

The Power of Encouraging Conversation

A FreeIC event

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(Photo by Jessica Condon, IMC student photographer)

By: Lisa Hayden

Students, faculty and staff filed into Chan Shun Hall on a brisk Saturday evening to engage in Free Intelligent Conversation (FreeIC). Presented by the Office of Diversity & Inclusion and the Institutional Diversity & Inclusion Action Council, this event encouraged dialogue and interpersonal growth between individuals of different backgrounds.

Co-curricular credit was provided and the program began promptly at 6:30 p.m. on November 18. After participants engaged in some conversation warmups, Clifford Allen, a recruiting coordinator for International Business Machines (IBM), moderated a panel on discussing challenging topics. The panelists were Andrews University Student Association (AUSA) president Jessica Yoong (senior, business), Andrews University Graduate Student Association (AUGSA) president Mark Reid (Master of Divinity, third year) and Andrews University staff/faculty members: José Bourget, associate chaplain, Krista Cooper, assistant professor of social work, and Marcella Myers, associate professor of political science.

Founded and directed by Andrews University alumnus Kyle Emile (BS '14), Free Intelligent Conversation is a non-profit organization started with one goal: to encourage conversation.

According to the official FreeIC website, “The movement has spread beyond Chicago—we’ve made it into 15 major U.S. cities and have even stretched internationally into Canada and Italy.”

Reid said, “I had heard about FreeIC in Chicago, but I was never able to attend. Having FreeIC on campus was a great opportunity to have conversation with individuals I normally wouldn’t. I appreciate VP Nixon and his office for organizing this event. It highlighted the need for conversation. We are all different with different experiences and different opinions and different rationales, and the only way to experience all of that is through conversation.”

The organization sets out to accomplish three objectives: celebrate each other’s differences, create places where you can talk about anything and encourage meaningful face-to-face conversation. The questions posed by the moderator aligned with these objectives.

During the discussion, panelists were given the opportunity to answer these guided questions. Audience members recounted their favorite questions and topics that surfaced during the discussion.

Autumn Goodman (sophomore, photography) said, “One of the questions they asked at the FreeIC event was, ‘If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be and why?’ They also talked about safe spaces and the purpose of creating them as well as the conflict that comes with having safe spaces for people to discuss issues but not having safe people in the safe spaces.”

While the questions certainly touched on important topics, individuals felt they were also relatable, which resulted in responses from people with varying backgrounds and experiences.

Crystal-Anne Tan (sophomore, documentary film) said, “The Free Intelligent Conversation event was a really positive experience. I think a lot of the questions asked could definitely be applied to everyday conversations with your peers just to get different perspectives.”

The moderator led the audience in breakout sessions before and after the panel discussion. During these sessions, audience members formed into groups of 4–5 and participated in conversation prompted by FreeIC question cards. Attendees resonated with the importance of group discussion and expressed the need for Andrews University to continue these events.

Theard Pierre (freshman, theology) said, “I enjoyed the FreeIC’s groups of different people talking about things we usually never get a chance to speak on. You not only got to hear the thoughts of others but also connect with people you’d never think you would or had the opportunity to speak to. Andrews should absolutely make more events like this. We need more intelligent conversations because the minds of the student body work and think differently!”

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