



Teaching During Presidential Elections

Students have numerous opportunities both on and off campus to engage with the upcoming elections, potentially bringing their enthusiasm and emotions into our learning environments. The [Teaching Engagement at Penn State](#) website offers a variety of resources for instructors to encourage democratic, non-partisan civic engagement. This document provides information for instructors who want to learn more about how to plan for instruction before and after a presidential election.

To schedule a consultation about how this guidance applies to your course, email site@psu.edu or find your consultant at schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/Help/Liaisons.

Pre-Election Guidance

Planning for Instruction

- Review departmental and university policies about [election day class attendance](#), [political activities](#), and [academic freedom](#).
- If you opt for remote asynchronous instruction, refer to [Election Day Asynchronous Instruction Guidance](#) to assist with planning.
- Remember that [it is unlawful to incentivize voting in any way](#), including by offering extra credit. Nor should you ask students about their voting intentions. Doing so may be construed as influencing your perception of them. All communication about voting should be strictly non-partisan.
- Acknowledge that you and your students hold a variety of political views, opinions, and beliefs.
- Acknowledge that the weeks before the presidential election might be a time of intense emotions for yourself and for your students.
- Remind students about expectations about respectful communications verbally and in written communications, referring to departmental or university policies on [Student Conduct](#) as appropriate and to your own [classroom ground rules](#).
- Prepare for [navigating disruptions](#) and [responding to disruptions](#), perhaps practicing with colleagues to develop strategies that work for you. Familiarize yourself with departmental safety policies and/or ways to contact [University Police & Public Safety](#).

Student Questions about Voting

- If students have questions about absentee ballots, mail-in ballots, or how to vote, direct them to [PSU Votes](#) or [VotesPA.com](#).
- If students are concerned about voter intimidation, let them know that federal and Pennsylvania laws protect against voter intimidation. Students may learn more about their voting rights or make an election complaint at [VotesPA.com](#).

Faculty Senate Policy Supporting Voting on Election Day

The Faculty Senate amended [Senate Policy 42-27: Class Attendance](#) to add a section regarding Election Day to facilitate, not to incentivize, student voting: “Instructors should provide, within reason, pedagogical and

curricular necessity, the opportunity for a day consisting solely of remote asynchronous instruction on a November election day. This would enable students to participate in local, state or federal governmental elections. Instructors also should provide, within reason, the opportunity to make up work for students who miss synchronous or in-person classes that are unable to accommodate a remote asynchronous format to be held on an election day.” We encourage you to share this policy with your students and work with them around election day absences.

University Policies Relevant to Elections

[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 or group advisory 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.”

All instructors should also familiarize themselves with [University Policy AC64: Academic Freedom](#), which states that “No faculty member may claim as a right the privilege of discussing in the classroom controversial topics outside or unrelated to their own field of study. The faculty member is normally bound not to take advantage of their position by introducing into the classroom provocative discussions of irrelevant subjects not within their field of study.”

Post-Election Guidance

Planning for Instruction

- Consider how flexible you can be regarding attendance, missed class activities, and upcoming assessments. Can you post readings/videos, PPTs, lecture notes, or assessments in Canvas or offer flexibility around due dates? [Plan for class absences, including your own.](#)
- Recognize your own assumptions about how students will react. Keep in mind that their reactions might differ based on their political persuasions, lived experiences, and their belonging to different identity groups.
- Be aware that your position of power as the instructor, your values, passions, and reactions, may affect your students’ willingness to fully engage in class discussions and activities.
- Take Penn State’s [Policy on Academic Freedom](#) into consideration and be transparent about the purposes for bringing up the election (or not) in your classroom.
- Prepare to address [microaggressions](#) in order to maintain an inclusive classroom environment.
- Anticipate the possibility of [hot moments](#) or [difficult dialogues](#). Remind students of expectations for classroom conduct.
- Check in with yourself about your own wellbeing and how the election or uncertainty about its outcome might impact you (see instructor resources below).

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. 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. For example, "How has the election been impacting your ability to learn? What strategies have helped you to focus on your learning?"

Acknowledge and 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.

Focus on Course Content: Remind students of the goals and/or objectives of the course or that class session. If you decide not to address the election at all, keep in mind that students may bring it up for discussion.

Penn State Student Resources

- [Voter Registration & Election Information](#)
- [Support, Safety & Conduct](#)
- [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS)

Penn State Instructor Resources

- [Canvas Voting Module](#)
- [Teaching During Presidential Election Dos and Don'ts](#)
- [Election Day Asynchronous Instruction Guidance](#)
- [Red Folder at Penn State](#)
- [Support Linc Employee Assistance](#)
- [University Police & Public Safety](#)
- [Voting Resources](#)

Additional Instructor Resources

- [Grounding Techniques to Help Control Anxiety](#), Johns Hopkins University
- [Maintaining Campus Community During the 2024 Election](#), Constructive Dialogue Institute
- [Presidential Election Discussions in the Online Classroom](#), Barnard College
- [Teaching in Times of Strife and Trauma](#), Graduate School of Education, Harvard University
- [The Post-Election Classroom](#), Scholars Strategy Network