

“Celebrating curiosity while encouraging differing points of view creates a platform to look at the world with fresh perspective.” — DENESHA SNELL

AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE

DENESHA SNELL, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

American Public Square programming at William Jewell College embraces the belief that polarizing topics can be teased apart through civil discourse. Denesha Snell, Program Director, spends her days ensuring this positive, proactive principle is shared with an audience. Concepts such as climate change; local, regional and national politics; racial equity and how to frame it are weighty issues. They're often viewed through disparate lenses. “And that disparity,” shares Snell, “can be an opportunity to explore the thought processes that produced them.”

She explains her work as helping facilitate the exploration. “We don't have to agree, to see each other as human,” she continues. “It's not always easy, yet when we bring our individual lived experiences to a shared dialog, an absolute belief in one point of view can often—for a while—be suspended.”

When she is producing an event to feature a controversial conversation, she also produces a set of guidelines to ensure discussion is substantive,

respectful, and based on facts. These “civility tools” must be agreed upon by all participants.

In addition to signature programs offered four times a year, Snell produces bi-monthly podcasts and facilitates informal evening gatherings featuring recognized thought-leaders. She has also developed a student-focused programming stream helping the younger generation build capacity to function with—and help encourage—a civil democracy. “I love working with this younger generation,” shares Snell. “Their engagement is some of the most encouraging.”

“Though politics too often drive the news cycle,” concludes Snell, “a political lens is not as important to these young thinkers. They seek out discussion around global issues of right versus wrong based on fact versus opinion.” Their perspective—encouraged by Snell's insight and support—is certainly something to think about, no matter what platform generates the thinking.

