

# New Student Reflection

Fall 2023

**CENTER *for* CIVIC REFLECTION**

*in partnership with Salisbury University & PACE*

# Program Overview

In 2018, with support from the Provost's Office, the Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement replaced the long-standing New Student Reader program with a New Student Reflection (NSR). NSR uses a humanities-based conversation model in which a shared source (e.g., a poem or short text) is used to examine pressing social issues. This reflection activity is coordinated through PACE's Center for Civic Reflection and brings several benefits to our new student orientation activities, including:

- a structured discussion about a source that enables participants to think and talk about their shared world and differing values and perspectives.
- no requirement that students read or prepare before participating in the activity, which may more fully engage students since all start from the same place with the presented source. Each group has its own conversation, informed by its own experiences.
- modeling the type of dialogue we seek in our classrooms. The purpose is not finding “the” answers so much as exploring larger questions and ideas.

PACE uses a co-facilitator model for leading reflections. A paired faculty or staff member and an orientation leader facilitate the group conversations of approximately 25 students. Facilitators receive training in discussion leadership.

Approximately 1,103 students participated in New Student Reflection in 2023. Of those students, 848 participated in an exit survey immediately following the event. The results of that survey are outlined in this report.

# Source

In the program's early years, source selection was determined by PACE in conjunction with the Office of the Provost. Since 2021, PACE has led a yearly series of conversations with Student Affairs staff, members of the Office of the Dean of Students, and faculty who have facilitated reflections in previous years. A group of approximately twenty participants met three times in the Spring of 2023 to determine the source and suggest logistical considerations for the fall event.

The group selected an excerpt from the TEDWomen 2017 talk "Get Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable" by Luvvie Ajayi Jones. The group aimed to select a source to welcome students to campus and into a conversation and encourage them to consider how they will engage with others in this new space. The excerpt is reproduced below.

## **Get Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable**

I want us to leave this world better than we found it. And how I choose to effect change is by speaking up, by being the first and by being the domino.

For a line of dominoes to fall, one has to fall first, which then leaves the other choiceless to do the same. And that domino that falls, we're hoping that, OK, the next person that sees this is inspired to be a domino. Being the domino, for me, looks like speaking up and doing the things that are really difficult, especially when they are needed, with the hope that others will follow suit.

And here's the thing: I'm the person who says what you might be thinking but dared not to say. A lot of times people think that we're fearless, the people who do this, we're fearless. We're not fearless. We're not unafraid of the consequences or the sacrifices that we have to make by speaking truth to power.

What happens is, we feel like we have to, because there are too few people in the world willing to be the domino, too few people willing to take that fall. We're not doing it without fear.

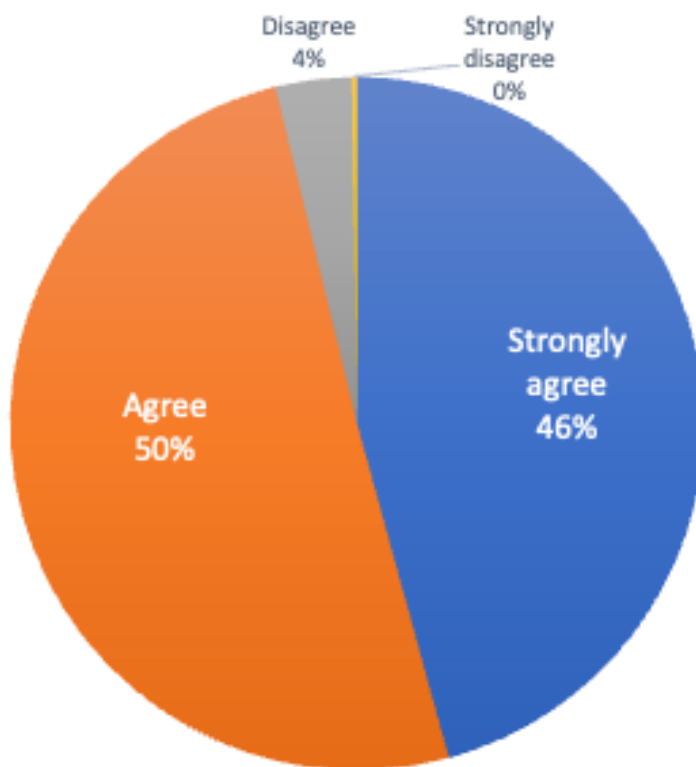
# SURVEY RESULTS

Since establishing the New Student Reflection program, PACE has surveyed incoming students, asking them to express whether they felt welcomed, engaged, and respectful to others during the reflection. Of the 1,103 participating students this year, 848 filled out the corresponding survey, providing the following responses.

## A Welcoming Experience

For the fifth consecutive year, more than 90% of responding students reported that NSR activities contributed to their feeling welcomed at Salisbury University. Given that NSR occurs during new student orientation activities, a sense of welcoming is integral to the experience. PACE feels confident in our ability to craft a welcoming and supportive environment conducive to thoughtful conversation.

This conversation made me feel welcome at Salisbury University

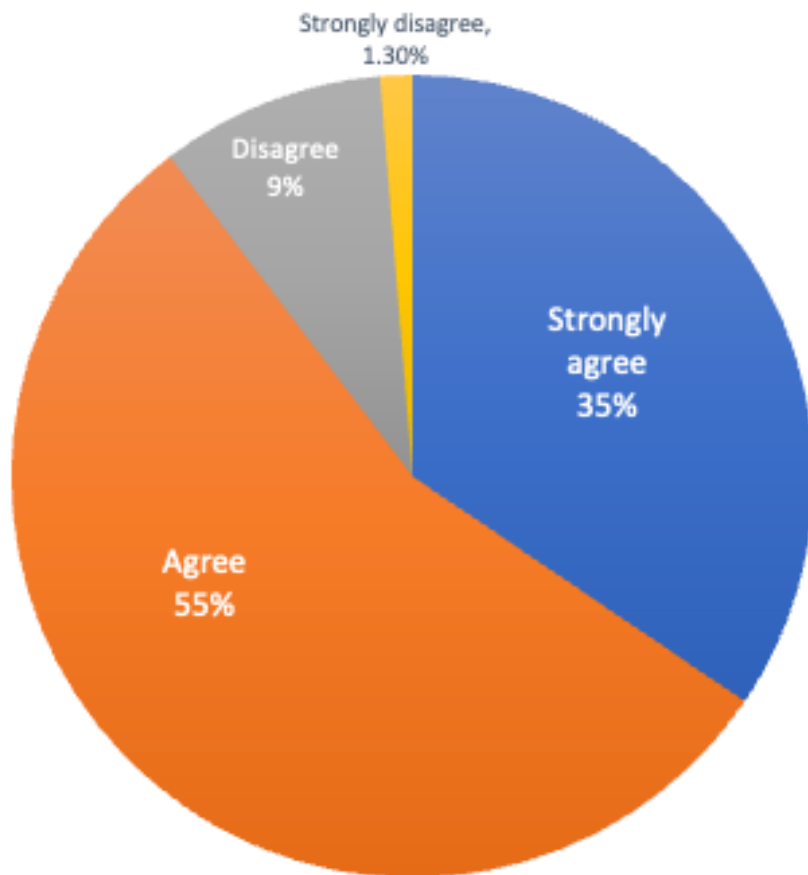


Strongly agree	386
Agree	426
Disagree	30
Strongly disagree	2
N (total respondents)	844
Number of students participating in NSR	1103

# Engaging Conversations

More than 90% of respondents also shared that they felt engaged during the discussion. This speaks in part to the quality of the source selected for discussion as well as how facilitators guided the conversation. This average increased from 2022 responses, and PACE believes that reinstating the model of paired faculty/staff and orientation leaders in 2023 is one factor in this increase.

## I felt engaged throughout the discussion



Strongly agree	292
Agree	467
Disagree	78
Strongly disagree	11
N (total respondents)	848
Number of students participating in NSR	1103

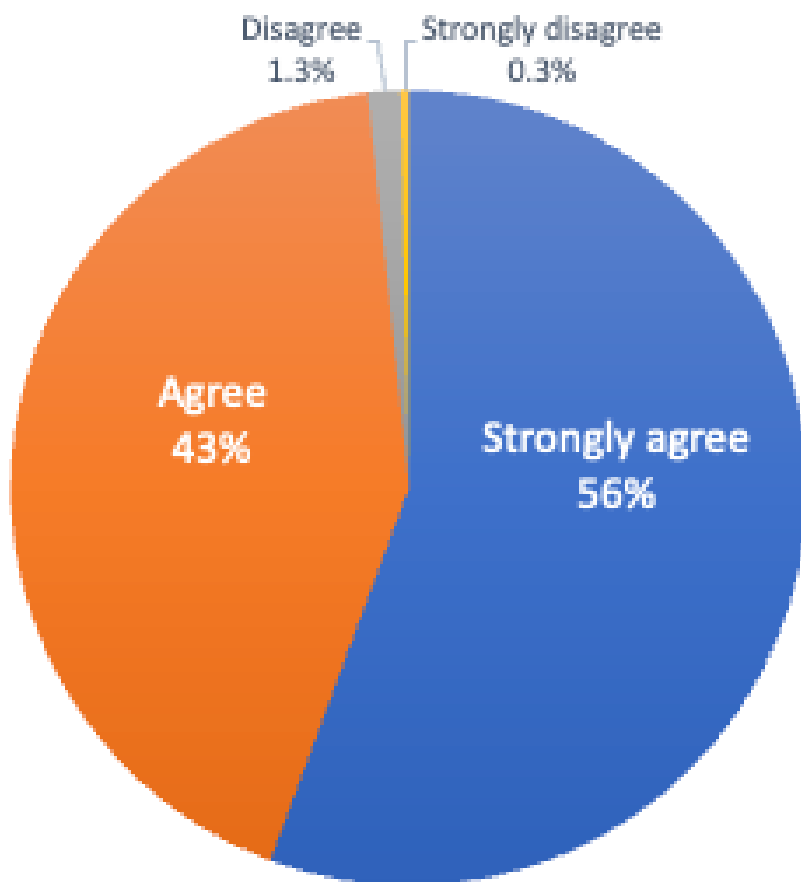
# Active Listening

Civic reflection depends on a group to advance the conversation and, through that conversation, explore important or concerning issues. Particularly given the subjective nature of the sources being discussed, shared conversation lies at the heart of a successful civic reflection experience.

This year, 97% of participants again reported listening carefully to what others had to say. Although the self-reported nature of this particular data set may raise questions about student honesty—and the extent to which students share an idea of what it means to “listen carefully”—the data is consistent across data from this and prior years.

These conversations are successful because facilitators establish conditions where people listen to each other.

## I listened carefully to what others had to say



Strongly agree	472
Agree	362
Disagree	11
Strongly disagree	3
N (total respondents)	848
Number of students participating in NSR	1103

# Planning for 2024

PACE looks forward to facilitating the University's sixth New Student Reflection in the fall of 2024. To prepare for this event, PACE will again facilitate a faculty and staff working group in the spring of 2024 to guide source selection. Participation is open to all members of the university community.

PACE works closely with the Office of Student Affairs in NSR planning. To support faculty/staff and orientation leader training, PACE will again host an event to match pairs on Monday before Convocation. PACE will facilitate faculty/staff training over the spring and summer and orientation leader training in the fall of 2024.

The New Student Reflection program replaced the New Student Reader, a program that cost the university approximately \$150,000 each year. Planning and implementation for NSR averages less than \$10,000 per year. All aspects of the program are prepared and delivered within the current staffing and program bounds of the Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement and the Office of Student Affairs.

## Thank you!

PACE thanks the Office of the President, the Office of Student Affairs, The Dean of the Fulton School, and the orientation leaders, faculty, and staff facilitators who make the New Student Reflection possible.