
A CALL FOR CIVILITY

Collaborative Nexus Maximus challenge works to bridge the divide.

By **Mike Bederka**
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From a zero-waste grocery store and community garden, to an open-source education platform, the common thread tying together these projects at this year's [Nexus Maximus](#) student challenge is civility.

The theme was top of mind for Mike Leonard, who began planning Jefferson's signature [Nexus Learning](#) event in the spring. General feelings of animosity, hate and disrespect often fill the airwaves and clog social media feeds, he says.

"The uncivility—you can taste it," says Leonard, [Kanbar College of Design, Engineering and Commerce](#) dean. "Right now, we're looking over our shoulder all the time. The sense of

hopefulness needs to be pushed back.”

University president [Dr.](#)

[Stephen K. Klasko](#)

applauded the 60 students—freshmen to graduate level—involved in the international collaboration. Along with Jefferson, students from Ulster University in Northern Ireland, University of Applied Sciences Detmold in Germany, Pace University in New York and Duoc UC in Chile joined together on East Falls Campus for four fast-paced days of researching, developing and innovating.

“You’re taking on the root cause of so many problems,” says Dr. Klasko. “I want to thank you. It’s what makes this University so special.



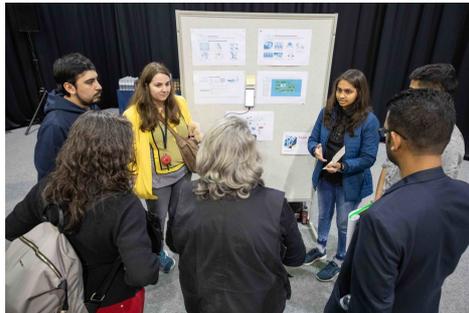
Interior design student Tanushree Parikh pitches her team's business that addresses office incivility.

Nexus Maximus regularly tackles major issues affecting society. Last year's competition, for instance, tasked students **to improve lives by developing healthy communities.**

Following Dr. Klasko's remarks, judges toured 13 poster presentations centered on the various ways to make the world a more civil place. There were 10 academic programs involved, and Leonard purposely placed students from different majors and schools on each team to see what ideas would percolate.

The groups didn't disappoint, notes Leonard, anticipating some projects will make their way into senior capstones.

"You see the power of them working to generate results in such a pressure cooker," he says. "You can't help but be impressed. They were up to the challenge."



The Being Able To app earned the Ready for the World Award from the judges.

For example:

* The trio of Jefferson
interior design student
Tanushree Parikh, Jefferson
management student Elias
Siegelman and Duoc culinary

student Miguel Quiroz proposed a business that addresses office incivility. The venture had a dual focus on workplace training and interior design that allows safe conflict resolution and encourages friendly interaction among employees.

* Jefferson [industrial design](#) major Rachel Smith teamed up with students from Ulster and Duoc to create Project Second Chance, a government program to assist the homeless population. The project's key component, a community garden, works to reduce the stigma of homelessness. "Having a clear focus helped to drive the idea forward," says Smith.

* An online tool that teaches children social skills through

technology and then motivates them to use these skills in the real world won Nexus Maximus' Power of Collaboration Award. The team included urban planning, architecture, and hospitality and tourism majors. "I got to see so many different perspectives," says Danielle Jones, a computer science student from Pace.

* Ahmed Meselhy's group developed Naked Market, a zero-waste grocery store that strives to reduce the public's demand for plastic. His team—winners of the Peer-to-Peer Fan Favorite Award—benefited by the open-ended nature of the assignment that cut across all majors and disciplines, says the Jefferson [sustainable design](#) graduate student. "Everyone

contributed during the brainstorming.”

* Rounding out the honors, the Ready for the World Award went to Being Able To, an app that allows users to actively support causes that matter most to them.



Sixty students from five institutions participated in the sixth annual Nexus Maximus.

For inspiration and to fuel their success, students attended workshops over the weekend led by Jefferson faculty and [Design Factory Global Network members](#). Sessions covered subjects like empathy mapping, information ethics and how civility relates to the human experience in

emergency medicine and patient care.

“Students used that as raw information,” explains Leonard. “You heard them quote those presentations.”

Tod Corlett, Jefferson’s industrial design program director, dubs this portion of Nexus Maximus the “secret sauce” that helps separate it from typical pitch competitions.

“We give them the skills *along* with their project,” he says.

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The Nexus:
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noun

Get in touch with

A connection or series of connections linking two or more things, bringing ideas to life.

“The nexus between students and industry”

A connected group or series.

“A nexus of ideas”

The central and most important point or place.

“The nexus is news at Jefferson”

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