

STUDENTS GATHER FOR BRIDGEUSA “MIDDLE GROUND” DISCUSSION ON IMMIGRATION



Students gather in Homer Babbidge Library in Storrs, Conn. on April 14, 2026. The event was hosted by BridgeUSA UConn and aimed at fostering dialogue across political differences. PHOTO COURTESY OF @BRIDGEUCONN_ ON INSTAGRAM

by Donte Mills
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Students gathered Tuesday evening in Homer Babbidge Library to take part in a structured “Middle Ground” discussion on immigration, an event hosted by BridgeUSA UConn aimed at fostering dialogue across political differences.

The conversation followed a moderated, discussion-based format in which participants responded to prompted statements before moving into group dialogue. Topics ranged from immigration policy and ethics to economic impacts and enforcement authority, with students forming into a smaller group based on agreement before the rest of the room would join in on the discussion.

Organizers said the goal of the event was to bring together students with a range of viewpoints, rather than a single ideological group.

“We’re trying to teach people that it’s okay to hear other people’s opinions and respond, not even positively, but just making sure you hear people out,” Victoria Hamel, BridgeUSA UConn’s president and a fourth-semester political science and human development and family sciences major, said. “Our goal is just to make sure that people are talking about politics, about everything, and just know how to talk to each other even if they disagree.”

BridgeUSA UConn, which established its chapter last semester, hosts weekly discussions in addition to one larger event each semester. Tuesday’s event drew around 30 attendees, according to organizers.

Hamel said the structure of BridgeUSA discussions is designed to expose students to viewpoints they may not normally encounter in smaller or more ideologically uniform settings.

“Our usual meetings are probably a little bit more left-leaning than these ones,”

Hamel said. “The more people, the more perspectives you hear. The conversations go a little more in depth.”

During the discussion, students responded to statements such as “unauthorized immigrants boost the economy,” “ICE has too much unchecked power,” “there is no ethical way to conduct mass deportation” and “it should be easier to immigrate to the United States.” Participants first indicated agreement or disagreement, moved into the circle if agreed, then explained their reasoning. After about four minutes the rest of the room joined the circle and said their opposing viewpoint, opening a room-wide dialogue.

Participants said the format helped structure what might otherwise become a fragmented or unproductive debate.

Elio Delgado, a seventh-semester political science and psychology major and vice president of BridgeUSA UConn, said the organization emphasizes communication skills as much as political viewpoints.

“I think you can have perspectives and not agree with people of a certain, like, extreme,” Delgado said. “I think that’s one of the reasons why we do these moderated discussions, is for people to have the opportunity to hear a different perspective.”

Katerina Anikeev, a sixth-semester political science and applied data analysis major and treasurer of BridgeUSA UConn, said the larger event format brought in a wider range of perspectives than typical weekly meetings.

“I think usually we get only politically motivated people who want to talk about politics,” Anikeev said. “But when you make it a larger event, you bring in more people, and I think I saw a much broader spectrum today.”

She added that while the group tends to lean center-left in the context of the broader U.S. political alignment, the

Tuesday discussion included a wider ideological range than usual.

“I definitely saw a broader spectrum today, and I thought that was kind of cool,” Anikeev said.

Jacob Fagan, a fourth-semester political science major and event chair for BridgeUSA UConn, said the structured nature of the discussion made it more productive than typical meetings.

“It’s a bit more organized,” Fagan said. “We heard more voices than we usually do. We got representatives from some other clubs, but overall, I think it was more productive than the usual meeting.”

Fagan also emphasized the importance of moderated political discussion in a campus environment.

“College students can get emotional sometimes,” he said. “Moderating student discussion keeps things under control and helps people hear other ideas, as opposed to just yelling at each other.”

Fagan also spoke on being a participant in the discussion, noting that the format created a more comfortable environment for speaking.

“Whatever you believe in, it’s BridgeUSA — bipartisan,” Fagan said. “No one’s going to be looked down upon, so whatever I had to say I felt pretty comfortable saying it.”

He added that the event reflected broader campus diversity in political thought.

“A lot of times people see big universities like us as liberal hotspots,” Fagan said. “But as you saw today, we have a lot of different views. Even if it’s not the majority, it’s valuable to have different perspectives.”

BridgeUSA UConn hosts weekly meetings in addition to its larger events each semester, which organizers say are designed to encourage civil dialogue across ideological lines. For more information or to get involved, visit the organization’s UConncontact page.

FREE DENTAL CLINIC COMING TO STORRS THIS WEEKEND

by Gwendolyn Leonard
CAMPUS CONTRIBUTOR
SHE/HER/HERS

The 20th Connecticut Mission of Mercy Free Dental Clinic (CTMOM) will be happening this weekend, April 17 and 18, at E.O. Smith High School, with doors opening at 7 a.m.

The clinic will serve patients on a first come, first served basis and expects to be able to provide care to around 1,200 people over the two-day event.

Schools website.

Connecticut residents have faced challenges of having reliable dental care, especially in more rural areas like Storrs.

“Challenges such as lack of insurance, limited provider availability, transportation constraints, and financial hardship continue to contribute to health inequities in our region,” Robert Miller, Director of Health of the Eastern Highland Health District, said in the CTMOM press release. “Programs like the CT Mission of Mercy play

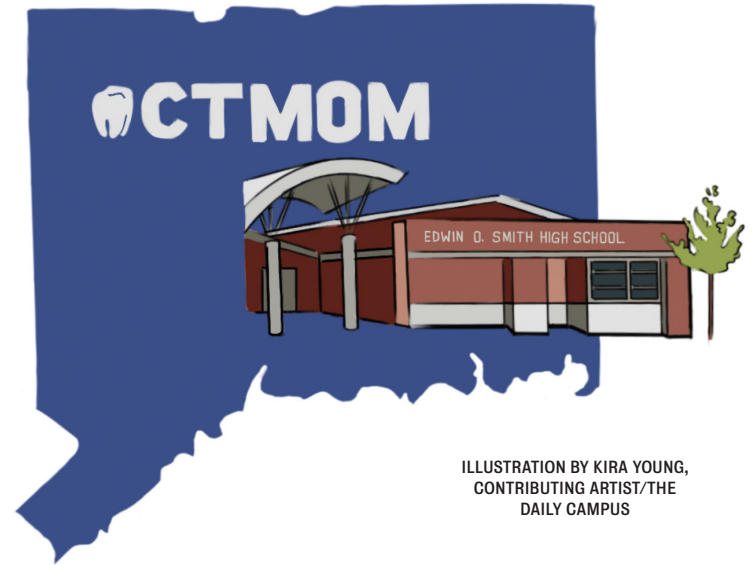


ILLUSTRATION BY KIRA YOUNG, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

It will have around “80 dental stations staffed by 800 volunteers,” according to a CTMOM press release. The clinic will offer a wide range of services such as physical exams, x-rays, tooth cleanings, extractions and fillings, limited root canals on front teeth and premolars, and limited interim partial dentures and repairs, according to the press release.

According to the City of Mansfield Public Schools website, CTMOM is “committed to improving the quality of life for all.”

“Storrs Village in the Town of Mansfield, CT, is well poised to help us extend our mission to as many patients as possible,” according to the City of Mansfield Public

a critical role by providing high-quality, compassionate dental care to individuals in need.”

CTMOM is a non-profit organization founded in 2007 as a “consortium of individuals from the oral health care sector who sought to collaborate to improve the oral health of the underserved and working poor in Connecticut” according to their website.

The mission statement of CTMOM is “oral health is inseparable from general health and can affect a person’s self-esteem and compromise their ability to work, attend school, and lead a normal life.... Every year, the CTMOM clinic is held in a different location throughout the state,” according to the website.

CTMOM FREE DENTAL CLINIC

NO APPOINTMENT NEEDED. FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED. ALL ADULTS AND CHILDREN WELCOME.

SERVICES PROVIDED:

- Exams
- Cleanings
- Fluoride Treatments
- Oral Health Education
- X-Rays
- Extractions
- Fillings
- Interim Partial Dentures (Limited)
- Root Canals (Limited to Front Teeth Only)

THINGS TO KNOW

- Children under 18 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.
- Take your medications as prescribed. Please bring a list of your medications with you.
- Wait times for treatment are expected, please bring something with you to help pass the time.

APRIL 17-18, 2026

E. O. SMITH HIGH SCHOOL
1235 Storrs Rd
Storrs, CT 06268

DOORS OPEN 7:00 AM

MORE INFORMATION
(860) 863-5940
www.cfdo.org

Connecticut Foundation for Dental Outreach
Connecticut Mission of Mercy Free Dental Clinic

The flyer for a free dental clinic coming to Storrs this weekend at E.O. Smith High School. This clinic is targeted at helping those who cannot get regular cleanings or access to dental healthcare and is expected to help over 1,000 community members.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @EOSMITHHIGH SCHOOL ON INSTAGRAM