



Topic and Resolution Toolkit

Developed by the College Debates and Discourse Alliance

What is a Braver Angels Debate resolution?

Simply put, a resolution is a statement that forms the basis for constructive arguments and discussion in a debate. It is a choice about where to *start* the debate, enabling speakers to express their diverging views on a given issue. As they unpack the resolution, opening speakers typically inspire deep listening and critical thinking in the debating audience, inviting others to express views of their own and explore rich complexities and nuances that inevitably unfold.

Resolutions must be formatted as “Resolved: [statement that takes a side].” For example, “Resolved: Guns keep people safe.” or “Resolved: Healthcare is a human right.” This ensures that there can be arguments made affirming and negating the statement.

Note: The selection of resolutions does not, in any way, reflect a statement of values on behalf of the College Debates and Discourse Alliance, its partner organizations, or representatives.

Why is topic / resolution development important?

The selection of a topic and formulation of a resolution are paramount to the success of a Braver Angles debate. A great resolution will accomplish two main objectives:

- Elicit a balanced split of opinion among debate participants.
- Inspire people on both sides of the issue to make their case.



A good resolution is often:

- Short and simple, avoiding clauses and qualifiers.
- Neither too broad nor overly specific.
- Relevant within a specific community, state, or society generally.
- Idea-descriptive rather than factual; you want to discuss ideas, NOT argue about facts!
- Actionable—pointing to an action that can be taken, not just to an attitude.

Some ways to phrase a resolution...

- “Should” / “should not”:
 - For example, “*Campuses should regulate speech.*”
- “More harm than good” / “more good than harm”:
 - For example, “*Regulating speech on campuses will do more harm than good.*”
- “Is” / “is not” , “Are” / “are not”:
 - For example, “*Cancel culture is a threat to higher education.*”

How to Select a Topic and Develop a Resolution



Brainstorm with members of your campus community

Think about issues that are highly salient on your campus, in your community, or in the nation more broadly. What are students, faculty, and staff currently talking about? While creating a long list of topics is a good place to start, narrowing it down to issues that elicit personal stories and lived experiences often creates the conditions for compelling speeches and an engaging debate between participants with differing views.

You can brainstorm topics directly, or come up with questions you hope the debate will help you explore, and then frame resolutions that will help steer the conversation in that direction.

- Before polling, with guidance and feedback from the CD&D national team, narrow down your topic list into 4-5 clear and concise resolutions.

Poll Your Potential Audience

Poll potential participants beforehand to determine which resolution will work best in a specific campus environment. Follow these important steps:

1. Copy the CD&D [Google Poll](#) template, and insert your selected resolutions.
2. Share the poll, using some or all of the methods below –
 - a. Send the poll to potential participants via email and message boards.
 - b. Create a “Save the Date” flyer with a QR code linking directly to the poll and post it in high-traffic areas on your campus.
 - c. Share the poll on social media.
 - d. Identify campus allies that can help you spread the poll even further.
3. Once the poll has been in circulation for **1-2 weeks**, review the results and complete the following steps to finalize your resolution.

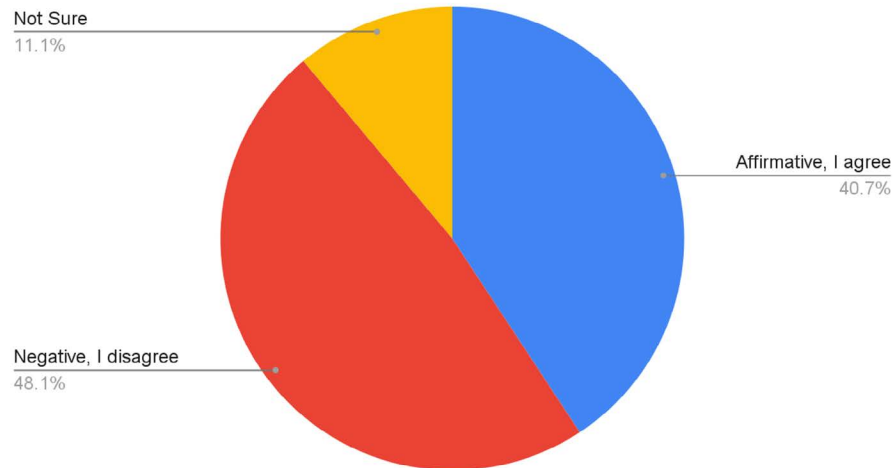
Note: More poll responses will help to better gauge of which resolution will work best for your community. Aim for 30-60 responses

Resolution Selection

Generally, a good resolution shows a balanced split in opinion. Look for resolutions that have roughly equal proportions of respondents who are in the affirmative and in the negative of the statement. A good balance might look like this:

Eliminate resolutions that are heavily skewed one way or the other.

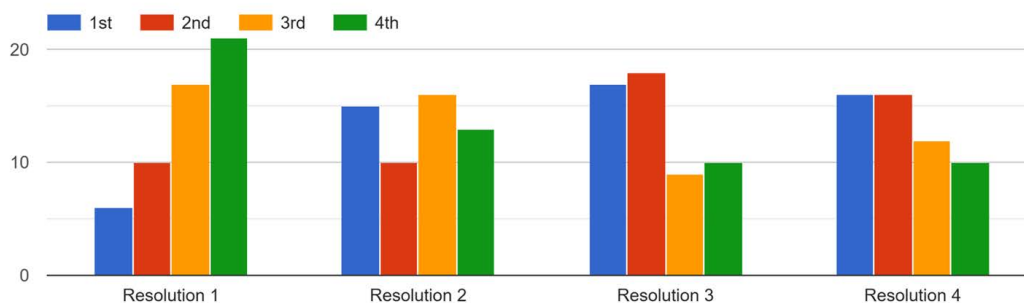
Which side of "[Insert Resolution]" are you on?



Finally, consider how a resolution ranks in popularity among the others. Ideally, a resolution will be the most polarizing and the most popular. However, oftentimes, this is not the case.

Gauge popularity only from resolutions that show a relatively close division of opinion.

Please rank the above list



Examples of College Debate Resolution Questions by Topic:

Following is a list of resolutions *written as questions*. In this format, they often serve as headlines in promoting our debates to encourage student engagement and participation. As previously noted, when you debate the topic, you will debate a decisive statement that puts participants in either the affirmative or negative. This will typically involve moving the word “should” or “is” to make the question a statement.

Speech and free expression:

- Should colleges disallow controversial speech that could be construed as hate speech?
- Should college campuses disinvite speakers whose ideas can be construed as cancellable?
- Should colleges impose limits on speech on their campuses?
- Should social media corporations have control over what is said on their platforms and who can use them?
- Is cancel culture erasing free speech in America?
- Is social media misinformation a threat to democracy?
- Does regulating social media content do more harm than good?

Abortion:

- Do the rights of a pregnant adult take precedence over the rights of a fetus?
- Should abortion have no restrictions within the United States?

Healthcare:

- Is healthcare a human right?
- Should our college require COVID vaccination for students and staff?
- Do public health considerations outweigh individual civil liberties?
- Should government provide healthcare for all citizens?

Gun control:

- Should the U.S. implement more restrictive gun laws to reduce crime?
- Should assault weapons be banned?
- Should average U.S. citizens be able to possess semi-automatic guns?
- Should the Second Amendment be abolished?
- Do gun-free zones make people safer?
- Should colleges and universities allow concealed carry on campus?

Education:

- Should schools teach Critical Race Theory?
- Do online college classes do more harm than good?
- Should colleges adopt a zero-tolerance policy for academic dishonesty?
- Does society unfairly prioritize sports over music and arts programs?
- Is ChatGPT a threat to higher education?
- Should student loan debt be forgiven?
- Should colleges and universities maintain institutional neutrality on social and political issues?



Do gun-free zones make people safer?

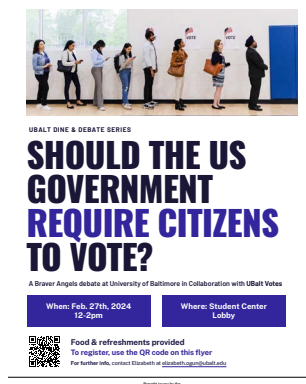
A Braver Angels debate for Western Carolina University students, faculty, and staff

WHERE: FOREST BUILDING, ROOM 101
WHEN: MONDAY, APRIL 22ND AT 6:00 PM

Food and refreshments will be provided at 6:00 pm, debate will begin at 6:30 pm.

For further info, contact
Diana Eiders at dmeiders@wcu.edu or
Kevin Lavery at klavery@wcu.edu
To register, use the QR code on this flyer

SPONSORED BY
The Barnes Family Foundation



UNALTY DINE & DEBATE SERIES

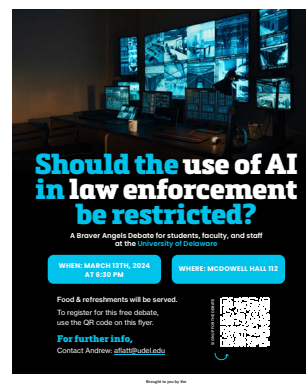
SHOULD THE US GOVERNMENT REQUIRE CITIZENS TO VOTE?

A Braver Angels debate at University of Baltimore in Collaboration with UnAlty Votes

When: Feb. 27th, 2024
12-2pm

Where: Student Center Lobby

Food & refreshments provided
To register, use the QR code on this flyer
For further info, contact Erika at erika@braverangels.org



Should the use of AI in law enforcement be restricted?

A Braver Angels debate for students, faculty, and staff at the University of Delaware

WHEN: MARCH 15TH, 2024
AT 6:30 PM

WHERE: McDOWELL HALL 102

Food & refreshments will be served.
To register for this free debate, use the QR code on this flyer.

For further info, Contact Andrew at andrew@udel.edu



Should the U.S. government implement reparations for historic racial injustices?

A Braver Angels debate for Denison students, staff and faculty in collaboration with the Liska Center for Intellectual Engagement

When: Thursday, October 26th - 11:30-1:15
Where: Shepardson College Room (Slayer 4th Floor)

To register for this free event, use the QR code on this flyer
For info, contact Robert Neithart: neithart_rj@denison.edu

Immigration:

- Should our immigration laws be changed to allow for quicker citizenship?
- Should children born on U.S. soil to non-citizens automatically have U.S. citizenship?
- Should the U.S. adopt a completely open borders policy?
- Should the U.S. build the southern border wall?

Assorted topics:

- Should monuments that are perceived as symbols of racism, such as Confederate statues, be removed from public view?
- Should police departments be defunded?
- Should local governments defund police departments and redirect funds toward alternative solutions for public safety?
- Should there be term limits for the Supreme Court?
- Do requirements for voter identification cards and restrictions on mail-in ballots suppress the voting rights of minorities?
- Should non-discrimination laws take precedence over religious liberty?
- Should women in the U.S. military be assigned combat roles?
- Should the U.S. military intervene in response to human rights violations?
- Should the minimum wage be raised at the Federal level?
- Should transgender athletes compete in sports according to the sex they were assigned at birth?
- Should gender-affirming healthcare only be accessible to individuals post-puberty?
- Should Americans receive Universal Basic Income?
- In the U.S., should the states develop their own climate change policies?
- Should the drinking age be lowered to 18?
- Should physician-assisted suicide be legalized?
- Does AI provide more benefit than harm to humanity?
- Does the two-party system in American politics do more harm than good?



If you have further questions or interest in hosting a workshop on your campus,
contact: swebb@goacta.org or dsprei@goacta.org.