

Incorporating Election Engagement into Your Courses



Much of campus election engagement happens outside the classroom—but because all students take courses, faculty members can play a key role. Here are some classroom approaches to help students participate as informed voters. Also see our guide to [Talking About Elections in Your Classroom](#).

Provide essential information.

- **Include key election dates and requirements** on your course calendar to remind students. You'll find state-specific information on voting rules and deadlines [here](#).
- **Steer students to resources.** One example is the League of Women Voters' [Vote411.org](#). Students can use it to help register to vote, check their registrations, or learn how to obtain absentee ballots. As the election approaches, they can use it to find polling locations and identification requirements for voting.
- **Involve students in campus election engagement efforts.** If your campus has a nonpartisan engagement coalition, sign up to hear about their initiatives. Ask the [designated CEEP staffer](#) in your state, or check with your campus student affairs department or civic engagement center. Encourage your students to get involved with campus [voter registration campaigns](#) or [voter education](#) and [Get out the Vote](#) events.
- **Distribute our [nonpartisan candidate and issue guides](#)** to provide accurate information and get students past the obstacle of not knowing enough about the candidates.

Integrate election issues into your courses.

- **Discuss elections, candidates, or ballot issues.** These can be quick, informal discussions or extended assignments in which students research and present pros and cons. You can use election-related topics to build research, analysis, writing, and presentation skills, or link specific election issues to course content. Assign these topics to individuals, small groups or all students in the course. (See our [Living Room Conversations guide](#) for specific conversation templates on [Free Speech on Campus](#), [Student Debt](#), [Guns and Responsibility](#), [Immigration](#), and [various other topics](#). Or use our [candidate and issue guides](#) as catalysts for discussions.)
- **Discuss issues around voting vs. staying home.** See our article on [Combating Cynicism](#), or use the specific Living Room Conversations guide on [To Vote or Not to Vote](#). ([Our 90-second Close Elections video](#) may also help.)
- **Assign related research and writing projects.** Assign or promote topics on elections and voting, candidates, or ballot issues as part of more general research and writing projects. These could range from short essays on "How I feel about voting," or students exploring their own political evolution, to rigorous research and analysis of political trends or issues related to your course.
- **Have students use respected fact-checking sites to explore current political discourse.** Media literacy skills are critical for students, so incorporate an assignment in which they fact-check positions from candidates and advocacy groups. Use respected sites like [FactCheck.org](#), [FlackCheck.org](#), and [Politifact.com](#).
- **Have students create their own nonpartisan candidate or issue guides.** This is a great way for students to gain skills and knowledge, working individually or

better yet, in groups. Your campus nonpartisan election coalition can help distribute these guides campus-wide or even to other schools, promoting informed voting. To get started, see [Creating Your Own Nonpartisan Candidate Guides](#) and use [CEEP's Candidate & Issue Guides](#) as examples.

- **Have students develop nonpartisan election engagement campaigns or events.** They can volunteer with your school's nonpartisan engagement coalition to register, educate, and mobilize fellow students as voters—or create their own initiatives. Students have developed and hosted events from voting workshops and candidate debates to art installations, [debate watch parties](#), and ballot issue education forums. Events can be a chance for students to present their nonpartisan research or distribute materials they've created. For debates, students can prepare questions and serve as moderators. They can also recruit

community experts to participate, as long as the event stays nonpartisan.

Students can also help organize targeted election engagement projects. Examples range from Ohio State University students who conducted a voter registration campaign for campus staff, like janitors, food service workers, and groundskeepers, to students who created election web pages for the campus, ride-share campaigns to get students to the polls, and student-run social media campaigns to encourage turnout.

- **Encourage students to volunteer in campaigns of their choosing, and report back to the class.** Use CEEP's resources for guidance. It can be particularly instructive to have students volunteer for candidates on opposite sides of a race and then report back to the class. Our [candidate guides](#) list relevant candidate websites for major statewide races.

Involve students in community-based projects.

- Have students work with nonpartisan community partners in off-campus election engagement activities. Students at North-Carolina A&T registered voters in nearby communities as part of six successive community service weekends. Students at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) work with residents of the nearby Mosby Court public housing project to help them register and vote. Other schools we work with have replicated the VCU model.
- Give academic credit for individual election engagement service. You might require students to volunteer a certain number of hours in election engagement, or

give extra credit to students who volunteer for election-related organizations or for campaigns. These activities can be nonpartisan, or students may work on particular candidate or issue campaigns that draw their interest. Which campaigns of course have to be their choice, not yours.

- Integrate into existing service-learning courses. Election engagement is particularly appropriate for semester-long service-learning projects. Students can work regularly with election-related nonprofits or government entities, including local election boards, and then reflect on their experience for course credit.

Possible classroom lessons:

As much as possible, integrate examples with your specific field of study. But even if you can't do that, try exploring ways that the subject of your particular discipline is affected by choices made by our elected officials—or offer useful perspective on these choices.

Example 1: Close elections

Watch our [90-second Close Elections video](#). Reflect on how many of the examples you knew. Do you know (or could you research) other close election examples?

Does this change your view on whether your vote can matter?

Example 2: Rules for registration and voting

Read our partner Campus Vote Project's [concise summary of state voting and registration rules](#). If you haven't registered, or want to change your registration to your school address, please follow the links and do so. Did you know about the requirements before you went to the site?

Write a short essay on a voting-related issue, perhaps related to your state. For instance, use our nonpartisan guide to [Florida's felon rights restoration initiative](#) as a departure point to discuss whether prisoners and former felons should have the right to vote, and under what conditions. Or read about the Ohio League of Women Voters' recently passed [Fair Redistricting Initiative](#), then talk about redistricting and gerrymandering. Or research and explore issues around voter ID laws.

In your response, be sure to 1) summarize the policy; 2) discuss states with varying policies on this issue; 3) present arguments supporting and opposing the policy; 4) present your view and reasons for it.

Example 3: Infusing civic engagement into the curriculum

From the list below, select a few of the issues most important to you.

- Abortion
- Crime & criminal justice
- Economy
- Education
- Environment
- LGBTQ issues
- Gun issues
- Healthcare
- Immigration
- Military & defense
- National debt
- Student loans and debt
- Social Security
- Taxes
- Voting issues, like voter ID and who can vote.

Explore why you believe what you do about them, how you came by those beliefs, and how they might be related to your field of study or major.

For all students, find which candidates best match your values:

Use [CEEP's nonpartisan candidate guides](#) to explore how candidates line up with the issues you care about most. You can reflect and write about your responses.

Our guides average 25 hours of work apiece and go through multiple vetting procedures to ensure that they're accurate (including review by a 19-year former *Encyclopedia Britannica* senior editor). Schools consider them the best guides available for the races we're able to cover. Our guides become available [on CEEP's website](#) between early September and mid-October of each election year.

Another option is VoteSmart's [VoteEasy Map](#). It's a fun tool, but sometimes includes candidates who are no longer running or have virtually no support. And the surveys it's based on can be significantly dated. So we recommend [our guides if available](#)—although VoteSmart has valuable information on areas like interest group ratings, to which we link from our guides.

[BallotReady.org](#) is another source to see how candidates line up with your values. It includes information on important lower-profile races. The information is pulled from candidate websites, so it's always subject to their spin, whereas CEEP's guides include research on voting records and other public statements. But BallotReady does include many important races that CEEP doesn't have time to research.

Finally, some states have vitally important ballot initiatives, allowing citizens to vote directly on issues they care about. Your local [League of Women Voters](#) usually has the best nonpartisan information on initiatives, which as the election approaches will be integrated into their [Vote411.org](#) localized voting tool. They're another excellent source for learning about candidates.

Remember, the more we all make classrooms centers of engagement, the more likely students are to vote.