



## Connecting with Students During Election Week



Significant current events, such as the upcoming national election, affect all members of our academic community. The American Psychological Association (APA) just released the [Stress in America poll](#) that shows that close to 65% of U.S. adults indicated that they experience significant stress from the presidential election (Abrams, 2024).

The sheer omnipresence of this national event can affect both faculty and students. Individuals' reactions to the election are front and center in the news and social media. **How might we provide a supportive, inclusive space for students to process their reactions considering our own level of comfort with this topic and our instructional practices?**

Some faculty may have intentionally incorporated the election into their course. They may draw from election topics that they have previously addressed in class and re-purpose them within today's election context.

If faculty choose to not address the election, they may want to share their reasons with the students. For example, "Given the scope of the course we will not be talking about the election." Faculty may consider applying some of the low-stakes, easy to implement and for students to engage with, instructional approaches listed below to help students process the election week. Reflecting on your own comfort, emotions and readiness will help you decide how to instructionally work with this current event with empathy and care.

Consider carefully when you want to acknowledge the significance of the election. For example, if you plan to have a conversation with your students after the election you may want to let your class know that so that students are not wondering whether you plan to address the election. If you have established guidelines to guide a climate for learning, re-visit them with the students before engaging in instructional activities or discussion of the election.

**Acknowledge the significance of the national election.** Faculty can promote [student voting](#) as a step toward recognizing the significance of elections. Students found it most helpful and expressed gratitude when faculty acknowledged the gravity of an event in class, however briefly, as it conveys concern, recognition that our lives are impacted significantly (Houston & DiPietro, 2007).

**Provide structure for acknowledgement/conversation.** Indicate why you are having this conversation and how long it will last. Mention that the conversation is optional and share your goals, such as to acknowledge a significant event that is likely impacting them in some ways, to provide a trusted place to process how they are feeling, and to share resources. You may refer to [examples](#) to begin the acknowledgement, please adapt to reflect your own goals and voice. You may also show your acknowledgement by reading a passage from an inspirational book, a poem, or play an inspiring song. Maybe your students would like to share readings, songs that are meaningful or uplifting to them during election week.

**Provide structured time** for students to reflect on their experiences, thoughts, feelings. Individual writing activities enable students to collect and process their thoughts, arrive at deeper understanding, and bring forth a range of voices and perspectives.

**Sample individual writing activity:** Invite students to write about how the election is impacting them (10 minutes). Ask the students to highlight the aspects that are most meaningful to them. Invite them to share if they would like to, there is no obligation. During this time, others listen actively, consider the statement and reflect upon it. The goal is to lift up individuals' statements without judgement, response, reaction, and to be open to various experiences, feelings. In this process we convey that we hear the students, we may note common themes or resources we can direct them to. Indicate how much time will be set aside for student sharing and hold to that time. Mention that students may speak with you later and/or share their writing.

**Recognize that students may experience stress and heightened emotions.** Stressful events add to students' cognitive load and impact the capacity of their working memory. Extend grace around short term requests for extensions on assignments and/or students' missing class, if possible. Undergraduate students may find it helpful to use [Personal Day\(s\)](#) to focus on their well-being. Consider how the stakes of vulnerability may be different for members of different groups (e.g., BIPOC, LGBTQ). Check in with the students and raise their awareness of election-related [campus resources](#) they may find helpful.



**Provide suggestions regarding students' social media engagement.** Social media platforms are designed to keep us hooked. Students may consider tuning in when there is something to be done, like learning where to vote, but disconnect otherwise. They may consider reading rather than watching the news as when we read, we exercise some control over the information; we are less flooded with manipulative scenes that may be intended to influence us (Abrams, 2024).

**Share coping strategies with students** that may help them manage the increased stress and anxiety that some may be experiencing. Remind students that this is the time to prioritize self-care, such as getting enough sleep, healthy food, and exercise. They may also benefit from setting boundaries around news consumption and social media use and intentionally get together with others offline for social support (Mbuqe, 2024)

While written with a focus on in-person instruction, these suggestions pertain to other teaching modalities as well.

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Resources:

Abrams, Z. (2024, October). [The impact of election stress. Is political anxiety harming your health?](#) *Monitor on Psychology*. American Psychological Association.

Bruff, D. (Host). (2024, September 18). Teaching in an election year. In [Intentional Teaching podcast](#).

Houston, T. & DiPietro, M. (2007). In the eye of the storm: Students' perceptions of helpful faculty actions following a collective tragedy, In *To improve the academy*, 25, Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Publishing.

Mbuqe, E. (2024, October). [How to manage your stress during the 2024 election](#). Syracuse University News.

MIT Teaching + Learning Lab. [Navigating politics](#). Cambridge, MA. Accessed October 29, 2024.