

The Big Ideas series began as an opportunity to educate students on the critical issues facing society today. In our interactions with students, we found that many times they were relying on the headlines to determine their position on the critical issues of the day. In the Leadership Programs office, we utilize the Social Change Model of Leadership Development, which focuses on developing leaders who can contribute to positive social change. The Social Change Model challenges students to develop in the area of citizenship, which is defined as a commitment to the community. Recognizing that our students need to be prepared to serve as leaders in their communities and careers, the Big Ideas program set about to educate students on critical issues by providing background information on current news stories and presenting the various viewpoints held regarding the issue. Our goal is not to indoctrinate students, but to teach them to look for multiple sources of information and perspectives as part of the process of understanding complex issues.

Workshop topics change each week and are based on topics that are relevant in the news cycle. Each week, students learn the history behind the various issues through short presentations that include videos explaining the issues from multiple perspectives. Facilitators lead the students in discussions of the issues and ask students to point out the pros and cons of different perspectives as well as consider their own position. Students work in small groups to discuss potential solutions to the problem presented each week.