

UPF USA: The Role of Media in Advancing Civility in the Public Square

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United States -- In today's climate of political polarization, we are desperately in need of ways to bridge the divide between left and right, between faith-based and secular worldviews. IMAP's March 28, 2023 webinar, "The Role of Media in Advancing Civility in the Public Square," addressed this important topic through the eyes of two leaders with cutting-edge experience in the field.

The Dignity Index, founded by **Tim Shriver**, is one nonprofit that aims to ease divisions and elevate the political dialogue. In our March 28th webinar, **Ms. Tami Pyfer**, leader of the Dignity Index's Utah Demonstration Project and longtime civil servant, highlighted some of the successes and takeaways from their inaugural foray into the oft toxic political sphere.



Ms. Pyfer commented that, in an era of pervasive social media and partisan news, Americans' differences have become dangerously tribal, fueled by a new media that markets outrage. Opposing views can no longer be tolerated. These tensions are poisoning personal relationships, consuming our politics, and putting our democracy in peril.

The Dignity Index brought together bi-partisan groups of student coders on the University of Utah campus to score selections from candidate speeches, debates, fundraising outreach, social media posts, and campaign ads in Utah's 2022 federal congressional races. The results were then publicized on the organization's website and widely covered by the news media. [Unite.us](https://unite.us) found that many business, faith, civic and education leaders were very interested in the model for their own institutions.



[Unite.us](https://unite.us) now plans to build a network across the nation's college campuses to lead scoring and mobilization efforts for the dignity movement, create workshops and culture-change tools to empower people across the country to adopt the Dignity Index in their own communities, and apply the Dignity Index to the 2024 Presidential campaign.



Our next speaker, **Dr. Thomas Selover**, international co-coordinator for the International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP), and international president of Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA), explained that while in the US today we tend to see two sides, red states and blue states, pitted against each other, there are in fact people in every state holding a full range of political opinions. Taking the game of soccer as an inspiration, Dr. Selover suggested that the cooperation of left-wing and right-wing in supporting the center would be a much more successful model for political dialogue. He called this approach "Headwing," a term coined by Rev. Sun Myung Moon. Headwing would be not so much trying to convince others of the righteousness of one's own position or views, but rather seeking fruitful discussion based on the conviction that there is a solution that includes the righteous principles on both sides, and the determination to find that solution through vigorous shared thinking.

He further suggested that we cannot expect the media to change until we as individuals and as a society change. In this regard, Dr. Selover offers a proposal for self-monitoring, especially on social media. Just as there are controls for limiting obscene and violent content, so there ought to be voluntary controls for limiting inflammatory rhetoric. By de-selecting and screening out sources that indulge in incendiary commentary, individuals can contribute to the positive redirection of the social media environment.

The presentation of our two speakers was followed by a lively question and answer session in which the speakers had the opportunity to elaborate on their ideas and to interact with each other and with our online audience.