

**Diversity and Divisions: Examining Polarization Within the Macalester Campus**

**Community**

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## **Executive Summary**

Our survey mission is to get at the heart of polarization in Macalester students and measure how polarized Macalester students are as well as what skills they need to overcome this issue. Some of our key findings indicate that Macalester students as a whole, while they possess some key leadership skills we measured, have a degree of nervousness that prevents them from discussing certain differences and challenges that Americans face. In our study, we viewed a majority of respondents who identified at least a moderate level of nervousness when conversing with someone of a different political ilk. This is illuminatory in the sense that our community members are seemingly focused on the supposed differences of a politically contrasting peer rather than on finding common ground, and this nature of resentment and fear leads individuals to believe their perspectives will not truly be heard or respected. To those ends, many Macalester students ultimately feel that their ideas are not valued when interacting with people who hold differing beliefs.

Polarization is a dangerously broad topic, one which, as our society knows, can be deeply overwhelming. Moreover, it is quite ineffective to simply discuss the divisiveness of polarization if we are unaware of the specific root causes of disharmony that trigger divided communities. Our survey shows that students agree that the United States is currently divided, particularly among race, social class, and political ideology. In spite of the nervousness and feelings of division though, Macalester students are interested in facilitating dialogue with those of varying demographic backgrounds. This level of interest indicates that while Macalester students might not have the capacity to interact with those of different backgrounds at the moment, they would be interested in future opportunities to do so and this level of interaction could help bridge political and demographic based divisions.

## Introduction

Our study has examined polarization in the context of the Macalester College student community. Basing our research on students' individual perspectives, we aim to evaluate the intensity of polarization from a variety of angles. Polarization is a phenomenon which deeply plagues the wellbeing and prosperity of our nation, and we wanted to investigate whether the patterns within the Macalester community reflect larger social interactions. Our task, then, is to further understand how Macalester students think about tools of divisiveness--and the potential for unity--and how differing backgrounds shape on-campus interactions. Furthermore, we yearn to understand how this divisiveness is fostered and the ways in which it impacts our students--and the college community as a whole--to the greatest extent. The sociological process emphasizes the roots of societal functions; to those ends, we decided to focus on demographics that hold notable significance and sway. There are many grounds on which polarization may arise: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, home landscape, socioeconomic class, and age. These are the domains we have paid special attention to in relation to social divisions. A multitude of interactions occur every day between members of Macalester's student body (obviously many of which have been hindered by COVID), but divisiveness is a visible and adversely impactful phenomenon at Macalester.

We gained extensive insight into the values and perspectives of many of our students. The most noteworthy findings largely centered on political opinions and race and ethnicity. For example, the question above regarding an individual's interest in conversing with people who differ from them in some way, 58% of students replied that they were extremely interested in discussing public issues with someone who differs from them racially and/or ethnically. The desire to interact with people who differ in race and ethnicity was the most popular category by a

margin of 9%. Conversely, interaction based on political differences was the area where respondents most notably displayed a lack of interest, a lack of confidence, and even fear. In a prompt that asked students how valued they feel their perspectives on public issues are with people who differ from them in a certain demographic, based on political dissimilarities (using the same scale of “not at all”, “only a little”, “moderately” or “extremely”, 23% feel that their perspectives are not at all valued, while 45% contend that their perspectives are only a little valued. Findings such as these provide further insight into the rationale for students’ desire--or lack thereof--with regards to conversing across demographic differences. To those ends, we hope this study can help us, to a greater extent, understand the roots of the division that maintains rigid social boundaries in our community.

## **Methods**

In order to understand how students view polarization in their community and broader society, we created and conducted a survey using Qualtrics for currently enrolled Macalester students to fill out. We created the survey focusing on how we could get students’ feedback on polarization without overtly bringing up polarization, a very complex issue.

The analytical approach of our study was to utilize the factors listed above in a way that could illuminate various lines of division within Macalester. Polarization is often viewed as such a broad and overarching concept, but our approach was to create questions that would illustrate the specific demographics that Macalester students feel most influentially serve as mechanisms for polarization in our community. To those ends, we developed questions that offered students the opportunity to respond to one overall prompt that often included various demographics as subsets of the prompt. For example, one prompt read: “How interested are you in engaging in

conversation about public issues with people who differ from you in...”, on a scale of “not at all”, “only a little”, “moderately” or “extremely”. Participants responded by selecting one of these four options for each of the following demographics: race/ethnicity, gender, religious background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and political viewpoint, home landscape (urban/suburban/rural), and age (generation). Prompts such as this one enabled us to gain a better understanding of the specific factors students feel most strongly hinder further unity on our campus.

The survey consisted of 37 questions and took respondents an average of seven to nine minutes to complete. Students were given 12 days to reply to the survey, from the initial survey email to when we closed the survey. For feedback on these questions, students were asked to respond with how strongly they felt about situations on numbered scales, to select which concepts applied to them, and some free responses regarding race and ethnicity. There were four broad topics we wanted to address through the survey: self-rated ability in interacting across differences, extent of division in the U.S., how to address disagreements, and the effects of political divisions. These groups allowed us to get a holistic perspective on polarization, examining students’ thoughts on both the causes and effects of social divisions.

When we closed the survey, 198 students had responded. Of these students, 10.7% were international students, similar to the overall student body. 53.6% identified as women, 34.94% as men, and 9% as non-binary. Men are underrepresented in survey participants in comparison to the student body, which is often the case in surveys conducted at Macalester. 74% of survey respondents were white, creating an overrepresentation compared to the overall macalester community. Overall, the demographics of students who participated in the survey are quite similar to the overall demographics at Macalester with some slight variants. Once we collected

all of our survey data, we then exported the data we collected from the survey into SPSS in order to code and analyze it.

In order to receive feedback from a wide variety of students, the Institutional Research group at Macalester created an email list by randomly selecting students with diverse backgrounds. In order to maximize survey responses and get more diversity, we sent out the initial survey and three follow up reminders, all at different times. The first three times, different students in the group sent it out, and the final time our professor sent out a final reminder saying that the survey is closing soon.

### **Assessment of polarization in the US**

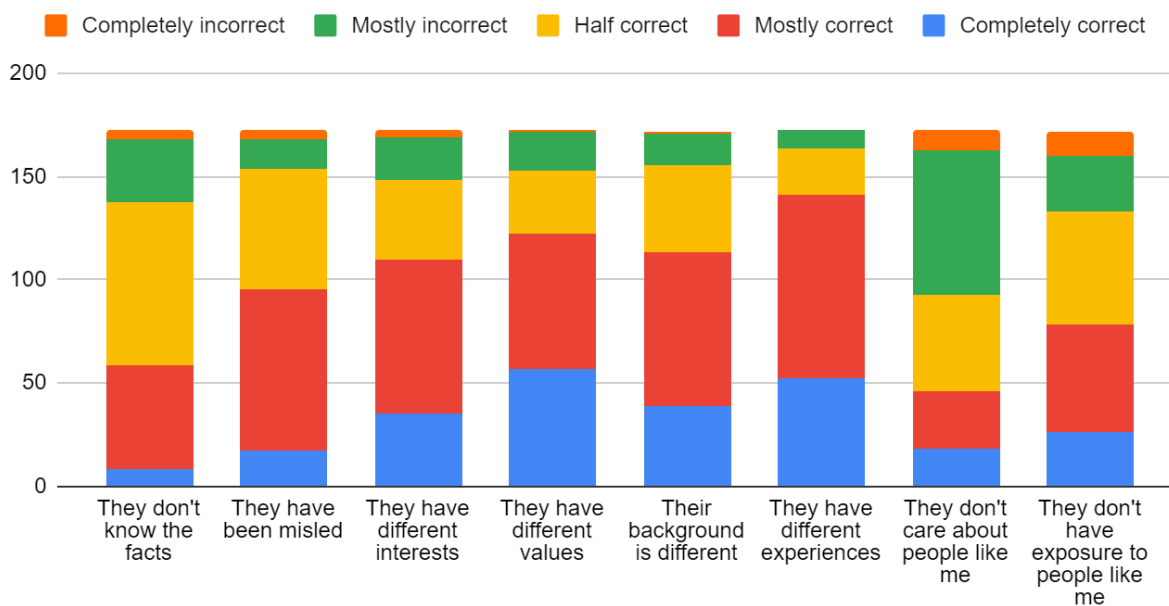
In order to assess Macalester students' ability to address polarization, we measured their thoughts on the divisions in our country and if those divisions are likely to be overcome or not. Doing so allows us to see if Macalester students feel that polarization is an issue or not, providing context for our overall findings that indicate Macalester students feel that more needs to be done in order to solve polarization but don't believe they have the necessary skills to tackle this issue.

Our data shows that most students believe that the United States is heavily divided, particularly among race, social class, and political viewpoints and that said divisions are important issues facing the country. In addition, the majority of Macalester students also believe that the U.S. can resolve divisions but it is not likely to happen, meaning that there is some type of hope and possibility that people can unite and overcome polarization someday.

In order to understand polarization further, our survey asked students how they perceived others who hold different political beliefs. We offered participants the possible explanations of

“they don’t know the facts,” “they have been misled,” “they have different interests,” “they have different values,” “their background is different,” “they have different experiences,” “they don’t care about people like me,” and “they don’t have exposure to people like me and then asked respondents to evaluate the accuracy of these statements on a scale of “completely incorrect,” “mostly incorrect,” “half correct,” “mostly correct,” and “completely correct.” The responses provided showcase that students believe in more charitable interpretations of others’ beliefs as opposed to the more dismissive explanations offered.

To what extent do you think these statements about people holding different political beliefs from you are accurate?



The graph above shows a wide array of responses and viewpoints but includes some important findings. Namely, 46.24% of respondents answered either “mostly incorrect” or “completely incorrect” when asked if people with different political viewpoints don’t care about them, making it the statement with the highest responses of mostly and completely incorrect. This hopefully shows that students are at least somewhat interested in facilitating dialogue with one another and not as outright dismissive. Another key finding is that 81.51% of respondents

said that different experiences mostly or completely explain different political views and 65.69% said the same of different backgrounds. This helps us understand how political divides based on different demographics (i.e. race, geographic background, gender, age) occur and could be useful in helping to foster more connections going forward.

### **General attitude towards diversity of opinions and compromise**

A majority of Macalester students indicated that diversity of opinion is always important and that individual actions have some amount to a moderate amount of importance in addressing division, meaning that Macalester students value diversity and believe their actions could help overcome polarization.

Polarization is a very loaded topic, so we avoided using the term “polarization” in our survey in order to collect accurate data on students’ perspectives on it. We avoided using the word polarization because we believed that students would have too much of a strong association and bias hearing that word. One question we used to gain student’s perspectives on it was asking students to describe their beliefs on how divided the United States is. We prefaced the question with “I believe” and gave them the choices of “the U.S. can never resolve divisions,” “the U.S. can resolve divisions, but it is not likely to happen,” “the U.S. can and will resolve divisions, but not anytime soon,” and “in the near future, divisions within the U.S. will be solved.”



*I believe that*


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	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
The U.S. can never resolve divisions	16	9.5%
The U.S. can resolve divisions, but it is not likely to happen	89	52.7%
The U.S. can and will resolve divisions, but not anytime soon	61	36.1%
In the near future, divisions within the U.S. will be solved	3	1.8%

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Based on the data on the table above, it is clear that students believe that the divisions in the United States are difficult to resolve, and might not ever happen. The majority of students (52.6%) “the U.S. can resolve divisions, but it is not likely to happen.” This high response rate shows that students believe that it is possible to bridge gaps and for people to come together, but it is not likely to happen. This response shows how important it is for as many people as possible to have the skills and access to communicate with others from different backgrounds. The second largest portion of students (30%) responded that “the U.S. can and will resolve divisions, but not anytime soon,” showing us that Macalester students are interested in and have hope for solving polarization in the United States. With the majority of respondents falling into these two categories, it emphasizes how important it is to equip students with the skills to confidently address the issue of polarization.

Another question where respondents exhibited a high level of pessimism is where they were asked to evaluate the US government on the basis of three characteristics, representativeness, effectiveness at addressing important issues, and equity. Respondents were asked to rate the US government on those three characteristics, with a scale ranging from poor (1) to excellent (5). The average rating for all three characteristics was 1.52, and there was very

little variation across the categories. This illustrates that Macalester students generally have a very negative perception of the US government. Such a negative perception of the US government may contribute to students' hesitancy to interact across political differences, especially in regards to electoral politics. Having an overall negative view of politics in the United States does not incentivize students to seek political compromise, as the effort required may not lead to desirable results.

Next, we wanted to investigate whether the extent of polarization reported by respondents could be attributed to a mere intolerance of diverse opinions. We gave respondents the statement "diversity of opinion in society is," and they could choose the from the following answers: always important, sometimes important, rarely important, and never important.

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*Diversity of opinion in society is:*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Always important	116	65.2%
Sometimes important	61	34.3%
Never important	1	0.6%

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Nearly all respondents said that diversity of opinions is either always important or sometimes important. Furthermore, 65.17% of respondents believe that diversity of opinions is always important. Thus, we can conclude that the majority of respondents value a diversity of opinions. If diversity of opinions is highly valued, any divides or polarization seen amongst respondents is not likely due to the mere intolerance to ideas other than their own.

Similar to a diversity of opinions, the willingness to compromise is also an important factor in polarization. Much of polarization, particularly political, is exacerbated by a lack of

ability to compromise. To gather Macalester students' opinions on compromise, respondents were asked "how important is it for different actors who disagree to advocate for their own beliefs or to seek compromise?" for three groups of people: members of the public, elected officials, and political parties. To answer, respondents were given a scale from 1 (advocate for their own beliefs) to 10 (seek compromise). Across the three categories, the mean score was 5.46, meaning that respondents overall were in the middle ground between compromise and advocating for their own beliefs. These numbers change slightly when looking only at political entities, as the mean scores for politicians and political parties were 6.198 and 5.8, respectively. Thus, students did not exhibit an overwhelming allegiance to either compromise or advocating for their own beliefs.

We recognize that there are a multitude of topics the last question encompasses, so we wanted to explore opinions on compromise regarding specific topics. Respondents were asked what areas, if any, on which they were unwilling to compromise their beliefs. The options were equality (racism, sexism, classism, etc), healthcare, financial security, commerce, housing, employment, and safety. Equality was overwhelmingly the most common answer, with 132 people saying they were unwilling to compromise their beliefs in this area. Healthcare and safety were the second and third most popular responses, with 85 and 62 in each category. The areas with the fewest responses were commerce and employment. From this, we can conclude that respondents care about compromise, but the extent to which is dependent on what is being compromised on. Students are less likely to value compromise with differing opinions if the compromise is regarding individuals' safety or humanity.

From this, we can recognize that thoughts on compromise are not monolithic. When speaking about seeking compromise, it is important to acknowledge that notions of equality are

likely to be very important to each individual. If one desires students to compromise with individuals who hold differing beliefs, it would be helpful to be clear in your expectations. Students will be more willing to engage in such an activity if they are aware that they will not be asked to compromise on beliefs of equality or safety.

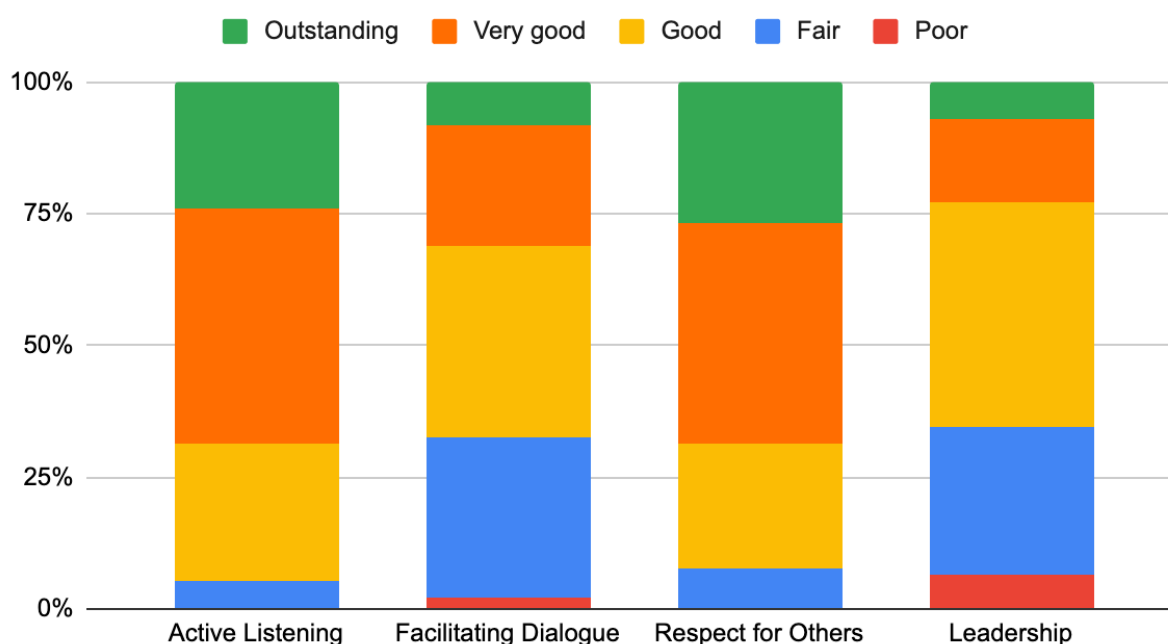
### **Assessment of individual ability**

A majority of Macalester students are moderately to extremely confident in their abilities to interact with those of different backgrounds, including class issues, race, and political divisions. In addition a majority of Macalester students view their abilities in active listening and respect for others as outstanding or very good and view their leadership abilities as good or fair, which shows that Macalester students believe they possess skills that are important to help overcome polarization and divisiveness.

In order to understand how confident students feel about their communication skills with people who are different from them (racially, politically, geographically, religiously, socioeconomically), we asked them how they rated their abilities in certain areas with respect to addressing social and political divisions (active listening, facilitating dialogue, respect for others, oral communication, written communication, and leadership). They responded with a scale from “outstanding” to “poor,” and using the data, we can interpret that students have much less confidence in their leadership skills and ability to facilitate dialogue. In addressing polarization, it is important to understand what barriers students might be encountering internally when it comes to facilitating connections with people from different backgrounds. Once these barriers are understood, programs can work to address them, allowing students to feel more comfortable when interacting across differences. If we want to make a change and lessen polarization on an

individual level, this data that we collected will help us understand where students need to improve their skills and comfort level in order to communicate effectively with people who are different from them. Our survey showed that students want to discuss issues with people who are different from themselves, so with this data we collected and quantified in the chart below, we can see which internal barriers we can help students break down in order to feel confident having those kinds of discussions.

### Students' self reported communication skill ability



The data displayed in the chart above shows that Macalester students are confident in their abilities to listen and respect others, but when it comes to portraying their own ideas they do not feel as confident. The categories with the highest level of “outstanding” as the response were “active listening” and respect for others, having 24% and 27%, respectively. As for “facilitating dialogue” and “leadership,” only 8% and 7% of students said they were “outstanding,” respectively. This demonstrates a large disparity between students’ perceived ability to facilitate action for change and their willingness to listen.

This could cause and further polarization within the United States, because comparing it to other data from our survey, students overall were moderately to extremely interested in having conversations with people who differed from them on race/ ethnicity, gender, religious background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, political viewpoint, home landscape, and age. This data shows that students have a desire to discuss with people who are different from them, but they might not have the skills to facilitate these conversations. The data shows that students feel equipped and ready to listen and respect people of diverse backgrounds, but they do not feel that they have a strong skill set for initiating dialogue and being a leader and reaching out to people who are different from them.

Our group asked whether or not Macalester students felt like their actions could have an impact on addressing social and political divisions. The findings based on the data show that only 3 students of the 168 students (1.79%) that answered think that their individual actions have no impact on political and social divisions. 70 out of the 168 students who answered this question, (41.67%), think that they only have some impact on political and social divisions. On the other side, 64 out of the 168 students, (38.10%), who answered this question think that they have a moderate impact on political and social divisions. Lastly, 31 out of the 168 students, (18.45%), think that they have a lot of impact on political and social divisions. If we add the students who answered “no impact” and “some impact”, we get 73 out of 168 or 43%. If we add the participants who answered “moderate impact” or “a lot of impact”, we get 95 out of 168 or 57%. Overall, more than half of the students who answered this question believe that they have some type of individual impact on political and social divisions. From this data combined with the data on students’ self reported communication skill ability, we can conclude that students

believe in the power of individual impact, they just might need some guidance and confidence boosts in their communication abilities.

### **Actual interactions across differences**

Our survey shows that Macalester students are the most interested in engaging with other students of different races and socioeconomic status, which are the same issues that were deemed as the most divisive. Taking this into consideration, this shows that Macalester students value diversity, which could help overcome polarization.

In attempts to gain an understanding into the emotions felt by students in regards to polarization, we asked respondents the level of nervousness they experience when interacting with individuals who hold differing political beliefs or values. We wanted to see if nervousness or anxiety was a potential barrier for students in interacting across political differences.

Respondents were asked to what extent does interacting with individuals who hold differing political views make you nervous, and they could answer on the following scale: not at all, only a little, a moderate amount, a great deal, extremely.

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*To what extent does interacting with individuals who hold different political beliefs or values make you nervous?*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all	19	9.6%
Only a little	49	24.7%
A moderate amount	68	34.3%
A great deal	31	15.7%
Extremely	5	2.5%

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As we can see from the table above, the majority of respondents report some level of nervousness when interacting with individuals who hold differing political beliefs or values. Nearly 89% of respondents feel some level of nervousness in such interactions, with 52.5% of respondents reporting a moderate to extreme level of nervousness. From these answers, we can see that nerves and anxiety are prevalent for students during interactions across political differences. Given that Macalester students value diversity of opinion, it is likely that nervousness is the barrier preventing people from interacting across differences, not just an intolerance of ideas. From the data, we can see that people are interested in engaging with people who hold different political beliefs, with 70% of people reported a moderate to extreme interest in making such connections. It is not a lack of interest that is prohibiting interactions across political differences, but nervousness. It is possible that this nervousness stems from a lack of self-rated ability to interact across differences, seen in the previous section.

One interesting thing to note from these responses is the gender breakdown of the answers. 40% of respondents who identify as a man report moderate to extreme levels of nervousness when interacting with individuals who hold differing political beliefs. This is contrasted with women and non-binary people, for who 70% and 80% report moderate to extreme levels of nervousness, respectively. Thus, we can conclude that men are less likely than women or non-binary people to report moderate to extreme nervousness when interacting with people who hold different political beliefs or values. This trend could be attributed to the fact marginalized genders are less likely to be respected in conversations across political differences, due to historical patterns of sexism and queerphobia.

The univariate data that we collected is helpful to understand how students feel about polarization, but in order to evaluate more complex relationships within the data, we utilized



crosstabulations. To better understand how we can help students bridge gaps and experience less polarization, we need to evaluate what is holding students back from being comfortable with interacting with those who are different from them. We compared different survey responses against each other, and analyzed it to learn more about why students act and feel the way they do about polarization.

### **Association Between Interest in Communicating with Others and Division**

A trend that we discovered in our data was that respondents were most interested in communicating with people who are different from them based on race and ethnicity, and they also believe that the United States is overall very divided on the basis of race and ethnicity. In one question, we asked students how divided they think the United States is based on different factors such as gender, social class, age, political beliefs, race/ethnicity, etc. They could reply with “not at all,” “only a little,” “a moderate amount,” “a great deal,” or “completely.” Based on race, 20.2% of students said the US is completely divided, 67.9% said it is divided a great deal, and 10.1% said it is moderately divided. We asked this question in order to understand how polarized students think that the United States on the basis of different background traits, since they can all cause rifts. The findings from this question are important to understand which areas of polarization are most severe and should be mended. We also asked how interested students were in engaging with people of different races, genders, religious backgrounds, etc. in discussions about public issues. Students could answer with “not at all interested,” “only a little,” “moderately,” and “extremely.” Overall, the majority of students were either moderately or extremely interested in conversing with people from different backgrounds. Race had the strongest response of students who were extremely interested; 58% of students replied that they

were extremely interested in discussing public issues with someone who differs from them racially. This is the largest response by 9%. Using these two questions, we analyzed them in comparison to one another using cross tabulations since it is clear that students believe that the United States is very divided along racial lines, but also want to discuss issues with people of different races.

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*How much is the United States divided on the basis of race?*

			<i>Completely</i>	<i>A great deal</i>	<i>Moderate amount</i>	<i>A little</i>
<i>How interested are you in engaging with in conversation about public issues with people who differ from you in race/ ethnicity?</i>	Not at all	<b>Frequency</b>	0	0	0	1
		<b>Percent</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Only a little	<b>Frequency</b>	0	1	1	0
		<b>Percent</b>	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
	Moderately	<b>Frequency</b>	5	51	8	0
		<b>Percent</b>	7.8%	79.7%	12.5%	0.0%
	Extremely	<b>Frequency</b>	29	62	8	2
		<b>Percent</b>	28.7%	61.4%	7.9%	2.0%

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In the table above, you can see that the students who were moderately and extremely interested in discussing issues with people of different races also believe in the majority that the United States is either completely or a great deal divided. 28.7% of students believe that the United States is completely divided and are extremely interested in discussion with someone of a different race than themselves, followed up by 61.4% of students who are extremely interested believing that the country is divided a great deal. This is in comparison to 7.8% of students who were moderately interested thought that the country is completely divided, although 79.7% of students who were moderately interested thought that the country is divided a great deal. This finding is important because it shows that how much a student believes the United States is divided based on race correlates with how much they want to discuss issues with people of

different races. Students who view the country as more racially divided desire this conversation more than others who think the country is less racially divided.

### **Association Between Valuation and Nervousness**

An association we examined was between how valued a person's public issues perspectives are by politically contrasting students and an individual's level of nervousness when interacting with a politically dissimilar population. Among the 172 participants, 40% feel that interacting with individuals who hold differing political beliefs makes them moderately nervous, with another 19% stating that it makes them a great deal nervous and 3% identifying that it makes them extremely nervous. In regards to how valued a person's perspectives are based on political differences 94% of participants answered that they believe their public issues perspectives are not at all, only a little, or moderately valued by those with different political perspectives. 23% feel that their perspectives are not at all valued, while 45% contend that their perspectives are only a little valued. For reference, the demographic for which the next largest contingent of people state that they felt their perspectives are not at all valued is that of older generations; among the 184 participants who answered the generational prompt, 7% feel their perspectives are not at all valued by older generations, and 29% record that that their perspectives are only a little valued by older generations. This indicates a clear distinction between how people feel their perspectives are evaluated by those with differing politics compared with those who hold demographic dissimilarities other than politics. Our data led us to question: do people feel reluctant to engage with those who hold contrasting political beliefs *because* they feel their perspectives are marginally valued?

To test the potential association between these two variables, we created a compressed cross tabulation. To examine whether the likelihood of expressing moderate to extreme nervousness when interacting with people who hold different political beliefs varies based on how valued students feel by others of various backgrounds, we compared students who reported that their perspectives were valued only a little or not at all to students who reported being their perspectives were moderately to completely valued.

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Association between the extent to which individuals' perspectives are valued by those with different political opinions and level of nervousness felt when interacting across political differences

		<i>Low nervousness</i>	<i>High nervousness</i>
Low valuation by others	<b>Frequency</b>	39	78
	<b>Percent</b>	33.3%	66.7% ( $p < .05$ )
High valuation by others	<b>Frequency</b>	29	26
	<b>Percent</b>	52.7%	47.3% ( $p < .05$ )

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Looking at the crosstabulation, we can see interesting variation across the variables. Of people who reported a low level of nervousness when interacting across political differences, nearly 53% believe that opposing individuals have a value of their opinions. Thus, if the respondents experience a low level of nervousness in these interactions, they are more likely to have their opinions valued by others. Conversely, individuals who experience a high level of nervousness when interacting with people who hold differing political views are more likely to feel that their perspectives will not be valued. From this, we can conclude that there is an association between an individual's perspectives being discounted and a high level of nervousness experienced when interacting across political differences. Thus, reluctance to interact with people who hold differing political beliefs likely stems from the nervousness experienced when one's ideas are discounted by others.

To dig deeper into this pattern, we wanted to see how nervousness affects one's *desire* to interact with people who hold differing political opinions. To do so, we constructed a three way

cross tabulation. There are many notable items in this table. First, the majority of respondents who have little to no interest in engaging across political differences experience a high level of nervousness in such interactions. The distribution of level of nervousness was nearly identical between those whose perspectives are valued by people with opposing political ideologies, and those who aren't (78% and 77.8% of respondents experiencing high levels of nervousness, respectively).

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Association between the extent to which individuals' perspectives are valued by those with different political opinions and level of nervousness felt when interacting across political differences, separated by interest in engaging with those who hold different political views

		<i>Low nervousness</i>	<i>High nervousness</i>
<i>Low interest</i>			
Low valuation by others	<b>Frequency</b>	9	32
	<b>Percent</b>	22.0%	78.0%
High valuation by others	<b>Frequency</b>	2	7
	<b>Percent</b>	22.2%	77.8%
			(p = .9)
<i>Moderate interest</i>			
Low valuation by others	<b>Frequency</b>	15	36
	<b>Percent</b>	29.4%	70.6%
High valuation by others	<b>Frequency</b>	10	14
	<b>Percent</b>	41.7%	58.3%
			(p = .29)
<i>High interest</i>			
Low valuation by others	<b>Frequency</b>	15	10
	<b>Percent</b>	60.0%	40.0%
High valuation by others	<b>Frequency</b>	17	4
	<b>Percent</b>	81.0%	19.0%
			(p = .12)

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It is important to note that only the third cross tabulation is statistically significant. The first two have p values that are too high to be able to say there is a reliable association. While it is unfortunate that the majority of this three way cross tabulation is not statistically significant, we can still draw conclusions from the last panel. Of the respondents who reported a high level of nervousness, they were more than twice as likely to believe that their perspectives were valued little by others. The opposite trend is seen amongst people who experience low nervousness, as they are more likely to believe that their perspectives have a high valuation by others. Thus, even amongst people who have a high interest in engaging with people who hold different political beliefs, higher levels of nervousness is still associated with the individual's perspective being valued by others. While we thought that adding the third variable of interest in engaging across differences would further expand the initial association, we can conclude that it does not impact level of nervousness in a significant manner. Valuation by others impacts the level of nervousness experienced the most significantly of the tested variables.

Ultimately, students are nervous to interact with people who hold different political beliefs. This nervousness likely stems from the combination of students feeling that their perspectives will not be valued and the lack of self-rated ability to utilize necessary interpersonal skills when interacting across differences. It is important to work to break down this nervousness, as these reservations can lead to severe hesitancy to build across differences. Perhaps the reasoning for this hesitancy is that people believe our differences define us to a greater extent than our commonalities; in reality however, the truth is vice-versa, and the findings remind us that we must collectively improve at getting to know one another as human beings rather than prematurely judging based on the political affiliation of our peers.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, our survey results found that as a whole, Macalester students believe that the United States is overall moderately to extremely divided on the basis of race, social class, political beliefs, religious beliefs, level of education, geographic background (rural/urban), ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. This is due to nervousness about interacting with people who are different from themselves, along with students feeling that their ideas are not valuable when presenting them to someone with differing viewpoints and students not feeling like they have the leadership and dialogue skills to facilitate these discussions. The vast majority of students responded that they have some level of desire to have discussions and interact with people who have different backgrounds than them, but from the data collected we found that they need more access to these conversations in order to improve their skills and confidence when talking to someone who is different from them.

Often Macalester students do not have access to a fully diverse range of people and viewpoints, and this has caused them to become nervous and unconfident when they do have that opportunity. In order for students to interact with a larger range of people, it would be beneficial for groups within Macalester to organize and facilitate discussions with students and people who have different backgrounds. For example, students could talk to people who live in a rural area or have a different political viewpoint than themselves. They could establish a relationship through a penpal type system, where they could get to know each other and maintain contact in a low pressure environment. This would allow students to feel more comfortable and less nervous discussing issues with people who differ from them. Another way to help students interact with people who are different from them is to incorporate dialogue and leadership skills specifically focusing on interacting with people of different backgrounds into more courses at Macalester.



This would help build students' confidence levels when discussing issues with others, because Macalester can easily become an echochamber. Overall, students need to be encouraged to branch out and discuss their ideas with people outside of the Macalester bubble.

### Survey Appendix

Q1: How interested are you in engaging in conversation about public issues with people who differ from you in: race/ethnicity, gender, religious background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, political viewpoint, home landscape, age/generation

- not at all interested
- only a little
- moderately
- extremely

Q2: How confident are you in your ability to interact with people who are different from you in: race/ethnicity, gender, religious background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, political viewpoint, home landscape, age/generation

- not confident at all
- only a little
- moderately
- extremely

Q3: To what extent are your perspectives on public issues valued: in academic discussion, by your friends, by your family, by older generations, by people with different political beliefs

- not at all
- only a little
- moderately
- greatly
- completely

Q4: In discussions about public issues, how often are your perspectives discounted due to your: race, gender, religion, place of residence, sexual orientation, age

- none of the time
- some of the time
- most of the time
- all of the time

Q5: Diversity of opinion in society is:

- always important
- sometimes important
- rarely important
- never important

Q6: How important is it for different actors who disagree to advocate for their own beliefs or to seek compromise? Please rate for the following actors by selecting on this scale:

It is better when (members of the public, elected officials, political parties):

Advocate for their own beliefs										Seek compromise
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Q7: To what extent does interacting with individuals who hold different political beliefs or values make you nervous?

- not at all
- only a little
- a moderate amount
- a great deal
- extremely

Q8: To what extent do you think these statements about people holding different political beliefs from you are accurate: they don't know the facts, they have been misled, they have different interests, they have different values, their background is different, they have different experiences, they don't care about people like me, they don't have exposure to people like me

- completely correct
- mostly correct
- half correct
- mostly incorrect
- completely incorrect

Q9: In addressing social and political divisions, individual actions have:

- no impact
- some impact
- moderate impact
- a lot of impact

Q10: How do you rate your abilities in the following areas with respect to addressing social and political divisions: active listening, facilitating dialogue, respect for others, oral communication, written communication, leadership

- outstanding
- very good
- good
- fair
- poor

Q11: In general, how much is the United States divided?

- completely
- a great deal
- a moderate amount
- only a little
- not at all

Q12: More specifically, how much is the United States divided on the basis of: race, social class, political beliefs, religious beliefs, level of education, geographic background, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation

- completely
- a great deal
- a moderate amount
- only a little

- not at all

Q13: When compared to other issues that the US faces, how important of an issue is political division?

- not at all important
- a minor issue
- moderately important
- a major issue
- the most important issue

Q14: I believe that:

- the U.S. can never resolve divisions
- the U.S. can resolve divisions but it is not likely to happen
- the U.S. can and will resolve divisions, but not anytime soon
- in the near future, divisions within the U.S. will be solved

Q15: Of the following, which divisions will be the hardest to resolve?

- race
- social class
- political beliefs
- religious beliefs
- level of education
- geographic background
- ethnicity
- gender
- sexual orientation

Q16: What areas, if any, are you not willing to compromise your beliefs on? Check all that apply.

- equality (racism, classism, sexism, etc.)
- healthcare
- financial security
- commerce
- housing
- employment
- safety

Q17: In general, how would you rate the U.S. government on the following characteristics: being representative, being effective at addressing important issues, being equitable

- poor
- fair
- good
- very good
- excellent

Q18: How would you describe your political beliefs overall and on social and economic issues?

- far left
- liberal
- moderate
- conservative
- far right

Q19: What U.S. political party (if any) are you aligned with?

- Democratic
- Republican
- Green
- Libertarian
- Independent
- Other
- None

Q20: What year are you?

- First year
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior or higher

Q21: What geographic area best describes where you grew up?

- Urban
- Rural
- Suburban

Q22: Are you a:

- Domestic student
- International student

Q23: Are you religious?

- Yes
- No

Q24: Are the people who raised you religious?

- Yes
- No

Q25: What is your gender identity?

- Man
- Woman
- Non-binary
- Other

Q26: What is your sexual orientation?

- Gay
- Straight
- Lesbian

- Bisexual
- Other

Q27: How do you categorize your racial identity?

Q28: How do you categorize your ethnic identity?

Q29: Are you a first generation college student?

- Yes
- No

Q30: How do you classify your socioeconomic status?

- Upper income
- Upper middle income
- Lower middle income
- Lower income