How to address elections with students

Goals:

- Help students learn to have productive dialogue, including when there is disagreement
- Help students learn to cope with uncertainty
- Help faculty plan ahead to encourage productive engagement

Preparations and Planning:

- Discuss as a team/department/unit overall strategy for the day(s) after election
- Keep in mind that students can be heavily impacted. In times of crisis, executive functioning (ability to reason, prioritize, concentrate, etc.) can be interrupted. Consider being flexible in your response to what students need.
- What will the expectations be for students, faculty and staff?
  - Will there be space given within the class to process reactions?
  - What attendance policy will be enforced?
  - Will the scheduled curriculum be set aside, postponed or canceled in favor of election related discussion? Consider integrating how these elections impact the subject matter of your class.
  - Be sure to communicate your expectations to your class.
- Consider flexibility in timing and extent of assessments. For example:
  - not scheduling a high-stakes assignment/exam during elections week
  - allow students to pair up on an originally independent assignment
  - extend deadline(s), for all students
  - allow re-submission of an assignment for re-grading
  - allow student to select a subset of total assessments (quizzes, homeworks) for grading (e.g., 3 out of 5; drop lowest score)

Ways to address it with students

1. Individually
   a. Listen. Each person will be impacted differently by the elections and a student may just need to feel heard.
   b. Encourage dialog with friends and roommates, (classmates if appropriate to subject) encourage practicing respectful discourse.
   c. encouraging students to check-in with friends and roommates they are concerned about and provide them with resources
   d. Know what support resources are available on campus for students wanting to learn more about skill-based processing
   e. Acknowledging these are challenging times; acknowledge faculty and students are dealing with extraordinary pressures: childcare, eldercare, social and political unrest, a global pandemic, loss of loved ones, separation of families
2. In the classroom:
   a. Suggestions if you want to just acknowledge reactions to the elections
i. If you want to keep it brief: acknowledging the moment and the various
text reactions within families, communities and across the nation. **Take a moment to
center** and bring our thoughts to the present task at hand. You can add that you
are choosing to teaching class content as you want to honor the commitment to
their education.

b. Suggestions if you want to spend class time discussing the elections
   i. Start by acknowledging the impact of the elections
   ii. **Moment to center**
   iii. Community agreements for today’s conversation

Whether students are involved in creating the norms or if faculty design them to
present to students, here are some of the items that might be included on a list
of communication norms to promote respectful discourse (**CTRL Faculty
Resource**):

- Encourage students to engage in active listening, and not to interrupt
  their peers;
- Allow space for all voices rather than allowing a few students to
dominate the conversation;
- Apologize in cases where class members unintentionally offend a peer;
- Students (and faculty) should be willing to examine and challenge their
  beliefs: to grow intellectually;
- Critique or challenge ideas but not individuals;
- Refrain from expecting one person to represent an entire social group,
class, race, or gender;
- Define behaviors that will not be accepted in class, including eye rolling,
  name calling, and laughing at mistake.

iv. Incorporate the election into the curriculum of your class (social dimensions,
quantitative dimensions, science outcomes - **think about it**, there really isn't a
class on campus that a presidential election doesn't touch)

3. **BOILER PLATE ELECTION-ORIENTED LANGUAGE FOR**
   a. **Discussion at the end of class:**
      i. “At the end of lecture today, I will stay on to hear from anyone who wants to
         speak about how they are feeling about the election”
      ii. “I’ve gone ahead and pasted a new meeting link into the chat. At the end of
          lecture today, I’ll move to that room. I’m happy to meet with any/all of you to
discuss the election – please be patient – I’ll let you in in the order you arrive.”
   b. **Anonymous feedback:**
      i. “We’ve faced a lot of chaos and uncertainty these past 8 months, and that has
taken a toll on many of us. I want to let you know I’ve set up an anonymous
feedback form [which I will paste in the chat/which I will post on Canvas] for
those who want to share some of those feelings and challenges. Knowing the
thoughts and feelings of my students helps me be a better instructor, and
listener.
   c. **Extension of assignment:**
i. “Given the unique challenges of this year, and the week [or days] ahead, I am extending the deadline for the [ASSIGNMENT] to [DATE AND TIME]”

Additional Resources:

1) UW Ombud's Office video on Election Prep: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caL52T0mlbY&feature=youtu.be

2) Promoting Civil Discourse in Troubling Times: American University Provides suggestions for bringing civil discourse to campus classrooms


4) The Lost Art of Democratic Debate: TED Talk by Michael Sandel, Professor of Political Philosophy, Harvard

*Special thanks to the College of the Environment for allowing us to borrow from their Election Academic Best Practices