



great minds don't always think alike

Community Guidelines

HxA Member Forum Moderation Policies

Last updated January 18, 2024

In service to our [mission](#), Heterodox Academy works to promote open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in higher education. As a private organization, HxA sponsors a wide range of programs and communities, online and offline. Most HxA communities are led and moderated by member volunteers, while some are moderated by HxA staff. Participation is always voluntary.

HxA conversations are examples of ordered liberty. As in a classroom, faculty meeting, or academic conference, we insist that all *people* are treated with civility. Unlike in some academic settings, we do not restrict the *ideas* that may be discussed.

Put another way, we have rules about *how* HxA-related topics should be discussed, not *which views* can be shared about those topics.

Because our resources are limited and our mission is urgent, HxA reserves the right to adjust rules and allowed topics, divide or consolidate discussion groups, and open or close groups in response to interest, discussion quality, and staff capacity. Feedback is welcome at membership@heterodoxacademy.org.

About this Version:

This revised version includes updated policies regarding ad hominem, repetitive posting, and moderation procedures.

The HxA Way

The HxA Way describes, in detail, our aspirations for all HxA events and interactions. By joining HxA and participating in our forums, you agree to strive to follow the HxA Way (see below). We acknowledge, however, that the HxA Way is too general and aspirational to serve as hard rules for forum engagement.

Member Forum Rules

TL;DR Keep it confidential. Promote discussion about HxA-related topics. Talk about ideas, not people. Don't spam, be abusive, or do political electioneering. Try to follow the HxA Way.

1. All viewpoints are welcome.

Heterodox Academy does not moderate forum activity based on views or opinions expressed, or based on a member's larger set of personal or professional views, or personal or professional associations. This includes so-called far-right or far-left politics, devout religious or committed atheist views, and so forth.

When comments are otherwise in keeping with the rules listed here, they will *not* be removed on subjective grounds of being inherently "harmful" or "hateful." The best response to a mistaken idea is to share a better one.

2. Maintain the privacy of HxA online forums.

HxA's online communities, including the Member Portal, are private, invitation-only discussion spaces. Discussions should not be shared via screenshot, copy-and-paste, etc., outside of the online community. Although HxA cannot guarantee confidentiality, we encourage all to follow the [Chatham House rules](#). Members can share information they have received in the portal but should not reveal any identifying information about others in the portal.

3. Stay on-topic and add value to the conversation.

A. All posts should be clearly connected to some element of [HxA's mission](#), particularly open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and/or constructive disagreement within educational institutions, and the conditions for the same.

HxA's online communities are for professional conversations about topics like university policies, campus life, teaching and pedagogy, research and publications, and career advice.

General news, events, and political discussion should not be posted. Discussion of news or events tangentially related to HxA, its mission, higher education, free speech, etc., will also be considered off-topic. Such threads will be closed at HxA's discretion.

B. No repetitive comments, spam, or solicitation.

This includes posting links to offers, incoherent or illegible messages, repeatedly posting identical or nearly identical messages, and selling of any kind. All user contributions should be good-faith discussion attempts.

If you recently published a book or other material that is relevant to HxA's mission, feel free to share the details but not repeatedly.

This also includes replies to your own posts. There are many great places on the Internet for longform writing, blogging, etc. This space is for conversation and engagement, so allow other users to respond to your post before adding more of your own comments.

C. Posts with links should include context and/or a question for other forum users. All posts should be addressed to all members and include a good-faith attempt at discussion. Twitter-style posts with only a link and a casual comment, or "open letters" to specific individuals inside or outside of the forum, are not allowed.

D. Do not double-post.

Please don't create a new thread on a specific topic that has already been discussed within the last week, or post identical or similar comments repeatedly within the same week, or share the same link repeatedly in multiple threads.

E. Debate about HxA itself is welcome. Personal gripes are not.

HxA has a proud tradition of open discussion about HxA itself. Critiques of HxA's programs, policies, and priorities, with illustrative examples as helpful to a larger argument, are allowed.

Detailed personal complaints and grievances, or demands for action or answers from HxA moderators or staff, do not invite engagement and are better communicated directly. Such posts and comments will be considered off-topic.

This includes posts about the forum itself. Such posts do not add value to the conversation, nor do they encourage participation from other forum users. Feedback or questions about the forum should be shared directly with HxA staff (membership@heterodoxacademy.org).

4. No *ad hominem* attacks.

Disagreements will happen, and we hope that they do. We just ask that they happen in a constructive and respectful way.

If you disagree with something, respond constructively to the ideas and positions at play. Commentary should not focus on an individual(s) (e.g., do not resort to name-calling, veiled references, or using demeaning labels to refer to other members) or their personal characteristics. This policy extends to HxA staff. If you disagree with HxA, discuss the policy, not the person.

Forum users who post *ad hominem* will receive an email from HxA. Three violations will result in removal from the forum.

Examples of *ad hominem*:

- Direct or indirect name-calling or use of insulting or demeaning labels (e.g. "There's no need to be a jerk about it")
- Slurs based on race, sex, ethnicity, or sexual orientation
- Casual or disrespectful terms in lieu of someone's name, e.g., referring to "this guy" or "the communist" or "fools among us."
- Dismissive characterizations or assumptions about another person's preparation or thinking : "You must not know.... You clearly never studied... You seem to have a problem with reading comprehension."
- Using political or ideological labels to describe another member who has not identified as such: "you are a.... right-winger," "leftist," "MAGA," "fascist," "communist," etc.

Not *ad hominem*:

- Use of political labels to describe ideas, policies, or public figures
- Respectful discussion of relevant training and expertise

5. No threats or violent rhetoric.

Violent rhetoric can have a chilling effect on conversations in the forum and discourage other members from participating at all. Many forum members have never met in person, and reasonable members should not have to wonder whether an online comment includes a veiled threat or indicates a willingness to commit violence.

Violent references to individuals or groups of people *outside* HxA membership are not exempt from this policy, even if the referenced person or group will never see the message.

Examples of threats or violent rhetoric:

- Direct threats such as, “I am going to kill you” or “I would like to wipe that smirk off his face”
- Vague/ominous/indirect warnings or references such as, “Mess around and find out” or “Be very careful what you say to me”
- Conventional idioms in unconventional use, e.g. “I would give you a slap in the face”

Not violent rhetoric:

- Conventional idioms in conventional use, e.g. “this decision is a slap in the face to professors,” “fighting for a cause,” “killing an initiative,” or “the war on liberty”

Topical discussions of crime, war, capital punishment, protests, etc. may naturally include substantive discussions of violence; these, as such, are not considered violent rhetoric.

6. No abuse or harassment.

Do not:

- send multiple messages in an attempt to force someone to answer you;
- follow another member from one post to another, referring to previous conversations;
- send unwelcome or repeated messages to another member via other channels;

- make comments that violate the rules, but describe them as “kidding” or “joking”;
- flag content that is objectionable to you in some way not detailed in these rules; or
- encourage others to do any of the above.

7. No electioneering.

As a tax-exempt 501(c)3, Heterodox Academy is legally forbidden from advocating for or against any particular political candidate, political party, legislation, or ballot initiative. To protect this status, we prohibit partisan or campaign-related content.

Examples of electioneering:

- Encouraging members to vote, volunteer, or donate for a certain candidate, party, or ballot initiative.
- Giving a candidate, campaign, political party, PAC or any group working in a partisan political manner access to the portal or a list of forum members.
- Forwarding a communication from a candidate, campaign, political party, PAC or any partisan political group.

Not electioneering:

- Discussion of politics and policy as they relate to HxA issues, such as the implications of an election for open inquiry or the political incentives of higher education regulators

8. No sharing outside content or information without permission.

This includes contact information or content from other outlets for which you do not have permission to share. This also includes private communications; do not share private conversations in the HxA Portal without the permission of all parties.

Procedures for Moderation

Moderators regularly review posts, independently. Members may report posts or comments to the admin(s) if they feel they violate the policies above. *Please do so sparingly; flagging posts aggressively or without reference to a specific rule violation is itself against the rules.*

To flag a post or comment for review in the Member Portal: click the arrow at the top right of any post or comment, then click Flag. You can also email membership@heterodoxacademy.org. Posts that are flagged by more than one member receive priority for review.

Volunteer moderators have the discretion to exercise moderation in the best interest of their communities. In forums with HxA staff moderators, decisions about moderation are made by at least two HxA staff members.

HxA moderators also reserve the right to remove comments and/or close threads. This is most likely in cases of abuse, harassment, violent rhetoric, spam/solicitation, double-posting, or electioneering, but may happen for other reasons after a public or private warning.

HxA reserves the right to moderate and manage access to all discussion venues that are operated by HxA. This includes closing threads that are no longer active or adding value to the conversation, at our sole discretion.

The HxA team works to create resources, support communities, put on conferences, and so forth. We can't promise to also spend time communicating moderation decisions. In some cases, HxA moderators may send a public or private warning or request for the member to revise or remove the comment. This is most likely for posts that are off-topic or lacking an attempt at discussion (e.g., Twitter-style posts.)

Multiple or severe rule violations may result in a temporary suspension or permanent removal from the group, at HxA's sole discretion. Moderation decisions may be appealed by email to president@heterodoxacademy.org.

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FAQ

Why does HxA have moderation rules at all? Doesn't that violate free speech? HxA members prize open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement. Generally speaking, when we talk about ideas instead of each other, it's not difficult to enjoy all three. We have moderation rules to ensure that our

online platforms host discussions that are valuable to our members, aligned with our mission, and do not compromise HxA's nonprofit status.

Legally speaking, this is a private and voluntary forum, and a form of free association. Ethically, HxA has the right to establish ground rules for communication just like any other association or institution.

If a comment of mine is removed, how can I find out why?

The HxA team prioritizes several mission-focused and member-facing items. Regrettably, we can't promise to also spend time communicating all forum moderation decisions.

What checks are there on HxA staff acting in a biased manner?

Decisions about moderation are made by at least two HxA staff members to ensure no single person is responsible for making moderation decisions. Moderation decisions may be appealed to president@heterodoxacademy.org.

The HxA Way

In order to best promote open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement, we embrace a particular set of norms and values, which we have taken to calling "The HxA Way." We encourage our members to embody these in all of their professional interactions and we insist upon these norms and values for those publishing on our platforms or participating in our events.

Even for those who are not members and not publishing on our platforms or participating in our events, we believe that these values can help foster more robust and constructive engagement across lines of difference.

We encourage you to print out the document and hang it up in your office or classroom.

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 actually 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-man” opponents rather than “straw-manning” them). One should be able to describe their interlocutor’s position in a manner 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, under the assumption that others are roughly as reasonable, informed, and intelligent as oneself.

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.