

Learnings from the ASEE Interdivisional Town Hall Series: 2022-2025

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Abstract

This full paper examines the Interdivisional Town Hall (ITH), a feature of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) Annual Conference that provides a structured forum for cross-divisional dialogue on complex challenges in engineering education. Designed as an open, facilitated space, the Town Hall brings together faculty, administrators, staff, and students from across ASEE divisions to engage in discussions that surface shared concerns, tensions, and emerging priorities that cut across disciplinary and institutional boundaries. Each year, the Town Hall is organized around a set of community-identified themes developed through a cross-divisional planning process. These thematic discussions are intentionally generative, emphasizing sensemaking, reflection, and the articulation of shared challenges rather than immediate solution development. Insights from these conversations often inform subsequent, more focused engagement with a specific initiative or project later in the session, such as collaborative efforts around sustainability or engineering mindset. While this follow-on engagement provides important continuity, the primary focus of this paper is the initial thematic dialogue that anchors the Town Hall experience. Drawing on qualitative data collected from structured table-level documentation and facilitator synthesis; this study analyzes four consecutive years of Town Hall discussions (2022–2025). A cross-year thematic analysis identifying persistent concerns, emerging areas of emphasis, and shifts in framing over time. Findings illustrate how recurring themes related to equity and access, student experience, faculty roles, emerging technologies, and societal responsibility are revisited and reframed as conditions in engineering education evolve. This work positions the Interdivisional Town Hall as a mechanism for inclusive, multidisciplinary sensemaking within a professional society. By documenting how thematic dialogue supports collective learning and agenda setting, the paper contributes to understanding how large-scale, cross-divisional conversation can inform community-driven improvement in engineering education.

Keywords: Collaboration across disciplines, Communities of practice, Organizational change and culture, Faculty professional development, Emerging technologies in education

Introduction

The Interdivisional Town Hall (ITH) is a distinctive and enduring component of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) Annual Conference. Held during the final technical session on Monday afternoon, the Town Hall occupies a protected time slot, with divisions discouraged from scheduling competing meetings or sessions. This intentional placement reflects ASEE's recognition that some challenges in engineering education extend beyond disciplinary boundaries and require collective, society-level dialogue.

Unlike traditional conference sessions that emphasize dissemination of completed work, the Interdivisional Town Hall is designed as a facilitated space for conversation, reflection, and shared sensemaking. In this respect, it aligns with established models of town halls that emphasize structured participation, inclusive dialogue, and collective reflection rather than debate or decision-making [1]. The Town Hall brings together faculty, administrators, staff, and

students from across ASEE divisions to engage with issues that shape engineering education broadly, including equity and access, student experience, emerging technologies, and the evolving responsibilities of the engineering profession. The Town Hall can also be understood as a form of large-group intervention, bringing together a substantial portion of a professional community to address system-level challenges [2]. Such interventions are designed to surface shared concerns and align understanding across organizational boundaries, rather than to generate immediate solutions. This orientation is particularly well suited to engineering education, where many pressing challenges are complex, value-laden, and interconnected.

Each year, the Interdivisional Town Hall is organized around a small set of community-identified themes developed through a cross-divisional planning process. These themes serve as prompts for generative discussion rather than as problems to be solved. Participants are invited to share experiences, articulate tensions, and explore how challenges are understood across different disciplinary and institutional contexts. From a sensemaking perspective, these conversations provide a mechanism through which participants collectively interpret emerging conditions and negotiate shared meaning [3]. Following this broad thematic dialogue, the Town Hall typically transitions to a more focused engagement centered on a specific initiative or project that has emerged as salient through prior discussions. Examples have included collaborative work related to sustainability and engineering mindset. This focused engagement provides continuity and depth, but it is grounded in the themes surfaced through the initial dialogue. The analytic focus of this paper remains on the thematic discussion that initiates the Town Hall, as it represents the primary site of large-scale, cross-divisional participation and collective interpretation.

Over the past several years, the topics addressed through the Interdivisional Town Hall have mirrored broader shifts in engineering education and higher education more generally. Discussions have evolved from post-pandemic concerns about student well-being and instructional strain to more integrated conversations about artificial intelligence, rigor and preparation, equity, and societal responsibility. The recurrence of these themes across years suggests that the Town Hall functions as a learning structure through which the ASEE community revisits persistent challenges while adapting to new contexts, consistent with perspectives on organizational learning in professional communities [4]. Despite its central role within the Annual Conference, the Interdivisional Town Hall has received limited scholarly attention. Understanding how themes persist across years, how framing shifts over time, and how collective dialogue informs subsequent engagement is essential for assessing the Town Hall's contribution beyond the conference session itself. As a full paper, this study examines four consecutive years of thematic Town Hall discussions to explore how large-scale, cross-divisional dialogue supports multidisciplinary sensemaking within a professional society.

Background and Related Work

The Interdivisional Town Hall can be understood through several complementary bodies of literature relevant to multidisciplinary engineering education, including town halls and civic dialogue, large-group interventions, sensemaking and organizational learning, and communities of practice within professional societies. Together, these perspectives provide a foundation for examining how structured, thematic conversation supports shared understanding in complex educational systems.

Town halls have long been used as a mechanism for engaging large, diverse groups around complex social and organizational issues. Lukensmeyer and Brigham describe contemporary town halls as intentionally designed forums that enable broad participation, structured dialogue, and collective reflection rather than debate or decision-making [1]. Their work emphasizes that effective town halls rely on facilitation, carefully designed prompts, and mechanisms for capturing and synthesizing participant input, particularly when participation occurs at scale. These characteristics closely align with the design of the Interdivisional Town Hall. Like civic town halls, the ITH prioritizes inclusion and representation while acknowledging that not all challenges can or should be resolved within a single session. Instead, the value of the town hall lies in surfacing perspectives, articulating shared concerns, and creating a foundation for continued engagement.

Related literature on large-group interventions and whole-system engagement further informs understanding of the Interdivisional Town Hall. Worley, Mohrman, and Nevitt define large-group interventions as structured processes that bring together a substantial portion of an organization or community to address system-level issues [2]. Their empirical study highlights how such interventions support alignment, shared understanding, and coordinated learning when participation, structure, and purpose are carefully balanced. Large-group interventions differ from traditional meetings or workshops in that they are explicitly oriented toward whole-system perspectives rather than localized problem solving. Facilitation and shared framing are central to their effectiveness. The Interdivisional Town Hall reflects these characteristics by convening participants across divisions and roles, using common prompts, and emphasizing dialogue over presentation or directive outcomes. Within engineering education, such large-group approaches are less common than course-level or program-level interventions. However, as challenges related to equity, emerging technologies, and societal responsibility become increasingly interconnected, professional societies are turning to formats that support engagement across disciplinary and organizational boundaries. The Interdivisional Town Hall exemplifies this shift by positioning thematic dialogue as a legitimate and valuable form of professional engagement.

Sensemaking theory provides a useful lens for understanding the role of thematic dialogue in contexts characterized by uncertainty and change. Sensemaking emphasizes how individuals and groups construct meaning through social interaction, particularly when established routines and assumptions are disrupted [3]. From this perspective, conversation is not simply a means of exchanging information, but a process through which participants interpret experiences, surface assumptions, and negotiate shared understanding. Engineering education currently operates in such conditions. Rapid technological change, including the emergence of generative artificial intelligence, ongoing debates about rigor and inclusion, and shifting expectations for the societal role of engineers introduce ambiguity that cannot be resolved through technical expertise alone. Thematic dialogue creates space for participants to collectively explore these uncertainties rather than address them in isolation. Organizational learning perspectives further emphasize the importance of recurring structures that allow issues to be revisited over time [4]. Learning-oriented processes support reflection, feedback, and adaptation rather than one-time decisions. The annual recurrence of the Interdivisional Town Hall enables themes to persist, evolve, and be reframed as contexts change, contributing to longer-term learning within ASEE as an organization.

Communities of practice theory frames learning as participation in shared activity and the development of identity within a community [5]. In engineering education, such communities often form within disciplines, departments, or interest groups, where shared language and norms facilitate coordination and learning. The Interdivisional Town Hall operates across the boundaries of these communities. By intentionally bringing together participants from multiple divisions and institutional contexts, the Town Hall creates opportunities for boundary-spanning dialogue. These interactions expose participants to alternative perspectives and challenge assumptions that may remain invisible within more homogeneous settings. Research on boundary-spanning interaction suggests that such dialogue can be generative but also challenging, as participants must navigate differences in language, values, and priorities [6]. Structured facilitation and shared prompts help manage these challenges by providing common reference points for discussion.

Professional societies play a central role in shaping norms, priorities, and practices within engineering education. Beyond disseminating research, conferences provide spaces where members collectively interpret emerging challenges and align around shared values. While the Interdivisional Town Hall emphasizes generative, thematic dialogue, insights from these conversations can inform more focused, project-based engagement within the Society. Examples of such engagement include collaborative initiatives that build on themes surfaced through Town Hall discussion, such as recent sustainability-focused work that translated shared concerns into a co-created teaching resource [7]. These efforts illustrate how broad dialogue and focused action can be linked without conflating sensemaking with solution development. Despite the importance of these processes, relatively little empirical work has examined how professional society programming supports organizational learning over time. By documenting the design and evolution of the Interdivisional Town Hall's thematic discussions, this study contributes to understanding professional societies as active sites of learning rather than passive venues for information exchange.

Research Methods

This study used a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine the thematic discussions of the Interdivisional Town Hall across four consecutive ASEE Annual Conferences (2022–2025). The goal was to understand how shared concerns, priorities, and framings emerged and evolved through large-scale, cross-divisional dialogue within a professional society. The analysis was intentionally focused on collective sensemaking rather than on evaluating individual participants, measuring outcomes, or assessing the effectiveness of specific initiatives.

Data was collected during the generative, theme-based discussion portion of each Interdivisional Town Hall. These discussions were organized around a small number of community-identified themes and conducted in facilitated small groups. Each discussion table was led by a facilitator who also recorded key ideas, questions, and points of tension using a structured documentation template developed by the planning committee. Because Wi-Fi access in conference venues was inconsistent, documentation relied primarily on paper-based templates. Following each session, facilitators scanned and submitted their completed templates for archiving. In addition to table-level documentation, facilitators provided brief summaries during large-group report-outs at the conclusion of thematic discussions. Notes from these summaries provided supplementary context for interpreting patterns across tables.

The data included documentation from four years of Interdivisional Town Hall discussions. Participation across these years ranged from approximately 150 to over 250 attendees per session and included faculty, administrators, staff, and students representing a wide range of ASEE divisions and institutional types. Participation in the Town Hall was open and voluntary, and no individual demographic data were collected. As a result, the data reflect the perspectives of those present rather than a representative sample of the entire ASEE membership. The analysis therefore emphasizes patterns that emerged across multiple tables and years, rather than individual viewpoints or frequency counts.

Analysis proceeded through iterative thematic coding of all available documentation. Initial coding identified prominent topics and concerns within each year's discussions. These codes were then compared across years to identify persistent themes, emerging areas of emphasis, and shifts in framing over time. Rather than quantifying the prevalence of specific terms, the analysis prioritized convergence across tables and recurrence across years as indicators of shared salience. This approach aligned with sensemaking-oriented qualitative research, which emphasized how groups collectively interpret experiences and challenges in contexts characterized by uncertainty and change [3]. The analytic focus was on how issues were framed, linked, and revisited through repeated dialogue, rather than on determining causality or attributing statements to specific individuals.

The authors have served in planning and facilitation roles for the Interdivisional Town Hall, providing deep contextual knowledge of its design, goals, and implementation. This positionality strengthened interpretation by grounding analysis in an understanding of the Town Hall's intent and constraints. At the same time, it introduced the potential for bias. To mitigate this risk, analysis emphasized themes that appeared consistently across multiple tables and years and relied on documented data rather than anecdotal recollection. Interpretations were discussed collaboratively among authors to challenge assumptions and ensure alignment with the data.

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. Facilitator-recorded notes vary in depth and style, and the absence of verbatim transcripts limits analytic granularity. The focus on collective documentation may obscure minority or dissenting perspectives. These limitations are inherent to large-scale, in-person dialogue and reflect deliberate trade-offs between inclusivity, feasibility, and data fidelity. Despite these constraints, the data provided a robust basis for examining how multidisciplinary themes surface through structured dialogue.

Interdivisional Town Hall Design and Guiding Principles

The Interdivisional Town Hall is intentionally designed as a facilitated forum for large-scale, thematic dialogue rather than as a presentation-based or decision-making session. Its design reflects the premise that many challenges facing engineering education are complex, interconnected, and value-laden, and therefore benefit from collective interpretation and reflection across disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

The Town Hall experience is anchored by a generative discussion phase organized around a small set of community-identified themes. Participants engage in facilitated small-group conversations that emphasize exploration, reflection, and sensemaking. These discussions are intentionally open-ended, inviting participants to share experiences, surface tensions, and

examine how challenges are framed in different disciplinary and institutional contexts. Following this thematic dialogue, the Town Hall typically transitions to a more focused engagement centered on a specific initiative or project that has emerged as salient through prior discussions. This focused engagement may involve structured discussion around shared artifacts, reports, or collaborative efforts, such as sustainability-focused curriculum development. While this later engagement provides continuity and depth, it is grounded in the themes surfaced through the initial dialogue. The analytic focus of this paper remains on the thematic discussion phase, which represents the primary site of broad, cross-divisional participation.

Planning for the Interdivisional Town Hall begins several months prior to the ASEE Annual Conference. A planning committee composed of Town Hall co-chairs and representatives from ASEE divisions meets regularly to identify and refine discussion themes. Division representatives solicit input from their respective communities, gathering perspectives on emerging issues, persistent challenges, and questions that warrant society-level dialogue. Through iterative discussion, the planning committee narrows this input to a small set of themes that are timely, cross-cutting, and likely to resonate across divisions. Selection criteria emphasize relevance to current conditions in engineering education, potential for multidisciplinary engagement, and alignment with ASEE's commitments to inclusion, representation, and professional development. This process ensures that Town Hall themes are community-informed rather than imposed by a single disciplinary group or leadership body.

Starting in early January, the ITH Planning Committee initiated outreach to ASEE Programming Chairs and Division Chairs, requesting identification of an Interdivisional Town Hall representative for each division. Divisions without a designated representative were encouraged to solicit volunteers from their membership, broadening participation and leadership across the Society. The outreach email communicated the purpose of the Town Hall, logistical details for the session at the ASEE Annual Meeting, and expectations for involvement in the planning process. Representatives were invited to complete a Google Form survey by mid-January. The survey served as the primary mechanism for collecting proposed themes and topic descriptions and for compiling representative contact information to support ongoing communication and coordination.

The Google Form was intentionally brief and low burden while still capturing both logistical and substantive input. In addition to basic identification and contact information, respondents were asked to propose topics their division felt were timely and relevant to engineering education and to elaborate on those topics where appropriate. Table 1 summarizes survey questions used to solicit and contextualize themes.

Table 1. Core Survey Questions

Survey Component	Purpose
Division affiliation	Identify representation across ASEE divisions
Representative name and contact information	Enable follow-up communication and planning coordination
Role within division	Provide context for perspective and level of engagement
Open-ended theme/topic prompt	Solicit proposed Town Hall discussion themes

This design balanced efficiency with depth, enabling representatives to contribute meaningful ideas without requiring extensive time or preparation.

Analysis of the open-ended responses revealed a range of proposed themes reflecting shared and emerging concerns across divisions. Many responses emphasized cross-cutting issues such as ethics, global competence, and technological change that transcend individual divisions and align well with the interdivisional nature of the Town Hall. To illustrate the nature of the input collected, two anonymized excerpts from the survey responses are presented below. Identifying information has been removed, and excerpts have been lightly edited for clarity where necessary.

“How engineering education programs can better integrate global and cultural competencies while preparing students for increasingly international and interdisciplinary work environments.”

“The role of artificial intelligence and data-driven tools in engineering education, including ethical considerations and faculty readiness.”

Following survey closure, responses were compiled and reviewed by the Interdivisional Town Hall (ITH) Planning Committee to identify areas of convergence, overlap, and alignment with ASEE’s broader educational priorities. All proposed themes and accompanying descriptions were then presented to the full committee as a starting point for facilitated discussion during regularly scheduled planning meetings. Rather than relying solely on survey frequency, themes were revisited across multiple meetings, allowing representatives to reflect on relevance, urgency, and cross-divisional applicability. Observations of sustained engagement, discussion depth, and breadth of divisional participation informed the narrowing of candidate topics. Themes that consistently generated active, cross-divisional dialogue were prioritized, while those with more limited engagement were set aside. This iterative, participatory process as shown in Figure 1 ensured that the final Town Hall topic reflected both community input and demonstrated collective interest from divisions actively involved in the planning process.

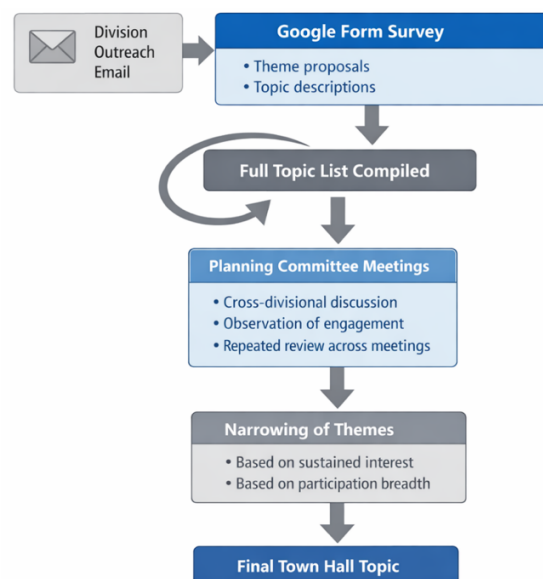


Figure 1 Process of Town Hall Theme Generation, AI generated from input [8]

During the Town Hall, roundtable discussions are led by a facilitator drawn from the planning committee or broader ASEE community. Facilitators represent a range of disciplines, institutional types, and professional roles, reinforcing the Town Hall’s emphasis on diverse perspectives. Prior to the conference, facilitators receive guidance on discussion goals, use of documentation templates, and strategies for supporting equitable participation. Facilitation emphasizes creating an environment where participants feel invited to contribute, regardless of role or seniority. Facilitators are encouraged to manage dominant voices, invite quieter participants into the conversation, and keep discussions grounded in the shared prompts. Rather than steering groups toward agreement or specific outcomes, facilitators support exploration of experiences, questions, and viewpoints related to the theme.

To support synthesis across many discussion tables, the Town Hall uses structured documentation templates that prompt facilitators to capture key ideas, questions, and points of convergence or tension. These templates provide consistency across tables while allowing flexibility in how discussions unfold. Following the thematic discussions, facilitators share brief summaries during a large-group report-out. These summaries help participants recognize patterns beyond their own tables and reinforce the collective nature of the dialogue. Committee members reviewed documentation to identify themes for future Town Hall planning.

The design and implementation of the Interdivisional Town Hall are guided by principles that emphasize inclusion, participation at scale, and learning over immediate action. The Town Hall is not positioned as a venue for policy formation or decision-making. Instead, it functions as a space for surfacing perspectives, building shared language, and identifying areas that warrant continued attention within the ASEE community. These guiding principles help manage participant expectations and reinforce the Town Hall’s role as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue and reflection. The next section provides an overview of the themes addressed through the Town Hall’s generative discussions from 2022 through 2025.

Overview of Interdivisional Town Hall Themes by Year

Across the four years examined in this study, the Interdivisional Town Hall addressed themes that reflected both persistent challenges and shifting priorities within engineering education as shown in Table 2. While each year’s themes were distinct, they were unified by a focus on how educators understood their responsibilities to students, the profession, and society in a rapidly changing context. This section provides a brief overview of the generative discussion themes for each year, establishing context for the cross-year thematic analysis that follows.

Table 2. Summary of Interdivisional Town Hall Thematic Discussions by Year

Year	Framing Focus	Core Themes Addressed
2022	Preparing engineers for the future	Professional identity, mentorship and coaching, justice and equity, stewardship of the profession
2023	Navigating change and uncertainty	DEI discourse, generative AI, instructional culture, student wellness and support
2024	Enhancing the student experience	Equity in preparation, collaboration and teamwork, responsible AI use, global citizenship
2025	Engineering mindset and responsibility	Artificial intelligence, rigor in math and science, social justice and societal responsibility

Preparing Engineers for the 2030s (2022)

The 2022 Town Hall revisited the question of how engineering education prepares engineers for the future, building on earlier national conversations about the “Engineer of 2020” while explicitly shifting the time horizon forward. Discussions emphasized how the skills and attributes long associated with engineering competence, such as analytical ability and technical rigor, intersect with emerging expectations around leadership, ethics, empathy, and societal engagement. Participants explored what it means to prepare engineers not only for technical roles, but also for leadership in industry, government, and communities. Thematic conversations highlighted mentorship, coaching, and professional identity as central elements of this preparation. Questions of justice, equity, and responsibility were woven throughout discussions, with participants grappling with how engineers can and should engage in addressing societal challenges.

Navigating Change in Engineering Education (2023)

In 2023, Town Hall discussions centered on the changing context of engineering instruction. Participants engaged with questions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion amid shifting public discourse, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence, and growing attention to student well-being and trauma-informed teaching. Discussions reflected a sense of tension between long-standing educational norms and rapidly evolving conditions. Participants shared concerns about resistance to change, institutional constraints, and the challenge of supporting both students and faculty during periods of uncertainty. At the same time, conversations surfaced opportunities to rethink instructional roles, assessment practices, and definitions of rigor in ways that better align with contemporary student experiences.

Enhancing the Student Experience (2024)

The 2024 Town Hall focused explicitly on the student experience in engineering education. Themes addressed equity in STEM preparation, effective collaboration and teamwork, responsible use of artificial intelligence, and global citizenship. Discussions emphasized how structural factors, such as preparation pathways and team formation practices, shape student learning and persistence. Participants explored how educators can better support students as whole individuals, balancing technical development with collaboration, ethical awareness, and global perspectives. Conversations about artificial intelligence shifted from initial uncertainty toward questions of appropriate use, transparency, and alignment with learning goals. Global citizenship emerged as a lens for connecting technical education with broader social and cultural responsibilities.

Engineering Mindset and Societal Responsibility (2025)

The 2025 Town Hall drew on the ASEE Engineering Mindset Report [9] to frame discussions around artificial intelligence, rigor in mathematics and science, and social justice and responsibility. Participants engaged with how mindset shapes both student learning and institutional culture, particularly in relation to inclusion and belonging. Discussions highlighted ongoing tensions between maintaining high standards and reducing barriers to access and success. Participants examined how notions of rigor are constructed and whose experiences they

privilege. Conversations about artificial intelligence emphasized ethical use and critical engagement, while discussions of social responsibility underscored the need to reconcile the historical roots of engineering education with contemporary commitments to societal good.

Continuities and Transitions Across Years

Taken together, these yearly themes reveal a trajectory from post-pandemic reflection toward more integrated, future-oriented conversations. While the specific prompts evolved, recurring concerns around equity, professional identity, student support, and societal responsibility remained central. At the same time, the framing of these concerns shifted, with increasing emphasis on systems-level thinking and the interconnected nature of educational challenges. This overview provides the foundation for the cross-year thematic analysis presented in the next section, which examines persistent themes, emerging areas of emphasis, and shifts in framing across the four years of Town Hall discussions.

Cross-Year Thematic Analysis

While each Interdivisional Town Hall addressed distinct prompts shaped by its specific context, analysis of discussion documentation across four years reveals consistent patterns in how participants frame challenges in engineering education. These patterns can be grouped into persistent and recurring themes, emerging and intensifying themes, and shifts in framing over time. Together, they illustrate how the Town Hall functions as a space for collective sensemaking rather than isolated conversation.

Persistent and Recurring Themes

Several themes appeared consistently across all four years, even as language and emphasis evolved.

Equity, inclusion, and access emerged as a foundational concern throughout the discussions. Participants repeatedly raised questions about who engineering education serves, who is excluded, and how structures such as preparation pathways, assessment practices, and institutional norms shape student opportunity. While equity was sometimes framed explicitly through DEI language and at other times through discussions of rigor or student experience, the underlying concern with fairness and access remained constant.

Evolving faculty roles and professional development needs also surfaced repeatedly. Across years, participants described shifting expectations for educators, including roles as mentors, coaches, facilitators, and institutional change agents. Discussions highlighted gaps in professional development and support for these roles, particularly as faculty navigate new technologies, changing student needs, and institutional pressures. The Town Hall provided space to articulate these tensions without requiring immediate resolution.

Tension between rigor, flexibility, and student support was another recurring theme. Participants consistently grappled with how to maintain high standards while responding to diverse student backgrounds, mental health concerns, and calls for inclusive practice. Rather than treating rigor and support as oppositional, discussions increasingly framed them as interdependent, requiring thoughtful design and reflection.

Emerging and Intensifying Themes

In addition to persistent concerns, several themes gained prominence over time.

Artificial intelligence and responsible use emerged as a significant topic beginning in 2023 and intensified in subsequent years. Early discussions focused on uncertainty, misuse, and academic integrity. Over time, conversations shifted toward ethical use, transparency, and alignment with learning goals. Participants increasingly framed AI as a tool requiring critical engagement rather than simple acceptance or rejection.

Engineering mindset and identity formation became more explicit in later discussions, particularly as participants connected student learning to belonging, confidence, and professional identity. Rather than focusing solely on skills acquisition, conversations emphasized how mindsets shape persistence, engagement, and ethical responsibility. This shift reflects broader trends in engineering education toward holistic conceptions of learning and professional formation.

Global and societal responsibility also grew in prominence, with participants linking technical education to social justice, sustainability, and global citizenship. These discussions often revisited the historical roots of engineering education while questioning how contemporary programs can better prepare students to address societal challenges.

Shifts in Framing Over Time

Across the four years, notable shifts in framing were evident. Discussions moved *from post-pandemic recovery toward proactive, future-oriented design*. Early conversations reflected uncertainty and disruption, while later discussions emphasized intentional redesign of curricula, policies, and professional roles.

Participants also shifted *from isolated challenges toward interconnected, systems-level thinking*. Rather than treating issues such as artificial intelligence, rigor, equity, or student wellness as separate concerns, discussions increasingly highlighted how these challenges intersect. This shift suggests growing recognition that meaningful change in engineering education requires coordinated, systemic approaches.

Implications for Multidisciplinary Engineering Education and Professional Societies

The cross-year thematic patterns identified in this study highlight the Interdivisional Town Hall's role as more than a conference session. Instead, the Town Hall functions as a recurring space where members of a multidisciplinary professional community collectively interpret emerging challenges in engineering education. Several implications follow from this analysis for both engineering education practice and the design of professional society programming.

The recurrence of themes related to equity, rigor, student support, and professional identity suggests that many challenges in engineering education are not isolated within disciplines. The Town Hall provides a structured environment in which participants can encounter how these issues are understood and experienced across different contexts. This exposure supports multidisciplinary sensemaking by helping participants recognize commonalities and tensions that

may not be visible within divisional boundaries. For engineering educators, this form of sensemaking can inform how challenges are framed within departments and programs. Rather than adopting solutions developed in isolation, educators may draw on shared language and perspectives developed through cross-divisional dialogue. For professional societies, this highlights the value of maintaining spaces where interpretation and reflection are treated as legitimate forms of professional work.

The Town Hall's structure, which pairs broad thematic dialogue with subsequent focused engagement around specific initiatives, offers a model for balancing openness and continuity. Thematic discussions allow the community to surface concerns and explore framing, while focused engagement provides opportunities to deepen understanding or coordinate action without constraining initial dialogue. This balance is particularly important in multidisciplinary settings, where premature convergence on solutions can marginalize perspectives or oversimplify complex issues. The findings suggest that preserving a generative phase of dialogue is critical for maintaining inclusivity and trust, even when the goal is action or change.

Analysis of the Town Hall highlights the importance of intentional design in supporting participation at scale. Structured prompts, facilitation, and documentation enable large numbers of participants to engage meaningfully without requiring consensus or uniform outcomes. These design features are especially relevant for professional societies seeking to engage diverse memberships around contested or evolving topics. For multidisciplinary divisions within ASEE, the Town Hall offers an example of how large-group dialogue can complement traditional scholarly programming. Rather than replacing research-focused sessions, such forums expand the conference's role as a site of collective learning and reflection.

The persistence of themes and shifts in framing across years underscore the value of recurrence. By revisiting issues such as equity, rigor, and emerging technologies over time, the Town Hall supports organizational learning rather than one-time discussion. This longitudinal perspective allows the community to adapt its understanding as contexts change, rather than treating challenges as static. For ASEE and similar professional societies, this suggests that impact should not be evaluated solely in terms of immediate outcomes or deliverables. Instead, value may lie in the gradual development of shared language, evolving priorities, and increased capacity for collective interpretation.

Lessons Learned

Analysis of four years of Interdivisional Town Hall discussions offers several lessons for designing and sustaining large-scale, multidisciplinary dialogue within a professional society. Intentional framing of discussion themes supported early and meaningful engagement. Themes that were broad enough to invite multiple interpretations, yet focused enough to anchor conversation, helped participants from different disciplines and roles find common ground quickly. Effective facilitation was essential for participation at scale. Facilitators played a key role in fostering inclusive discussion environments, managing dominant voices, and encouraging contributions from participants with varied levels of experience. Consistent facilitation practices across tables helped maintain coherence while allowing conversations to develop organically. Structured documentation enabled continuity without constraining dialogue. While necessarily imperfect, shared templates provided a way to capture key ideas and tensions across many tables,

supporting cross-year reflection and analysis without requiring consensus. Maintaining a distinction between generative dialogue and later focused engagement helped preserve openness. Allowing participants to explore themes without pressure to produce solutions supported trust and inclusivity, particularly when discussions addressed contested or value-laden issues. Finally, recurrence across years supported learning. Revisiting themes over time allowed the ASEE community to refine language, deepen understanding, and adapt framing as contexts changed, reinforcing the Town Hall's role as a learning structure rather than a one-time event.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. These limitations reflect inherent trade-offs in studying large-scale, in-person dialogue within a professional society. The data are based on facilitator-recorded notes rather than verbatim transcripts. Although structured documentation templates supported consistency across discussion tables, variation in facilitation and note-taking likely influenced the level of detail captured. As a result, the analysis emphasizes recurring themes and shared framing rather than fine-grained linguistic differences. Participation in the Interdivisional Town Hall is voluntary and limited to conference attendees. The perspectives represented therefore reflect those present in the session and may not capture the full range of views within the ASEE community. The analysis does not attempt to generalize findings beyond the Town Hall participants. The focus on collective documentation may also obscure minority or dissenting perspectives. Large-group dialogue tends to surface areas of convergence, which can unintentionally limit visibility of less common viewpoints. Additionally, the authors' involvement in planning and facilitating the Town Hall introduces the potential for interpretive bias, though this positionality also provided essential contextual understanding of the process. Despite these limitations, the study offers a credible account of how multidisciplinary themes emerge and evolve through repeated, structured dialogue at scale.

Conclusion

This full paper examined four years of Interdivisional Town Hall discussions at the ASEE Annual Conference to understand how large-scale, multidisciplinary dialogue supports collective sensemaking in engineering education. Rather than evaluating specific initiatives or outcomes, the study focused on how recurring thematic conversations surface shared concerns, evolving priorities, and shifts in framing across a professional community. Analysis revealed persistent themes related to equity, professional identity, student support, and societal responsibility, alongside emerging emphases on artificial intelligence, engineering mindset, and systems-level thinking. Over time, discussions moved from post-pandemic reflection toward more proactive, future-oriented framing, highlighting the interconnected nature of challenges facing engineering education.

These patterns suggest that the Town Hall functions as a learning structure through which the ASEE community revisits complex issues and adapts its understanding as contexts change. The Interdivisional Town Hall's design, which centers generative thematic dialogue followed by more focused engagement, offers a model for how professional societies can balance openness with continuity. By valuing dialogue as a form of professional work, the Town Hall creates space for inclusive participation, shared language development, and longitudinal learning without

requiring immediate consensus or action. For multidisciplinary engineering education, this study underscores the importance of structured forums that enable collective interpretation across disciplinary boundaries. As engineering education continues to navigate rapid technological change and societal expectations, such spaces will remain essential for fostering shared understanding and coordinated progress within the profession.

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