the world and I love that this forum gives people the opportunity for open discussions"

"I liked all of the questions that were asked and some of them stumped the both of us so it was cool to talk those through in a civil manner"

DATA SUMMARY FROM

UND Student Participants

8.8 /10 average student rating



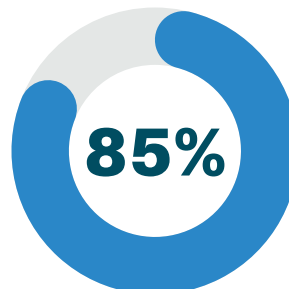
of students feel more confident in their ability to have a conversation with someone who disagrees with them



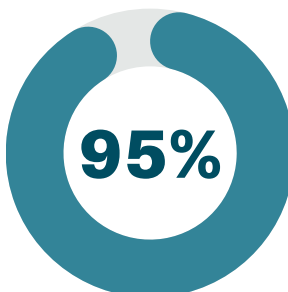
of students feel more comfortable collaborating and problem solving with someone whose views are different



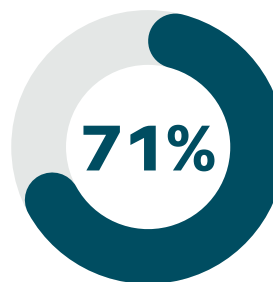
of students felt the Civic Gym gave them an opportunity to more deeply examine their own perspectives on an issue



of students said the Civic Gym helped them understand different perspectives



of students felt they practiced evaluating facts and using them to refine their arguments



of students feel more comfortable actively listening to someone's perspective before responding

Data: UND 2023-2026 Civic Gym student post-assessment

PRE AND POST-EXPERIENCE

Faculty Experience

The Civic Gym is built to fit into any course and work for any student, regardless of previous courses or major, as a graded or optional component.

100%

of UND professors said they would recommend the Unify Challenge to colleagues

The Civic Gym Process

START

Faculty and staff register their class or group for the Civic Gym. Through the Civic Gym Hub, educators gain access to a custom landing page, a real-time attendance report, post-event insights, and educator toolkits.

Faculty and staff provide students with landing page.

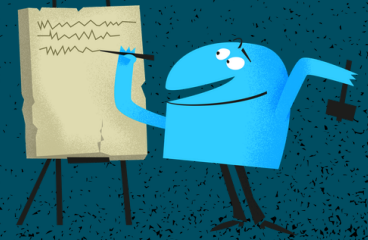
Students complete pre-assessment questions via the landing page that Unify America uses to create ideal matches across differences and time/date of their event.

On event day, registered students join their event through Unify's virtual platform and meet their matched partner.

Students complete post-assessment questions for impact, measurement, and feedback that we share with faculty and staff (and use to improve the experience).

Faculty/staff track attendance in the Civic Gym Hub and review post-assessment insights.

Where We're Going



During each Civic Gym event, students practice durable skills such as:

- **Active listening:** In the Deep Dive, students practice paraphrasing: "In your own words, take turns summarizing your partner's point of view. You're not judging. You're just paraphrasing."
- **Perspective-taking:** "If you agreed, why might others see this differently? What concerns could they have?"
- **Weighing trade-offs:** "What worries you more: harm caused by false information, or harm caused by punishing free expression?"



Dr. Jason Evans
Assistant Professor, Aviation

“

[The Unify Challenge] fits nicely with many of the themes of my aviation Crew Resource Management course...like emotional intelligence, communication, conflict management, etc.

[It] allows the students to practice a scenario where they are randomly paired with a stranger they are forced to interact with, which is what they'll experience in real life aviation careers.

”

By practicing intellectual humility and curiosity with people from all different backgrounds and beliefs, students are building the core skills to help them live UND values on campus and beyond.

Learning

Equity

Affinity

Discovery

Service

HARNESS THE POWER OF Viewpoint Diversity



About Unify America

Unify America is on a mission to replace political fighting with collaborative problem-solving, starting with opportunities for finding shared goals and practicing civility.

In 2021, we piloted our first Unify Challenge with ten partners nationwide and have grown to partner with over 190 colleges and universities, reaching over 41,000 students to date.



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 unifyamerica.org

About the University of North Dakota

The University of North Dakota is the state's oldest and largest university. We offer 225+ highly accredited on-campus and online degrees.

We provide students accessible educational opportunities as they embark on their journey to become leaders through hard work and determination. We believe in work worth doing. We value diverse people, perspectives, and ideas. We take active steps to ensure a sense of belonging and equity for all.



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