

Make Shift Coffee House

Bringing Political Differences onto Campus. Respectful and Safe Face-to-Face Community Discussion.



Overview

Imagine your students – conservatives, liberals, apoliticals – engaged in deep conversation with each other, with faculty, and with members of your community. Imagine a pro-gun person explaining why they believe what they believe, and an anti-gun person listening with genuine respect. This actually did happen, twice in the past year, at Make Shift Coffee Houses held on the **Bowdoin College** and **University of New England** campuses.



Imagine a pro-life activist listening with compassion to a pro-choice woman tell her story. And this happened too, at the **University of Maine**.

Now imagine there's live music in the background, people sipping coffee and nibbling snacks, people milling around seeking new conversations. And the conversations continue in the parking lot and into the next day and week and month. That's a Make Shift Coffee House.

Imagine then the educational outcome for participants having experienced a civil and engaged discussion with others who have distinctly different perceptions and values.

How They Work

Make Shift Coffee Houses are held on college campuses but also in public libraries, grange halls, church halls, school cafeterias, and many other places. The purpose is to help people understand each other's political views. There's always live music and free food and drinks. All people are always welcome and there is never a charge.

Make Shift Coffee Houses are moderated by Craig Freshley, a professional meeting facilitator with a passion to increase face-to-face civic dialogue and help people bridge the political divide. Craig has professionally facilitated almost 3,000 meetings for almost 1,000 nonprofits and hundreds of governments and corporations of all sizes in all sectors. He is the owner of a Good Group Decisions, Inc. and the author of *The Wisdom of Group Decisions*.



Why It Matters

America has been strong because of our unique political system, which works best when people with different views work together.

Right now, people are so politically divided that we're not working together. The incivility and contempt people show to "the other side" threaten what we love about America.

Make Shift Coffee House brings people together face-to-face across our political divides to learn from our differences and listen to each other with civility and respect. We demonstrate how it's done and inspire people to carry civil dialogue techniques into other settings. Make Shift Coffee House is providing a proven solution to a deeply concerning threat, and it's catching on.



When we understand and respect each other we can find positive solutions, even if we disagree. Our conversations help reduce conflict and gridlock so we can work together to build our state and our country.

Hosting Details

The most important role of a host college or university is to promote the event in ways that attract people with genuinely diverse political views, both from on campus and off campus. Craig has a lot of experience and advice on how to do this.

Other responsibilities include arranging a really great space for the event, arranging live music (student bands are awesome!) and providing coffee and food. In addition to reimbursement for Craig's travel expenses, financial remuneration is expected and supports our non-profit mission.

Recommendation

"Make Shift Coffee House has been an outstanding partner of Bowdoin College and Craig Freshley is a top-notch facilitator. Our collaborative programs have exposed Bowdoin students to diverse opinions from the outside community as well as within their own student body.



Creating forums to respectfully breach our increasing political divide is critical on college campuses.

I cannot recommend Make Shift Coffee House for colleges and universities enough!"

- Tom Ancona, Associate Director,
McKeen Center for the Common Good, Bowdoin College

Learn more at MakeShiftCoffeeHouse.com