Classroom Strategies for Election Season

The resources below offer an array of approaches, considerations, and planning tips for teaching during election season. It's not too late to lay groundwork for healthy discussions of contentious topics in your courses, plan to help students become involved citizens, or build out lessons that connect to election season. While not all instructors will be comfortable navigating heated conflict in the classroom, students benefit when we acknowledge and make space to reflect on the world beyond Quinnipiac. These resources can help you approach these moments in ways that reflect your own style and pedagogical practice.

Voter Education Resources

Vote.org

A hub for various ways to register to vote and cast your ballot. This can be a good first stop in the registering to vote process – the site will take you to your state website so you can register, request an absentee ballot, find your polling place, and even preview your ballot.

QU Library's 2024 Voter Education Resources page

This library guide covers all the information and resources a Quinnipiac community member could need for the upcoming election. Share with your students so they can find out how to register to vote, why they should vote, and relevant issues up for discussion this election season.

QU's Voting Resource Page

This page directs students to relevant election events happening on campus and offers a step-by-step overview of registering to vote and casting your ballot.

Campus Compact's Education for Democracy Knowledge Hub

A wide selection of resources for encouraging civic engagement and democratic participation on campus and in the classroom. There is a section on "teaching for democracy" which contains a variety of classroom strategies that faculty can use to facilitate difficult discussions.

Teaching during an Election/Class Discussion Resources

Institute for Democracy & Higher Education

This website provides many resources with ample guidance for teaching during election season and in contentious times more broadly. It also includes a help desk feature that allows you to submit an inquiry and receive confidential advice.

"Teaching in an 'era of volatility'"

Key takeaways:

- It's okay and important to acknowledge that contentious times can be stressful for both your students and you.
- Be mindful of your own values.
- Recognize what you can and can't do in your classroom ("scope of practice," i.e., setting parameters and boundaries around your role and honoring them – you are a scholar of _____, and your role is that of an educator, not a therapist, friend, etc.).
- Use quieter times to build community in your classroom so challenging moments have a solid foundation for respectful and healthy discourse.
- Don't be afraid to shift your plans to make space for conversations about what's happening in the world.
- Talk to and lean on colleagues for support.

'Students resent professors who ignore public events'

Key takeaways:

- Familiarize yourself with broader initiatives and resources around campus to support students during challenging times.
- Any discipline presents opportunities to talk about and build democracy.
- Plan to set aside time after the election to allow students to discuss results.
- Remember that student political perspectives come in many varieties, and that it's likely some will be happy, and others will be distraught. Plan for this variability.
- Remember that certain groups, particularly those whose status or rights may be at risk, may have stronger and more visible feelings about what has happened.

Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast: Facilitating Contentious Conversations in your Classroom

Key takeaways:

- Even if your classroom content is apolitical, your students are learning how to work with people who have different backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints in your classroom.
- Trust between you and your students matters in building a foundation for productive conversations.
- While you want to make space for students to have conversations about ongoing events, you should be sure you're knowledgeable about what you're sharing and provide your students with information that helps them to share knowledge as well.
- Establish ground rules/norms/agreements regarding how you and students will engage with one another during contentious conversations.
- Add structure to your discussion by using a speaking stick, think-pair-share, small groups, etc., to ensure discussion parameters are in place.
- Be aware of your own biases and do your best to manage them to maintain trust. Acknowledge them when possible so students see you are authentic and that you're taking them seriously. Model the type of engaged reflective conversation you want to see from them.
- Set goals for the discussion, so that you have a destination. Is it just to allow students to express their views? Is there a larger learning goal in the conversation? Be clear with students about what you're doing, and if you have a time limit for this exercise, tell them so.
- If things get really heated, take a moment for students to collect themselves – a two-minute writing prompt that they can share, acknowledge that things have intensified and redirect the conversation by pushing for meaning, reinforce the norms you've set for respectful conversation, try to synthesize points of agreement and unpack disagreement, etc.

Intentional Teaching Podcast: Teaching in an Election Year with Bethany Morrison

Key takeaways:

- Find connections between your discipline and the election to make it relevant for all students. This helps students engage in political discussions from a place where they may feel they have more knowledge. For instance, embed election-related data into coding exercises, or talk about flows of people in polling places during engineering conversations. Bridging gaps between seemingly unrelated disciplines and political engagement can help your students feel like more educated citizens.

- Connect student identity to election engagement. For instance, a nursing student will have knowledge to offer on issues and policies related to public health. Linking their educational identity to their citizenship will help them feel confident without distracting from disciplinary content.
- Establish norms and ground rules for discussion. It's not too late in the semester if you have not done this already. Tell the students you want to ensure their ability to engage authentically in conversation and work with them to set those norms. Go back to them when discussions feel like they're going awry.
- Build structure for your activities and be clear about the parameters for the conversation or activity.
- Prepare some scripts that you can go to if things get very heated and you feel unsettled. Faculty are human too, and we can get thrown off by difficult moments in the classroom. A pre-planned script will help you take a pause and reorient the discussion. Consider asking the students to take a moment to write, draw, or even meditate. A one-minute meditation is available here. Find ways to depersonalize arguments. Help students clarify their ideas.

Additional tips:

- If students are very quiet, or if you need a moment to regroup, count out 7-10 seconds before talking again. Sometimes a moment to think or breathe is all it takes.
- Don't feel like you need an answer to every question. Engage students in finding answers online (with some parameters in place) or say you'll come back to it/follow up when you have the information handy.
- Consider setting ground rules about sharing what people say beyond the classroom, including not attaching the content of comments to a particular individual. Having students agree not to name other students, and agreeing not to name students yourself, when talking about your discussions after the fact ensures that individual student views do not become gossip. It also allows students to feel more comfortable taking risks and sharing.
- Acknowledge any moments where students use inappropriate language or express bias. Remember that most students aren't intentionally using harmful language, but there may be students who are harmed by it in your classroom too, and they may not feel comfortable enough to speak up. Explaining the meaning and possible

effects of harmful language creates a learning moment for the speaker and mitigates any harm for students who might be impacted.

- **Share that students can visit Quinnipiac's Counseling and Mental Heath Services if they are struggling in response to national or global events.**
- **If any student engages in behavior that is truly unsafe or threatening, consult the Code of Conduct and consider filing a report.**