



SUSTAINED DIALOGUE INSTITUTE

What is Sustained Dialogue[®]?

“Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others' concerns into their own picture, even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up their identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims so that they will act differently toward the other.”

--Dr. Harold Saunders, Founder of SDI

Sustained Dialogue (SD) is an intentional process used by citizens around the world to **transform relationships** and **implement sustainable change** in intergroup conflicts, especially intergroup identity clashes. It is rooted in the conflict resolution methodology developed by Dr. Hal Saunders, a senior U.S. diplomat and founder of the Sustained Dialogue Institute (SDI). During his involvement in international negotiations, including the Camp David Peace Accords and the Iran Hostage Crisis, Hal observed that participants' relationships evolved through a recognizable pattern that he distilled into a 5-stage dialogue-to-action process. In 1999, the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network (SDCN) formed as a student-created branch of SDI and has since spread to over 60 campuses worldwide.

Campus Applications

SD organizers gather participants from diverse backgrounds into small groups that meet regularly to build relationships and develop informed strategies to improve their campuses and communities, especially around the following dimensions of identity:

<i>Mental Health</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Socioeconomic Status/Class</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sexual Orientation</i>
<i>Political Affiliation</i>	<i>Sex & Gender</i>	<i>Race & Color</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Ability Status</i>

While SD looks different on different campuses, most groups incorporate the following elements:

- Multiple dialogue groups of 8 to 15 participants meet for a semester or year.
- Some campuses have an SD course or incorporate SD aspects into a current course.
- Two trained peer moderators lead each dialogue group.
- SD leaders support groups logistically and hold events to include the larger community.
- Learn more on page 4 about structuring, but SD is sustained in three ways:
 1. **Participants:** Each SD group maintains the same participants and moderators.
 2. **Agenda:** Each meeting is designed to continue where the last ended.
 3. **Time:** Dialogues meet consistently at an appointed weekly time for at least an hour.

Campuses learn the **five-stage process of Sustained Dialogue** from SDI trainers:

Stage 1: The group comes together

Stage 2: They discuss personal experiences that relate to community concerns

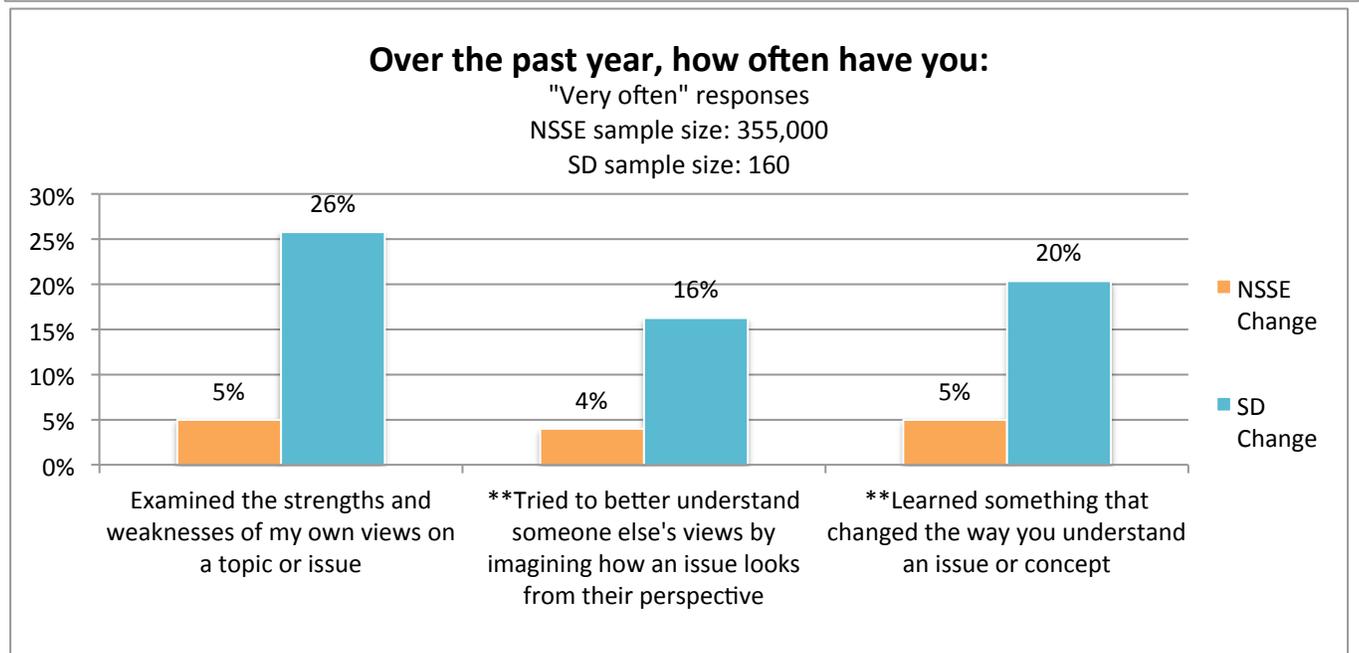
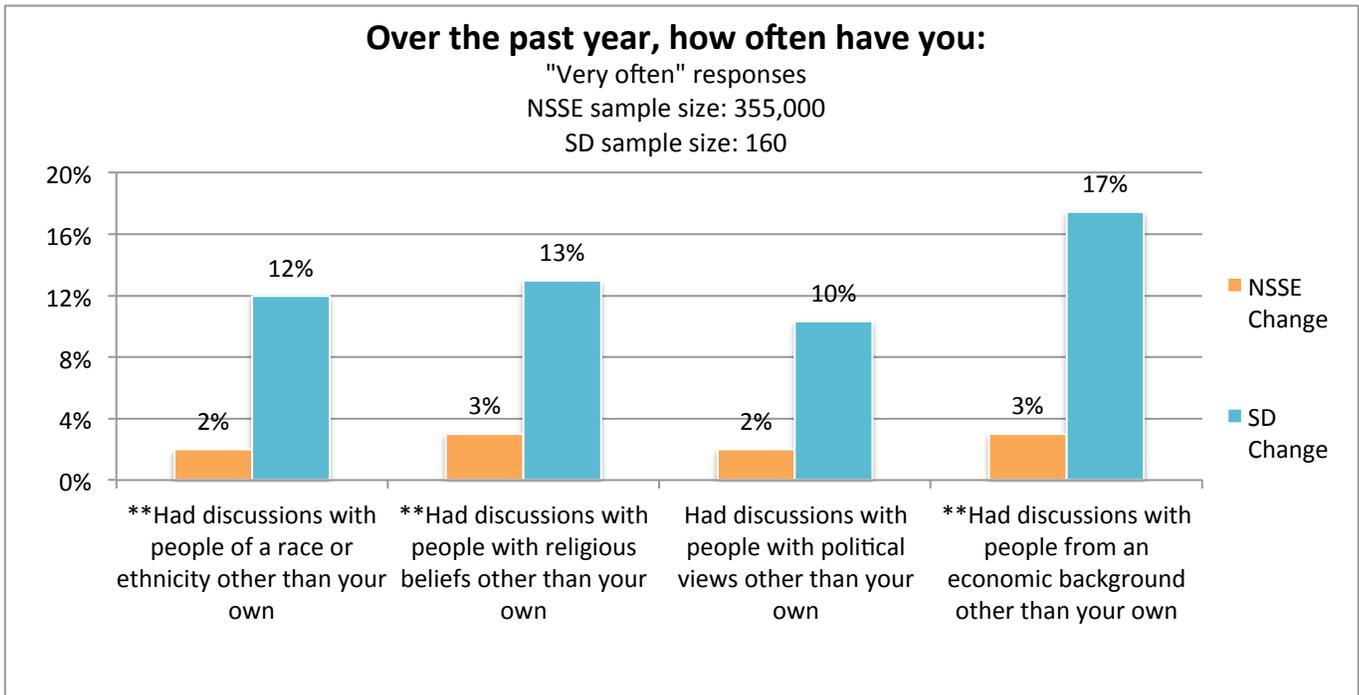
Stage 3: They pick an issue to focus on and work to analyze the root causes

Stages 4 & 5: They plan and execute action/advocacy around their chosen issue

What impact should campuses using SD expect?

Through these experiences, participants develop a diverse set of leadership skills, including strong personal identity awareness, knowledge of social justice concepts and systemic inequities, empathy, facilitation and conflict resolution skills, and more.

SDCN conducts pre- and post- dialogue surveys for student participants based on key measures from questions similar to The National Survey on Student Engagement, NSSE. Compared with NSSE statistics in 2015, total percentages of participants who responded "Very often" to the following questions were as such (** indicates statistically significant results in the SD data):



After participating in Sustained Dialogue, respondents are:

Significantly more likely to:

- Think critically about the experiences of others and how they can be improved
- Feel comfortable talking about their experiences and identities in front of a groups of their peers
- Try to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from their perspective
- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic or issue
- Raise awareness about local or campus issues
- Organize others to work on local or campus issues, as well as on state, national, or global issues
- Have discussions with people who are different from them in terms of: Religious beliefs and economic background

Significantly more able to:

- Resolve conflicts that involve bias, discrimination, and prejudice
- Lead a group where people from different backgrounds feel welcomed and included
- Explain the college climate towards diversity, issues that arise between students, and why issues persist

Impact internationally:

Sustained Dialogue is used at over 20 campuses across Sudan, Zimbabwe, Mexico, and Ethiopia. In a randomized field trial* conducted comparing two-term SD participants at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia with students who did not participate, the study found statistically significant attitudinal change:

- A decrease in mistrust
- An increase in trust between people of different ethnic origin
- An increased sense of ethnic identity
- An increased perception of being ethnically discriminated
- An increase in accommodative feelings towards students of other ethnicities leading to resulting positive relationships

*Svensson, Isak and Karen Brounéus. "Dialogue and interethnic trust: A randomized field trial of 'sustained dialogue' in Ethiopia." *Journal of Peace Research* (August 20, 2013): 1-13. Available at:

<http://jpr.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/08/19/0022343313492989>

Where can I turn for more information about Sustained Dialogue?

For more information on the campus application or more detail from our annual reports, please contact info@sustaineddialogue.org. The tenets of SD work have also been described in Hal Saunders' books, including *A Public Peace Process* (2001), *Politics is about Relationship* (2005), and *Sustained Dialogue in Conflict* (2012).

A Checklist For Building SD

As you're considering, a great way to learn the process is to check in with the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network staff with your questions. Use this checklist as you learn more about the process.

- SD groups include 8 to 15 participants and are moderated by two fully trained peer moderators who previously participated in SD. Many groups run on campus at any given time.
- Groups can be formed to affect any large community challenge. Most often, they are formed to improve challenging relationships between social identity groups or to approach large-scale intergroup conflicts, rather than to approach issues like parking, weather, or who likes which foods.
- Dialogue groups start with agreements to attend and interact peacefully. Each dialogue group creates and maintains a list of group norms/ ground rules that create openness to share, instead of intimidating or silencing certain voices or experiences.
- SD meetings are not one-time events, but are sustained in three main ways:
 - **Time & Duration:** SD groups meet consistently at an appointed weekly time for at least an hour.
 - **Participants & Moderators:** Each SD group maintains the same participants and moderators.
 - **Continuity of Conversation:** Each meeting is designed to continue where the last one ended.
- Dialogue groups typically meet more than 7 times for at least an hour each time.
- Dialogues focus on learning about the real personal experiences of the others in the group to build empathy and relationships across lines of difference. They are not meant to debate issues, "win" people to one side, or impress group members with conceptual thinking.
- SD dialogues seek to meet two goals: 1) improving relationships across lines of difference AND 2) taking concrete action to improve communities. Thus, to do so, the dialogue moves through the 5 stages of SD.
- Later meetings should become less focused on experiences and more focused on actions that can improve group relations in the present community in relevant, organized, and strategic ways.
- Each meeting is closed after moderators lead a thorough process of feedback, called debriefing, to establish how process, facilitation, and content followed SD process. Debriefing also should establish the next meeting's agenda based on participant interests.
- SD dialogues use a relational approach to facilitation. The focus is NOT on presenting interesting topics, but rather on how group members share, interact, respond, and understand each other. Adherence to the process allows for improved group relationships that lead to informed, concrete community change.
- SD is never used for topics that require relevant professional support without that support being present, especially around mandatory reporting guidelines, such as intent to harm others or self, abuse, experiences with sexual assault, etc.

If the way you learned SD is different from any of these items, please get in contact with someone either at SDCN or on your campus to chat about it.