

# Courageous RI

Final Report





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## Project overview



Courageous Rhode Island was a whole-of-society community education initiative to prevent targeted violence and terrorism through strengthening media literacy and active listening. This two-year program included three programs for adults, educators, and youth. Although it was specifically designed for the residents of Rhode Island, it reached a local, national, and international audience.

### 1. Courageous Conversations

For adults, we offered an online dialogue and discussion program that brought people together to address the role of media and technology in amplifying the fear and hate that leads to violence. We designed, implemented, and assessed an online discussion series to increase awareness of the risks of harmful propaganda and disinformation. We modeled the use of media literacy concepts to analyze media messages and gave people practice in active listening to reduce conflict. The program reached 1,986 people, and research findings show that participants increased their active listening and media literacy knowledge and skills, while reducing defensiveness and increasing intellectual humility.

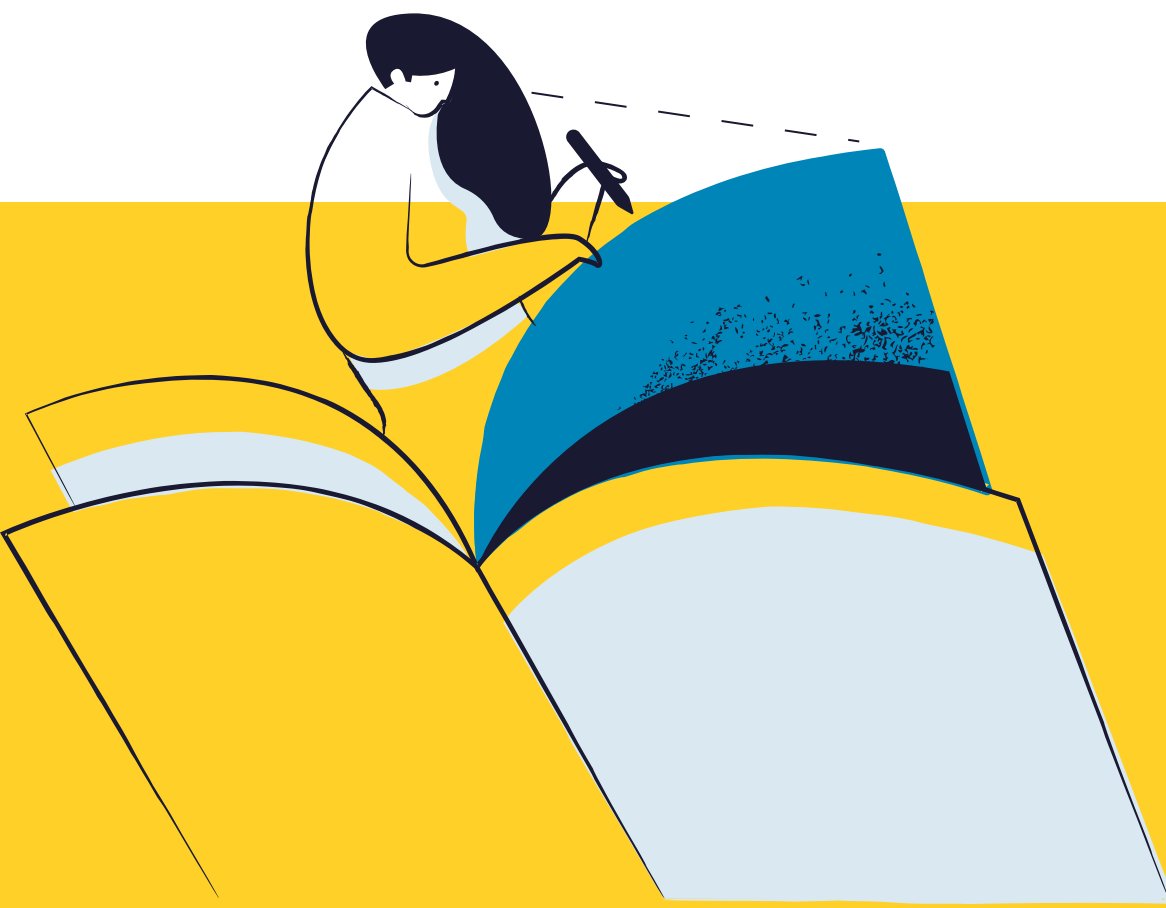
### 2. Courageous Professional Development (PD) Program

Fifty-four secondary and college educators participated in a ten-hour online professional development program that modeled learning activities that activate critical thinking about media, active listening, kindness and compassion, and community engagement. Most educators created and implemented at least one lesson and some developed more intensive units. Educators reached 10,278 students during the 2023–2024 academic year. Although they perceive that teaching about propaganda and disinformation is risky, especially in the current political climate, educators used a range of instructional practices to support student learning. Research found statistically significant

increases in educators' confidence, strategy, knowledge, and skills in bringing media literacy pedagogies into the curriculum.

### 3. Courageous Youth Media Contest (YMC)

We developed a student media contest for middle school, high school, and college youth, who were invited to create written, visual, video, and audio content to highlight the value of media literacy and active listening to reduce the hate and fear that leads to violence. We received 71 submissions of print (including essays, poetry, and opinions), video (documentary, informational, and persuasive), audio (including podcasts and an original musical composition), and graphic design (print brochures and memes). We awarded 20 prizes to students for their creative writing, graphic designs, videos, and original songs. Some student-created media works were displayed on two highway billboards, reaching an audience of 984,104 drivers in RI. An additional 130,000 social media users saw student work that featured on posts on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X.



### 1.1. We built a diverse intergenerational team that worked collaboratively to accomplish the task.

Our team included people with different types of expertise: education at all levels, business experience, data analysis, social-media savvy, communication, and community engagement. Core team members also worked with graphic designers, curriculum specialists, and public relations professionals. Faculty members helped in designing and implementing the professional development program and we hired two undergraduate interns who also provided strong support for our social media outreach program.

Our use of a digital project-management board helped us effectively coordinate our efforts working on this project. We followed our implementation and management plan closely as we “built the plane while flying it.” This helped the program be responsive to current events and to participants’ needs as we discovered them. We took time for reflection after every event to improve our planning as we went along, incorporating participant feedback after each session and making real-time adjustments to ensure continuous improvement.

We also took advantage of partnership opportunities when they presented themselves, and four partnerships in particular enabled us to expand the visibility and reach of the program:

- Because we developed a language-access policy enabling people who speak a language other than English to receive interpretation or translation services at no cost and available upon request, the URI Office of Community, Equity, and Diversity helped us reach diverse audiences and find simultaneous translators who provided translation services for Spanish speakers.
- Our partnership with the Rhode Island Civic Learning Coalition helped us build relationships with social studies educators, students, and community leaders.
- Our partnership with Cortico.AI enabled us to develop an online platform to display and visualize some of the most powerful courageous conversations that occurred in Program 1.
- Our partnership with Rhode Island PBS helped showcase the voices and experiences of young people and educators.

We expect all of these partnerships to be sustained as the Media Education Lab continues to advance media literacy as a powerful tool in the practice of violence prevention. Throughout this report, we share some “voices in the field” as mini-case studies, featuring the voices of anonymous participants who express their thoughts and feelings about the value of the program as they experienced it.

## 1.2. We hosted 22 events and supported Courageous Conversations participants by creating a dynamic format and rich content that enables anyone, anywhere to host a dialogue and discussion program using the Courageous Conversations framework.

The program consisted of ten topics:

### 1. Why Media Literacy Matters

Confront the many forms of disinformation, hoaxes, and propaganda that are part of everyday life. Experience the practical power of strategies for critically analyzing media messages that shape public opinion about education. Consider the power of media literacy as a civic skill and examine how people of all ages learn to spot disinformation and hoaxes. *Discuss: What is media literacy and how can it help people to respond to disinformation & hoaxes?*

### 2. Preventing Violent Extremism

Learn how to analyze media representations of mass shootings and build new knowledge about the growing problem of violent extremism. It's important to take a step back from us-vs-them frameworks that are common in media depictions of violence and to use the power of small acts of unexpected kindness. *Discuss: How is violent extremism affecting our society and what can we do about it?*



### 3. High Conflict

In dialogue and discussion, conflict can be beneficial or harmful. But it's important to watch out for "fire starters" who accelerate conflict that can lead to violence. Learn about the skill of "looping for understanding," a listening practice that helps people feel understood. When people feel understood, they are more open to understanding others. By identifying conflict and listening well, we can take action in helping to dial down conflicts in our family, workplace, and social and civic life. *Discuss: What is the difference between good conflict and high conflict?*

### 4. Conflict Entrepreneurs

Explore the economics of the attention economy, where conflict is a powerful strategy in attracting and holding attention. Examine the various tricks and techniques that are used to amp up social conflict as a means for gaining profit and power. Reflect on the addictive and yet corrosive influence of conflict entrepreneurs in business, entertainment, politics, and news. *Discuss: What do people need to know about social media economics and the profit motives that underpin conflict?*

### 5. Feelings and Facts

People are naturally drawn to stories with compelling heroes, villains, and victims, and with plenty of conflict, uncertainty, and suspense. When people encounter a type of story called a conspiracy theory, feelings may be more important than facts in making decisions about who and what to believe. Confront the limitations of reasoning and evidence in daily life and consider the power of stories and emotions to shape our thinking and decision-making. *Discuss: Why do stories, characters, and conflict change minds?*

## 6. The Influencers

We are living in a world where disinformation and propaganda are leading people to make new and different choices about who to trust. Learn why people trust influencers as thought leaders. People can persuade others by leveraging both their authority and their authenticity. Thought leaders and influencers can also inspire people to hate – and hate can lead to violence. We don't have to agree with the trust decisions that others make – but everyone wins when we're more reflective about who we choose to trust. *Discuss: How do we decide who to trust?*

## 7. Free Speech, Hate Speech & Censorship

Consider the scope of rights granted to Americans by the First Amendment and examine both the benefits of free speech and the drawbacks of hate speech. Learn more about how digital technologies are reshaping people's ideas about the scope and limitations of freedom of expression by discussing the phenomenon of de-platforming, content moderation, and cancel culture. *Discuss: How are digital technologies influencing people's understanding of free speech, hate speech, and censorship?*

## 8. Targets of Propaganda



Learn how and why some people are specially targeted to receive propaganda. While disinformation and propaganda have become pervasive, some target audiences are perceived as vulnerable to certain messages. Campaigns may target audiences based on their age and on racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural identity, using practices like algorithmic profiling and micro-targeting. Propagandists may hijack search terms that are used by teens, new immigrants, racial minorities, and the elderly to deliver emotionally-resonant messages that tap into their deepest hopes, fears, and dreams. *Discuss: Who is targeted to receive harmful propaganda and how does it affect them?*

## 9. Falling Down the Rabbit Hole

Discover how to intervene and support individuals drawn into networks of disinformation, propaganda, and hate. Learn to identify signs of radicalization and employ questioning and active-listening strategies to disrupt the process. Be a guiding light toward a more positive pathway. *Discuss: What can you do to support people in your life who may be moving toward radicalization?*

## 10. The Ripple Effect

Be a “do-er” and exercise your leadership in media literacy for violence prevention by hosting a Courageous Conversation in your school, club, group, library, workplace, or community. Learn more about how your “ripple” can prevent violent extremism through active listening, media literacy, small acts of kindness, and community engagement. *Discuss: How can you help to counteract violent extremism using the power of media literacy, active listening, and dialogue and discussion?*

The scope and sequence of these topics serve as a strong introduction to the value of media literacy education in addressing the problem of targeted violence and terrorism. Materials designed to empower anyone, anywhere to replicate these conversations with diverse audiences are available at the Courageous RI website (<https://www.courageousri.com>).

**1.3. Courageous Conversations reached 1,986 people, including 1,263 people who participated in at least one of twelve online dialogue sessions (including 131 people who received a certificate for completing four or more sessions) and an additional 723 people who participated in a Ripple Effect event offered by 46 participants who delivered a program in their local communities after receiving individualized coaching.**

Each Courageous Conversation session included a 20-minute orientation to the topic, followed by questions to be discussed in facilitated small-group breakout groups. After the small-group discussion, participants gathered as a large group to reflect and synthesize key insights. By offering the program virtually and at varying times throughout the day, we provided flexibility, allowing participants to join from either work or home.

We trained 19 individuals to work as facilitators in small-group breakout rooms, and these individuals were invaluable in ensuring that all participants were provided with opportunities to share their thoughts and feelings. These sessions clearly resonated with adult participants, who found the program content informative, timely, and personally meaningful. Typical feedback included comments like this:

- “While we can learn from the media, we often read into it based on our preconceptions.”
- “I really enjoyed the perspective of others and the respectful language used by all people even when opinions differed.”

**1.4. Rich content on the website provided 31,522 unique visitors with deeper knowledge and offered a roadmap of how to host dialogue and discussions that advance media literacy competencies in the context of violence prevention.**

For all ten topics of the Courageous Conversations program, we created lesson plans, videos, and PowerPoint slides to support educators. We also developed curated educator resources that identified excellent additional materials suitable for secondary and college use. We created a five-part Listening Matters series and a set of Creative Expression Project Ideas that aligned each of the topics with hands-on media production projects. See the list of Program 1 deliverables (page 55) for links to all resources. To encourage sharing, all materials were made freely available on the Courageous RI website. PowerPoints and lesson plans can be downloaded as editable Google Docs. This enables users to customize materials as needed for their learning contexts.

**Table 1. Website Visitors, Courageous RI**

DATES	PAGE VIEWS	SITE SESSIONS	UNIQUE VISITORS
January 2023 – December 2023	33,791	15,891	8,690
January 2024 – September 2024	46,305	32,207	22,832
<b>Total</b>	<b>80,096</b>	<b>48,098</b>	<b>31,522</b>



The significant growth in website traffic over the course of the two-year program is primarily due to the quality of our social media campaigns and the depth of rich content available on the website. While the large majority of website users were from the United States, data revealed a global audience, with users visiting from Ukraine, Brazil, India, Canada, and other countries.

**1.5. We developed an innovative digital platform that enables website users to “listen in” to Courageous Conversations, helping to build confidence and appreciation for the importance of media literacy and active listening as a form of violence prevention.**

The Courageous RI Portal (<https://www.courageousri.com/portal>) helps people to understand the complex emotional and personal dimensions of these dialogue and discussion programs. To develop this content, we used Fora, a platform by Cortico.AI that amplifies underheard voices using a combination of human listening and machine listening. At this website, users can hear the voices of participants as they respond to open-ended discussion questions. This website helps people understand the personal value of these courageous conversations to participants themselves.

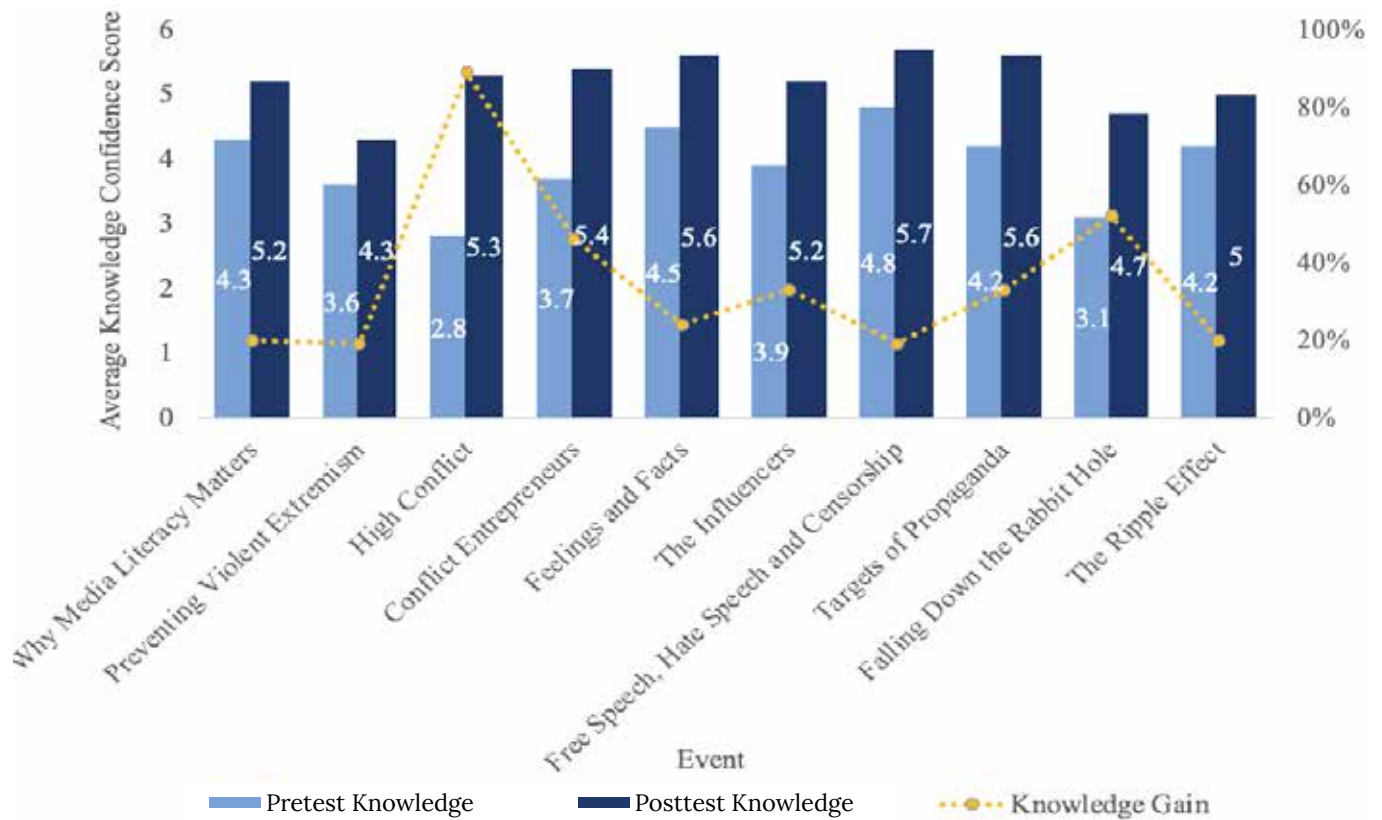
**Figure 1. Courageous RI Portal: Listen In**



**1.6. The program increased knowledge of the risks of exposure to harmful propaganda and disinformation and of how extremist communities use media to foment the fear and hate that leads to violence.**

Comparing knowledge scores from pretest to posttest, we found that participants experienced increases in knowledge in all ten programs. The most substantial knowledge gain resulted from programs in differentiating between beneficial and harmful conflict (High Conflict, 89% knowledge gain), approaches to deradicalization (Falling Down the Rabbit Hole, 52% knowledge gain), and understanding the economic motives behind conflict (Conflict Entrepreneurs, 46% knowledge gain).

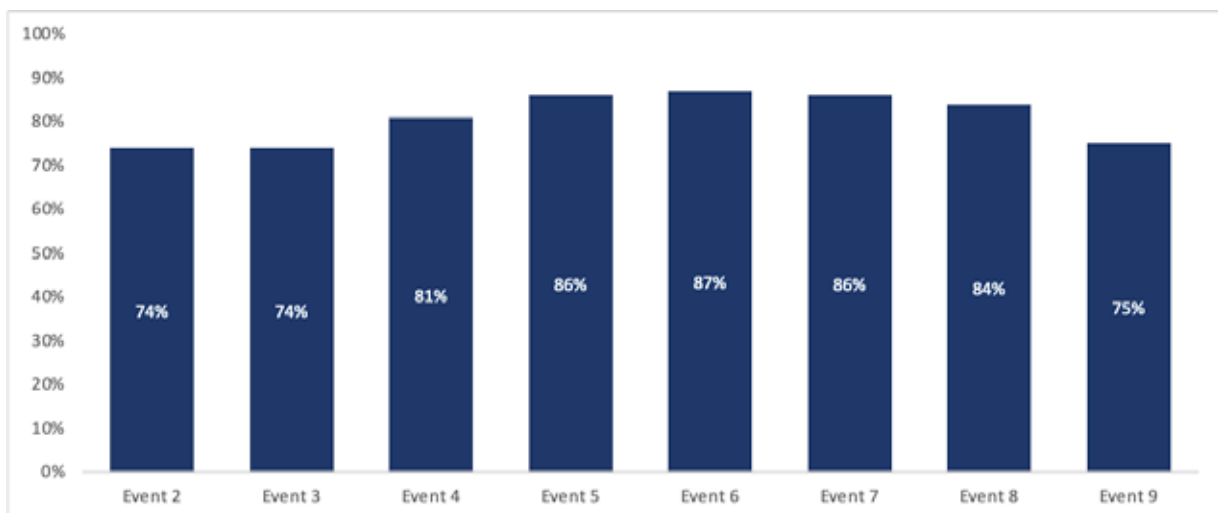
**Table 2. Increase in Knowledge from Pretest to Posttest for Each Courageous Conversations Session**



**1.7. The Courageous Conversations programs provided practical knowledge and skills that people applied to their everyday lives.**

Three out of four participants indicated that they had applied knowledge and skills from a previous session to their everyday use of media and technology. Table 3 shows these data. This is very strong evidence that participants found the program relevant and useful.

**Table 3. Real-Life Application of Skills to Daily Life**







NOTE: Participants who attended the previous session were asked, “Over the past two weeks, did you apply what you learned to daily life?”

**1.8. Survey research shows that the program improved people’s active listening, intellectual curiosity, and media literacy competencies while decreasing their defensiveness in responding to people with different points of view.**

We measured the long-term impact of the program with survey research that was conducted at two points in time: just before the start of the program (February 2023) and then five months later (June 2023) when the program concluded. Participants completed a pretest and posttest survey which measured active listening, intellectual humility, defensiveness, and media literacy knowledge and application, and 185 people completed both surveys. As Table 4 shows, participants increased active listening skills and intellectual humility, and they decreased defensiveness. This robust dialogue and discussion program also increased media literacy knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge to daily life.

**Table 4. Research Results, Impact of Program on Active Listening, Intellectual Humility, Defensiveness, and Media Literacy Knowledge and Application**

	PRETEST		POSTTEST		T	DF	P	
	M	SD	M	SD				
<b>ACTIVE LISTENING</b>	55.79	7.35	57.82	7.52	3.32	129	0.001	
<b>INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY</b>	7.69	1.16	8.07	0.967	3.53	138	0.001	
<b>DEFENSIVENESS</b>	4.67	1.45	4.28	1.08	3.08	139	0.001	
<b>ML KNOWLEDGE</b>	8.02	1.49	8.42	1.09	2.79	184	0.003	
<b>ML APPLICATION</b>	7.94	1.48	8.48	1.19	3.71	183	0.001	

*Paired T-test*

**1.9. Some participants chose to replicate and extend the Courageous Conversations program in their own communities, and 723 people encountered Courageous Conversations through a Ripple Effect event that was developed and offered by former participants in the program.**

The Ripple Effect is the term we coined for replication and extension of Courageous Conversations by participants themselves. We documented that 42 Courageous Conversations replication programs were held in nine US states and two foreign countries. Thirty-four of the sessions were held in-person in high schools, colleges, libraries, community centers, and churches for students, educators, parents, school administrators, workplace colleagues, senior citizens, victims of crime, and the general public. Twelve sessions were held online for community mediators, librarians, and singer/songwriters.

## A Teacher-and-Librarian Partnership Brings Courageous Conversations to High School Students



### CASE STUDY: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Social studies teacher Jack (a pseudonym) did not participate in Courageous Conversations or Courageous PD. But his school library colleague, Sam (a pseudonym) did participate in a number of Courageous Conversations, and he introduced Jack to the idea of creating a Courageous RI dialogue and discussion program for his Grade 12 Government and Politics students. This initiative became a Ripple Effect event. Jack and Sam worked to develop, implement, and assess a nine-week unit on media literacy and violence prevention in the Spring of 2024 with 65 students. And Jack plans to implement this program again in the Spring of 2025. Courageous RI staff members were fortunate to be able to visit his school and observe a lesson in person. This excerpt comes from an interview:

**Jack:** So when we first checked out your website, we saw that there were the slideshows, there were the handouts you could make Google copies of, and there were the videos, too. And the podcast, of course, and, you know, we realized that all of those components together were super helpful. And we realized that the way you had set up your curriculum was the way that we probably wanted to present our lessons as well. So seeing that there are slides, seeing that there are activities, and then something to listen to or watch is how we teach, right? If we want to access kids from all areas of learning, some are visual learners, some are auditory, some are hands-on learners. This is great that you had all these resources in these different formats.

And then what we did is, you know, we used the website, and we looked at the unit on conflict entrepreneurs, and the unit on high conflict and good conflict. And then we dove into that. And I think an important part was to make sure that it connected to the U.S. government and politics component of the Massachusetts state social studies curriculum, and to make sure that we were meeting those benchmarks. The fact that there's a whole standard in the Massachusetts curriculum that is dealing with media literacy was a huge help – and this allowed us a little bit of wiggle room to make sure we hit the things we had to and then could add on to the other things we wanted to do. What you presented and made available was easy to follow, easy to access, and easy to implement, and, you know, it was also easy to adapt for our older kids.

## Mediation Center Brings Courageous Conversation to Local Communities



### CASE STUDY: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Sarah (a pseudonym) hosted a total of seven events using the Courageous Conversation program design for her small non-profit mediation center, reaching 12 people over four months. This excerpt comes from a webinar featuring participants who hosted Ripple Events.

**Sarah:** So we were so excited to be part of the Ripple Effect. Here at the <...>, we do a lot of work around active listening. And how can we help navigate through this very chaotic and conflicted world? So what we decided to do is to take all of the good work that you folks have done and simply replicate it.

We chose to start with the High Conflict topic because that seemed to be really engaging and it certainly was. We had nine people at the first event. It was, from our perspective, incredibly successful. We reached out to people who are kind of outside of our normal community. People were very engaged. The format of having a large group and then the small groups facilitated was excellent. It provided opportunities for really great discussion and frankly, for us, also provided opportunities for some of our volunteers to sharpen their facilitation skills, which was really great for us as well.

Everything that this project is trying to do around active listening, kindness, community engagement, those are things that are very closely aligned with the work that we do. So we were really grateful to be participating.

## Musicians and Educators Use Courageous Conversations to Build Community Cohesion



### CASE STUDY: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Mary and Joe (pseudonyms) hosted a series of events that brought together musicians and people who appreciate music to create music on the themes of Courageous Conversations. Rashonda (a pseudonym) participated in most of these sessions. A total of 28 participants were part of this unique Ripple Effect event. This excerpt comes from a webinar where Ripple Event hosts were featured.

**Joe:** When the opportunity came for me to participate in the Courageous Conversations, my mind went immediately to country music and the contested space that had sort of erupted in country music at the time. I was fascinated by the way that cancel culture had kind of crept into country music and the way musicians and then people who love music were making sense of that contested space. What does it mean to encounter a different

way of seeing the world in song? That kind of basic question for me has come up through all these three Ripples, whether we talked about, you know, propaganda or some of the other topics. What does it mean to engage in that conflict-possible space? In a way that is authentic in a way that is not sort of like losing the battle before it's begun, by sort of turning yourself into a propagandist. But, you know, how do we, how do we make it new? And then as audience members, how do we participate? You know what happens in our own emotional space as we enter into that special zone of music.

**Mary:** As a scholar, one of my complaints about media literacy has been assumptions about logical, reasonable reasoning as a source of decision-making. And so I've really loved the way our Ripples have dug into the emotional work that happens in music. And I think that it's been so neat to see that integrated in media literacy discussion. What we found out and what we learned was structurally that there was both a process and a product. The process was trying to get the ideas from Courageous Conversations somehow into a different modality, music, okay? There's a lot in terms of songwriting that depends upon the music. And so we had musicians there, represented, and also people who just wanted to be appreciators.

**Rashonda:** These Ripples were so engaging and I align with a lot of hip hop music and hip hop dance. And so I knew our participants liked a lot of country music, a lot of folk music. And so I wondered how we would find alignment or how we would just work together, but we had a lot of the same participants who came to all the Ripples, like me. And it's like we developed our own sense of community.

I will admit: I was initially frustrated with the mantra of "Be curious, not furious," because, you know, I've got a lot to be furious about, I felt. And so this would come up and I was furious about something, this space allowed the time for just thinking about it more. It made me rethink, and think more deeply about some of the initial things that I felt about something. It just kind of made me add different perspectives and textures to it. Whereas I would have initially just kind of dismissed it right away.

That was a really cool part of it. I really liked that we focused on music because still as artists, there's a commonality as well. And so it just ended up being a really nurturing and eye opening experience



## COURAGEOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

### Key Accomplishments and Outcomes



**2.1. To support the learning needs of secondary and college educators, we recruited a diverse group of faculty and participants, which included 54 middle school, high school and college faculty from RI and across the United States; 48 completed the Courageous RI Professional Development Program. These educators reached 10,278 students during the 2023–2024 school year.**

In this ten-hour online professional development program for secondary and college educators, we modeled learning activities that activate critical thinking about media, active listening, kindness and compassion, and community engagement. Participants developed original lesson plans on themes related to Courageous Conversations.

The program faculty modeled a range of instructional practices suitable for secondary and college use to support student learning about propaganda and disinformation. Most participants also completed a final assignment, which was a detailed plan to implement media literacy and active listening into their classrooms. We showcased many of these teachers in webinar events, which enabled them to share their insights with peers. Educators reported increases in their confidence, strategy, knowledge, and skills in bringing media literacy pedagogies into the curriculum.

We received 142 applications for this program in the early fall of 2023. Fifty-four selected participants were employed as middle school teachers (26%), high school teachers (54%), or college teachers (31%). Most participants identified as White (85%), 12% identified as Hispanic, and 3% identified as African American. Some participants taught at both the secondary and college level, and 3% of participants specialized in pre-service teacher education. Participants ranged in age, including 25–33-year-olds (10% of the sample), 34–44-year-olds (38% of the sample), 45–54-year-olds (31% of the sample), 55–64-year-olds (18% of the sample), and 65+ (3% of the sample). Participants came from RI and other states (including California, North Carolina, New York, and Florida). We used measures of political orientation in the selection of applicants to the program by using a 10-point scale, with 1 being extreme left and 10 being extreme right. Most participants indicated they were in the middle, but some participants identified as extreme right and extreme left. We sought to ensure viewpoint diversity in selecting program participants.

## 2.2. We designed and implemented a ten-hour Courageous PD program, guided by a team of experts, that explored the uses of media literacy and active listening as a means to reduce the fear and hate that leads to violence.

The program consisted of twelve online programs (six sessions offered at 12 PM and 7 PM) plus four hours of independent reading, viewing, writing, and other work. Each participant developed a final assignment to implement with learners in their own schools, libraries, and communities. A lively mix of synchronous and asynchronous content was developed and implemented by distinguished faculty members including:

- A media literacy expert who is a college professor and author
- The director of a social studies teacher education program
- A former social studies teacher and author
- A college professor with expertise in youth media

The program used a blend of real-time (synchronous via Zoom) and anytime (asynchronous via the Media Education Lab's Pathwright Learning Management System [LMS]) learning experiences. We offered twelve real-time sessions, each one at 12 PM and 7 PM, from September to December 2023. These one-hour sessions featured a short lecture component and a small-group discussion activity. In the anytime learning component, participants completed reading, viewing, and discussion activities that helped them synthesize their learning. They read articles and viewed videos, participating in threaded discussions to exchange ideas in response to new information.

Because we needed to address the authentic needs of teachers, we worked collaboratively to build the learning outcomes for the program, emphasizing the positive power of communication, dialogue, and discussion as a means to build relationships of compassion, trust, and respect. Figure 2 shows a visual depiction of our learning journey. These learning outcomes were identified as most important:

- **ENGAGE** with others with kindness, acknowledging the humanity and autonomy of all individuals and being mindful of their background, experiences, attitudes, and behaviors.
- **UNDERSTAND** the messages being communicated by others (both interpersonally and via mass communication), the goal of finding common ground, and the challenges facing their communities through practicing active listening.
- **ANALYZE** and **EVALUATE** the opinions and information being communicated by others by developing both critical and media literacies.
- **PARTICIPATE** in civic life, using the analytical, social, and emotional skills they have developed to help build and better their communities.
- **EXPRESS** perspectives and **SHARE** experiences in effective ways (using media or other means) in an effort to promote nonviolence.
- **SHOWCASE:** Experience the educational potential of create-to-learn projects that build knowledge, creativity, confidence, and leadership skills.



Figure 2. Courageous PD Outline



**Session 1: Engage with Courageous Questions.** At the first gathering, the four facilitators wanted to get to know the individual educators who were enrolled in the program. We engaged participants to share about their background and life experiences that drove them to apply to participate in the program. We asked participants, “Why do educators and students need to be courageous?” This helped us better understand motivations and needs that participants were bringing to the table, and we used this information to design subsequent sessions. Responses included the following types of concerns:

**Concerns about Extremist Violence**

- “Preventing violent extremism would seem the most important goal ultimately. If the general public is educated about the dangers of social media, then perhaps we could prevent the types of acts of violence we witness nationally.”
- “I wish we could do more to regulate platforms. I found it so rude that in yesterday’s hearings a congresswomen held up a picture of a scantily clad woman who she said was one of Hunter Biden’s girlfriends. The hearing moderator said that was porn and she couldn’t show it in the hearing. She said, ‘It’s not porn. It’s all over the internet.’ Is that our bar for what is a commonly acceptable image? What is commonly acceptable?”
- “How do we distinguish free speech from harmful, hostile, or dangerous language? I remember the controversy after a lunatic got Gabby Gifford and a nine-year old child in their sights and killed the child and several other people. The question was, ‘Did hostile political rhetoric play a role? How do we hold people creating postings accountable?’”

**Exposure to Harmful Propaganda**

- “I am interested in addressing the question regarding who is targeted to receive harmful propaganda and how it affects them. During the pandemic, the Latinx community in RI experienced disproportionate high rates of illness and death. Yet ... multiple social media sites disseminated false information about COVID-19 to the Latinx community. It is critical

- to provide education to the community to ensure they receive correct information.”

### Accusations of Indoctrination

- “Educators need to be courageous because we are under constant scrutiny. We need to constantly walk the fine line between challenging our students to achieve a higher level of critical thinking and claims of indoctrination.”
- “Educators need to be brave because the climate in this country at the moment is deciding reality for oneself. We seem to be able to choose what reality is and what facts are real.”
- “Students are caught in the middle of a larger discussion between what to teach and to whom while being deprived of their rights to an education.”

### Meeting the Needs of New Immigrants and Minority Students

- “I feel that we all should be courageous in having an honest and heart-to-heart conversation with administrators and colleagues about how we can better support our MLL [multilingual learners] students in our schools without letting our own biases interfere with students’ learning.”
- “Over the years, I have heard many negative comments about MLL students such as ‘Why should I have to translate our lessons/assessments into their language? I don’t get paid enough to do this. I am a teacher, not a translator. They don’t pay attention because they get everything for free,’ etc. Sometimes these students are seated in the back of the class (out of sight – out of mind). We have seen many news reports... that affect our personal biases and in turn can get in the way when teaching our students.”
- “Our biases and perceptions can have negative effects on how we perceive their capabilities (skill levels/proficiency, etc.). Some teachers water down materials rather than providing them with quality-grade level materials that would foster learning new material, new language/s, and getting acclimated to a new culture.”

### Political Polarization

- “I teach communication courses for college students and I see that political polarization and classrooms saturated with digital media are the two main factors that require courage from students and instructors. For instance, a student told me that he refrained from participating in discussions last semester. He was Black and conservative-leaning student who had different opinions from the rest of the group. Thus, he feared that a peer would post some of his comments on social media. Over the years, this student was one of the few who shared this type of concern directly with me.”

### Respect for Diverse Perspectives

- “I am passionate about students learning to speak in an educated and respectful way about how they really feel, regardless of what responses those feelings might elicit. But I also want them to truly be able to hear what others are saying about the same thing ... I want them to form an educated opinion, with the understanding that opinions can change as life progresses, and to be able to speak freely without violating norms around hate speech and

- bigotry that seem to be so popular in the media today.”
- “I consider myself a really moderate thinker when it comes to political and social issues, I like to hear lots of sides and think about issues for a long time before I make up my mind, and even then, I know my mind is liable to change at some point. But higher education (at least the universities I work in) are bastions of uber-liberal values where moderate isn’t well-liked. Which is one of the things that drew me to this program. Because I am bothered by how extreme we all are these days – so many of us seem to need to be on one side or the other, as far away from the other guy as we can get, and I just don’t think that’s healthy or useful.”

**Session 2: Consider the Misperceptions We Hold (October 10, 2023).** We watched and discussed a video entitled “America’s Divided Mind: Video Intervention” by the Beyond Conflict Innovation Lab for Neuroscience and Social Conflict. The video features everyday Americans from across the country, and researchers at Stanford found that it was an effective tool to reduce support for political violence, anti-democratic attitudes and animosity across partisan lines. After sharing their thoughts and feelings in response to the video, participants were then asked to critically analyze it using the five critical questions of media literacy. During the synchronous session, participants discussed these questions in small group breakout rooms:

- How does the research on misperceptions relate to your life and experience?
- Which of these ideas is most interesting/relevant/useful to you?
  - Correcting misperceptions
  - Showing cooperation and civility among opposing leaders
  - Condemning political violence by party leaders
- How could you address these ideas with your students?

Nearly all participants engaged with this activity, and some noteworthy takeaway responses include the following:

- **Listening Matters.** “Getting to know what people actually think always seems to reveal many more nuances and much more common ground than we realize. This reminded me to take the time to really get to know people, to build relationships.”
- **Focus on the Issues.** “This video serves as a reminder for me, not only in this class but in our broader discussions, to emphasize the importance of focusing on the issues rather than fixating on someone’s political party or candidate choices. It’s crucial to break down tensions and embrace our differences, as this is key to our quest for knowledge and fostering a more inclusive and informed society.”
- **Finding Common Ground.** “Relationships and empathy are critical for a society to thrive. This research reveals that we have more in common than we realize, yet we often choose (as a society) to focus on our differences. I have to face the reality that I, too, am part of the problem when I am upset about how the ‘other side’ feels about an issue without taking the time to listen and really think about another perspective. It’s humbling ...”

**Session 3: Analyze and Evaluate Media (October 24, 2023).** This session was led by all four faculty members, who modeled how they help students of different ages develop critical thinking skills about media. The session provided mini-lessons intended to inspire educators as they begin the process of developing original lesson plans that are specifically targeted to the needs of their own learners.

- **Who Were the Black Confederates?** We modeled a lesson that was relevant to middle school social studies students. It involved viewing and critically analyzing a short video titled “A Tribute to Our Black Confederate Heroes” produced by Heritage Not Hate Productions. On the first viewing, students are asked: What symbols do you see? Which photos do you notice? What text jumps out at you? Then students listen to the music track, and they discuss: Take note of the words of the song. What jumps out at you? What is happening in the story? Students then consider that the narrator of the song was not necessarily the same entity as the creator of the video – and indeed that the protagonist depicted in the song was not necessarily even a real person. Through dialogue and discussion, students recognize that the purpose of this video was to remind the viewer of the heroics of the so-called Black Confederates – African Americans who fought for the Confederacy. This media literacy lesson then activates students’ intellectual curiosity: Were African American laborers in the Confederate army formally enlisted in the army, equipped with uniforms, arms, and accoutrements, and paid for their own work, as were African Americans in the U.S. Army? What story is the creator of this video telling about the Civil War? In what ways can a close analysis of the content of the video help us better assess the reliability of the creator’s message?
- **Were the Stonewall Riots a Form of Violent Extremism? Why or Why Not?** We modeled a mini-lesson that was relevant to both high school students and teacher educators, from the Reading Like a Historian program developed by the Stanford History Education Group. The activity involves comparing and contrasting primary source documents about the causes of the Stonewall riots in New York City in 1969.
- **What Different Kinds of Contemporary Propaganda are Beneficial and Harmful?** We showed educators how to use the Mind Over Media Propaganda Gallery, a crowdsourced platform where high school and college students can critically analyze examples of contemporary propaganda and engage in discussion about their perceptions of benefits, harms, and risks associated with propaganda techniques including activating strong emotions, simplifying ideas and information, appealing to audience needs, and attacking opponents.
- **How Is Violence Represented as Heroism in Superhero Movies?** We modeled a lesson for college students that involved analyzing a film clip from *Captain America: The First Avenger*. After introducing students to the term “ideology,” they apply the concept by examining an artifact of popular culture to consider the politics of superhero stories. Discussion questions include:
  - What political viewpoint is confirmed by the “Star-Spangled Man with a Plan”?
  - Whose interests are served by the message being communicated?
  - What role does the sequence play in the context of the film’s era – WWII-era America?
  - What role might the sequence play in the context of today?
- **Teaching about the Israel Hamas Conflict.** Because the Israel–Hamas conflict had just begun, we also shared a webinar from the Media Education Lab, which offered insights on how to teach about the ongoing conflict with nonviolence and media literacy strategies.

**Session 4: Reflect on Storytelling as Both Personal and Political (November 7, 2023).** This session focused on using storytelling to bridge political divides and foster courageous engagement in educational settings. Participants viewed and discussed the video “Why Facts Don’t Convince People.” Then they analyzed a student-produced video “Like a Lion” which features a boy who recovered from trauma through telling his story using a simple metaphor about the need to be a courageous communicator. This session built an important connection between courage, storytelling, identity, and social–emotional growth. Participants engaged in breakout sessions to

reflect on how storytelling can be both a personal and a political act. Storytelling can also help people transcend political differences. Key takeaways from participants are outlined below:

### Implementing Storytelling in the Classroom

- “There is power in storytelling to get to the heart of whatever you are trying to teach content or skill set.”
- “It is important to encourage students to share their perspectives. This is how we can help them embolden their voice and reshape perspectives.”
- “Stories are important! Thanks to everyone who shared their stories tonight. I loved the ideas about using photography, recipes, songs to encourage/as springboards for storytelling.”

### Creating Safe Spaces

- “Students really need the chance to tell their stories and feel comfortable doing so to feel accepted, heard and safe in their school community. Learning can’t happen if they don’t feel safe.”
- “I am thinking about how to create safe spaces for students to be vulnerable and share their stories and how very powerful student stories can be.”

### Relationship-Building through Storytelling

- “Storytelling brings the human side of us and allows us teachers to connect with the younger generation. It helps us learn from each other.”
- “I love hearing and talking about the importance of stories with students – creating them, sharing them, and listening to them – this is the meat and potatoes of relationships which is the path to peace.”

**Session 5: Behold the Power of Creative Expression (November 21, 2023).** This session focused on the power of creativity in advocating for nonviolence and combating hate. Participants explored how creative expression can be misused for harmful purposes, such as political violence, using examples like the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021. Lively discussion occurred in response to the question, “How have those promoting political violence (past & present) used creativity to communicate their message?” Participants watched and discussed clips from films about media’s role in promoting violent racism (*BlacKkKlansman*) and media’s role in promoting peace (*The Interrupters*) to analyze how media can both perpetuate and counteract violence. The session also highlighted the role educators play as “teacher-creators” and introduced the upcoming Courageous RI Youth Media Contest, encouraging educators to inspire their own students to use creative skills for positive change. The session included time for guidance on the Final Assignment and Gallery Walk Showcase, emphasizing the need for creativity and courage. Participants expressed these key takeaways:

### The Value of Incorporating Creativity in Teaching

- “I need to plan creativity into more activities, lessons, and even assessments – it makes things fun, engaging, and memorable. Remembering my own time as a student reminded me of that.”
- “I enjoyed the brief discussion in the breakout session on how lecturing (and teaching in general) can be a creative endeavor.”
- “I learned that creativity is directly linked to aim; even when we think we are not creative, we are when we are working on reaching specific objectives.”

## Sharing Examples of Creative Teaching Techniques

- “Learning from other’s experiences of valuable classrooms/teachers in the past. It seems connection, creativity, and storytelling were all key components.”
- “I enjoyed the small-group discussion and hearing the other folks in our session discuss creative projects that had impacted them over the course of their schooling. Some great ideas were mentioned.”

## Broadening an Understanding of the Term “Creative Expression”

- “Sometimes I forget about the many art mediums and focus on the visual; I need to remember the full spectrum of creative expression.”
- “That everyone has something to say and can express it in different ways – our job as teachers is to create the opportunity for them to do so.”
- “I think I actually am more creative than I had previously thought of myself.”

**Session 6: Gallery Walk Showcase (December 5, 2023).** The Courageous PD program ended with the final showcase session, where small-group breakout sessions were used for participants to present their final assignments. Each participant added three slides about their project to a collaborative slide deck, and a Google Doc made all projects available to all participants via hyperlinks. Participants addressed the impact of media literacy and active listening as a means to reduce the hate and fear that leads to violence, but all projects were specifically created for a target audience of students who are currently in middle school, high school, or college, and enrolled in classes taught by the program participants. We also discussed future opportunities for professional development and program amplification, urging participants to engage youth in the Youth Media Contest.

## 2.3. Participants worked individually and collaboratively to create innovative lesson plans and activities. Of the 54 participants, 45 (83%) produced original work and earned certificates and stipends.

Participants chose to create work for diverse audiences, including middle school, high school, college, graduate school, and even current teaching staff. All participants received an email with personalized feedback from their designated mentor teacher. Sample projects included:

- **Poems as a Creative Platform** (Created by a high school English teacher). Students explore the poetry of Amanda Gorman to appreciate how the stories told in poetry are a form of communal cultural participation. Poetry provides concepts and purpose necessary for a community to survive harsh conditions, such as wars or other cultural upheavals. It can help reinforce values and community ideals. Students look at poetry from across time and place and investigate how it is used to affect social change.
- **AI Image Exploration with Middle School Students** (Created by a middle school teacher). Students move through an inquiry learning process where they explore the questions:
  - Is seeing believing?
  - Who do you trust?
  - How can we responsibly use AI-generated images?
- **How Storytelling Shapes and Reflects Cultural Norms and Values** (Created by a middle school teacher and high school teacher working together). Students rewrite a traditional fairytale from the villain’s perspective. They apply media literacy skills to their

- understanding of authority and authenticity to learn how storytelling works to shape our cultural norms and values.
- **Social Media, Patriotism, and Violent Extremism in Cultural Context** (Created by two college teachers – one from the U.S. and one from Brazil). Using a cultural studies methodology, students explore the visual language used to persuade social media audiences to follow a leader or participate in a rally that was used to incite violence on Jan 6, 2021 (in the USA) and Jan 8, 2023 (in Brazil). Because visual language tends to impact the viewer in a more immediate way than text alone, and because students tend to get their news from social media, it is worth analyzing how the images and text work together. Activities include dialogue and discussion to practice visual reading of persuasive texts; analysis of how patriotism is visually constructed; reflection on how personal exposure to themes/motifs of patriotism is shaped by their own media choices; and discussion on how cultural context shapes interpretation of media.
- **Memes: Propaganda of Our Time** (Created by a teacher educator and a middle school teacher). Students explore the question: Why are memes an effective way to spread persuasive ideas online? Activities include deconstructing memes and evaluating their messages using guiding questions for evaluation. Students will create their own persuasive memes applying the knowledge they acquired in the analysis portion and offer reflection on memes as a component of political communication
- **Media Literacy 101 for MLLs** (Created by a teacher of multilingual learners). Participants learn why media literacy is important by learning to understand and identify point of view, bias, and stereotyping. Teachers learn to activate the “reality check” function of critical thinking that can be used to counteract the fear and hate that can be present in the media.

## 2.4. Feedback from teachers provided strong evidence of the value of the final assignment project as a culminating activity.

We asked participants to respond to these questions in a threaded discussion:

- What was the most surprising or unexpected thing you learned in this program?
- How did this program reinforce what you already know or challenge your knowledge, attitudes, or beliefs?
- How have you helped others in this program? Who has helped you?
- How have you grown as a leader in media literacy?

Figure 3 shows a sample of a threaded discussion as participants experienced the process of critically analyzing a video as part of their work at the Media Education Lab’s Pathwright LMS. At the end of the program, participants reflected on their learning. Sample responses include:

- “One of the biggest takeaways for me is the role that active listening plays in reducing violent extremism. Thinking back on it, it shouldn’t be surprising, but I’ve never connected the two before and I’m not sure why.”
- “I feel like this class was a RUNWAY or a SKI RAMP that has launched my thoughts, lesson creation, and ideas about media literacy and civil discourse – I so appreciated the exposure to so many teachers and kindred souls along with the exciting curriculum resources. Thank you!”
- “This program has opened my eyes to more ways I can help my students become self-aware, self-disciplined, and critical of the world around them. It has also taught me which tools I can use and questions I can ask while digesting media in my own world. I enjoyed all of the breakout rooms and the voices I heard while in the zoom calls. I was happy I was able to attend all of them during the busy work day!”

- “The program emphasizes that communication is vital to overcoming attitudes, biases, and beliefs, highlighting the importance of supporting and educating one another, and having K. as my partner has been enriching beyond. I’ve also learned from every participant in the program, contributing to my growth as a media literacy guru.”
- “My journey through the Courageous RI has been eye-opening, reshaping how I view digital media literacy and enhancing my ability to bring contemporary training methods into the classroom. Exploring issues like extremism, propaganda, hate speech, and free speech has deepened my understanding, guiding me to integrate even more digital literacy education into my educational materials with a more comprehensive and intentional approach.”

**Figure 3. Sample of Threaded Discussion: Participants Critically Analyze a Short Video**

> | **Watch: challenging misperceptions**

**Critically analyze the video "America's Divided Mind"**

Consider one or more of the five Key Questions of Media Literacy and apply it (them) to the video:

- Who is the author and what is the purpose?
- What techniques are used to attract and hold your attention?
- What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented?
- How might different people interpret the message?
- What is omitted from the message?

33 reply\_other

Reply...

Show Best ▾

a year ago

I decided to do a little bit of digging to learn more about Beyond Conflict, the author of this video. Beyond Conflict is an organization with more than 30 years of experience in the field of conflict negotiation in the individual, national, and international arenas. Their work is rooted in neuro- and behavior science. In a quick review of their website, it appears as though their work is non-partisan. This leads me to be more trustful of the information presented.

I believe the purpose of this video is to get viewers to consider what would happen if they changed their assumptions of those in the "other" party and to be more curious about finding places of agreement.

1 Reply

a year ago

Excellent--I totally agree. I always ask my students about the credibility of the source and this is reassuring.

0 Reply

a year ago

This video is a powerful tool for challenging the idea that "Americans are divided now more than ever before." As some have mentioned in the other thread and again during our Zoom meeting, the video made many viewers wonder to what extent the repetition of "we're more divided than ever as a country" is actually making us more divided. And while that may be true and contributing to our country's political polarization, I felt like this video made a glaring omission... we are divided -- more than before (See [Pew's 2017 research](#))! The division is real. As I watched, it felt as if the video didn't acknowledge the reality of that fact enough -- the acknowledgment came near these end. I found the question about whether someone see the members of the other political party as human a hamfisted way to force the conclusion the creators were trying to make. Nevertheless, I found it compelling and powerful!

1 Reply



**2.5. Online engagement via the Media Education Lab’s Pathwright LMS was a significant component of the learning experience. Most participants were highly engaged with online learning activities, including readings, videos, and threaded discussions.**

Participants earned points for their online interaction on the Pathwright LMS. Of the 54 participants, 36% were high-achievers, with sixteen receiving a perfect score of 365 points and an additional four participants (7%) receiving 330–360 points, representing a nearly perfect score.

Moderate achievers – thirteen participants (24%) – received 100–320 points. But 35% of participants were less involved in the online learning component of the program, with eleven educators earning 95–50 points (20%) and five participants earning less than 50 points (9%) – evidence suggesting that some individuals did not have time for this type of independent learning or did not find online learning to be meaningful. As the program progressed, five participants dropped out due to health issues, job, or other personal challenges.

Because educators participated in this program on top of their full-time job and family responsibilities, we did not eliminate participants or refuse them a certificate if they did not complete all the online learning. We did, however, take attendance at Zoom meetings, and certificates and stipends were contingent on meeting stated attendance expectations. We gave out a total of 43 stipends and certificates to participating educators.

**2.6. Program evaluation data show very strong levels of satisfaction with the quality of the Courageous RI Professional Development Program.**

We used the Net Promoter Score (NPS) to assess overall satisfaction, which is an established and validated measure used widely in business, social services, and education. The score’s calculation is based on a customer survey that asks, “On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely would you recommend

- **7% Detractors:** Unhappy customers who can spread negative reviews (rating 6 or lower)
- **23% Passive:** Satisfied but unenthusiastic customers (rating score of 7 or 8)
- **70% Promoters:** Loyal customers who can spread positive reviews (rating score of 9 or 10)

As Figure 4 shows, a total NPS score of 62.79 represents the percentage of promoters minus the percentage of detractors. This score is quite impressive, and it is more than double the NPS average score for higher education, which is 32.

**Figure 4. Net Promoter Score for Courageous PD**



Net Promoter Score = Promoters (%) – Detractors (%)

## 2.7. Participants experienced increased confidence in their ability to use media literacy analysis techniques to address issues related to targeted violence and terrorism prevention.

At the beginning and end of each Courageous PD session, we asked participants to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 7 on a question specifically relevant to the theme of the session. As Table 5 shows, participants experienced increased confidence, indicating growth in knowledge and skills. Among the most substantial levels of growth are questions specifically related to targeted violence and terrorism. For example, in the second week, participants experienced an improvement of 17.8% from pretest to posttest on a question about their confidence in modeling ways to ease the hatred and fear that leads to political violence. In the fourth week, participants experienced an improvement of 13.3% in using media literacy analysis activities to explore questions related to the topic of violent extremism. We also asked participants whether they incorporated ideas, information, or instructional strategies in their work with learners or colleagues, and 97.6% of participants said “yes.” This evidence shows that the program met its objectives in addressing the problem of targeted violence and terrorism.

**Table 5. Growth in Confidence, Courageous PD**

COURAGEOUS PD SURVEY	PRE TEST	POST TEST	CONFIDENCE GAIN
How confident are you in explaining why media literacy matters for work, life, and citizenship?	5.17	5.62	8.4%
How confident are you in modeling for your students ways to ease the hatred and fear that leads to political violence?	4.07	4.80	17.8%
How confident are you in engaging your students in storytelling in your classroom as a form of courageous participation?	4.54	5.04	10.8%
How confident are you in using media literacy analysis activities to explore questions related to the topic of violent extremism?	4.89	5.54	13.3%
How confident are you in using creative expression activities to help students explore courageous questions?	4.91	5.31	7.9%
How confident are you in implementing the final assignment action plan you developed?	6.03	6.56	8.7%

N = 42. Participants completed the survey using a scale from 7 to 1, with 7 = “very confident” and 1 = “not at all confident.”

## 2.8. Participants reported statistically significant changes in their media use and media literacy behaviors in everyday life.

Behavior change is generally considered the “gold standard” for education; knowledge, skills, confidence, and motivation all work together to produce behavior change. When the program began in September, and then in December after it was completed, we asked three self-report

questions about behaviors that were associated with program goals. Participants responded to the following questions on a 4-point scale, ranging from “I have not done this” to “More than five times.” We asked participants to report on three media literacy behaviors:

“How many times in the last month have you:

- Asked critical questions about what you watch, read, or hear in news and current events?
- Talked with someone with a different background or life experience about a news or current events topic?
- Searched for different points of view about a news event or topic of interest to you?”

We found increases in all three of these measures over time. For asking critical questions, participants’ mean pretest (3.50) was compared with the posttest score (3.76), which was a statistically significant improvement ( $p = .001$ ). For talking with people with different points of view, participants’ mean pretest score (2.57) was compared with the posttest score (2.76) – which, although it was an improvement, was not statistically significant ( $p = .367$ ), meaning that the result could have occurred by chance. For the practice of searching for different points of view, participants’ mean pretest (2.40) was compared with the posttest score (3.00), which was a statistically significant improvement ( $p = .03$ ). Table 6 offers very strong evidence that the Courageous RI professional development program had an impact on the media use behaviors of participants.

**Table 6. T-Test of Means, Media Literacy Behaviors in Everyday Life**

COMPARING PRE AND POSTTEST MEANS	V1	N	MEAN	STD DEVIATION	STD ERROR MEAN	F	T	Sig
ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS	PRE	42	3.50	.773	.119			
	POST	42	3.76	.484	.075	15.39	1.861	<.001**
TALKING WITH SOMEONE WITH A DIFFERENT BACKGROUND OR LIFE EXPERIENCE	PRE	42	2.57	.914	.141			
	POST	42	2.76	1.008	.155	.822	.907	.367
SEARCHING FOR DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW	PRE	42	2.40	1.083	.167			
	POST	42	3.00	.855	.132	4.411	2.795	.039*

### 2.9. Delayed posttest shows evidence of continuing engagement with media literacy instructional practices as a means to reduce the hate and fear that lead to violence.

Nine months after Courageous PD ended, we reached out to participants and asked them to complete a short survey, and 31 participants responded. Answering the question, “Last year, did you incorporate ideas, information or instructional strategies from Courageous RI in your work with learners?” 93% of participants reported “yes” and 79% reported that they had used resources available at the Courageous RI website after the program was completed. In addition, 65% of participants indicated that they had implemented the final assignment they created. We also asked, “Which of these instructional strategies did you use with your learners?” As Table 7 shows, 68% indicated that they used critical analysis of media, 80% used dialogue and discussion, 36% used digital storytelling, and 32% used other media production activities.

When asked about the topics they explored with students, 71% indicated they taught about propaganda and disinformation, 38% taught about political polarization, 17% taught about extremism and radicalization, 33% taught about ethics, care, creativity, and joy, 67% taught about being a responsible consumer and creator of digital media, and 71% taught about the benefits, risks, and harms of social media (see Table 6). The topic of extremism and radicalization is the lowest topic on the list because we believe teachers prefer to frame the problem from a positive point of view. Rather than “name and shame” those vulnerable individuals at risk of radicalization, teachers prefer to emphasize the value of offering care and compassion to all.

**Table 7. T-Test of Means, Media Literacy Behaviors in Everyday Life**

MEDIA LITERACY INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES	PERCENT
Critical analysis of media messages	68
Dialogue and discussion	80
Digital storytelling	36
Other media production activities	32

MEDIA LITERACY INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES	PERCENT
Propaganda and disinformation	71
Political polarization	38
Extremism and radicalization	17
Ethics, care, creativity, and joy	33
Being a responsible consumer and creator of media messages	67
The benefits, risks, and harms of social media	71

N = 31

**With Leadership from an Academic Librarian,  
Undergraduate Students Offer Courageous Ripples across the  
Generations**



**CASE STUDY: VOICES FROM THE FIELD**

I'm Rachel (pseudonym), a librarian at Capacious University (a pseudonym). We are very fortunate in our libraries that we are able to offer fellowships, which are endowed by this family, but we are allowed as librarians to create these fellowships and be as creative as we like. I think I'm going somewhat outside the bounds of what the librarians normally do with these fellowships and focusing on media literacy.

When I participated in the professional development program last fall, I knew that I wanted to build a fellowship around Courageous Conversations. So this spring, the fellowship that I offered was called “Enhancing Civic Engagement across the Generations through Media Literacy Education.” This fellowship was centered around undergraduate students leading three community conversations with community partners. They also create a deliverable, a media object that would enhance civic engagement through media literacy.

First, students organized an event at the Walker School (pseudonym) which is a private school very convenient to the university. The three fellows presented the unit of Free Speech, Hate Speech, and Censorship. Students got to choose whatever topics they were most interested in, and this first event was like a warm-up for them. The second conversation that they led was with a center for older adults in the community. And this was a very lively conversation. They used the same curriculum for this group, but they changed up examples to meet the needs of different audiences.

And then, their final conversation was a little bit different. It came out of the partnership from the Courageous RI professional development program. In that program, I worked with another Courageous PD participant who is an instructional coach at a middle school out in California. We thought this would be kind of a cool project, trying to figure out how to get these undergrads to teach some media literacy skills to middle schoolers. But because we're in central time and they're in Pacific time, these Vanderbilt students can be very hard to schedule. We used Flip video (to learn asynchronously as a group). Each of the undergraduates chose a piece of media for the middle schoolers to analyze using the five questions, and then middle schoolers worked in groups to answer those questions. There was a curve ball, though, because the teacher we worked with was out sick that whole week. But I know that my students really enjoyed it. So I wanted to share just a few of the reflections from the fellows at the end of the semester, they're asked to write a reflection about their experience with the fellowship.

So this is from one of the students – it's kind of a long excerpt, but you can see that they had a newfound appreciation for how people's lived experiences in real life and on social media influence their outlook on media literacy's broader implications.

“Participating in this fellowship has reinforced my belief in the transformative potential of civic engagement and the importance of amplifying youth voices and shaping our collective future.” The student also said, “This journey didn't just make me more knowledgeable about the importance of media literacy education. It inspired me to continue this work outside the fellowship through conversations with friends, families, and peers.”

So that's the Ripple Effect! It was more than just a discussion and learning. It was action.

## English Teacher Uses Courageous Curriculum to Teach Research Skills



### CASE STUDY: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

I am Georgia (a pseudonym) and I am an English teacher at MLK High School (a pseudonym). And I primarily used the Courageous RI curriculum with my AP Language and Composition students. I participated in the Courageous RI ten-hour professional development last fall, and I worked with thought partners, which I found to be an incredibly powerful experience in bringing some new ideas into my teaching in these topics of media literacy.

I used the “Why Media Literacy Matters” unit quite a bit when I had students research media literacy and form an argument about if, when, and how students in public education should be receiving instruction in media literacy. Then I had them choose a particular current event topic. They had to use social media and news media, and if they worked together, they had to actually analyze five artifacts. And if they worked alone, they had to analyze three artifacts. And they had to use the media literacy questions to unpack what we’re seeing online. They had to consider how consumers of media need to be aware of certain aspects of the conversation surrounding this topic. They needed to use a little more research to consider how the conversation might be reframed. They used facts from good scholarly academic sources to support that part of the argument, and then they had to create their own media, and then overall they had to reflect on their learning at the end. So I have a few samples here of what these projects ended up looking like.

The first student here, she was looking at political extremism and she presented her media literacy arguments, noting the fact that we are encountering much more information online, particularly children and teens. Then, she presented some further research to support exactly what she was talking about in terms of why media literacy is important. She selected artifacts that she went online and analyzed. These students did a great job with really thinking deeply about these topics and connecting everything to how media literacy helps them understand these topics and be wary of what they see online and how to talk about them too. I also had students incorporate stories. This was one of their favorite projects in the course, so I think it was quite successful. I definitely learned a lot myself, and we’ll do it again and we’ll tweak it a little bit next year. I think that there’s a lot of opportunity for this curriculum to be used in classrooms.



### YOUTH MEDIA CONTEST Key Accomplishments and Outcomes



**3.1. We designed and implemented a Youth Media Contest (YMC) to engage young people’s concerns about the fear and hate that lead to violence. We received 71 submissions from middle school, high school and college students who created print, video, graphic design, and audio media to depict their understanding of the value of media literacy, active listening, kindness and compassion, and community engagement.**

To honor the winners, we hosted a YMC celebration at Rhode Island PBS on June 27, 2024, celebrating young people worldwide for their creative efforts to address the question, “How can media literacy, active listening, kindness and compassion, and community engagement reduce the hate and fear that lead to violence?”

A total of \$10,000 in prizes were awarded to sixteen students, including a grand prize of \$1,000 to a student for his original song “My Child.” Second place went to a student for his anti-misinformation graphic design project entitled “The Power of Fire,” and third place went to a student for her poem “Whispers of Light.” Participating youth developed their projects as part of an in-class assignment, an after-school program, or by working independently.

The celebration featured remarks from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security representative as well as our youth media expert who managed the program and awarded the prizes. Winners also participated in a panel discussion on the importance of using media literacy to address the problem of hateful propaganda and disinformation, moderated by a Rhode Island PBS reporter. We also recognized the work of five educators who took the initiative to integrate the contest into their curriculum, thus increasing the number of youth participants.

**3.2. We identified program goals, developed contest rules and procedures, and established judging criteria, developing the submission platform using Film Freeway, a media contest management tool that enabled us to collect applications and streamline the judging process.**

Because no members of our team had previous experience with running a youth media contest, we invested time to learn about best practices and adjusted our marketing and promotion practices as the program was running. We used the California Student Media Festival, the nation’s oldest youth media contest, now in its 58th year, as a model. We developed social media messages that addressed both teachers and youth, relying on our undergraduate interns and recent college graduates for support.



**3.3. We recruited and trained judges from RI and across the country, selecting a diverse group of individuals with expertise in writing, graphic design, video, and audio media, as well as those with expertise in youth development.**

Judges were required to participate in a Zoom orientation meeting and a training session. We provided judges with a rubric to ensure consistent evaluation, and each submission was reviewed by at least 3 judges. Judges included people with the following kinds of expertise:

- An individual with 30+ years in cinema programming
- A bestselling author, poet, speaker, and podcaster
- A teacher–artist with a background in animation, video editing, photography, and computer science and a passion for making education accessible for all
- A singer songwriter who leads a community songwriting workshop open to people from all walks of life and all abilities.
- Artistic director of of a non–profit youth arts organization
- A painter, experimental sound composer, and educator at an internationally renowned art school
- A teacher whose poems, essays, and stories have appeared in more than 70 literary magazines
- A college professor who teaches courses on the graphic novel and also translates comics from Czech to English



- An award-winning documentary filmmaker
- A teacher-artist who offers a filmmaking program to high school students
- A pioneering radio personality, DJ and MC
- A youth media professional who works at a teen center
- A fiction writer whose work has been broadcast on public radio and published in various literary journals.
- An author who was a finalist for New England Book of the Year
- A youth media expert who works at a leading youth media organization
- The leader of a graphic design firm with a focus on education, nonprofit, and hospitality clients.
- A creative director of a marketing and entertainment agency

### **3.4. Social media and mass media messages about Courageous RI helped the program to be visible locally and regionally, reaching nearly one million people across RI.**

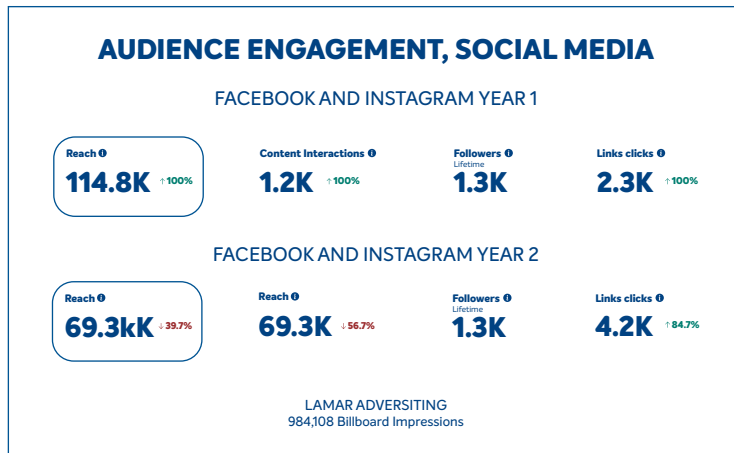
We did our best to inform students, parents, and teachers about the Youth Media Contest, building on the strong visibility we established from the start of the Courageous RI initiative. During the first year (2023), social media organic and paid posts were particularly useful in helping us reach 114,800 unique users on Facebook and Instagram in more than 1,200 content interactions, gathering 1,300 followers. During the second year (2024), we reached 69,300 unique users in 534 content interactions. Although the numbers are smaller for 2024, these individuals clicked our links more (4,200 link clicks in the second year as compared with 2,300 in the first year.) Figure 5 shows these data. We also experimented with extending our social media reach to more students by having their peers post through a Student Ambassador program, where students who promote the Youth Media Contest receive a small stipend. Unfortunately, the uptake on this opportunity was small and resulted in only three student ambassadors making 15 posts.

Through our media partner, Lamar Advertising, we reached 984,108 impressions via a billboard campaign that featured the work of a high school student who won second for overall best submission. Figure 6 shows a sample social media post where we mention Courageous Conversations curriculum materials as a response to the school shooting at Apalachee High School in Georgia.

Participating faculty, community members, and students received media attention in the following publications:

- Boston Globe. In Push to Counter Misinformation, RI to Launch Conversations to Foster Media Literacy
- The People's Radio, Rhode Island NPR. Interview with Renee Hobbs
- WPRI. Community Focus: Media Education Lab's Pam Steager
- Providence Business News. URI Media Education Lab Launching Courageous RI Initiative to Combat Disinformation, Propaganda
- The Providence Eye. Courageous RI: Teaching Us to Talk (and Listen) to One Another
- Cranston Herald. CHSW Student Places in Courageous Youth Media Contest
- Valley Breeze. Local Courageous RI Winners Speak Their Peace
- The Republic. IU Professor and Students Recognized for Media Awards

Figure 5. Audience Engagement, Social Media



An award-winning graphic design used in the Courageous RI billboard campaign



Other top winners in the Graphic Design contest

## College Students Create Media to Prevent Violence and Extremism



### CASE STUDY: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Jean (a pseudonym) was an active participant in Courageous Conversations and she decided to incorporate the curriculum into work with her college students. This excerpt comes from an interview.

**Q: What were you hoping that your students would gain from this initiative?**

This is a major project for one of my classes, it took up almost the [whole] second half of our semester, so it was definitely something that was going to have big impact. As far as the goals, the assignment started out by saying, “Create a real-world artifact,” because we place a lot of emphasis on what we call service learning, which are things that impact outside the classroom. So that was one goal. The other part of the introduction that I gave them was the word “empower.” So my instructions to students said, “We want to reflect in this project how media literacy practices can be used to empower, to counter disinformation, prevent violence and extremism, increase tolerance, solve problems and appreciate other points of view.” So it was definitely along the themes of Courageous RI and it also served as sort of a capstone for the learning they had done over several classes to kind of put together in their own voice what they had learned.

**Q: How did students react to the assignment?**

When I first introduced this project, they had a lot of anxiety and hesitation. They stared at me in silence. And I think there were two big reasons for that. One was, of course, they’re getting a grade. And as you know, college students in their upper levels, they’re always very conscientious about that.

**Q: What did you do?**

I calmed them down a little bit with that and said that “I’m not going to be grading the quality of your outcome. It’s the process.” Since I am not a video expert, as most teachers are not, I was not going to judge what they had created. I wanted them to feel free to use whatever they wanted to to produce this. The second thing I think they were hesitant about was the technology and the process. Many of them have not created a video in this sort of formal way. They may have created a video that they just did one take on for Instagram. They hadn’t really done a scripted project. So I created steps for them in the process, I brought them to the video lab. Showed them the equipment we used. We took a little video right away. I showed them something I had created with all of its mistakes the first time through, and I gave them some steps.


**Q: How did you scaffold the learning experience?**

So we talked about when we were going to decide on our topics. We talked about when we were going to have the script done. It was also a collaborative project, meaning they were on a team. That always seems to create a little anxiety, but it is also very real-world. So many teachers are doing project-based learning, and that, you know, always throws a little bit of a twist. Another hesitation, I think, is just that they didn’t know where to get started. I had to sit with them to brainstorm. We had to work on scripting in class together. I had to encourage them to read their scripts and listen to say, “Is this how I would really say something, or is this academic writing?” Or, you know, proper English writing. So they were getting a little more comfortable, and after that initial push, they really surprised me.

**Q: How so?**

I would say that's something many teachers would experience once they get a hold of the tools that [students] need to produce something to speak their voice, whether it's in video, art writing, and you give them that freedom and that comfort level, that it is not the quality of the end product, it is the process of doing it, they really catch on and they get excited.

**Figure 6. Sample Social Media Post Promoting Courageous RI Curriculum Materials**

 **Media Education Lab**  
September 4 · 🌐

The Georgia school shooting increases fear for learners and teachers all across the country. How is violent extremism affecting our society and what can we do about it? You and your students can discuss the reality of violent extremism through the Courageous RI dialogue and discussion program that builds media literacy skills by focusing attention on how the news media frames mass shootings. It's called Preventing Violent Extremism. Check out the lesson plan, PPT slides, and ... [See more](#)

## *Shooting at Georgia High School Leaves Multiple Casualties, Officials Say*

A suspect was in custody after the shooting on Wednesday morning at Apalachee High School in Winder, Ga., the Georgia Bureau of Investigation said.

▶ Listen to this article · 2:26 min [Learn more](#) 📄 Share full article 🔗 🔖



The police responded to a shooting at Apalachee High School in Winder, Ga. Students gathered at the school's track and field stadium.  
Christian Monterrosa/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### **4.1. We could not fully anticipate how our work would be used to critique the U.S. Department of Homeland Security or how activists would attempt to weaponize the term “media literacy.”**

Media literacy has long been an educational intervention embraced by both Democrats and Republicans, who see it as a vital life skill for navigating a complex media landscape, where information, entertainment, and persuasion are increasingly blurry and where it can be difficult to discern fake from fact. As legislators gain an understanding of the concept, they embrace it, and as of 2024, Media Literacy Now reports that 21 states have taken legislative action to elevate K-12 media literacy education.

But according to the Public Religion Research Institute, in 2023, 24% of Americans agreed with the statement, “Because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.” Some people genuinely believe that both government and education have become deeply problematic institutions. Others, motivated by a drive for political advantage, find it valuable to stir up fears about government overreach and educational indoctrination, encouraging followers to distrust experts, hate government officials, and lose faith in the value of education.

### **4.2. Our program was targeted by activists who were vocal in criticizing the program’s aims and goals.**

Right at the outset, with our launch event at the Rhode Island State House in January 2023, critics began a drumbeat of fear concerning our initiative. A local public-policy think tank called our program’s mission “a scam” intended to indoctrinate students, teachers, parents, and citizens with divisive theories and “false government narratives.” Even though both Rhode Island Republicans and Democrats participated in our press conference, this organization accused them of being “complicit in using public dollars to politically influence K-12 students.”

In February 2023, the University of Rhode Island received a series of Access to Public Records Act requests (APRA) from an American content analysis and media watchdog group. Sought copies of all of the program director’s emails that contained words including “disinformation,” “propaganda,” and “hate speech.” University officials turned over 800 pages of emails. Over the course of 18 months, the University of Rhode Island received seven more APRA requests each of which took up valuable staff time away from core tasks. At the present time, the URI is being sued over a decision we made to redact five emails, and this case is currently before the State Attorney General.

On January 19, they published a report that used “name and shame” tactics including direct references to the names of many CourageousRI program participants, claiming that they were implicated in a program that was training teachers to “silence political dissent.” We heard from many of these people named in the report, who informed us that they did feel “chilled” by the false representation of their involvement in the Courageous RI program. The author of the report urged parents to call their local school boards and check if media literacy curriculum resources “have been imposed” in their children’s classrooms. They want congresspeople and state attorneys general to investigate media literacy advocacy groups, and they urge New England nonprofits to “distance and disentangle themselves” from the initiative. Finally, they urge Congress to defund all media literacy initiatives, which they call “domestic censorship programs”.

In late January, 2024, one U.S. Senator did just that, by introducing a new bill that would defund media literacy programs sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security. One month later, the RI, along with a high-ranking member of the RI General Assembly, called upon US and state government agencies to cancel their affiliation with CourageousRI. The RI State Representative was quoted as saying:

“I participated in the launch event one year ago upon being asked because I think the issue of media literacy and educating our children how to sift fact from fiction is important. But I issued several warnings about how this program, while appealing in concept, could go off the rails if not managed properly. Unfortunately, and to my disappointment, though not surprise ... the partisanship, censorship, and bias that has been infused by the Courageous RI leadership proves that this program is not worthy of, nor legally defensible for, any government entity to support in any way.”

The state legislator did not experience Courageous Conversations for himself; he was emboldened by media outlets mischaracterized Courageous RI in publications including The Daily Wire (January 17, 2024) and Fox News (January 22, 2024) by quoting extensively from MRC reports.

We experienced another type of disruption when in the Fall of 2023, one participant in the Courageous PD program made repeated negative comments about the program in small-group discussions on topics related to critical thinking about media. During small-group dialogue and discussions, this individual’s comments were unnerving to some participants and eroded the development of respect and trust in the group. A Courageous RI faculty member reached out to talk by phone with her, asking if she was satisfied with her experience in the program and inquiring about the reasons for her dissatisfaction. She revealed very little about her mindset at the time. Ultimately, this individual did not submit a final assignment and did not receive a certificate of participation.

Only through a subsequent blog post did we become aware that this individual was deeply opposed to “the harmful anti-American curriculum platforms” that had entered RI schools, where students are “manipulated and weaponized by partisan teachers,” where “they will be targeted, isolated, silenced and perhaps falsely reported to the a Rhode Island political blog;” In a blog post published on (February 19, 2024), the participant’s report was titled “DHS Is Training Teachers to Develop Student ‘Disinformation’ Informers – I Know, I Took the Training.” The participant describes the Courageous RI professional development program as a “K-12 surveillance program” teaching teachers and students to identify and report allegations of violent extremism.

Unfortunately, this individual continues anti-media literacy activism to this day. In the fall of 2024, this individual enrolled in another RI-based media literacy program funded by the U.S. Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and offered by the RI State Office of Library and Information Services (RI-OLIS), where she reportedly also disrupted meetings, leading participants to complain about her hateful rhetoric.

### **4.3. The URI's budgeting and fiscal support was challenging to navigate, and we often lacked the institutional support we needed to manage the grant.**

During the period in which our grant operated, many changes were underway at our institution's Office of Sponsored Projects. Regarding the payment of invoices, would routinely get feedback from other staff members that was contradictory or misinformed, which sometimes led to long delays. For example, it took months to get stipends issued to program participants, even after all the required paperwork was submitted. Getting cash payments to reward student contest winners was another real challenge, and as of September 1, 2024, some students had still not received payments that were expected in July.

Attempts to use our purchasing card for routine payments were stymied by many failed transactions, with multiple emails required to address technical problems. It took weeks (or sometimes months) before we would get any response, and some of the information we received turned out to be incorrect. When we submitted a Budget Amendment Request to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, we found out that all the URI leaders formally responsible for managing the federal grant had retired or left the university, and there was no authorized official who could submit our request. In addition, our fiscal clerk worked diligently to follow Human Resources procedures for hiring, but we could only get contracts for part-time workers. We were able to overcome these challenges eventually, but they took valuable staff time away from core tasks.

### **4.4. We did not meet our target goals for the number of expected submissions to the Courageous Youth Media Contest. In addition, we learned that while teachers may have recommended the program to their students, only a few teachers incorporated it as a formal course assignment.**

Substantial levels of time, talent, and effort were required from the 13–25-year-olds who participated in the Youth Media Contest. After learning about the contest rules, students needed to create a media message, compose a 300-word artist statement, and upload both documents to a digital platform. We did not have a mailing list of students or any direct communication mechanism to identify and reach out to youth participants. We visited high schools across Rhode Island and dropped off posters, chatting with principals, media teachers, and school counselors if we got the opportunity. Although we did not have the funds to support a major marketing campaign, we ran a pre-roll video ad on YouTube that attracted 19,000 views by RI youth ages 12–25. We also made personal visits to meet with youth development groups, including Providence's Teen Institute and the Providence Student Union.

We posted social media messages three times weekly during the entire six-month time period, creating 36 unique social media posts for Instagram, Facebook, and X, and we offered a special webinar demonstrating a simple media production technique for making a mini-podcast responding to some of the many voices found on the Courageous Conversations Portal. We also recruited a young media literacy activist, and she created three TikTok videos, but these did not reach a wide audience. During the six-month process of promoting the contest, we also participated in monthly online meetings of the RI Civic Learning Coalition, a group of educators who work directly with youth.

Although more paid promotion might have helped us reach more youth, we recognized that our estimates of program participation was rooted in our belief that teachers would require students to participate in the program. Instead, teachers emphasized this as an optional activity. Creating media is perceived as a “heavy lift” since young people are primarily consumers (not creators) of digital media. In the future, we will consider developing outreach campaigns specifically targeted to parents, encouraging them to play a role in supporting their children’s creativity and voice by inviting them to submit entries. After all, this was how our grand prize winner learned about the Courageous Youth Media Contest – his father heard about the contest in an interview that Renee Hobbs participated in on RI PBS.

#### **4.5. The digital platform we selected for managing our customer relationships proved to be too difficult, cumbersome, and expensive for us to maintain, and it took us nearly a full year to pivot to the use of a more cost-effective tool.**

We began the project without a strong understanding of the value of marketing automation, and we learned that it was more difficult than we expected to use these tools. We struggled to produce reports showing the number of Courageous Conversations sessions that individuals attended. With more than 1,200 participants in Program 1, we were challenged to track participants using this cumbersome platform designed for marketing professionals. We resorted to conventional use of Excel spreadsheets. Eventually, we realized that the platform was not useful, and we switched to MailChimp, a more basic tool. However, with MailChimp, we gained insights over time through the production of a weekly newsletter that enabled our Courageous RI community to feel connected to the larger media education community, and we are proud that we now have a stable membership of over 8,000 people, 40% of whom open the newsletter every week.





## CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

### **5.1. We demonstrated that increasing media literacy among adults, educators, and young people is an important step toward depolarizing our civic discourse on media-related issues in ways that reduce the fear and hate that lead to violence.**

Through this project, we were able to produce strong empirical evidence that demonstrates how media literacy and active listening skills measurably increase through participating in a dialogue and discussion program about topics and issues related to media, technology, and society. We also showed how defensiveness is lowered and intellectual humility is increased as a result of participating in these programs. Importantly, we found strong evidence that shows that teachers who participate in a professional development program in media literacy gain confidence in their ability to teach it to students. They also report statistically significant changes in their own media literacy behaviors in everyday life, as they are more likely to ask critical questions about what they watch, read, or hear in news and current events, talk with someone with a different background or life experience about a news or current events topic, and search for different points of view about a news event or topic of interest.

Media literacy education does not mandate what people read, who they watch on TV, or which social media influencers they follow. It's about teaching people to ask critical questions about what they're reading and watching, by vetting the content they're consuming, and determining whether the information comes from a credible source. Most importantly, media literacy education encourages people to reflect on their own biases are baked into the meaning-making process with a spirit of intellectual humility.

### **5.2. We found strong evidence of educators' continued use of media literacy instructional practices a full nine months after the program had ended.**

Most participants continued to use critical analysis of media, dialogue and discussion, digital storytelling, and other media production activities, long after the program was completed. When asked about the topics they explored with students, three in four teachers continued to teach about propaganda and disinformation as well as strategies for becoming a responsible consumer and creator of digital media. Most also taught about the benefits, risks, and harms of social media. While only four in ten taught about political polarization and two in ten continued to teach about extremism and radicalization, this likely reflects the growing cultural anxieties that were a part of the media ecosystem in the months before the U.S. presidential election of 2024. Even still, we found that one in three teachers taught about ethics, care, creativity, and joy – ideas that ultimately address how care and compassion can be a means to reduce the fear and hate that lead to violence.

**5.3. Members of the Media Education Lab made 25 presentations (ten international, seven national, and eight local) at professional meetings to inform the education and violence prevention communities about our work, including a keynote address to more than 700 secondary students and educators in New Jersey and one in Texas reaching 300 college students, faculty, and community members.**

#### INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

- “Courageous Rhode Island,” presentation at the World Forum for Democracy, European Parliament, Strasbourg, France, November 8, 2024.
- “Building Resilient Communities: Using Media Literacy to Fight Extremism, Hate and Violence,” Media and Learning (Brussels, Belgium) webinar, October 23, 2024. Sponsored by the Media and Learning Association, October 23, 2024.
- “Courageous Rhode Island: A Statewide Community Approach to Media Literacy,” Media Literacy Matters: European Digital and Media Literacy Conference in Brussels, February 29, 2024.
- “Building Resilient Communities: Using Media Literacy to Fight Extremism, Hate and Violence,” “Media Literacy Education in a Global Society,” panel discussion, Media and Information Literacy Week, Communications Commission of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia, October 31, 2023.
- Keynote: “Media Education in the Era of Algorithmic Personalization: Facing Polarization, Hate Speech, and Propaganda,” Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania, October 26, 2023.
- “Digital and Media Literacy in the Classroom: Practices and Teaching Tools,” Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania, October 26, 2023.
- “How Media Literacy Education Helps to Depolarize Society,” University of Lisbon, Department of English, Portugal, October 11, 2023.
- “Designing Educational Futures for Media Literacy Education,” workshop, University of Lisbon, Department of English, Portugal, October 11, 2023.
- Keynote: “How Media Literacy Reduces Polarization,” Center for Independent Journalism Conference, Bucharest, Romania, May 17, 2023.
- Keynote: “Reducing Polarization and Exclusion with Digital Media Literacy,” Conference on the Practices of Digital In- and Exclusion in Everyday Life, University of Groningen, Netherlands, April 4, 2023.

## NATIONAL EVENTS

- “Media Literacy Education as Community-Based Resistance to Radicalization,” National Communication Association (NCA) 110th Annual Convention, November 23, New Orleans, LA.
- “Considering Connections Beyond the Classroom: Building Community Partnerships with Greater Regard for Local Concerns,” top panel presentation, National Communication Association (NCA) 110th Annual Convention, November 22, New Orleans, LA.
- Keynote: “Confronting Propaganda,” presentation to the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights, and Genocide Education (Chchange), 42nd Annual Colloquium. Brookfield, NJ, May 15, 2024.
- Keynote: “Artificial Intelligence, Media Literacy and America Values,” E. James Holland Symposium on American Values, Angelo State University, TX, February 15, 2024.
- “Reducing Hate with Media Literacy,” Buchanan Fellows presentation, Vanderbilt University, February 9, 2024.
- “Media in the Online Space During Wartime,” Center for Prevention and Partnerships (CP3) New England, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, November 3, 2023.
- “Media Literacy and Propaganda,” Council on Foreign Relations, webinar, March 29, 2023.
- “Information Literacy Convening,” panel member at the Institute on Museum and Library

## LOCAL EVENTS (RI)

- “Hacking for Good: Reducing the Fear and Hate that Leads to Violence,” presentation to the Rocky Hill School, East Greenwich, RI, October 25, 2024.
- “Media Literacy Is for Everyone,” in-person event in honor of National Media Education Week, co-sponsored by Rhode Island PBS, Media Literacy Now RI, and the Media Education Lab, October 22, 2024, Providence, RI.
- “Mastering Media Literacy: Navigating Politics in a Media Age,” Congress to Campus presentation, RI College, October 8, 2024.
- “Using Mini-Podcasts to Build Media Literacy and Active Listening Skills,” Media Education Lab, April 29, 2024.
- “The Twilight Zone and Civil Liberties,” panel member, RI Civil Liberties Union, Warwick Public Library, April 8, 2024.
- “Homegrown: A Study Guide,” Media Education Lab, February 20, 2024.
- “Propaganda Education in a Digital Age: A Teaching Demonstration,” Conference on Teaching the 21st Century, Old Avon Farms School, Avon, CT, April 7, 2023.
- “Global Media Literacy,” German Marshall Fund and the World Affairs Council of RI, Providence, RI, Hope Club, September 21, 2023.
- “Why the Public is Confused About Censorship,” Rhode Island Library Association Conference, Providence, RI, May 24, 2023.
- “Preventing Violent Extremism,” Rhode Island Teen Institute, Wakefield, RI, August 24, 2023.

## SUSTAINABILITY

**6.1. We created a network of media literacy educators with interest in and knowledge about its value to the prevention of targeted violence and terrorism. More than 8,000 people from across RI, the United States, and around the world subscribe to the Media Education Lab's weekly newsletter, where they continue to receive invitations to participate in webinars and conferences.**

Supporters of Courageous Conversations continue to grow. This is perhaps the single most important resource that makes the Courageous RI program sustainable into the future. Why? Because more than 40% of subscribers open and read the newsletter every week, they will continue to feel connected to a learning community. We will continue to feature Courageous RI materials as media literacy instructional practices as a tool for violence prevention.

**6.2. We will develop a fee-for-service program that will enable school districts and community partners to learn how to offer Courageous Conversations to others. We are also sharing our research findings with a global audience and are preparing scholarly manuscripts that document our results.**

We believe there is a market for professional development, public speaking, and other community engagement around the themes that underlie Courageous Conversations as a way to build media literacy competencies that reduce the hate and fear that lead to violence. In 2025, we will explore how to price and market these programs. Our research that validates program effectiveness will be critical to this effort. Thus, three scholarly manuscripts are under development, and we expect to publish at least two new works in 2025. When published, they will include funding disclosure to acknowledge the support of the U.S. Homeland Security's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships.

**6.3. We developed a number of enduring partnerships that will enable us to continue Courageous RI programs into the future and we have secured some meaningful financial commitments that will enable us to increase the number of people who engage in dialogue and discussion programs and professional development programs in 2025.**

These partners are currently helping us sustain Courageous RI into the future:

- RI Department of Health (RIDOH) received CP3 funding for a violence prevention program in October 2024, and we received a \$48,000 subcontract from that project that will allow us to bring Courageous Conversations professional development program to mental health professionals and school counselors in RI.
- U.S. Department of State, Office of Palestinian Affairs. URI received \$200,000 for Media Literacy in Palestine. With support from the Media Education Lab, the program will bring Courageous Conversations and a professional development program to 25 Palestinian college faculty in Ramallah, Hebron, and Jerusalem.
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The Media Education Lab received funding to conduct a landscape report on media literacy in Massachusetts, which is helping us identify unmet needs of educators in that state. One significant need is immediately evident: Although media literacy is prominent in the State

- Health Education curriculum framework, health educators have had no training in how to integrate media literacy into violence prevention programs. In our landscape report, we intend to increase awareness about Courageous Conversations curriculum resources as a means to meet media literacy learning objectives in K-12 health education.
- Rhode Island PBS has agreed to produce a series of six videos to accompany the Courageous Conversations curriculum at no cost to us, enabling our materials to be included in the PBS Learning Media collection of curriculum resources. PBS Education Services is a trusted resource for educators, students, parents, and learners of all ages providing educational programming and curriculum-based resources through high-quality public media content, centering best practices in digital literacy, and reflecting the values of our diverse community. The inclusion of Courageous Conversation in this rich national database of resources will ensure that the dialogue and discussion format for building media literacy and active listening skills will endure.



## PROGRAM 1 DELIVERABLES

DELIVERABLES	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
Launch Event	Launch event was held at the RI State House.	Ok to Share
Website	Courageous RI, with support from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, works to prevent rising violence and extremism with authentic and respectful conversation.	Ok to Share
Courageous Conversations Events	22 Courageous Conversations online events were held online between February and May, 2023.	Do Not Share
Run-of-Show Notes	Details including script, links, and timing for each event	Do Not Share
Facilitator Sign Up Form	We trained nineteen facilitators to support the small-group discussion component of Courageous Conversations.	Do Not Share
Lesson Plans and PPTs	Materials help teachers replicate Courageous Conversations in the classroom. Access the PDF.	Ok to Share
Listening Matters Lessons	Five lessons with PPTs build skills of empathic listening, looping for understanding, and self-awareness.	Ok to Share
Creative Expression Activities	Hands-on activity suggestions for each of the themes addressed in the program	Ok to Share
Curated Educator Resources	A collection of high-quality educational materials related to each of the themes addressed in the program	Ok to Share
Courageous Conversations Planning Guide	Ten-step process to help people replicate Courageous Conversations at the local level	Ok to Share
Rippler Planning Guide	A template for participants to use in planning their own Courageous Conversations replication	Do Not Share
Courageous Conversations Portal	Listen in on Courageous Conversations on an interactive website	Ok to Share

Podcasts	We produced fourteen podcasts to introduce some of the experts and community leaders who are working to reduce the fear and hate that lead to violence.	Ok to Share ▾
Press: In the News	Op-eds and articles about the program from the Boston Globe, the Providence Journal, and the Providence Eye.	Ok to Share ▾
Blogs	Content for sharing on Facebook, Instagram, and X help amplify key ideas to diverse audiences.	Ok to Share ▾
Videos	We created 25 videos to support adults, teachers, and students as they learned to activate media literacy and deep listening skills.	Do Not Share ▾
Propose a Blog	We invited our community to submit blog posts on topics related to the program.	Ok to Share ▾
Ripple: Register Your Interest	We received 99 applications from people interested in offering a Ripple Event, and 46 completed a Ripple.	Do Not Share ▾

## PROGRAM 2 DELIVERABLES

DELIVERABLES	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
Email Promotion	Weekly emails to an audience of 8,000+ educators	Do Not Share ▾
Application	Participants explain why they want to participate in the program and how they will use what they learn.	Do Not Share ▾
Zoom Meetings	Six one-hour programs held every two weeks from October 2023 to December 2023	Do Not Share ▾
Run-of-Show Notes	Each meeting was scripted with notes for faculty members, including content for chat and behind-the-scenes.	Do Not Share ▾

Courageous RI Online Professional Development	Six modules for participants encourage interaction with peers in asynchronous learning and discussion.	Do Not Share ▾
Final Assignment Template	Final assignment template supports educators' planning process.	Do Not Share ▾
Participants' Final Projects	Working with a partner, participants developed lesson plans and activities that use active listening, media literacy, kindness and compassion, and community engagement with their own learners	Do Not Share ▾
Slide Deck, Gallery Walk Presentations	Participants shared their completed work by making a short presentation.	Do Not Share ▾
Homegrown: A Study Guide	Study Guide to accompany the book <i>Homegrown: Timothy McVeigh and the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism</i> by Jeffrey Toobin	Do Not Share ▾

### PROGRAM 3 DELIVERABLES

DELIVERABLES	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
Website	Information about the contest	Ok to Share ▾
Application Website	Film Freeway platform enables youth to upload content and application materials.	Ok to Share ▾
Rules and Regulations	Details about submissions, judging criteria, and prizes	Do Not Share ▾
How to Compose Your Artist Statement	Video designed to assist students in preparing their application materials	Ok to Share ▾
Webinar and Graphic: "How to Create a Mini-Podcast"	Webinar and graphic outlining one approach to a viable submission	Do Not Share ▾



Student Ambassador Handbook	Guides students to get paid to promote the Youth Media Contest	Do Not Share ▾
Judging Instructions	Instructions for navigating Film Freeway with judging rubric	Do Not Share ▾
Judging spreadsheet	Tracks judging assignments, feedback, and final team ranking	Do Not Share ▾
Winner Award Certificates	Award certificates for winners of the YMC	Do Not Share ▾
Judge Orientation	Webinar orienting judges to the process	Do Not Share ▾
Youth Media Celebration	Run of Show for the Youth Media Celebration Event	Do Not Share ▾
Youth Media Celebration Planning Document	Document for tracking invitations, catering, and giveaways	Do Not Share ▾
Youth Media Contest Timeline	Document outlining the timeline and deliverables of the YMC	Do Not Share ▾
Youth Media Contest Project Examples	Examples for students and teachers to refer to	Do Not Share ▾
Honorable Mention Certificates	Certificates sent to entrants scored highly but were not selected	Do Not Share ▾
YMC Non-local Winners' Webinar	Run of Show for the webinar we hosted to feature winners from outside RI	Do Not Share ▾



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**Courageous** 