

Heterodox Academy is made up of more than 5,400 members from a range of demographic backgrounds and academic disciplines, holding various institutional roles all over the United States and beyond. As would be expected from such a heterogeneous network, our members hold a range of views on virtually any topic up for discussion. As an organization, we prize pluralism and we value constructive disagreement.

However, we do not promote viewpoint diversity for its own sake. Our primary goal is to improve research and teaching at colleges and universities. We recognize that institutions of higher learning are not “public squares” in the traditional sense, but rather sites for the production and dissemination of knowledge. To facilitate these objectives, we embrace a particular set of norms and values, which we call “The HxA Way.” We encourage our members to embody these in all of their professional interactions.

The HxA Way

1 Make your case with evidence.

Link to that evidence whenever possible (for online publications, on social media), or describe it when you can't (such as in talks or conversations). Any specific statistics, quotes, or novel facts should have ready citations from credible sources.

2 Be intellectually charitable.

Viewpoint diversity is not incompatible with moral or intellectual rigor — in fact it enhances moral and intellectual agility. However, one should always try to engage with the strongest form of a position one disagrees with (that is, “steel-manning” opponents rather than “straw-manning” them). You should be able to describe your interlocutor's position in a manner that they would, themselves, agree with (see: “Ideological Turing Test”). Try to acknowledge, when possible, the ways in which the actor or idea you are criticizing may be right — be it in part or in full. Look for reasons why the beliefs others hold may be compelling, and assume that others are roughly as reasonable, informed, and intelligent as you.

3 Be intellectually humble.

Take seriously the prospect that you may be wrong. Be genuinely open to changing your mind about an issue if this is what is expected of interlocutors (although the purpose of exchanges across difference need not always be to “convert” someone, as explained here). Acknowledge the limitations to one's own arguments and data as relevant.

4 Be constructive.

The objective of most intellectual exchanges should not be to “win,” but rather to have all parties come away from an encounter with a deeper understanding of our social, aesthetic and natural worlds. Try to imagine ways of integrating strong parts of an interlocutor's positions into one's own. Don't just criticize, consider viable positive alternatives. Try to work out new possibilities, or practical steps that could be taken to address the problems under consideration. The corollary to this guidance is to avoid sarcasm, contempt, hostility, and snark. Generally target ideas rather than people. Do not attribute negative motives to people you disagree with as an attempt at dismissing or discrediting their views. Avoid hyperbole when describing perceived problems or (especially) one's adversaries — for instance, do not analogize people to Stalin, Hitler/the Nazis, Mao, the antagonists of *1984*, etc.

5 Be yourself.

At Heterodox Academy, we believe that successfully changing unfortunate dynamics in any complex system or institution will require people to stand up — to leverage, and indeed stake, their social capital on holding the line, pushing back against adverse trends and leading by example. This not only has an immediate and local impact, it also helps spread awareness, provides models for others to follow, and creates permission for others to stand up as well. This is why Heterodox Academy does not allow for anonymous membership; membership is a meaningful commitment precisely because it is public.