

Why Students Should Vote: Resources by Issue

Emory Votes Initiative | Fall 2020 (updated 8/8/20)

Elected representatives make decisions on issues relevant to just about every discipline, so no matter what their major, students should vote, and faculty should encourage them to do so. The pages that follow contain short modules that help you to do precisely that. They offer an overview of an issue, alternative policy positions, and relevant background material.

The Emory Votes Initiative encourages you to modify these modules as needed and to develop and share your own—for example, on immigration, social justice, or public health—drawing on further resources such as the free electronic book [Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines](#).

By way of introduction, this table gives examples of policy questions decided by elected officials and relevant for students in a wide range of disciplines, including subjects for which voting, elections and public policy are not part of the core subject matter. Consider sharing this with your students as an indication of why elections matter—for all students.

Public Policy Issue	Major (not complete list; for illustrative purposes only)									
	Pre-med	PolSci	Business	Relig	Econ	Comp. Science	Soc	Public Health	History	Math
Student debt	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Equality of opportunity	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Healthcare: coverage, COVID mgmt.	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		
Religious freedom				x			x		x	
Reproductive health	x			x					x	
Sexual assault							x			
Climate change				x			x	x		x
Voting right: former felons, gerrymandering, voter ID)		x		x			x	x	x	
Tax reform					x					
(De)Regulation					x					
AI, government regulation		x	x		x	x				
Minimum wage		x	x		x		x	x		
Federal funding for scientific research	x	x					x	x		
Sugar drink taxes	x	x	x		x			x		
Immigration		x	x	x	x	x		x		
Criminal justice reform						x				
Freedom of speech						x				

Modules

Arts Education: Every Student Succeeds Act

Disciplines: Art History, Architecture, History, Performing Arts

Discussion Prompt

ESSA was signed into law in December of 2015 and is authorized from 2017 through 2020. ESSA helps return policies to those before 2002 when No Child Left Behind was enacted. NCLB was meant to recognize where students were both succeeding and needing help regardless of race, gender, etc. ESSA will give local and state-level administration better control over K-12 curriculum and will elevate the arts as a subject area to the same levels as math, reading, and science.

Issue Stances

- Should the arts have equal footing to reading, math, and science?
- Should Title I funds be used for all subjects?
- The law gives greater education oversight to states from the federal level, should states and local-governments have oversight and how does it get implemented for each state?

Supplemental Resources

- [Every Student Succeeds Act – US Department of Education](#)
- [ESSC and Arts Education](#)
- [Congressional Arts Handbook](#)

Charitable Giving and Tax Reform/Charitable Tax Deduction

Disciplines: Economics, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompt

In 1917 donations to charitable, 501(c) (3) nonprofit organizations became tax deductible. The recent issue of tax reform in the Trump Administration has proposed a question to remove incentives for charitable giving which would include tax deductions. In addition, there has been legislation introduced to help artists regain the ability to deduct the cost of materials they used for their art AND its fair market value if it is donated to a charitable collecting institute. The art can be in areas of literature, music, visual art, and scholarly composition. Before 1969 artists were able to deduct for both materials and fair market value but since 1969 they have only been able to deduct materials.

Issue Stances

- Should donations to nonprofit organizations be tax deductible?
- Should artists receive a tax deduction on both materials and fair market value of their work?

Supplemental Materials

- [Artist-Museum Partnership Act \(HR 1830\)](#)
- [Encouraging Charitable Giving and Supporting Public Access to the Arts](#)

Artificial Intelligence and Government Regulations

Disciplines: Computer Science, Engineering, Philosophy, Political Science

Discussion Prompts

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a growing field with potentially tremendous influence over our everyday lives. Regulating autonomous vehicles and investing in machine learning technology are important areas that the government has influence over, but are often researched by powerful private corporations. The applications of such technology could be nefarious or beneficial. To what extent should government have a responsibility in regulating AI? Is funding the responsibility of the government?

Issue Stances

- AI research and technology should be completely privatized
- The government should regulate all AI research and technology
- Only certain aspects of AI research and technology should be regulated by the government, and if so, which

Supplemental Resources

- Washington Post: Defense Department Pledges Billions Toward Artificial Intelligence Research
- NCSL State Legislations on Autonomous Vehicles
- Two subcommittees of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee held a joint hearing to consider the applications and implications of artificial intelligence technology, or “AI” and its possible corrupt applications.

Censorship Legislation and Free Speech

Disciplines: Anthropology, Art, Art History, English/Literature, Political Science

Discussion Prompts

Public influencers, art, and texts can often be divisive or offensive. Justice John Marshall Harlan said, “One man’s vulgarity is another’s lyric.” In *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, the Supreme Court held that the government cannot punish inflammatory speech unless it intentionally provokes a crowd and immediately causes unlawful/violent action. A public institution must regulate free speech/censorship as it pertains to the constitution. However, private institutions have more control over their regulations. How should campuses (public and private) respond when a group of people want to ban a speaker/art/text from campus, but isn’t technically immediately dangerous? How should the government respond to requests for censorship of private property?

Issue Stances

- Private institutions should ultimately decide what is censored.
- Private institutions should be held accountable to the same first amendment free speech standards as public institutions.
- There should be other ways to regulate free speech/censorship.

Supplemental Resources

- There should be other ways to regulate free speech/censorship.
- Supplemental Resources
- Journal of Dispute Resolution: Private Universities and the First Amendment

- ACLU articles: Freedom of Expression in the Arts and Entertainment; Speech on Campus

Climate Change: Emission Fees

Disciplines: Ecology, Economics, Environmental Science, Political Science

Discussion Prompts

Washington State's Initiative 1631 (ballot measure in 2018) proposed to place a fee on carbon emissions to big polluters. The fee would generate \$2.3 billion in the first five years and fund environmental and climate-related projects as well as to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, fossil fuel companies would be free to pass this increase on to their customers, which would increase a gallon of gas 14 cents, among other price increases. This would hit especially hard in rural areas where agriculture (involving electricity) and long-distance driving are part of life. What accountability measures should the government impose on big polluters like the fossil fuel industry?

Issue Stances

- Carbon fees should be charged
- There should be no carbon fees
- Carbon fees should only be applied in certain situations (if so, what?)

Supplemental Resources

- American Meteorological Society: U.S. Federal Climate Policy: Emission Fees
- NPR: Washington State Could Become the First to Charge A Carbon Fee
- Seattle Times: Washington State Voters Reject Carbon-Fee Initiative

Endangered Species Protections

Disciplines: Biology, Ecology, Economics, Environmental Studies

Discussion Prompts

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) enacted in 1973 to protect endangered species in the U.S. went and currently goes largely ignored by the federal government. The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Work recently released a new draft addressing the ESA, hoping to elevate its importance across the U.S. However, the ESA costs billions of dollars to enact. What responsibilities do elected officials have to protect endangered species? How should the government protect endangered species, if at all?

Issue Stances

- Continue the Endangered Species Act
- Eradicate the Endangered Species Act
- Protect endangered species in a different way

Supplemental Resources

- Draft Legislation to Strengthen the Endangered Species Act (July 2, 2018)
- The Hill Opinion: Wildlife has little to show for staggering cost of Endangered Species Act

Gerrymandering/Redistricting

Disciplines: Computer Science, Geography, Mathematics, Political Science, Sociology, Statistics

Discussion Prompts

Gerrymandering serves the purpose of ensuring that one political party wins a district over another with an unfairly drawn district, practically denying the other party any true political power. However, with the biased boundaries created by gerrymandering, many politicians who are unheard are given the opportunity to make their voice heard. Talks about who should decide how boundaries are drawn have escalated all the way up to the Supreme Court. Some think that the drawing of districts should be done by politicians, while others believe an unbiased/nonpartisan committee or automated machine should control these boundaries. How should districts how boundaries are drawn have escalated all the way up to the Supreme Court. Some think that the drawing of districts should be done by politicians, while others believe an unbiased/nonpartisan committee or automated machine should control these boundaries. How should districts be drawn?

Issue Stances

- Allow elected officials to control the drawing of boundaries
- Let an unbiased committee draw lines
- Let data from automated machines, mapping, census data, etc. control drawing of boundaries

Supplemental Resources

- Auto-Redistrict: a free and open source computer program that automatically
- creates “fair and compact electoral districts” using census and election data and a
- genetic algorithm
- Working Paper, Princeton University: A New Automated Redistricting Simulator
- Using Markov Chain Monte Carlo
- Ballotpedia: State by State Guide to Redistricting Procedures

Incarcerated People’s Right to Vote

Disciplines: Criminal Science, History, Law, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompts

Under section two of the Fourteenth Amendment, states can legally deny the right to vote to anyone with a criminal conviction. Currently, 48 states deny voting rights to current inmates, and many states bar parolees and probationers from voting. Many believe that people in jail, or who have gone to jail, have effectively renounced their civil liberties, while many also believe that prisoner’s having the right to vote could bolster major change in the U.S. incarceration system. In what ways would letting incarcerated people vote affect the political system and/or mass incarceration issues?

Issue Stances

- Allow prisoners in every state the right to vote
- Ban prisoners in every state from the right to vote
- Let states decide

Supplemental Resources

- Time Article: Why Can't Felons Vote?
- The Economist: Why the restoration of felons’ voting rights in Florida is a big deal

Minimum Wage Determination

Disciplines: Economics, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompts

The 2018 federal minimum wage rate is \$7.25 an hour, a rate that has not changed since 2009. While many states have set their own wage rates, none currently exceed \$11.50 an hour. Many feel that the minimum wage rate should not be increased, as there are many drawbacks, like possible lay-offs, slower hiring, a shift towards technology, or an outsource of jobs to other countries. Many, however, argue that with higher wages comes a better quality of life, lower unemployment rates, and a possible reduction in government spending for social programs for the poor, which would reduce taxes. In what ways should the minimum wage be changed, if at all? Would that be different in your campus town vs. your hometown?

Issue Stances

- Raise the minimum wage
- Do not change the minimum wage
- Let states/cities decide what to do with minimum wage rates

Supplemental Resources

- Ballotpedia: Minimum Wage on the Ballot (by state)
- CNBC Article: Amazon Raises Minimum Wage

Percent for Art Government Funding Programs

Disciplines: Architecture, Art, Art History, Economics

Discussion Prompts

Nearly half of all U.S. states have implemented a government issued program called Percent for Art, where any public building in that state must allocate no less than 1% of the building's construction cost to works of art for permanent placement in that building. Arguments have been made that art in public buildings generally makes the community safer, more vibrant, and healthier. However, building developers say that the tax increases the cost of the entire project, and that the tax serves as more of a threat, since developers will be denied a certificate of occupancy if they do not meet the art tax requirement. To what extent should art be integrated into the community? Should it be mandatory?

Issue Stances

- Percent for Art should be implemented in cities
- Public art should not be imposed by the government
- Public art should be funded by the government in a different way (be specific)

Supplemental Resources

- New York Times: Developers Fight Efforts to Make Them Pay for Public Art
- National Assembly for State Arts Agencies: State Percent for Art Programs

Sugary Drink Taxes

Disciplines: Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology

Discussion Prompts

In the case of Philadelphia, a sugar tax is leaving the city divided, with the question of its legality making it all the way to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. The extra taxes may help the consumer make a “healthier” choice and generate more tax revenue, but the tax also hurts businesses and disproportionately affects people of lower socioeconomic status. Should elected officials be able to tax what citizens privately consume? Would a sugary drink tax be a net positive or negative?

Issue Stances

- Implement sugar taxes.
- Ban the implementation of sugar taxes.
- A sugar tax should be implemented in certain situations/communities. If so, who would get to decide?

Supplemental Resources

- Cost Effectiveness of a Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Excise Tax in the U.S.
- Philadelphia Soda Tax
- List Places with Soda/Sugary Beverage Taxes