



A Brief Guide to Teaching through the Election

The purpose of this document is to provide information for instructors who are concerned about how to handle election-related student comments and questions. The pre-election information below provides information about how to respond to student questions about voting, as well as relevant Penn State policies. The post-election section includes information about what you might consider as you plan for your course sessions that occur immediately after the election. Some of the resources were developed for the 2020 election, but are still useful for this election.

Pre-Election Information

Considerations

- Acknowledge that the weeks before the election might be a time of intense emotions and/or anxiety for students and others.
- Acknowledge that students may disagree with each other.
- Remind students about expectations about respectful communications. If you have not co-developed course norms or discussion guidelines. Ask students what might be revised in preparation for the election.

Student Questions about Voting

- If students have questions about their mail-in ballots or how to vote, you can direct them to [VotesPA](#) for up-to-date voter information. Students can also call their [county election office](#) with questions.
- If students are concerned about voter intimidation, please let them know that federal and Pennsylvania law protect against voter intimidation. Students may learn more about their voting rights or make an election complaint at [VotesPA.com](#). Recent [Pennsylvania guidance regarding poll watchers and authorized representatives](#) provides examples of prohibited voter intimidation. Students and instructors can call, text, or message the non-partisan [Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law](#) about voting concerns.

Faculty Senate Policy Supporting Voting on Election Day

The Faculty Senate amended [Senate Policy 42-27: Class Attendance](#) adding a section regarding Election Day, “Instructors also should provide, within reason, the opportunity to make up work for students who miss classes on an election day due to participation in local, state, and federal governmental elections. Students should make every reasonable effort to inform the instructor prior to the election day of their anticipated absence in advance and make appropriate arrangements to make up work.”

We encourage you to share this policy with your students and work with them around election day absences. [University Policy AD92: Political Campaign Activities](#) provides guidance for a variety of contexts and all instructors should read the full policy. Key elements of the policy are relevant for anyone interacting with Penn State students in an instructional context, including the following.



- The policy prohibits “any and all activities that favor or oppose one or more candidates for political office.”
- Employees, in their official capacity or on behalf of the University may not “make public statements of position in favor or in opposition to any candidate for public office...”
- AD92 “is not intended to limit non-partisan courses, coursework, curricular activities and other assignments designed to foster civic engagement, educate students, or enhance public understanding of the political election process.”
- “Voter education and registration activities are not prohibited by this Policy so long as they are carried out in a non-partisan manner and do not favor or oppose any of the candidates for elective public office.”

Penn State Student Resources

- Student Counseling and Psychological Services ([CAPS](#))
- [Health Promotion and Wellness Resources](#)
- [Coping with Election Stress, You@PSU](#)
- [Penn State Student Organizations](#)
- [Teach and Learn 2020 Election](#), New York Times

Post-Election Response

Initial Considerations

- Recognize your own assumptions about students and whether they might be influenced by current events. Keep in mind that students’ experiences might differ based on their political persuasions, lived experiences, and their belonging to different identity groups.
- Try to be aware of your position of power as the instructor, as well as how your values, passions, and reactions might affect your students.
- Check in with yourself about your own wellbeing and how the election or uncertainty about its outcome might impact you (see Resources list below).

Considerations for your Approach to the Post-Election Classroom

- Take Penn State’s [Policy on Academic Freedom](#) into consideration and be transparent about the purposes for bringing up the election in your classroom.
- Consider how flexible you can be, e.g., can you pre-record lectures, move some of your content to an asynchronous format for the week, or have flexibility around due dates for upcoming assignments?
- Maintain an inclusive classroom environment and prepare to address [microaggressions](#).
- Anticipate the possibility of [hot moments](#) or [difficult dialogues](#). Remind students of expectations for classroom conduct.

Classroom Facilitation

Acknowledge and Refocus: Make a brief statement recognizing the election and its potential impacts on students, directing them to appropriate resources, and continuing with class as planned. Resource, “[Brief Remarks](#)” from Cornell University . Consider what resources to share (see below) and how you plan to share them with students (Canvas, email, Zoom chat, etc.).

Acknowledge and Lead Student Reflection: Facilitate a short reflection activity to give students space to process thoughts and emotions related to the election, with the aim of returning to class content. Consider



metacognitive prompts to enhance students' awareness of their own coping strategies and to explore connections to course content.

Facilitate Discussion: If your students are used to classroom discussions and the topic of your course is connected to any aspect of the election, consider engaging your students in a conversation. Discussions can also occur at a later time. Resources, "[Group Conversation](#)" (Cornell University), "[Teaching During the U.S. Election](#)" (Brown University), or "[Structuring Classroom Discussion about the 2020 Election](#)" (University of Michigan).

Focus on Course Content and Resources: If you decide not to address the election, keep in mind that students may bring the discussion to you. Consider the list of resources provided.

Additional Resources for Instructors

- Longer resource about student identity and identity-threatening incidents "when a student may feel unsafe as a result of their membership in a particular identity group" from the Student Experience Group (sponsored by Association of Public Land grant Universities), [Identity Safety](#). Additionally, sample scenarios from the [Student Experience Project](#).
- Webinar on teaching students in times of high stress, [Penn State Keep Teaching](#).
- Brief resource outlining classroom strategies about the election, [2020 Election Guide](#), Intergroup Dialog Project, Cornell University.
- [Empathic Teaching](#), brief PowerPoint with questions and resources about empathy, J. J. Pionke University of Illinois.
- Resources and references about classroom discussions, self-care, and impact, [Preparing to Teach Before and After the 2020 Presidential Election](#), Center for Teaching Excellence, University of Virginia.
- [Campuses in Politically Fraught Times](#), in-depth document with resources on teaching after traumatic events, racism, and politics inside the classroom from the professional society of faculty developers, POD Network.
- [Teaching in Turbulent Times Toolkit](#), University of Oregon.
- [Teaching During the Election Season](#), Center for Educational Innovation, University of Minnesota.
- [Teaching in Times of Strife and Trauma](#), curated resources about from the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.
- [The Post-Election Classroom](#), a practical on-the-ground tips and links to numerous resources from [Scholars Strategy Network](#), an organization of university scholars using research to improve policy and strengthen democracy.
- Faculty and Staff Resources for self-care and well-being, [Penn State Health & Well-being Resources](#).
- Employee Assistance Program, [Penn State Health Matters](#).

Penn State's [Schreyer Institute of Teaching Excellence](#) offers individual consultations, classroom observations, and other faculty support, email us at site@psu.edu or find the consultant who serves as the [liaison for your academic unit](#).