**Conversations That Make a Difference**

12 p.m. on a Friday afternoon. A group of students and staff gather in the living room of the Glover Alston Center. As they sit on plush sofas and munch on pizza from Sweet Basil Pizzeria, Daphne Gallegos ’19 leads the group in a discussion about hostile attitudes and behaviors that can occur during campus interactions.

The session begins with the group chatting with their neighbor about situations that appeared unwelcoming. After a few minutes of private discussion, Gallegos wrangles the group together for an open dialogue, during which the participants share their experiences and offer honest feedback to Gallegos’ discussion points.

Somewhat hidden within the group is Interfaith Chaplain Adam Kirtley, his watchful eyes steward every weekly session of Continuing the Conversation.

“My title is interfaith chaplain, so I consider the golden rule sometimes when it comes to treating people how you would want to be treated,” Kirtley said. “When I apply it to that space, I would say treat everyone as you would want to be treated, challenge as you would be challenged, confront as you would be confronted.”

CTC is an extension of the Power and Privilege Symposium, which takes place each February. It began from a suggestion from students that Whitman provide a platform that would allow the topics and conversations that occur during Power and Privilege to be explored throughout the school year.

“I was part of a small group discussing solutions and I got the idea that we could maybe do one every week,” Kirtley said. “Basically, if there are 40 sessions over the course of one day, there’s a lot of people who are making hard choices about which ones to go to.”

Unlike the session dedicated to campus hostility, topics selected for CTC were originally based off the P&P panel discussions, but as CTC grew, Kirtley became flooded with requests from students, faculty and staff to host a CTC and bring an issue worthy of discussion to the forefront.

For Gallegos, her decision to facilitate a CTC on hostility came from dialogue that she was hearing among different peer groups. She noticed the topic was trending in casual conversations and decided to act.

“I believe that CTC is definitely a way to get people's palates prepared to engage in P&P in the coming months, but mostly, I think it’s a way to continue practicing the analysis of Whitman’s campus on days other than one day a year in February,” Gallegos said. “It makes conversations more relevant and provides a time and place for people to gather, talk and share.”

Continuing the Conversation, along with P&P, MLK events and Holocaust Remembrance, provide opportunities for students to express themselves about issues that can be the catalyst that spark change.

Kirtley prefers to not interject during the hour-long student run session, and enjoys sitting and learning with fellow participants. He believes his main role is fulfilled before each session by curating the content and filling the room. He also opens each session by explaining the purpose for CTC.

 “I think there are ways to have difficult conversations that doesn’t necessarily mean that we all hold hands and sing ‘Kumbaya’ at the end,” Kirtley said. “But there’s a modicum of decency and civility that we can hold even in the midst of disagreeing.”