

Managing Election Discussions on Campus

Given the likely range of reactions and emotions to election results, we need to plan how we conduct these crucial and critical conversations that will happen in all academic spaces on campus.

Plan Ahead

What kind of conversation do you want to facilitate?

How will you moderate discussion?

What level of conflict are you willing to allow in the discussion?

Will you connect the discussion to course topics?



Set Ground Rules

For example:

- Listen with empathy and strive toward understanding
- Speak honestly and without hostility
- Attend to the impact of our words on other people
- Remain in relationship with one another
- Treat one another with respect
- Stay present in the room/discussion
- Request permission to share someone's words with others not in the room (do not text, tweet, email, or post what is said here without permission)



Emphasize Voluntariness

This will protect those who feel uncomfortable sharing their opinions.



Consider the Psychological Impact

Students may:

- Have difficulty keeping track of tasks
- Have difficulty prioritizing tasks
- Have a hard time engaging with others
- Have difficulty with time management
- Freeze in stressful situations



Practice Humility

Regardless of who wins, encourage students to avoid de-humanizing language and broad blame-casting.



Provide Context

Especially for international students

2021 will feature a variety of local elections that affect members of our community, most notably in the city of Atlanta.

A broader set of elections will occur in 2022 at the federal, state, and local levels, including for House, Senate, state legislature, and statewide elected executive officers.

Some helpful sources:

- AJC Georgia elections news: <https://www.ajc.com/politics/election/>
- Politico 2022 Elections Hub: <https://www.politico.com/news/2022-elections>



Strategies to Manage Stress

Inform students: talk about ways stress may affect the body and mind

Be aware students are experiencing a high cognitive load, and provide extra attention to guiding them through tasks and skills

Connect with students

Be flexible



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When Difficult Conversations Arise Open The Front Door (OTFD):

Observe: concrete, factual observations "I have noticed..."

Think: thoughts based on observation "I think..."

Feel: emotions "I feel..."

Desire: specific request "I would like..."

Example:

"I'm noticing a lot of murmuring after that last statement and I think some of you might have strong feelings about the topic. I feel that it is best that we stop and take a moment to reflect further because I would like for us all to understand the complexity of this issue."

Other Strategies

Clarification

"What I heard was..."



Depersonalize:

"Why might others disagree as well?"

Inquire Then Feel:

"Let's consider the evidence, because when I hear that, I feel..."

Pause & Reflect:

Stop and write what you think, feel, heard

Connect Students to Campus Resources

Some tips from Counseling and Psychological Services:



1462 Clifton Rd. Suite 235
404-727-7450
8:30am-5pm (M-F)

WE RECOMMEND SEVERAL STRATEGIES FOR SELF-CARE:

- 1 Unplug**
Limit your consumption of media. Monitor your emotional reactions and set time limits for how long you spend watching and interacting with various forms of multimedia (particularly social media).
- 2 Connect**
Engage with supportive friends and allies, utilize your community (or a safe space) to ground you and support you. Talk about your reactions but also communicate your boundaries when needed.
- 3 Take a Break**
Not everyone will share your perspective. End unproductive conversations. Pay attention to whether a discussion is going to be helpful or lead to stress.
- 4 Stay Present**
Focus on the here and now and try to shift away from a future focus. Journaling, focusing on gratitude, engaging in mindfulness/meditation, or connecting with nature can be helpful in staying present.
- 5 Refuel**
Go back to basics and focus on restoring yourself. Eat well, get plenty of sleep (7-9 hrs), drink water, exercise, play, laugh, make art, read something light, watch a movie, go outside, recharge, and avoid unhealthy coping strategies.
- 6 Acknowledge Feelings**
Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings in a non-judgmental manner and give yourself permission to feel the way you do. Check your emotional space before engaging in political discussions.
- 7 Volunteer**
Channel what you feel into positive and meaningful activities. Join Emory or off-campus organizations that support your values and interests.
- 8 Apps**
Take a breather and access your calm inner space. Try apps for relaxation: CALM, Breathe2Relax, Mindshift, Headspace, Stop Breathe & Think, Virtual Hope Box. etc.

<https://counseling.emory.edu/resources/political-climate.html>

<http://campuslife.emory.edu/about/initiatives/evi/index.html>

<https://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/about/letters/newsletters.html>

Works Cited:

<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/keep-teaching/teaching-in-turbulent-times-toolkit/>

<https://www.coursera.org/instructor/drellenottmarshall>

<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/crisis/>

<https://www.fearlessdialogues.com/>

