Semester in Dialogue Alumni Survey 2018

Simon Fraser University’s Undergraduate Semester in Dialogue was founded in 2002, and quickly became one of SFU’s signature programs. It’s mission was simple: a one-semester, intensive learning experience to inspire students with a sense of civic responsibility, encourage their passion for improving society and provide them with the tools they need to be effective agents for positive change in their communities.

The initial two years were a pilot project, one semester/year, the first on the subject of “Nature, Environment and Society,” followed by the 2003 “Urban Experience.” In 2004 the Semester began offering two semesters/year, and by 2006 had expanded with a third, shorter summer offering. In total, 44 Semesters in Dialogue have been offered, hosting a total of 820 students (up to and including Fall 2018).

The Semester’s learning approaches are unique, and even today remain at the forefront of innovation in Canadian education. Our approach is based on a triad of interacting elements:

- Dialogue: deep listening and learning to discover meaning among diverse participants. Class time is structured to encourage conversations in which students are on equal footing with guests.

- Experiential: emphasizes learning through doing. Students apply skills in the real world, reflect on the results and use this learning to provide context for their future activities.

- Community engaged: Students partner with community organizations on projects, convene community dialogues to address pressing issues and host community thought leaders in the classroom.

While these core elements of the Semester in Dialogue (SID) have continued, we have diversified the contexts and structures of our offerings. In addition to the traditional 13-week SID, we now offer a shorter seven-week summer Semester and a CityStudio Semester in collaboration with the City of Vancouver. We are also beginning to assist SFU Departments and Faculties to offer their own Semesters in Dialogue; the first such “Semester In” program will be offered in Spring 2019 through FCAT, focused on Alternate Realities. Full details about the SID and our pedagogy are available at our website and through a learning guide we prepared (available to interested faculty upon request).

We conduct extensive evaluations at the end of each semester, and student satisfaction has always been very high. However, we wanted to ascertain whether students remain positive long after graduation, determine what they are doing now, and explore whether SID had an impact in what they do professionally and personally, and how they do it. It’s our 15th anniversary, an appropriate time to celebrate with . . . a Survey!
We were able to contact 550 of our alumni, and 131 responded, 17% of all alumni and 24% of those we were able to contact, a notably high response rate indicative of the close ties alumni still feel with our program. The survey was designed with a combination of quantitative (range of “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” and “1-10” options) and deeper, more thought-provoking questions.

Overall, the survey confirmed that our alumni move quickly and successfully into their professional lives, with varied careers that hold in common a commitment to community engagement. It was also clear that the Semester in Dialogue’s learning objectives have been successful, as our graduates overwhelmingly emphasized how they have incorporated what they learned into their personal and professional lives.

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Background and Methodology

*Analysis prepared by Nicole Armos for the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue*

To mark our 15th anniversary, the Semester in Dialogue conducted a survey of alumni in February 2018 to explore the impact the program has had on students’ personal and professional lives. Survey questions (see Appendix A) were designed in consultation with Semester in Dialogue staff and select alumni. Some questions asked identifying information, but all questions were optional, allowing respondents to decide on their degree of disclosure.

The survey invited responses from the 767 alumni who had completed the program in one of the first 41 cohorts, from Fall 2002 to Fall 2017. We were able to email the survey link directly to 550 alumni, using a previously established alumni list as well as course email lists for each of the Semesters. The email addresses of the remaining 217 alumni were no longer active or not included in our databases. To reach these alumni, we encouraged email recipients to share the survey with their cohort, and the survey was also promoted on the Semester in Dialogue and Centre for Dialogue social media accounts.

Response rates varied between questions, but 131 alumni completed some or all of the survey, representing 17% of all alumni, and 24% of those who received the survey via email.

![Figure 1. Survey response rate](image)

Responses were fairly evenly distributed among the cohorts, with an average of 3 responses per cohort, or 8 responses per year.
Alumni Updates

Since graduating from the Semester in Dialogue, responding alumni have been busy working, studying, and volunteering in their communities. The majority of respondents still live in the Metro Vancouver area, although about a third have moved to other parts of Canada or abroad (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Survey response rate by cohort year

Figure 3. Residence of alumni respondents, February 2018

Most responding alumni described career trajectories that have included studying and working across multiple disciplines and sectors. The following summary offers an overview of respondent’s current or most recent endeavours.

Alumni in Government

19 respondents are working in government positions, including 10 at the municipal level in BC, 7 at the provincial level in BC or Ontario, and 2 at the federal level. Respondents’ roles include a mayor, a city planner, a community transportation planning engineer, a legislative intern, and employees of BC Public Service, Work Safe BC, WorkBC, BC Hydro, an MLA office, and the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. Additionally, one respondent described how they ran as an MLA candidate in a recent election.

“I was accepted into foreign service development program. I have over 10 years of federal public service with the Privy Council Office, Foreign Affairs and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.”
“I ran my own business, co-founded a community sustainability organization, worked as a community facilitator, and now am the Mayor of Prince Rupert, BC.”

“I am currently working for an MLA in Vancouver […] inspired by my chance to talk and connect with politicians during my Semester in Dialogue.”

“I found my passion in program and policy evaluation, and now work for the federal government as a senior evaluator, assessing the impact of my department’s programs and activities.”

“I worked as a foreign service officer for 4 years, working on humanitarian and security concerns in Africa and the Middle East. I also spent 2 years working on Canada’s responses to natural disasters abroad, including the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. I represented Canada at the United Nations and negotiated humanitarian resolutions on behalf of Canada in 2009 and 2010. I returned to Vancouver from Ottawa in 2011 and completed a master’s degree in International Studies at SFU in 2013. I then began working as a case manager at WorkSafeBC in the Mental Health Claims Unit. I currently work as a review officer in the appeals division at WorkSafeBC. I continue to be engaged in the urban environment and involve myself politically at all levels to improve my city and country, while also engaging on international humanitarian issues.”

Alumni in Dialogue and Civic Engagement

At least 8 respondents described how they continued to pursue careers in dialogue and civic engagement, working and studying at high-profile institutions and initiatives at the local, national, and international level. Respondents included the current Executive Director of SFU Public Square, the Program Director of SFU’s Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, and 3 alumni who have worked in short-term roles as research assistants and communications coordinators at Public Square and the Centre for Dialogue.

“My dialogue minor exposed to the world of facilitation and consultation, and I have since become a member of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) and attended two conferences and gained three certificates from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). During my studies I also earned a Certificate for Professional Development in Public Participation from the BC Population Prosperity Initiative (BCPPI).”

“Working for the Berghof Foundation in Germany on innovative dialogue formats for conflict transformation in conflict-affected countries and regions […] Working with Mediators Beyond Borders in Sierra Leone, training leaders in dialogue facilitation to host community dialogues to prevent pre-election violence, and more recently to respond to individual and community needs following the Ebola epidemic. […] Working with Reconciliation Canada to design and deliver Reconciliation Dialogue workshops to transform relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.”
Alumni in Non-Profit and Social Impact Sector

At least 17 respondents work in the non-profit or social impact sector, supporting initiatives in housing, environmental conservation and education, literacy, community health, social entrepreneurship, sustainable food systems, and international development. Positions include instructors, outreach workers, program coordinators, public relations professionals, volunteer and fund development managers, and marketing specialists. One respondent became an ordained Minister.

“I moved to Toronto to work for the Canadian International Council […] worked with Teach for Canada, Munk Debates, Donner Prize, Asia Pacific Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation […] Currently the Director of Ideas & Insights at the Institute for Canadian Citizenship.”

“I currently work with the Gibsons Marine Education Centre, which is a new facility working to bring marine education to the sunshine Coast about local marine ecosystems and the importance of the marine world to children and the general public.”

“For the last 18 months I have been employed with Sole Food Street farms, a social enterprise featured in our dialogue studies that emphasizes political economy and sustainable food systems as integral pillars.”

“I have been working in international development focused on civil society, governance, gender, and social inclusion in Afghanistan, Kenya, Mozambique, Bangladesh, and Cambodia.”

“I traveled in India and helped to develop an environmental education programme at an ecological research centre in the Andaman Islands. I am currently working for the Green School Foundation at Green School in Bali.”

Alumni in Private Sector

At least 14 respondents work in the private sector, within industries such as finance, communication and technology, transportation, design, agriculture, tourism, natural resources, and environmental consulting. Respondents’ roles include web development, marketing, project management, communications, and business analysis. 5 respondents described how they previously launched or are currently working in their own business.

“I’m a Project Manager in Marketing, Branding and Logistics. One neat project I’ve been working on is creating a new corporate recycling program to achieve a 90% company waste diversion target; we’ve rolled this new recycling program out to over 25 sites, impacting 3000 people to date.”

“I’m currently at Launch Academy, a tech incubator in Vancouver, as the Marketing and Events Manager.”

“Certified Health, Safety and Environment Advisor for Cenvous Energy, Co-Founder of Dominion Cider Co. LTD, and apple farmer in Summerland, BC
“I’m one of my organization’s go-to facilitators and public engagement practitioners.”

“Since graduating from the Semester in Dialogue, I studied graphic design at Emily Carr and coaching and leadership development at The Coaches Training Institute and launched my business right out of school. For the past 4 years I’ve been working for myself full time.”

Alumni in Academia, Research, and Education

At least 11 respondents work in higher education, including 5 respondents who have held positions as faculty members or instructors, and 6 who are working in administration or student services in post-secondary institutions. One respondent co-founded the Change Lab program at SFU with another Semester in Dialogue alumni, and also founded the RADIUS fellowship program at SFU. 2 other respondents reported that they are RADIUS fellows and mentors.

Additionally, at least 6 respondents are currently working in local, national, and international research projects, including one respondent who is a research coordinator at BC Children’s Hospital.

4 respondents reported that they pursued careers in K-12 education, and one pursued a career as a librarian.

“After I completed my Semester in Dialogue, I began my fundraising career within the not for profit sector. I have enjoyed working for various organizations, including Science World, UBC and the Arts Club Theatre Company. I have recently completed my master's degree at Carleton University within the Philanthropy and Not-for-Profit Leadership program. I now work at SFU in the Advancement Office building off of my knowledge gained from my graduate work and my passion for philanthropy.”

Alumni in Law and Medicine

4 respondents reported that they had completed medical school and are currently finishing their residency. Additionally, one respondent completed a master’s degree in occupational therapy and is working at BC Children’s Hospital, while another is active in the field of midwifery. 2 respondents pursued careers in law.

“During law school I worked in the fields of environmental and indigenous law, assisting with the campaign to stop the Northern Gateway pipeline. I also worked for a legal clinic representing low-income clients that had been charged with crimes. After graduating in
2012 I have been working with the City of Toronto as a labour, employment, and human rights lawyer. I also serve on the board of Aboriginal Legal Services.”

“I completed a master’s degree in occupational therapy in 2010. Since then I have primarily been working at BC Children's hospital, originally on their surgical unit and the last few years in mental health. have been professionally engaged through involvement with my professional organization (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists) as well as participated in instructing students as a clinical supervisor and faculty member and tutorial leader.”

Alumni in the Arts, Culture, and Media

9 respondents described their work in the arts, culture, or media, including in journalism, music, design, videography, photography, writing, editing, and community arts programming.

“I have been a practicing and quite serious amateur musician since graduating. I have performed at the Dawson City Music Festival, the Keno City Music Festival, Soupstock Festival, as well as several house gigs at bars and many assorted small concerts.”

“I have written arts journalism for local and national publications; was the managing editor of a poetry book, which was published with Anvil Press; and participated in craftivism projects online and at local maker-faires.”

“I received a Fulbright scholarship to attend Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. I worked for several years in local Vancouver media, first at The Vancouver Sun, then at CBC.”

“I am the Executive and Creative Director of Creative Okanagan Artist and Event Development Society.”

“I finished a master’s degree in Journalism at UBC. Now working full time as an investigative reporter with Discourse Media.”

“I found a job at Vancouver Mural Festival and have been meaningfully employed in public arts, culture, and civic engagement.”

Graduate Education or Second Degrees

Some respondents reported that they are continuing or have just completed their undergraduate programs. At least 21 respondents are currently pursuing further education, through graduate school or other professional programs, while at least 32 have completed programs beyond their undergraduate degree.

“I worked as a systems and service designer in hospitals and health systems in Canada and the US, including at the Mayo Clinic Center for Innovation & Center for Addiction and Mental Health. Currently doing PhD in Sweden on understanding and shifting social norms related to health and care through design.”
“My PhD project concerns the intersection of homelessness and migration policy and politics in a European context.”

Volunteer Initiatives

Additionally, respondents described a wide variety of volunteer initiatives they have been engaged in, including volunteering for non-profits and community organizations, serving as board members, engaging in activism, and working with children and youth.

“While I have been passionate about nature and social justice issues for a long time, Semester in Dialogue really sparked the fire in me to more actively contribute my time to causes that I believe in. Since graduating I have partnered up with a local non-profit to volunteer my time creating imagery and helping market their initiative.”

“While completing my degree this semester I have started volunteering with Gordon Neighbourhood House. Every week I have the chance to connect with members of my community while preparing healthy meals. I have also accepted a role as regional coordinator for my company’s annual charity program. This year we will be working with the Union Gospel Mission to provide meals for over 700 people!”

“I have volunteered on two boards of directors and have found that I really enjoy board development and strategic planning. I’ve given new board orientations to a number of organizations. I have started a social learning club for people who are interested in wild and managed bees! Through this, I’ve had opportunities to give presentations at Rotary, our Horticulture Society, Canadian Federation of University Women, Southern Alberta Council on Public Affairs, the Lethbridge Public Library as well as our local Nature Centre, the YWCA and Environment Lethbridge.”
Satisfaction with the Semester in Dialogue

The majority of responding alumni expressed a strong satisfaction with the Semester in Dialogue program. When asked to rate their overall experience on a 10-point scale, 83% of respondents rated the program an 8 or higher.

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Figure 4. Alumni respondents’ rating of the Semester in Dialogue, on a scale from 1-10

95% of respondents have or would recommend the Semester in Dialogue to someone they know. Many responding alumni spoke of the Semester in Dialogue as the most transformative experience of their undergraduate education, deeply impacting their future academic, professional, and personal lives.

“Looking back on my university education, the Semester in Dialogue was the most influential experience to shape who I am, and what I am able to contribute to the world today.”

“It is hard to overstate the influence the Semester had on my personal and professional life.”

“My best friends, my community, my professional network and every project I've ever worked on has roots in the Dialogue classroom.”
Professional Impact

Many respondents found that the Semester in Dialogue had a strong impact on their career.

Figure 5. Alumni respondents’ rating of the professional impact of the Semester in Dialogue

91% of respondents reported that the Semester in Dialogue helped them define their goals, beliefs, and interests.

“The were some exercises we did in class that made it clear to me and Janet that I wasn't aware of what my passions were. As I was developing a personal project, Janet kept pushing me to reconsider and think about choosing something that spoke to my passions—not just something that could hold my interest. It was a gentle and thoughtful push on her end, but one that has had an impact on me because it helped me become a fuller version of myself by giving me the tools to actually hear and listen to myself that I am still practicing today.”

“The Semester in Dialogue transformed the way I saw myself in the world. It gave me the opportunity to explore the questions, purpose and passion that underlie the things I most care about in the world.”

Many respondents described how the Semester helped them identify suitable career paths by exposing them to various sectors and offering opportunities to get hands-on experience with skills or tasks related to particular careers. Some continued to pursue careers related to the theme they explored during the Semester, or activities they enjoyed, such as civic engagement, event planning, public speaking, or urban planning. Meanwhile, other alumni changed their career plans after identifying areas of lesser interest.

“I changed the focus of my studies after attending the Semester in Dialogue. I learned a lot about myself, what I really cared about in life and what type of career I wanted to pursue.”
“The direction in my education and eventual career changed pretty drastically […] Looking back at my life, these themes and this work have been there for most of my life, but I definitely got back in touch with it in that semester.”

“Before participating in the Semester in Dialogue program I was set on a career within the judicial system. As a graduate of SFU in the criminology program a career in law was a natural trajectory. However, through Semester in Dialogue I found that my passion lies elsewhere, environmental sustainability.”

“After the Semester in Dialogue I began to narrow down my career path. Before Dialogue I was not sure what I wanted to do after graduation but hearing all the perspectives from the peers in my cohort and all their passions and paths it opened my eyes to all the various things one can do after graduation.”

“The Semester helped me realize my original intended career of urban planning or related fields might not have been the right fit for me, as our community engagements and dialogues made me realize I might not be the right person to lead or participate in those sorts of things!”

“The Semester in Dialogue made me realize my interest in social justice and the arts, which led me down the career path I am now in.”

“I chose to get involved in a career centered around clean energy in BC. I am working in a hands-on field learning every aspect of energy generation and transmission. I also have had a chance to deploy domestically with the army in response to the fires in BC this past year. These are both on theme with my semester in dialogue topic ‘Adaptations to Human Environmental Impact.’”

47% of respondents found that professional relationships they built in the program continued after their Semester. Some respondents described how the Semester helped them connect with institutions and initiatives related to their careers. 52% of respondents reported that the Semester in Dialogue helped them find employment.

“I met my future boss.”

“The Semester in Dialogue connected me to institutions engaged in on-the-ground work of sustainability in Metro Vancouver.”

“I participated in the Health Issues and Ethics semester, which allowed me to network with many individuals in the health field. I gained more exposure to the different areas of healthcare (including delivery of health care at the provincial/national levels, health policy, ethics etc.) and this knowledge has been invaluable to me during my current medical training.”

“[An experience that had particular impact was] getting a chance to interact with city staff before I was a city staff myself and, in that moment, really deciding that I want to be a municipal worker.”
Academic Impact

Many responding alumni found that the Semester in Dialogue had impact on their relationship with education and their future academic pursuits. For instance, several described how the Semester’s experiential and interdisciplinary approach to pedagogy re-ignited their passion for learning. One respondent described how their experience motivated them to finish their degree and “stay on track.” Some sought to bring the spirit of dialogue and experiential learning into their future studies.

“I learned that education and university courses could be interactive, practical and engaging.”

“The idea of attending yet another 200-student lecture hall courses at SFU was making my skin crawl. I wanted to get out of lecture halls and off the mountain! The Semester in Dialogue program reengaged me into learning and put my passion to work. That hunger for learning and making an impact that was ignited during the Semester in Dialogue program propelled my career and the success that I’ve enjoyed to date.”

“I’ve taken some dialogue ideals into other classes with me, hoping to create a more welcoming atmosphere to allow for deeper conversation, flow and listening.”

“The Semester in Dialogue changed how I understood education; shifting from a pursuit of mostly acquiring knowledge, towards a more holistic pursuit of personal development and formation, alongside intellectual growth, towards a collective or social need. On a practical level, I learned that my best chance at having impact in the world would require more than my best thinking, but the ability to get outside of the safety of the classroom and truly become engaged in the world. And even more importantly, that I couldn’t do it alone, that collaboration unlocked ideas and possibilities that were the product of people engaging big questions together, in relationship […] instead of deriving hypotheses and theory on some of the most interconnected problems, in isolation.”

35% of respondents reported that the Semester in Dialogue led them to attend graduate or professional school.

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**Figure 6.** Alumni respondents’ rating of the academic impact of the Semester in Dialogue

Some continued pursuing research in their Semester’s topic, while others sought further training in the practice of dialogue, civic engagement, or conflict resolution through programs such as SFU’s minor in Dialogue, or the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).
“I gained the interest and confidence to apply to graduate school.”

“I took the Dialogue minor after discovering how much I love the idea of bringing parties to the table to understand each other better.”

“I continued to be interested in dialogue, negotiation, and decided to do a masters in conflict resolution.”

“This experience also reinforced the importance of community and dialogue for shaping our views and experiences about the world. This insight has certainly informed my current PhD research topic, investigating communities on the internet and the real-world impact of the dialogue (or lack thereof) that occurs in these online contexts.”

Several respondents described how the Semester in Dialogue inspired them to frame their future research in interdisciplinary, holistic, non-dualistic, and collaborative perspectives, and with an appreciation for lived experience.

“[An experience that had particular impact was] learning what social determinants of health were, and having that knowledge grounded into personal experiences and stories from an array of areas in the field. It's been interesting watching more people in the public talk about social determinants of health and recognise that they are a thing. When I went to my medical school interview, I was talking about social determinants a lot, and I don't think anyone was really taking what I said particularly seriously, and I sometimes wonder if they would more today; I hope so!”

Others found that the Semester helped them develop valuable academic and research skills.

“Investigative interview skills that I practised were helpful in both my graduate work and my professional life after school.”

“My collaborative research work also links to the dialogue skills I took from the program. The tools I took from the dialogue program impact various dimensions of my research practice, including: research framing, knowledge mobilization, writing, on-going constructions of research questions.”

“Many of the skills I learned and developed (including leadership, community engagement, communication) during the Semester in Dialogue, have been invaluable to me during my medical training.”
Personal Impact

Several responding alumni noted that they graduated from the Semester in Dialogue with an increased sense of empowerment and agency in their own lives. Many stated that the Semester helped them “find their voice,” appreciate the value of their lived experiences, and gain confidence in their ability to engage with the world and pursue their passions.

“I took ownership of my own education (and life more broadly) deciding who and how I want to be in the world. It began an ongoing process of self-discovery where I feel more capable of taking action and speaking out.”

“[I gained] confidence in my voice and the sense of creating opportunity for myself.”

“[I am] more willing to take risks to pursue my interests.”

“[The Semester in Dialogue taught me] that if I want to see something in the world, I have the power to make it happen. If I want to devote my life to certain work, I can choose to pursue it. If I think it up, I can actualize it […] have pursued my career and even aspects of my personal life with more faith in my dreams.”

“When I wasn’t sure about what to write about for an op-ed, I was invited to chat with Mark Winston who just listened to me share. I ended up being inspired and went on to be published in the Vancouver Sun. I realized I had experience just like everyone else; I just needed to learn how to express it.”

“The feedback from my peers was remarkable and gave me the confidence to believe that my story and experiences are important as a part of the work I do.”

Some respondents felt that the Semester increased their sense of self-awareness, and offered them valuable skills in self-reflection, that support their ongoing personal development.

“[I gained] better understanding of myself, how I work, how I can maximize my own productivity, areas that I need to improve on.”

“Personally, I continue to have challenges with self-esteem and identity but what dialogue helped with was how I view those issues and gave me new ways to address them and view myself.”

“The ‘skill’ I learned was to consider myself as a process and project that I could take control over and work on in my own terms.”

“The Semester in Dialogue program has also proven to be extremely significant to me in a personal realm, creating a foundation for my own self-discovery and personal growth in the years following. I sincerely believe that this program was formative to me in the years following it, both in my education and in my growth as a person.”

“On a personal level, my Semester in Dialogue really helped me to slow down and reflect on the way I was leading my life.”
75% of respondents established lasting relationships with members of their cohort.

“I was able to connect with like-minded peers, who became lifelong friends.”

“The friends I made through the SID have become the closest I have in my life, even 13 years later.”

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 7.** Alumni respondents’ rating of the personal impact of the Semester in Dialogue

Additionally, many respondents found that learning and sharing dialogue skills improved their relationships with their family, friends, and partners.

“I feel I am a better partner, colleague and friend because of the skills I learned in the program.”

“At some point [during the Semester in Dialogue], I really became aware of my emotions during a conversation. I learned to be less judgemental and more understanding. This helped because I was finally able to communicate more effectively with my dad.”

“I think [the Semester in Dialogue] enabled me listen to my parents and now my husband better and engage in critical and effective conversation.”

“I taught my husband, siblings, children, parents and friends the proper way to communicate with much respect.”

“Dialogue has helped me improve how I collaborate and interact with others, and how I build relationships.”

Many responding alumni stated that their experience with the Semester in Dialogue expanded their worldview or changed their outlook on life. Alongside concrete skills and impacts, respondents described how they continue to be inspired by the overall values, practices, and ideas they engaged with during the Semester in Dialogue.

“I did not continue a specific project - but I continued to live the principles I learned during the course.”
“Every day has become a challenge to be a better citizen, a better human, to learn from individuals from all walks of lifestyle.”

“I have sought to carry the spirit of dialogue into all my endeavours. The quote by William Isaacs, ‘Dialogue is a conversation with a center not sides,’ has stuck with me. It reminds me to listen with an open mind, and also speak in a way that moves conversation and understanding forward instead of trying to ‘win’ or ‘persuade.’ I take this into my work mentoring students, and even into my personal life with family, partners, and friends.”

“I also learned much from Sean about the importance of personal integrity in complex, political situations that may tempt you to break your integrity in order to please power-holders. I have never forgotten that important lesson and try to live into that each day.”

Dialogue Skills

“Dialogue changed my life. Simple as that.”

A central goal of the Semester in Dialogue is to model the spirit of concentrated conversation among equals and deep listening that is the essence of dialogue, in an environment encouraging mutual understanding between diverse perspectives. Students have opportunities to participate in, facilitate, and reflect on dialogues with peers and members of the community. Faculty members challenge students to let go of judgement and remain curious while exploring issues from a variety of perspectives.

95% of responding alumni found that the Semester in Dialogue helped them develop key skills to engage in dialogue, including how to suspend judgement, engage in deep listening, and share their perspectives in open-minded conversations.
Many respondents described how the Semester in Dialogue helped them understand the value of listening to others and develop key listening skills, such as patience, empathy, suspending judgement, and curiosity.

“Since Dialogue I’ve been reflecting on how things would be different if we just tried listening to each other more... I believe there would be much greater understanding, and therefore harmony between people. [...] Better understanding may bring about collaboration. And it is collaboration that we need to confront today’s challenges.”

“Dialogue really helped me deepen my empathy skills which has been tremendously useful in all aspects of my daily life.”

“[After participating in the Semester in Dialogue] I am better able to openly and actively listen to others, and make space for a diverse range of opinions, and facilitate ways to allow voices not commonly heard a better chance to be represented.”

Respondents described an increased awareness of the impact of their words and action when participating in or facilitating dialogue, or even when serving as a note-taker in dialogues. Respondents noted improvements in their ability to make room for other voices, critically reflect on power dynamics, and shift the energy of the room.

“The other skill that came out of Semester in Dialogue was awareness of my own impact on a space. Before this program is was never something that I looked at, or even noticed.
During the program I was pointed to look at what I was creating in the space and in later training it was something that I got super curious about and learned to have powerful awareness around so that I could by intentional with the energetic impact I had on the spaces that I was in.”

“Dialogue helped me, as a person of privilege, look at how I can use my position in both work and the community, make space for other voices.”

“I’ve learned to be patient and take a seat back from always having to be the first to respond to a conversation. I’m more careful with my words.”

“I learned a lot about myself and how it's not always necessary to fill the silence if you don't have something intentional or meaningful to say. To this day, I'm still practicing on how to be a better active listener.”

“[A skill I gained through the Semester in Dialogue was] recognizing that those who hold the pen and act as note taker/minute taker have to be extremely conscious of how they choose to capture what others in the meeting say to ensure it is aligned with their intended meaning.”

“[In the Semester in Dialogue, I learnt that] although you need to manage the expectations of the loudest opposition in a stakeholder situation, that those voices are not the only voices that need to be heard in the process. Being able to make space for those not as willing or able to speak up is just as important to the process.”

The Semester in Dialogue helped many respondents feel more comfortable engaging with complexity and ambiguity. Several respondents feel more equipped to respectfully navigate disagreement and differences and consider diverse opinions from a non-adversarial perspective.

“[Through the Semester in Dialogue, I gained an] openness and appreciation for conflict and complexity - and a willingness to stay in the grey zone.”

“[Dialogue skills] enable me to become more comfortable with discomfort, ambiguity, irresolution, and complexity.”

“I always say that before [participating in the Semester in Dialogue] I was a very ‘right versus wrong’ person and the world that once was black and white to me became many shades of grey.”

“[A skill I gained in the Semester in Dialogue was] recognizing there's not one clear solve for every problem, and sometimes multiple approaches are necessary.”

“Taking the Semester in Dialogue challenged me to participate in my education, community and learning from others and see them as they are—complex, multi-faceted, and challenging.”
“It was the first experience I had of holding space for both myself and others, to navigate the direct experience of difference (and sometimes conflict) when deeply-rooted systems of knowledge were meeting for unknown outcomes.”

“It also helped subside a lot of anxiety that was caused by being unsure of how to approach people who were not in the same demographic as myself.”

“The class environment of spending time with the same group of people on the same topic means you can get into gritty conversations and challenge each other’s ideas and assumptions, and express your ideas and beliefs, deeply, without the typical hostility or confrontation.”

Respondents also described how the Semester in Dialogue helped them develop a deeper understanding of the value of collaborative and consensual approaches to group processes and decision-making. 95% of respondents feel more comfortable using dialogic and consensual approaches in collaborative group work after participating in the Semester in Dialogue.

“I find with current work and school projects, I’m able to work well through consensus and collaboration, versus being dominant and aggressive”

“I used the skills we developed in the Semester in Dialogue to participate in social activist groups that operate on a consensus model.”

“My job [as an employment counsellor] is all about using dialogue and consensual, collaborative approaches with clients as ultimately, they are in the drivers’ seat. I use my dialogue skills (and motivational interviewing training that is part of this job) to help ask them the right questions and help guide them along the way as they make big career or educational decisions.”

Dialogue in the Workplace

93% of respondents reported that they have used dialogue in their education, work, community, or personal life. Respondents offered numerous examples of how dialogue skills have been critical to their work in various fields, including community planning, policy development, business, intercultural relations, education, counselling, activism, research, and work in the social impact sector.

Dialogue principles and practices support respondents in various work-related tasks, including strategic planning, facilitating meetings, stakeholder consultations, community, engagement, research, training, management, communicating with colleagues, and planning events and programs.

“In my new role as mayor of our community [I utilize] the tools and education I learned from the Semester in Dialogue to help facilitate community interests - particularly helping find consensus on council, engaging First Nations, mobilizing volunteers and community groups into coordinated community projects, and negotiations with large multinational corporations investing in Prince Rupert.”
“In my work as a foreign service officer, I was often required to represent Canada in meeting with officials from other countries and international organizations. The relationships built using the principles of dialogue were so important to my role as a diplomat representing Canada.”

“In my work as a case manager in Mental Health, I was often working with individuals who were fragile, upset and angry. The ability to actively listen and be empathetic to others was especially important to help others in their time of need.”

“The dialogue skills I learned during the Semester in Dialogue and subsequently in the Minor in Dialogue, underline all of my other professional and personal communication skills. It's the bedrock of the successes I have had in the marketing communications profession.”

“[Dialogue skills] have been helpful in exploring a church conflict, in facilitating discussion on scripture during Sunday morning worship, in helping the boards of the 4 local united churches (3 of which I serve) to commute and vision together.”

“I encourage [dialogue] in the host committee I currently chair and on boards I have served on, such as the Daycare Connection Childcare Society in Kelowna, BC. I also utilize dialogue when working with the board of directors I work for.”

“I'm a research coordinator and often have to participate in many meetings, plan day events or even collaborate digitally and in-person with many other departments and institution. Practicing the dialogue skills I developed are critical to my job.”

“I used dialogue to revamp budgeting and how we approach funding allocations at a previous job.”

“Through my job as an employment counsellor with WorkBC, I am constantly listening to stories of individuals from many backgrounds and fields who are experiencing change, turmoil or transition. Dialogue helped me with my empathy skills and has also helped me immensely at being a better communicator, being less shy, being more open and honest with other people.”

Dialogue in Education

In particular, the Semester in Dialogue inspired many respondents to incorporate dialogue and experiential learning in their own teaching practice.

“I decided to go into education because the Semester in Dialogue opened my eyes of what education (at any age) can look like. I feel programs similar to the Semester in Dialogue should be accessible to not only university students, but youth as well. This is one of the reasons why I am trying to make [project-based learning] a method of education that is more commonplace [...] in project-based learning, students have the ability to impact real change.”
“I am always trying to recreate the dialogue spaces I experienced in the Semester in Dialogue in my own classrooms today. I aim for plurality of voices, active listening, mediating difficult conversations, and teaching studies to reach for others who are different from them, rather than reject, condemn, or become angry with them. I want students to not just engage in controversial subjects but also step back and consider how adversarial our culture is, but that this could be different.”

“I try to lead discussions more from a dialogue perspective rather than the traditional teacher-student relationship. Most recently, my students had a guest speaker visit. We then debriefed using the dialogue format focusing on really listening to others in a non-judgemental way.”

“I am finding the use of my dialogue skills especially valuable while teaching a 400-level course titled Race and Media at the School of Communication - which can become very uncomfortable for some at various points in the semester.”

“I used a dialogue and taught consensus-based deliberation when teaching a course to high school students.”

“I learned how to participate in public forums myself, as well as the skills to engage different participants in work and public discussions. These are skills I use on a regular basis in both participation in my community and work life. For example, today I lead a psychoeducation group for parents of children experiencing mental health difficulties; part of the group was didactic teaching, but the other part was engaging participants in discussion. I discussed with my student the art of engaging participants through a dynamic conversation relating to resources. I reflected on how my participation in the Semester in Dialogue built my skills in reading a group and including the voice of different participants.”

Engagement and Consultation

Several respondents described how the Semester in Dialogue inspired them to actively seek opportunities to listen to other perspectives in their work, using processes of consultation and engagement.

“The Semester in Dialogue deeply challenged how I have approached all aspects of work and life, with the recognition that I can only see my own experience, and that to have a more fulsome and accurate understanding of any situation, I need to invite in diverse perspectives. This was modelled again and again to me during the Semester in Dialogue by our instructors, in particular Janet Moore, who demonstrated an ability to hold curiosity central. [...] As a result, community engagement has become a central practice in better understanding shared challenges and co-generating solutions in all the work I do.”

“Rather than thinking I know the solution to a problem, I let my stakeholders tell me what they think so that I can bounce ideas off them or improve theirs. The end result is software that is more functional, better suits the needs of our stakeholders. I always
assume others have something to bring and will always hear them out, even in cases where I believe I know the best solution - because often times they prove me wrong.”

“I understand the importance of community engagement and not simply creating an initiative because I feel it is the right thing to do.”

“[I learnt that] the end user always needs to be consulted and heard -- and not at the end of a project.”

“I’ve used [dialogue] numerous times and expanded my knowledge to multiple facilitation techniques that use dialogue, [such as] focus groups, workshops, interviews, surveys, open houses, training, etc. I have worked with northern Indigenous governments, municipal and territorial initiatives, and non-for-profits. Some examples include: consultations to develop the North West Territories’ small communities employment strategy [...] consultations on the North West Territories’ climate change and energy strategy, fishing strategy, northern energy corridors, etc., strategic planning for departments in the Government of the North West Territories...”

In particular, several respondents learned the importance of identifying and engaging with key stakeholders.

“[A skill I gained in the Semester in Dialogue is identifying] who needs to be in the room and feeling confident and comfortable with engaging with the relevant people.”

“In non-profit board and committee work, it's helped me to always be aware of whether anyone else should be part of a given conversation or planning session.”

“[I applied dialogue skills] in bringing together diverse stakeholders to have difficult conversations about sharing water in times of scarcity.”

**Dialogue for Conflict Resolution**

Respondents also described how they apply dialogic skills and approaches to help navigate conflict and complex issues in their work.

“[I introduced] the practice of dialogue as a means to navigate complex workplace relationships and sensitive topics within my team.”

“Dialogue has made me a stronger listener, so in times of workplace conflict, I’m able to hear what 'the other side' is saying in a much more compassionate, calm way.”

“As I tackle the polarizing issues of environment and energy, I am better equipped to listen to all sides and share stories that resonate with people. I also came away with ideas on how to creatively engage the public.”

“I have learned to strive towards dialogic ways of communicating and knowing, and this is evinced especially strongly in my professional life. For example, I learned how our "debate culture" is a very ineffective way to understand, to meet horizons, and to
generate solutions in which all have a stake. Philosophically, I learned to think non-dualistically, and in a very interdisciplinary manner."

“...I've also been able to share the dialogue process with my colleagues, working with them to develop the skills necessary to approach a topic from a place of mutual curiosity and non-judgement.”

**Dialogue in the Community**

Some respondents also gave examples of how they have applied dialogue skills in their personal and community life.

“...I found that dialogue is a particularly useful tool to encourage skill sharing and meaningful discussion on important and complex topics. Events in which I have employed dialogue techniques are when leading world cafe activities in classes, storytelling circles with friends, and knowledge sharing sessions with community members.”

“...[I used dialogue in] planning projects at work, managing a recreational soccer team, participating in and chairing meetings, consultations with clients.

“...[I use dialogue] at the dinner table with my family, in school meetings, in my current experiential education program, and at work.”

**Dialogue Skills for Interpersonal Relationships**

Several respondents described how the Semester in Dialogue inspired them to focus on developing meaningful relationships in their work, and improved their personal and professional relationships.

“...In my professional life I have changed my perspective on collaboration and have begun putting relationships first no matter what the task.”

“...I think another really key skill I learned in SID that I've taken to heart is the art of saying thank you. It's something I can't say that I ever put much thought into before the Semester in Dialogue, it was more of a reflex. But it is something that I really try to put effort into now both personally and professionally, and I believe it has made deeper connections for me with friends and clients alike.”

“...In very simple situations within the family, conversations are much more open, and behaviours are reflecting greater degrees of tolerance. Relationships with friends have also become more complex because vocabulary and dialogue was a new tool to discover deeper understandings and deeper compassion.”

“...I also try to use a dialectic approach within my family and how I perceive situations.”

“...Everything from my romantic relationships to the position I take as a manager in my office has benefited from [a dialogic] approach.
“[The Semester in Dialogue] made me a better recruiter (for professional as well as volunteer positions): I feel I'm more empathetic to understanding where people are coming from and listening for their motivations and self-interest. I've gone on to take further training in Partnership Brokering, which feels a step closer towards action than dialogue, where we talked a lot about transparency around self-interest and how partnerships are typically stronger if parties' personal motivations are being met in addition to the broader goals of the partnership.”

The Power of Art and Story

Several respondents noted that the Semester in Dialogue gave them an appreciation for the power of art and creativity to deepen understanding of complex issues, engage in dialogue with others, communicate ideas, and generate positive social change.

“We explored art forms as ways of communication and dialogue, through physical contact and reading others’ bodies. The program raised my interest in physical performance particularly around critical subjects and group creation.”

“I was given the opportunity to use art and creativity to effect social change, in stark contrast from standard ways of expression and conformity in academia.”

“We also attended the C2D2 conference and did a session with a spoken word artist which had a great impact on me as [I had never used] poetry or spoken word as a mode of expression. That experience, and the piece I wrote as a final project, still influence my work today.”

“[The Semester in Dialogue] helped me to encourage community consultation projects I worked on to consider working with youth about planning projects in their community using games and play as a way to open a conversation.”

In particular, several respondents were inspired to incorporate storytelling in their work as a mode of communication and developing interpersonal understanding.

“Whenever I write a column for local ministerial or know I need to write a controversial sermon, I think of Mark's comment that he aims not to be provocative but thought provoking. The emphasis on story influences how I participate and facilitate group discussion.”

“My time in the Semester in Dialogue cemented my belief in the need to incorporate storytelling and diverse forms of knowledge in making lasting social change.”

“In one of our dialogue sessions, we were fortunate to host Naomi Steinberg, a local storyteller with a gift for understanding place and complex narratives. I remember sitting in a circle on the third floor of the Harbour Centre as Naomi shared a powerful story and then left us all to hang in the pause. Following what seemed to be the perfect interval of silence, Naomi said, ‘... never fix meaning to a story. This thing happened. It broke me. It might have broken all of us. But that is not the end.’
Better understanding the power of story has had a dramatic impact on my professional work in the realm of peace building and conflict transformation. I have held on to the words that Naomi shared, in diverse political and social contexts throughout Africa, the Middle East and Asia, remembering that meaning is never fixed, and that the story has not yet reached its end. In places where I have encountered stories of destruction and suffering and brokenness, I have been reminded that simultaneous narratives of resilience, creativity and human flourishing are also being written.

“I had a job as an organiser where I could use skills from the program to help motivate workers to fight for better conditions by listening for what was important for them in their work and personal lives.”
Civic Engagement

One of the Semester in Dialogue’s goals is to inspire students’ sense of civic responsibility and encourage their passion for improving society. Students design projects that explore current issues of personal and civic importance and engage in dialogue with community thought leaders with diverse experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After participating in the Semester in Dialogue...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a deeper understanding of the complex public issues associated with the topic of the semester I was enrolled in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have an increased general interest in public issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have a deeper understanding of the power relationships, processes, and factors that impact multiple-stakeholder issues.</td>
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<td>I am more engaged in my community.</td>
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**Figure 9.** Alumni respondents’ rating of their sense of civic responsibility after participating in the Semester in Dialogue.

The majority of Semester in Dialogue student respondents felt they graduated from the program with an increased understanding and interest in public issues: 97% reported that they had a deeper understanding of their Semester’s theme, while 86% had an increased general interest in public issues. In particular, several respondents described how the Semester encouraged them to ask questions and engage in critical thinking about the world around them.

“One day we watched the documentary/film Fractured Land and the debrief/discussion that took place after was profound. Before that moment I hadn't grasped the gravity of the situation between the energy industry and Indigenous people and how relevant it was to my everyday life. After that, I felt like I was more aware of the power dynamics that are at play every day from deciding where to fuel your car to voting for government. I was simultaneously devastated and encouraged at the impact we have on earth and the people who live here.”

“I developed a greater awareness of sustainability, in particular the more nuanced issues that are often overlooked. I developed a greater toolkit for taking action on local and global social issues.”
“I became much more attuned to issues of sustainability and learned about local programs relating to food and food security. I now have a knowledge base around that subject that I never would have otherwise.”

“The topic was brand new for me and sparked a long-term personal interest in food security and sources, and the community implications of food.

“The Semester in Dialogue made me appreciate and look at the world in a more analytical/critical way and not just take what the media, etc. says at face value.”

97% of respondents felt they had a deeper understanding of the power dynamics, factors, and processes involved in multi-stakeholder issues. This deeper understanding of public issues and civic processes increased many respondents’ sense of civic responsibility, empowerment, and agency. For instance, some respondents reported that they are more conscious of the impact of their actions on the environment and their community. One described their realization that “things which may seem complex or out of reach [can be attained] with the right amount of background knowledge and hard work.” Two-thirds of respondents reported that they are more engaged with the community after participating in the Semester in Dialogue.

“I learned how easy it was to become more active in shaping your own community and reaching out to those in local government and programs that influence change.”

“The Semester in Dialogue made me more aware that any action I take, impacts the environment and allowed me to realize what I can do to minimize that impact.”

“I can break down complex problems into their relevant components. I understand that most issues are very complex and there cannot be a solve-all solution; finding the right problem is extremely important before even starting.”

“The Semester in Dialogue made me more aware of [...] the amount of organisational work that goes into many successfully run community groups and programs.”

“The Semester in Dialogue strengthened my interest in community-based initiatives across Metro Vancouver.”

“I think I already had a degree of community-mindedness before the Semester in Dialogue, but the Semester helped me to develop a toolset for approaching community-based problem-solving in a civic context.”

“The Semester in Dialogue program completely changed my life, mindset, and future trajectory. Since graduating from the program, I became involved promoting community engagement throughout my city and volunteering my time with organizations such as the BC Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC) to advance the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thanks to Semester in Dialogue, I feel armed with the tools necessary to facilitate discussion and participate in meaningful dialogue.”
Impact of Semester in Dialogue Projects

Projects students develop in the Semester in Dialogue receive intensive feedback from peers and faculty and are expected to have the potential to impact the world outside of the classroom. 15% of alumni continued to develop projects they initiated during the Semester in Dialogue, working alone or in collaboration with other Semester in Dialogue alumni. Many Semester in Dialogue initiatives became established programs with widespread impact. Some examples include:

Alysha Bains, an alumnus from the Fall 2002 cohort, developed a proposal for a media literacy program for young women as an assignment for the Semester in Dialogue. Bains was subsequently hired to develop and deliver literacy programming to over 200 youth, and her work informed her graduate research on literacy at McGill University: “A Community Perspective on Literacy Education in the Inner City”

Four students from the Spring 2017 CityStudio cohort worked with staff from the City of Vancouver to develop Buddy Up!, a community board designed to help community members share skills. The alumni continued working on the project after completing the Semester in Dialogue, and in December 2017 they presented Buddy Up! at CityStudio's semi-annual project showcase, “Hubbub,” at City Hall. The project received great interest from City Staff, Parks Board Staff, and some of Vancouver's top leaders in urbanism and innovation, winning first place prize among the 20 student projects at the showcase. The alumni are working to scale up the project, in collaboration with CityHive, MakerLabs, HiVE Vancouver, Merakos Fieldhouse, Tandem Bike Cafe, and Saule Connection. https://buddyupvancouver.wixsite.com/buddyupvancouver

Another successful initiative emerging from CityStudio is Bike Lab, working to install public bicycle repair stations across Vancouver. The initial pilot project, launched in 2013 at Science World, drew significant media attention. Alumni Andrea Sanchez describes how managing media relations at the launch was “a very powerful experience because I understood the impact students, engaged citizens and people with a vision can have in their city. Seeing those bike repair stations literally hit the ground made me realize I can positively impact my city. […] I continue to feel empowered and motivated to use dialogue to take my city to the next level and engage all its citizens.” https://www.straight.com/news/369391/new-public-bicycle-repair-stations-coming-vancouver-streets

The Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC) “sponsored” a student project developed by Scott Young as part of the Spring 2008 cohort, and Young is now the Director of Ideas & Insights at the ICC.

Other alumni expressed an interest in continuing or returning to projects in the future or described how they found themselves developing or working on initiatives very similar to those they envisioned during their Semester.

“In the future I would love to do more research on the subject and make it much more standardized. I would pursue it as a project in a master’s degree if the opportunity became available.”

“While the project I took on was not initiated by me, it did align quite similarly with my values and vision"
Communication Skills

One of the Semester in Dialogue’s learning objectives is to develop students’ skills and confidence communicating for a public audience, engaging with community groups and decision makers, participating in collaborative group work, and designing and implementing public projects.

Figure 10. Alumni respondents’ rating of their communication skills after participating in the Semester in Dialogue

75% of respondents reported that they feel more comfortable with their speaking and writing skills after participating in the Semester in Dialogue. Respondents described how the Semester helped them reflect on the impact of their language choices and delivery, and gain skills in media relations, design, and writing for both public audiences and as a form of reflective practice.

“I learned what is needed to create an effective oral presentation. Brevity & clarity!”

“The Semester in Dialogue directly led to increased leadership skills and improved my public speaking.”

“I was socially reserved and severely feared public speaking. When I finished presenting my final project to the class, the class gave me an applause. One of my mentors of the semester, Mark, told me that there is no need to continuously close presentations in the way that I was doing, by saying: 'this concludes my presentation...'. He told me that when you close, the audience will know, if you communicate clearly and spend time situating your story. I did just that and finally understood it by the end of the semester”

“The practice of reflective writing that was introduced to me during this semester has turned out to be the most important personal practice in my life, something that I return
to every single morning. It has helped me develop a lot of self-awareness, process my feelings in challenging times, and question and explore the things that I believe to be true.”

“Mark provided some succinct pieces of advice that I have carried with me. One such advise was in regard to finding sources for an article I was writing---- overwhelmed with finding "the perfect source" he encouraged me to find a strong source rather than "the best". I consider this when looking for references for work I do and in other ways too, a good or a strong resource is more readily found than "perfection."

Some respondents noted that the Semester in Dialogue inspired them to continue publishing and presenting work they developed during and after their Semester. Alumni have been published in newspapers, magazines, and books. The interview that one respondent conducted for a Semester in Dialogue assignment was aired on the SFU radio, while another respondent presented their work at an international conference.

“I gained confidence to publish and to seek to publish. I have since published a handful of articles in professional and news sources.”

“I also believe without the Semester in Dialogue, I would not have embarked on a career in journalism, first with freelancing and later with journalism school and working in large newsrooms. Mark Winston was a supportive public writing mentor, and the peer-group feedback and encouragement I experienced during the semester bolstered my self-esteem as a writer.”

Additionally, many respondents noted that the Semester in Dialogue improved their editing skills and their ability to give and receive constructive criticism.

“[I learned] to provide constructive criticism and encouragement to others and to be open to that kind of criticism personally”

“It was fantastic to have input on personal writing from a renowned writer”

84% of respondents feel more confident interacting with key decision makers after participating in the Semester in Dialogue, empowering them to reach out to community leaders in order to build their professional networks or address issues of concern.

“Working with or just meeting industry professionals in the semester in dialogue helped me realize that anyone can be reached out to if you care about something enough.”

“I gained the confidence to reach out to community leaders, government and organizations that were doing work I was interested in.”

“Coming out of this experience, I am more confident in approaching professional figures and people in positions of power and expressing myself.”
“I also learned that many powerful people are still happy to help. It gave me the confidence to connect with people I might have previously been too intimidated to engage with.”

75% of respondents also reported improvements in their ability to design and implement complex projects. In particular, respondents described the value of spending more time conceptualizing a project and developing it with the support of constructive feedback.

“[I learned to examine] processes and options, rather than just driving towards the end as hard and fast as possible.”

“I am more open to failure and to constant reiteration of projects.”

The collaborative nature of many of the Semester in Dialogue’s projects helps students develop their understanding of group dynamics, their ability to work with diverse team members, and their sense of responsibility and trust in group projects.

One respondent described how in their previous educational experiences, group projects involved “splitting responsibilities and combining each individual section,” whereas in the Semester in Dialogue they worked collaboratively through the whole process. “This was the most taxing, emotionally fueled and problematic portion of the project,” the respondent states, “but it is more applicable to real world experiences where individuals must come together to decide on an initiative/movement they wish to pursue, and this opens the door to potential disagreement due to the differing personalities/identities and beliefs each member holds.”

“The format taught me how to work truly collaboratively, and to trust the skills and abilities of my teammates.”

“Learning to trust other people to pull through and do a good job, and not trying to take everything on your own shoulders.”

“Learning about how my actions or non-actions impact the group has been key in moving forward with my professional and personal relationships. I feel much more confident and assured about my place in groups and what skills I can offer.”

“Learning how to work with a team which holds diverse perspectives has been highly beneficial. Semester in Dialogue encouraged me to exercise my patience while remaining open to different concepts and approaches.”
Highlights of the Semester in Dialogue

Responding alumni mentioned several elements of the Semester in Dialogue experience that were particularly valuable or influential for their personal and professional life.

Experiential Learning

Many respondents emphasised the value of an experiential approach to pedagogy for their personal and professional growth.

“I feel that my experience in the semester at CityStudio perfectly captured what experiential learning should be about. Janet and Duane never did for us as a Cohort what we could do for ourselves, even when emotions and stress ran high, and interpersonal conflict arose. I feel that this tension and forced self-sufficiency resulted in some of the most impactful lessons I have learned in my life. In retrospect, I would not ask for it to have gone any other way than it did, even though it was so hard to "trust the process" while I was in it.”

“Perhaps the most valuable skill [I gained in the Semester in Dialogue]—that led to my growth in dialogue and communication—was to approach new tasks with curiosity and confidence [...] I really appreciated that in the SID program we were actually engaging with the community and doing real tasks; our projects were not confined to the classroom. I got used to trying new things (interviewing people, facilitating, writing an op-ed, planning a project, report-writing) with no previous experience. I started to lose my fear of doing things ‘wrong,’ and have stopped waiting till I feel ‘prepared.’ Rather I see all my endeavours as opportunities to continually develop my skills by trying and learning from results and feedback.”

Student-Directed Learning

Additionally, some respondents appreciated the ability to design their own projects around personal interests, and work with their peers to develop understanding.

“The most encouraging experience [of the Semester in Dialogue] was to be allowed to choose your own path with projects within the semester. I felt that this helped spur passion from within and realization that the world we live in needs everyday people and especially young folk to contribute”

“I really enjoyed the process of learning from [my peers] and being able to decide my learning path as opposed to having a lecturer explaining the concept of dialogue. I really enjoyed that we were given the opportunity to figure out what dialogue meant as a collective group.”

Community Engagement

When describing experiences from the Semester in Dialogue that had particular impact on their lives, many respondents remembered projects and dialogues that offered them opportunities to engage with the community around current issues of civic importance. Respondents described
how community-engaged learning helped them find greater meaning and purpose in their academic studies, consider new career trajectories, and—in the words of one respondent—feel “more prepared for life outside of academia.”

“I was able to practice and work through the critical links between academia, community work and my own career trajectory. Overall, I became more confident in myself and began to explore the ever-evolving question, what is my impact and what does this look like?”

“The Semester in Dialogue really encouraged me to be more engaged in classes the following semester. Content became much more relevant and didn’t seem so abstract and detached.

“I like how we had speakers from various—and very current—spaces in the industry. It made us feel [like we were] a part of things and not [were] just in a university bubble. I left feeling motivated and informed [and feeling] like what we did mattered.”

“Generally, just being encouraged to go into the street and make an impact on actual people. I spend so much time living in a world of theory, and this was very refreshing and grounding.”

“We had the ability to be powerful agents in the community, whether it was through our group projects or the public dialogue that we took part in (with CBC host Steven Quinn) regardless of our age. We didn't have to wait to be ‘grown up’ or gain experience to be able to contribute.”

**Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Connections**

For many respondents, the Semester in Dialogue was their first opportunity to work with students and professionals from different disciplines, as well as to engage in deep dialogue with people from diverse walks of life. Many respondents described an increased sense of empathy and cross-cultural understanding.

“I had never been to a Church or Sikh Temple before, so these new experiences helped me to see other religions and how our religions have more in common than not.”

“It's one of the few opportunities I've had to work with peers who were outside of my school program.”

**Collaboration and Sharing with Peers**

Several respondents described the supportive relationships they built with their cohort, through collaborative projects as well as informal opportunities to share with one another.

“In a general sense, the entire program's focus on students sharing open and honestly, and collaborating in a dynamic, highly personal environment, had the biggest impact on me. As a very shy individual who was quite guarded prior to the semester, the open,
honest, personal conversations that us students had together (as well as with our instructors!) had a huge impact for me.”

For instance, two respondents described how their cohort’s daily potluck lunches built a sense of trust and community, celebrated diversity, and inspired critical thinking, while alleviating the stress of preparing daily lunches individually.

“We all sat together, ate together, shared food and talked.”

“I hated the idea [of a potluck] at first. I did not trust the people in my class to actually pull through and be organized enough to pull this off. I was so wrong! And pleasantly surprised. It was an amazing experience. Our theme that semester was food and community, and I tried so many foods and was fed by every member of that class. We learned so much about each other from those recipes. We talked about culture, families, the cost of food, access to certain foods, the skills to prepare food. It was incredible. It taught me how to trust my classmates, when for so long in school I had come to believe I could only really rely on myself.”

**Mentorship**

Several respondents described the importance of the mentorship they received from Faculty. Additionally, some alumni noted that they gained an appreciation for the role of mentors in their professional life and encouraged them to reach out to others as they developed their careers.

“The Semester in Dialogue was a true ‘awakening’ for me. For the first time I was challenged to answer fundamental questions about myself, my beliefs and the experiences that had shaped me. Caring and compassionate instructors made space for this turbulent, revelatory period of my life, providing ongoing support long after the semester ended.”

“Working with a professional from the field as a mentor was highly beneficial and encouraged me to reach out to professionals in my field as mentors and taught me the value of a mentor.”

“Some of the best moments in the Semester in Dialogue were the chats in Mark Winston’s office. Mark became one of my life mentors over that semester, and still is one today. There were tears, lots of them, honesty and open dialogue and discussion. I appreciated Mark's efforts to help me be a better me. His faith in me often was greater than my faith in myself.”

**Mindfulness Activities**

Some respondents recalled inspirational mindfulness exercises they were introduced to during the Semester in Dialogue. For instance, one respondent cited the impact of “Flow Fridays” activity introduced by Janet Moore in the CityStudio programs. Inspired by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow, or a highly focused mental state, cohorts explored states of
flow “as a practice of understanding ourselves in this complex and fast-paced, urbanized world.” The respondent described how:

*Flow Fridays were my most memorable moments at CityStudio. Here, I learned that passion and productivity do not need to happen at separate times and I discovered the pure energy that comes through finding your flow state. Flow Fridays built my self-confidence, inspired creativity, and created an environment of self-reflection and self-expression. I’ve begun to make important life decisions based on following my flow and pursuing activities where I can find this incredible state more naturally. Flow Fridays inspired me to enter the world of place making, public art, and even freestyle rap, and they created the most special moments of bonding with my fellow cohort members.*

**Outdoor Learning**

Some respondents shared anecdotes of experiences from the Semester in Dialogue that took students outside of the classroom, such as “outdoor dialogues” and neighbourhood walks.

“*Learning to having dialogues with nature provides you with this sense of listening and patience that I feel was very helpful in my own understanding of what dialogue was and how it worked*”

“*We did a walking tour of a neighbourhood and I learned how to look. I learned that traces exist in the build environment, ready to tell a story if noticed. I took that idea into my MA when I wrote about traces that could be explored in an exhibition.*”

“*Dialogue made me learn the significance of my connection to nature, as my cohort was Semester Outside in the City. I feel I have a connection with nature I would have never had before, and I am grateful for the experience.*”

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Suggestions for Improvement

Responding alumni offered a number of suggestions on how the Semester in Dialogue could be improved, including:

**Improving accessibility.** Some respondents noted that tuition costs are a barrier to some students’ ability to participate in the Semester. As one respondent noted, the full-time format of the course allows students to gain many credit hours, and offers a valuable immersive experience, however it can be less accessible to lower-income students who are unable to work alongside such a time-intensive program.

> “The program is only as effective as the diversity of its participants. Please do everything you can to ensure a wide range of students from all backgrounds (ethnic and socioeconomic especially) can participate”

**Increasing opportunities for skill development.** Several respondents recommended balancing the experiential components of the Semester in Dialogue with more skill development. In particular, respondents indicated an interest in more direct instruction on dialogue techniques (such as establishing ground rules, ensuring physical comfort, and facilitation techniques), writing for a public audience, project planning, and networking.

> “While I do agree that some learning does happen as you experience things, we also weren’t given foundations or structures on ‘ways to Dialogue’—techniques, processes, etc.”

> “I did not feel that I received adequate instruction or constructive criticism on the personal writing assignments and as a result, my writing did not improve”

> “Perhaps do some focused writing workshops to improve writing for an audience”

**Increasing opportunities for tangible impact.** Some respondents would have liked to receive more support and opportunities to develop the tangible impact of projects. For instance, respondents suggested:

- Opportunities to practice facilitating dialogue in real-world contexts, such as facilitating break-out groups in municipal consultation sessions;
- Partnering with community organizations to develop assignments that contribute to projects that are of interest to the community;
- Receiving more feedback and guidance to support the implementation of projects

> “The course was pretty open to interpretation and I wished I received a bit more guidance and feedback on my group’s project in early stages. Our project involved a lot of research and community conversation, but I wished I was working towards something more tangible that could have been worked on after the semester”

> “I think it would be neat to have more time to implement our personal final projects, alongside the public dialogue. I remember we were meant to create something that was ready to be published or shared with a public audience, and I would have loved more
time to navigate that process of bringing my project into the world (as it was, I shared my project with the class, but never took it further).”

Balancing course structure. One respondent noted that they would have appreciated more readings beyond short articles during the Semester. Another stated that they “found the number of guests to be overwhelming. There wasn't enough space left (or provided) for us to process and discuss. We weren't building on ideas because the focus was around our guest.” One would have liked to have more variety in settings for the course.

Increasing transparency and communication about course expectations, grading rubrics, and daily activities.

Extending the summer semester in order to more deeply engage with the topic and develop dialogue skills.

“I found the summer term ended just as we were getting to know each other and just as we were getting comfortable with the idea of what dialogue actually looked like”

Addressing complex issues with dialogue and group process. Some respondents felt that there was a lack of discussion about the personal difficulties and power dynamics of dialogical process.

“I wish the program had addressed (to a greater extent) the problems and pitfalls of consensus decision making. Specifically, I wish there had been more of an emphasis on recognising, understanding and counter-acting informal power dynamics within groups - especially gendered and racial power dynamics”

“The Semester in Dialogue made me realize how extremely Euro-centric higher-level education is, no matter how much "creativity" you want to inject into the learning experience. I came away from the Semester in Dialogue with some knowledge about dialogue and its application, and how wonderful the process can be. But I have always felt something was missing in this program. The way we dialogued assumed that everyone, regardless of race, sexual/ gender orientation has the power to come to the table and dialogue and the privilege to contribute freely. The way the course was run assumed that race and orientations didn't matter or would be erased in the dialogue process. Not true. Never once was race or privilege addressed critically. Everyone was kept very comfortable. Looking back, that was my biggest lesson from the Semester in Dialogue. That attempts at dialogue processes that champion inclusivity and diversity fall right across the board when important conversations about systemic racism and gender discrimination aren't addressed so that everyone can be kept comfortable.”

“Mostly I am grateful for the things I learnt in the program, but I also picked up some ideas and habits that I wish I hadn't. I became a more empathetic person and a better listener. The flip-side of this was that I became so oriented towards compromise that I started having a difficult time asserting myself and setting proper boundaries. This has taken some unlearning.”
Supporting cohort group dynamics. Some respondents didn’t feel they connected well with their cohort peers, which impacted their semester. One respondent noted that this was “circumstantial.” Others suggested more team-building activities to improve group dynamics, and emphasising “curiosity, empathy, and genuine interest in the course topic” when interviewing applicants.

Remaining inclusive of diverse perspectives, amongst students and thought leaders.

“Sometimes I worry that the semester is becoming too radical-leftist-urban-elitist. I think that impressing the importance of inclusion is vital to ensuring it doesn’t become an echo chamber”

“Many of the guests in my semester had ties to the regional government. I think it would have been good to have people from outside government as well, folks with a grassroots and/or activists perspective”

“To actually practice listening to folks you would never usually talk to is so important in creating change makers, and the art of deep listening is crucial”

Increasing opportunities for alumni engagement. Several respondents expressed an interest in developing more opportunities for alumni engagement and mentorship. One respondent described how the “transition at the end of the [Semester in Dialogue] is quite abrupt.” Suggestions included:

- Professional development workshops
- Networking opportunities, and support connecting alumni to relevant work opportunities
- Support with career development, such as suggestions on how to describe the Semester in Dialogue in graduate study applications or resumes, or support developing public profiles of alumni and their projects
- Working groups or incubation spaces to support alumni develop initiatives
- Social events
- Opportunities to mentor other Semester in Dialogue students

“If there was a follow-up semester, I would have certainly taken it! I learned so much, but I remember coming out feeling like ‘we just got started!’”
Involvement with the Centre for Dialogue

The majority of alumni respondents expressed interest in being involved with the Center for Dialogue, particularly by participating in events, mentoring other students, and through professional development opportunities.

Figure 11. Centre for Dialogue activities that alumni respondents indicated they would be interested in.

Some respondents proposed other ways they would be interested in contributing to the Centre for Dialogue, including as a writer, or supporting with event organization and community engagement. Suggestions for Centre for Dialogue programming include:

- Professional development and/or certification programs in dialogue facilitation, entrepreneurial skills, community engagement, communication skills, “design-thinking,” and emotional intelligence skills
- Programming for alumni (see previous page)
- Dialogue programming for SFU graduate students, bringing interdisciplinary perspectives to address common issues
- Dialogue programming around issues such as electoral reform, climate change, reconciliation, housing affordability, multiculturalism, and science communication.
- Opportunities to be involved with the Center from afar, such as through online professional development opportunities, or “outreach work” bringing dialogue processes and education to other cities in Canada.
Appendix A

2018 Semester in Dialogue Alumni Survey

About You

1. Which cohort of the Semester in Dialogue were you enrolled in? [Dropdown menu listing cohorts from Fall 2002-Fall 2017]

2. Where do you currently live? [Multiple choice]
   a. Metro Vancouver
   b. Elsewhere in BC
   c. Elsewhere in Canada
   d. Outside of Canada

3. Please list some highlights from your work, studies, and/or other activities you have been engaged in since you graduated from the Semester in Dialogue.

Impact of the Semester in Dialogue

4. Tell us about the impact the Semester in Dialogue had on your academic, professional, or personal life [Rating: Strongly Agree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree/Not Applicable]
   a. The Semester in Dialogue helped me find employment.
   b. The Semester in Dialogue led me to attend Graduate/Professional School.
   c. The Semester in Dialogue helped me define my goals, beliefs, and interests.
   d. Professional relationships that I built during the Semester in Dialogue continued after my Semester.
   e. Personal relationships that I built during the Semester in Dialogue continued after my Semester.
   f. I continued to develop a project I initiated during the Semester in Dialogue after concluding the program.

5. If you continued a project you initiated in the Semester in Dialogue, please tell us more about it, including any media links you would like to share.

6. What else changed in your education, career, community engagement, or personal life as a result of participating in the Semester in Dialogue?

7. We are interested in profiling some alumni stories on our website. If you would like to be considered, please include your name and email below.

Skills Developed in the Semester in Dialogue

The Semester in Dialogue aims to:
• Model the spirit of concentrated conversation among equals and deep listening that is essential to dialogue, in an environment of mutual understanding between diverse perspectives;
• Inspire students with a sense of civic responsibility that encourages their passion for improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of their community;
• Develop students’ skills in communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills for real-world projects.

Dialogue Skills

8. After Participating in the Semester in Dialogue… [Rating: Strongly disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly agree/Not applicable]
   a. I am more comfortable suspending judgment, engaging in deep listening, and sharing my perspectives in open-minded conversations through dialogue.
   b. I am more comfortable using dialogic and consensual approaches in collaborative group work.
   c. I have used dialogue in my education, work, community, or personal life.

9. If you have used dialogue in your education, work, community, or personal life, describe some examples of where.

Civic Responsibility

10. After Participating in the Semester in Dialogue… [Rating: Strongly disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly agree/Not applicable]
   a. I have a deeper understanding of the complex public issues associated with the topic of the semester I was enrolled in.
   b. I have an increased general interest in public issues.
   c. I have a deeper understanding of the power relationships, processes, and diverse factors and assumptions that impact multiple-stakeholder issues.
   d. I am more engaged in my community.

Communication Skills

11. After Participating in the Semester in Dialogue… [Rating: Strongly disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly agree/Not applicable]
   a. I am more comfortable speaking to a public audience.
   b. I am more comfortable writing for a public audience.
   c. I developed better skills to design and implement complex projects.
   d. I am more confident interacting with key decision-makers.

12. What other skills from your Semester in Dialogue have been useful in your academic, professional, or personal life?
Feedback on the Semester in Dialogue

13. Overall, my experience with the Semester in Dialogue was… [Rating from 1-10]

14. I have recommended, or would recommend, the Semester in Dialogue to someone I know? [Yes/No/Maybe]

15. Do you have any comments or suggestions on how we can improve the Semester in Dialogue?

16. If you have time, please describe an experience from the Semester in Dialogue that had particular impact on your life.

About the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

17. I would most like to be involved with the Centre as a…
   a. Participant in events
   b. Volunteer
   c. Mentor to other students
   d. Small group facilitator at dialogues
   e. Participant in program-related focus groups
   f. Potential staff member
   g. Donor
   h. Alumni organizer (social gatherings, professional development, etc.)
   i. Participant in professional development opportunities
   j. Other, please specify...

18. Do you have any suggestions for programming (events, professional development, etc.) you would like to see at the Centre?

19. If you would like to be contacted about upcoming opportunities to get involved with the Centre, please provide your name and email.