



Great Questions Journey Courses at Austin Community College Student Fall 2023 Survey Report

The Great Questions Journey at Austin Community College:

Great Questions Journey (GQJ) courses focus on the discussion-based exploration of core and transformative texts within a teaching discipline. In these faculty-guided discussion-based classrooms, students of diverse backgrounds are active collaborators in their own education. They learn to approach difficult texts and complex issues thoughtfully. They find their voices in classes where they are listened to respectfully and encouraged to engage across differences, where they learn to work with their peers to form a community of inquiry where everyone's voice matters in a collaborative search for truth.

GQJ courses were created by ACC faculty members who completed a [six-week training](#), where they engaged with discussion-based pedagogy and other active and collaborative learning activities in the [HUMA 1301: Great Questions Seminar student success course curriculum](#). Afterwards, many of these faculty members went on to complete a Great Questions Journey course redesign of a general education course they teach at ACC, supported by a TLED [fellowship](#). GQJ courses are structured to meet the [course guidelines](#), established by the GQJ faculty advisory committee.

Data Highlights:

- 557 students completed GQJ courses in Fall 2023, and 130 students completed the survey, reflecting a **response rate of 23%**
- **63% of students** indicated that their Fall 2023 GQJ course was **one of the best courses they took at ACC** in that semester, in the top 10%.
- **95% of students** agreed or strongly agreed that in their GQJ class **they engaged with questions that were important to them as a human being**, with 69% of them strongly agreeing

- **80% of distance education students** reported that their GQJ course was **one of the best courses they took at ACC** in that semester, in the top 10%.
- In student comments, students expressed a deep engagement with the detailed exploration of human nature, an appreciation for the course structure that fosters open discussions, and a transformative learning experience that goes beyond traditional memorization, emphasizing critical thinking.
- GQJ courses intentionally make space for students to engage across principled differences in the classroom and to see things from perspectives outside of their own. **91.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in their GQJ class they felt free to express opinions and/or points of view that are not widely held.**

Executive Summary of Fall 2023 Survey Results:

557 students from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds completed Fall 2023 GQJ courses. 130 GQJ students completed the Fall 2023 Student Exit Survey, and 89% of them reported their Fall 2023 Great Questions Journey course to be either Excellent or Very Good, **with 63% of students indicating that their Fall 2023 GQJ course was one of the best courses they took at ACC in that semester, in the top 10%.** 47% of GQJ students are first-generation college students, and 95% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt included in their Great Questions Journey course. GQJ courses present first-generation ACC students with welcoming, inclusive, and discussion-based opportunities to complete core curriculum courses.

GQJ discussion-based courses contribute greatly to student success. As one student put it, “having the daily discussions with the readings helped me to stay on top of my work and understand what I was dissecting in each text.” GQJ courses help students succeed by intentionally drawing connections between student’s own lives and the subjects they are studying. **95% of students agreed or strongly agreed that in their GQJ class they engaged with questions that were important to them as a human being, with 69% of them strongly agreeing.** 91% reported that the work they did in their GQJ classes helped them to better understand and contextualize written material and 87% reported that the course helped them to communicate their ideas more clearly in conversation and/or writing.

57% of survey respondents reported having completed the class in a distance learning format. GQJ courses help our distance education students feel a deeper sense of connection to each other than in traditional distance education courses, which contributes to student success and belonging. **80% of distance education students reported that their GQJ course was one of the best courses they took at ACC in that semester, in the top 10%.** A distance education student remarked, “In previous online classes the amount of communication is very minimum. It was very fun connecting with my online peers in a way I haven't had the chance to before.” GQJ courses help make the promise of discussion-based liberal education available for our students, wherever in the world they may happen to be.

The student comments overwhelmingly highlight the success of GQJ pedagogy. Students express a deep engagement with the detailed exploration of human nature, an appreciation for the course structure that fosters open discussions, and a transformative learning experience that goes ***beyond traditional memorization, emphasizing critical thinking***. The positive impact of the course is evident in students' increased understanding of historical and ethical concepts, their ability to connect the material to the real world, and the creation of a supportive environment that encourages diverse perspectives.

In addition to helping our students succeed in mastering the material offered in each course, GQJ contributes to a ***healthier civil discourse***, by intentionally making space for students to engage across principled differences in the classroom and to see things from perspectives outside of their own. 91.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in their GQJ class they felt free to express opinions and/or points of view that are not widely held, with 72% strongly agreeing. Discussion-based study is instrumental in helping our students to engage with diverse viewpoints. 87% of respondents strongly agreed that their Great Questions Journey course included many opportunities for participation in class discussion when compared with other classes they have taken at ACC. GQJ courses reflect a broad vision of student success that helps students meet their academic and career goals while also aiding in the development of intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and a sense of social responsibility as active citizens in a pluralistic republic.

Survey Design:

Faculty members who taught Great Questions Journey sections were asked to distribute the google survey to their students. *130 students completed the survey, reflecting a response rate of 23%*. You can find a copy of the survey instrument here: <https://forms.gle/3dmy7JF5zrqcnatW8>

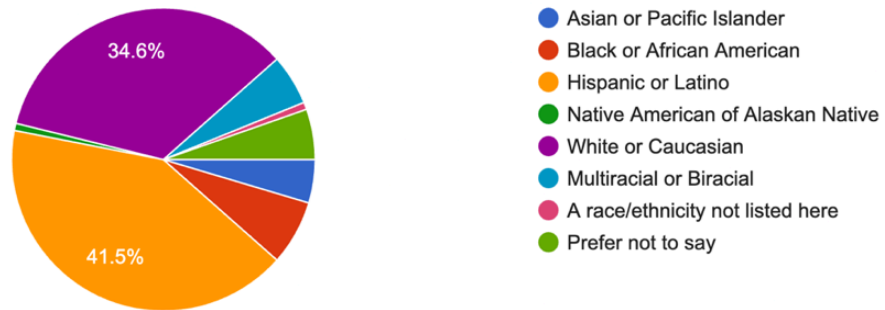
Student Respondent Characteristics:

557 students completed Great Questions Journey classes in Fall 2023 in the following courses: SPCH 1311, GOVT 2305, GOVT 2306, PHIL 2306, PHIL 1301, ENGL 1301, ENGL 1302 and ENGL 2322. GQJ courses are available to all ACC students on any degree plan. Any student eligible to enroll in a credit-bearing course at ACC can enroll in a Great Questions Journey course, following the same process as they would for any section of the core curriculum. Students may search for Great Questions Journey courses in the online course schedule, which bear a Great Questions Course tag.

Student respondents reflect a broad range of racial and ethnic identities, with a plurality of students, ***42%, reporting to be Hispanic or Latino***.

Which of the following best describes you?

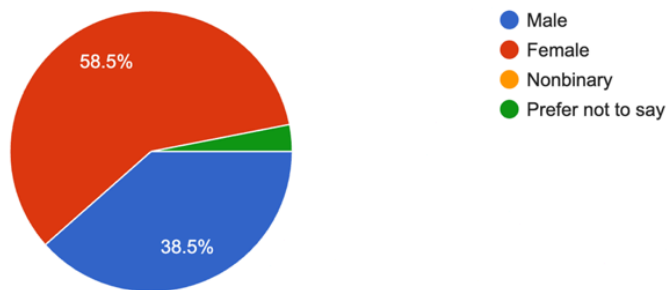
130 responses



59% of respondents reported to be Female, 39% reported to be male and 3% preferred not to say.

Your gender?

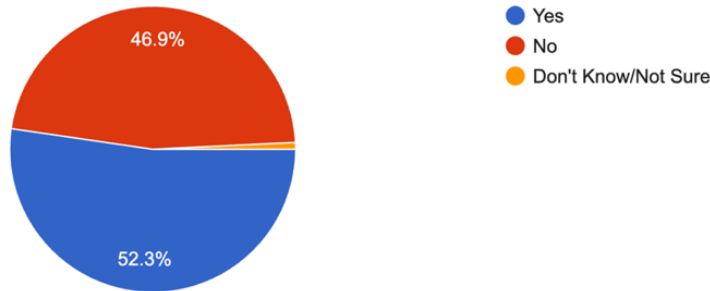
130 responses



47% of student respondents reported to be first-generation college students, with none of their parents or legal guardians having attended college.

Did any of your parents or legal guardians attend college?

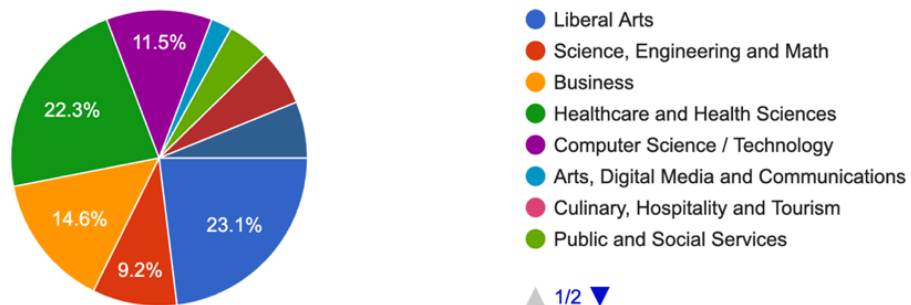
130 responses



Students who complete Great Questions Journey courses reflect a wide range of majors at ACC. In serving all students who must complete courses in the core-curriculum, **GQJ courses help make the benefits of a liberal education available to students enrolled in disciplines that are not typically associated with discussion-based study of transformative texts and ideas, such as business, computer science and engineering.**

In which of these categories does your major best fit?

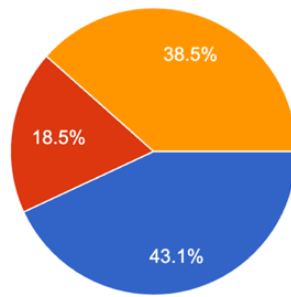
130 responses



Students who complete GQJ courses do so in a wide range of course modalities, including traditional in-person sections, online sections with synchronous meetings and online asynchronous sections.

Which best describes the course you took?

130 responses



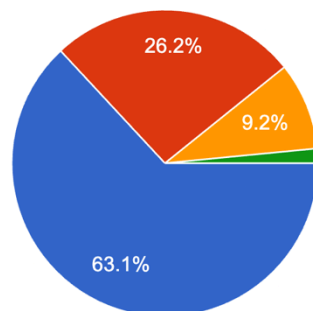
- In-person: we had regular meetings in-person on an ACC campus
- Online, with synchronous meetings: we had regularly scheduled meetings online via Zoom or another video conferencing platform
- Online, asynchronous: we completed course work online with no regularly scheduled meetings online via Zoom or another video conferencing platform

Student Experience:

Great Questions Journey Classes are among the best our students complete at ACC. **89% of students considered their Fall 2023 GQJ course to be either Excellent or Very Good, with 63% of students indicating that their Fall 2023 GQJ course was one of the best courses they took at ACC in that semester.**

Compared with other courses you've taken this semester, how would you rate your experience taking this Great Questions Journey Course? (If you took other classes in Fall 2023)

130 responses



- Excellent: one of the best courses I took this semester (top 10%)
- Very Good: better than most but not one of the best
- Acceptable: about the same as all my other classes
- Needs Improvement: not as good as most of my other classes
- Unacceptable: one of the worst classes I've taken this semester

Students expressed a wide range of positive impressions on their GQJ experience. **The emphasis on open discussion, exploration, and encouragement to think critically distinguishes**

GQJ courses from other courses students completed at ACC, which students often characterize as memorization-based classes. The course's impact extends beyond conventional learning, fostering a positive and intellectually stimulating environment that encourages active participation and individual academic exploration.

Note: All student comments are included as submitted, but emphasis is added by the author of this report.

<p>“Loved the class, the professor is very knowledgeable. He always made us feel there are no wrong answers even when we were not quite correct, but helped us expand on our current answer to get to the right place. He pushed us to be better and loved the content of the course. <i>I was not expecting to have enjoyed this class as much as I have.</i>”</p>	<p>“This class made me think. <i>It was more than memorizing a few facts to pass a test and then immediately forgetting them. The course style helped me greatly as a neurodivergent learner.</i> The excitement of exploration and discussion kept me engaged and encouraged me to go above and beyond in my research. It was fun.”</p>
<p>“This class was by far the most engaging one. <i>I liked how I gained knowledge not just from my professor, but also from my peers.</i> Seeing everyone’s different point of view made it all more fun, I felt comfortable speaking my mind with my classmates.”</p>	<p>“It was a pleasant course where <i>I learned a lot and made me think a lot about the world and myself.</i>”</p>
<p>“I liked how it was not a multiple choice, memorization kind of class. <i>The class is based on trying to learn how to think rather than what to think.</i>”</p>	<p>“I loved the fact that the lectures were based on our political philosophy instead of just government structure and laws. <i>I read things that were so enlightening that I was able to grow exponentially as an educated voter.</i>”</p>

80% of distance education students reported that their GQJ course was one of the best courses they took at ACC in that semester. Students in the distance education format emphasize the positive impact of the course in creating an engaging online learning experience. The inclusion of weekly discussion boards provides a platform for asynchronous interaction, fostering a sense of community and encouraging the exchange of diverse interpretations and thoughts. Despite being an online class, the student’s express satisfaction with the level of discussion, feeling valued, and appreciating the opportunity to connect with peers in a meaningful way, distinguishing it from their previous online learning experiences. GQJ courses help make the promise of discussion-based liberal education available for our students, wherever in the world they may happen to be.

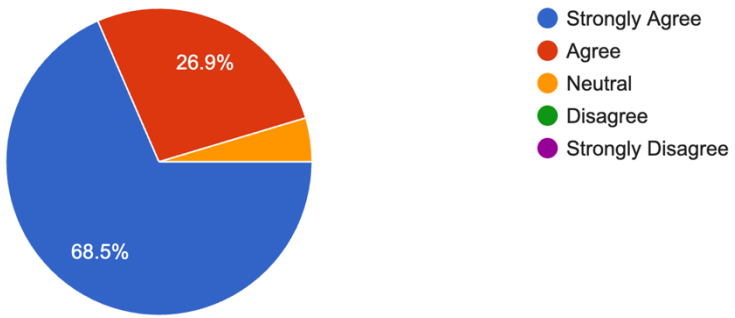
<p><i>“This course differed from others I have taken because it was more engaging. There were discussion boards weekly so although it was asynchronous I was still able to talk with my peers. I think what I took away from this course is how to express my opinions better and discuss them with others. I do not think there is much that would have made my experience better.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Since I take primarily online classes, I feel most lack a sense of community and discussion. This course made sure to require discussion among my peers weekly. I appreciated being able to hear others interpretations on the subjects we learned about.”</i></p>
<p><i>“This was a great course. Even though my class was online, I was able to connect with classmates every week and see all types of interpretations and thoughts.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Overall I felt very valued and included throughout the semester. A way this class has differed is the amount of class discussion and participation throughout the year. In previous online classes the amount of communication is very minimum. It was very fun connecting with my online peers in a way I haven't had the chance to before.”</i></p>

Student Engagement and Success

Student engagement is the key to student success. In helping students make personal connections with course material, success in a GQJ course is seen as intrinsically important, and more than only a degree or transfer requirement.

95% of students agreed or strongly agreed that in their GQJ class they engaged with important questions that were important to them as a human being, with 69% of them strongly agreeing.

In this course, I engaged with important questions that are relevant to me as a human being.
130 responses



Whereas some students see core-curriculum courses as boxes they must check to make progress towards their goals, students who complete GQJ courses often find their experience in

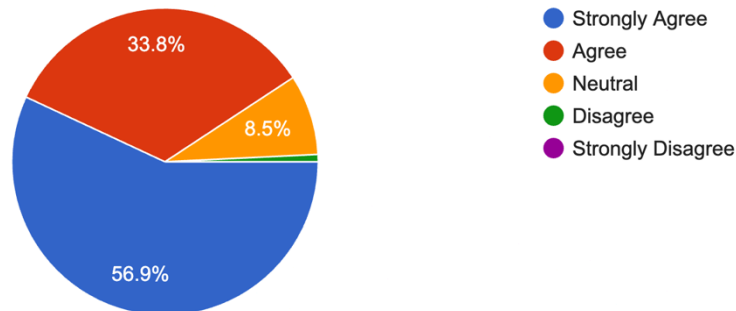
the class to be intrinsically valuable, noting the unique connection the course establishes between academic content and the real world. They appreciate the course's relevance beyond just fulfilling degree requirements, emphasizing the value of asking questions and deep thinking.

<p><i>“I have never taken a class that made me realize the connection the course has with the outside world. It was always just presented as a course that is part of the students degree plan. So thank you so much for the course and making connections to why it’s important to ourselves and the world by allowing us to ask questions and think a lot about the questions that we had to answer.”</i></p>	<p>“At first I thought this class would be a lot of extra work compared to a typical lecture course, but in the end I ended up enjoying it a lot and <i>I feel like I was more engaged with the material than I would have been in a typical lecture course,</i> and it really was not more work either, so I am glad I took this course.”</p>
<p>“I love this course. I had a great Professor who really made me open my mind and understand what has been going on in the world in history as well as what is going on now in the present day. <i>I think because of this course I understand people in general more as well as my self.</i> I feel like my brain has been rewired in the best way. I am very appreciative of this course.”</p>	<p><i>“Not only did I learn far more than I expected in this class, I also felt connected to my classmates and the knowledge I was receiving.</i> This was easily my favorite class I have ever taken at ACC.”</p>

Students note that their GQJ course has helped them acquire skills that are necessary for success in many other academic disciplines. **91% reported that the work they did in their GQJ classes helped them to better understand and contextualize written material, and 87% reported that the course helped them to communicate their ideas more clearly in conversation and/or writing.**

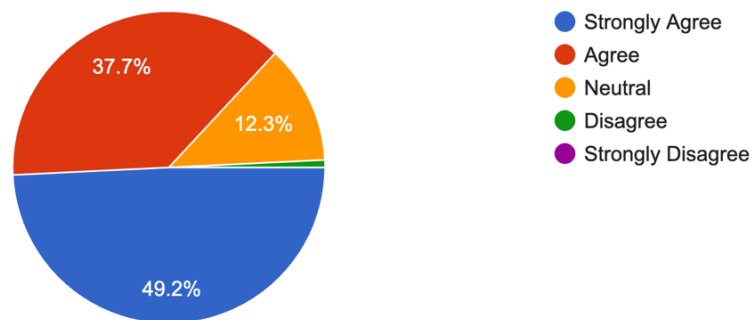
As a result of this course, I can better understand and contextualize the material I read.

130 responses



As a result of this course, I am a better able to communicate my ideas clearly in a conversation and/or in writing.

130 responses

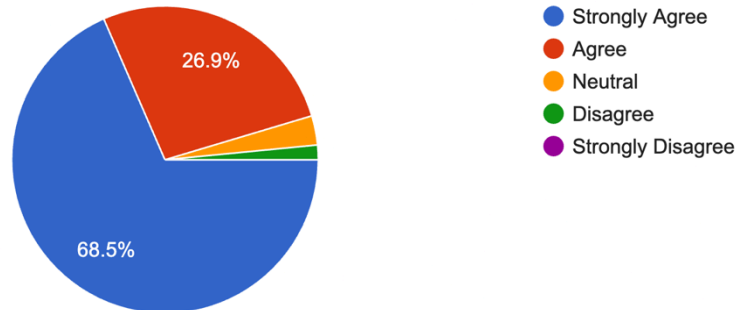


Great Questions Journey classes center discussion-based learning, which frames a student's personal engagement with the text as academically relevant.

Great Questions Journey courses provide students at ACC with more opportunities for class discussion. **87% of respondents strongly agreed that their Great Questions Journey course included many opportunities for participation in class discussion when compared with other classes they have taken at ACC.**

Overall, I felt included in this course.

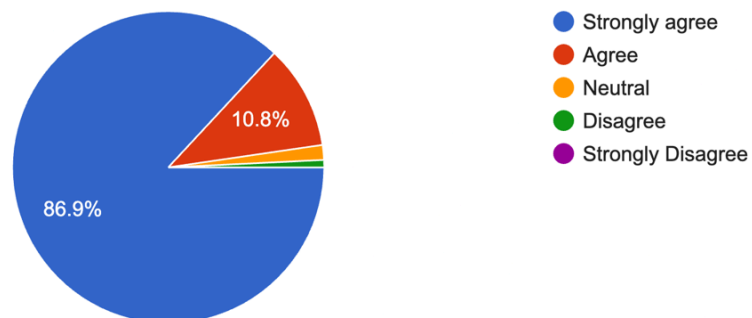
130 responses



GQJ presents all students with an inclusive classroom and curriculum. *95% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt included in their Great Questions Journey course. For survey respondents who did not identify as white (77), 95% also agreed or strongly agreed that they felt included in the course, with 68% strongly agreeing.*

Compared with other classes I have taken at this institution, this class included many opportunities for participation in class discussions.

130 responses



Students value the opportunity for frequent discussion-based engagement. The course not only enhances confidence and public speaking skills but also encourages independent research and critical thinking. The emphasis on relevance, relatability, and the opportunity to reflect on topics from different perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding and application of course material. The comments below emphasize the unique value of discussion-based learning, highlighting its positive impact on research habits and participation.

<p>“I loved how discussion heavy this course was. Hearing my peers opinions and experiences was something I was super interested in. <i>I also felt comfortable enough to share my own opinions which hasn't been the case for some of my other classes.</i> I wish we had more frequent meetings instead of once a week so we had more time to discuss the material and chapters. I would recommend this class to others.”</p>	<p>“Prior to this class, I have had maybe 1 or two professors who cared about my well being and participation in the class while keeping me engaged. I will say this is my first history course I have taken in my history of ACC and K-12 where I felt seen . . . <i>Having the daily discussions with the readings helped me to stay on top of my work and understand what I was dissecting in each text.</i> [My professor] gave everyone the opportunity to speak and ask all the questions they desired. I think my experience was the best it could have been, thanks to [my professor] . . . Out of all 4 courses I took this semester, I most definitely learned and took more content away from here that I can apply to my future beyond college.”</p>
<p>“I gained a lot of confidence taking this course. At first, I was hesitant and real nervous about talking in front of a group of people. <i>As the course progressed, it became easier to stand in front of a group of people and speak.</i>”</p>	<p>“The way the topics were discussed in class made it relatable and relevant to my life. Instead of just learning about certain events or systems I was given the opportunity to reflect on them. <i>Thanks to in class discussions I was able to see topics from different perspectives and relate the readings to my daily life or current events happening today. With this class I feel like not only I learned “what happened” or “how it works” but I learned to wonder “why it works like that” or “how it got to happen like that” and “how we can prevent it or better it”</i>”</p>
<p><i>“As I completed the coursework for this class because it was so discussion based, i felt more inclined to do further research on the readings on my own time, even if it wasn't required.</i> This class really pushed me to participate in class when usually i wouldn't. I found the assignments and topics we discussed in class to be very relevant and beneficial to my learning.</p>	<p>“This class was very different from any other class I have taken this semester. My professor did an amazing job teaching the materials and allowing us to ask questions and be apart of the conversation, not being lectured the whole time. <i>More classes need to be in this format.</i>”</p>
<p>“I think this course offered a great discussion based learning experience different from many of my classes. <i>I felt compelled to research and discuss topics, as well as free to share my points of view without worrying about losing points because the professor didn't agree with them.</i> For that, I want to say thank you. It is very difficult to find a professor that doesn't push their</p>	<p>“I loved taking this course, <i>I liked how it made us communicate with one another and make new friends as well as how involved everybody was.</i>”</p>

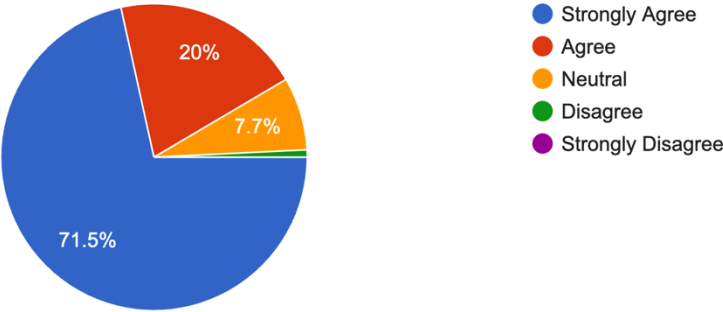
political views or force students to agree with them else they lose points or fail the class.”	
<i>“I have learned so much being apart of a discussion class rather that a learn and take a test class.”</i>	

Contributing to A Healthier Civil Discourse

In addition to helping our students succeed in mastering the material offered in each course, GQJ contributes to a *healthier civil discourse*, by intentionally making space for students to engage across principled differences in the classroom and to see things from perspectives outside of their own. 91.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in their GQJ class they felt free to express opinions and/or points of view that are not widely held, with 72% strongly agreeing. Discussion-based study is instrumental in helping our students to engage with diverse viewpoints.

In this class, I felt free to express or explore opinions and/or points of view that are unpopular and/or not widely held.

130 responses



The student reflections below highlight how GQJ courses contribute to a more healthy civil discourse by fostering an environment where diverse opinions are valued and respected. The emphasis on teamwork and the open expression of opinions creates a space where students feel comfortable challenging their own pre-existing ideas. GQJ courses provide an opportunity for students to see different perspectives, promoting a change in thinking, and encouraging self-reflection. The comments underscore the value of discussion-based courses in facilitating mutual understanding among students, allowing for the contemplation of alternative ideas, and ultimately contributing to an open-minded and enriching learning experience that extends beyond the classroom.

<p>“What i liked about this course was the teamwork and the opinions of others. <i>I’ve taken other classes where people don’t really tell there opinions to others because they either don’t feel like it or aren’t comfortable in that class.</i> I learned that other peoples cultures are different from others.”</p>	<p>“I enjoyed this course because <i>I was able to challenge myself including my preexisting ideas and perspectives. At times I found myself frustrated or uncomfortable which shows the growth in process.</i> I enjoyed communicating with others and hearing their interpretations of the texts and the philosophical conversations that came with that. Overall, <i>this course and some of the material covered will come with me going forward on my journey of life.</i>”</p>
<p>“class was super awesome and he created an environment where <i>every student felt like they could express their opinions.</i>”</p>	<p>“I like that <i>this course makes you see a different perspective and changes your way of thinking.</i> Whatever you may think you know you will reconsider your concepts after this course. because the course makes you evaluate yourself and gives you the opportunity to contemplate other ideas.”</p>
<p>“I believe this course like other discussions based courses serves as a great way to interact with other students in a mutually beneficial way. <i>All sides of the conversation learn, while also being able to better understand one another and their potential differences.</i>”</p>	<p>“Overall, I loved the class. I found the structure beneficial and easy to manage. <i>I enjoyed the way that we could discuss our opinions while being respected.</i>”</p>
<p>“This was my first time taking a Great Questions Journey course and I enjoyed it. <i>It made me open minded and made me see things differently.</i>”</p>	

GQJ courses reflect a broad vision of student success that values helping students meet their academic and career goals as much as the development of intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and a sense of social responsibility as active citizens in a pluralistic republic.

Discussion of Survey Limitations:

While the survey response rate of 23% provides us with a robust sample, we do note potential limitations regarding sample representation. GQJ faculty members were asked, but not required, to distribute the survey to their students. Some faculty members might have decided not to share a survey with students who may not have encountered the outcomes mentioned in this report. Going forward, we should ensure that all GQJ faculty members distribute surveys to their students. It should also be noted that the incentive to complete the survey is modest, a Great Questions branded Yeti bottle. A more robust incentive may increase the response rate. Finally, the author of this report, Ted Hadzi-Antich Jr., is the director of the GQJ program. While the author strives for clarity and is committed to honest reporting and analysis of the data, wherever it may lead, he is aware that confirmation bias is real and difficult to notice in oneself. Future survey reports should be created by an independent third-party to mitigate confirmation biases in reporting.

Conclusion:

“The journey doesn’t end when the semester ends, I will continue the journey because I believe it’s what will guide me in anything I do and anywhere I go.” – Fall 2023 Survey Respondent

The Fall 2023 Great Questions Journey (GQJ) courses have proven to be highly successful and impactful for the 130 students who participated in the Student Exit Survey. The data reveal that GQJ courses particularly benefit first-generation college students, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for students of diverse backgrounds. The success is not only reflected in students' reported academic achievements but also in their engagement with course material and the development of critical thinking skills. The intentional connections drawn between students' lives and academic subjects contribute to a deeper understanding of and appreciation for course content.

In adapting to distance education, GQJ courses have shown a remarkable ability to foster a sense of connection among students. The positive feedback from distance education students highlights the courses as among the best they have taken, emphasizing the unique and enriching experience of connecting with peers in a meaningful way.

Student comments from the survey further affirm the success of the GQJ pedagogy, showcasing students' deep engagement with the material, appreciation for open discussions, and the transformative impact on their learning experiences. Beyond academic success, GQJ courses actively contribute to a healthier civil discourse by providing a platform for students to express diverse perspectives and engage in principled discussions. The overwhelmingly positive

response to the inclusivity and freedom of expression in the classroom reinforces GQJ's broader vision of student success, aligning with the development of intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and a sense of social responsibility as active citizens. The Fall 2023 GQJ courses stand as a testament to their effectiveness in promoting both academic achievement and the holistic development of students.

—Spring 2024