

# Preparing Your Classroom for the Nov. 8 Election

[Download a PDF of this tip sheet](#)

In his most recent [State of the Campus](#) address, Chancellor Philip Distefano called on the university community to support democracy and civic engagement. In support of this agenda, the campus supports a centralized [website](#) on the Nov. 8, 2022, elections that includes a variety of resources for all voters.

Faculty may further benefit from reading the [Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom Memo Updated](#) (PDF) and visiting campus websites addressing academic freedom:

- [Free Expression](#)
- [Academic freedom shapes and protects work of faculty, students](#)

## First Amendment Rights in the Classroom: The Balance Between Our Rights and Responsibilities

The First Amendment: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.*

The first amendment protects people's speech from government censorship. It does not mean that there are no consequences for comments that students make in the classroom environment or other course contexts such as Zoom meeting and chats, discussion threads, and office hours. The faculty member, instructor, or graduate student instructor determines the parameters of engagement, including which topics will be considered relevant to the course.

## Modeling Non-Partisanship through the Tools of Diplomacy

Assist students in identifying the **common values** underlying strong opinions.

**Create thought experiments** by asking "Let's suppose X is true and we try to view this situation through that world view for 2 minutes. Then we will share our observations and thoughts."

Help students **elucidate assumptions** by examining what has been normalized for them. Begin by asking "What do we presume to be true in this situation, and what exceptions can we identify?"

Encourage class communities to use **points of confusion** for research and exchange: "Let's break this up into research teams and then share what we learn together."

Having a particular set of beliefs should not impact a person's standing. In order to make sure this is true, **civility and caution should be a priority**. Remind students to think of people with different views as a resource rather than a roadblock: "What can you learn from them about how other people think and experience the world?"

**Model respectful behavior and communication** at all times in both verbal and non-verbal offerings.

## Structuring Civil Discourse

**Track conversations** by stating topics clearly and encourage students to preface their contributions by stating how their comments relate to the central topic. Write down suggestions for unrelated topics and follow up with another time slot to address them.

**Build in frequent pauses**. This allows a few moments for students to collect, organize and capture their thoughts before launching conversations.

**Set agreements** for commentaries and use timers to stay within those guidelines.

In videoconferencing applications, **consider disengaging private chat functions** to keep the channel of communication focused within the collective.

**Establish classroom norms/guidelines**. Clearly define what you mean by uncivil, harassing or threatening behavior prior to opening discussions. Step in to intervene immediately if you observe it occurring. The class is relying on you to maintain fairness.

## Keeping the Learning Space Open During Charged Topics of Conversation

Allow questions to nudge the conversation forward

Examples:

- "I hear you and wish to sincerely consider this feedback. May I ask you a few questions to help me situate this information better in my understanding?"
- "The information you are presenting is unsettling and difficult for me, but I want you to know that I'm interested in understanding what you are offering."

Revisit or establish rules of engagement

- Revisit classroom norms that have been established. This should include what is expected of them and what students can expect from you as well. Address appropriate use of the chat window and screen sharing in Zoom. If this hasn't been articulated previously, create expectations together. Ask students to collaborate on creating classroom norms for engaging in charged discussions. Identify the behaviors that convey respectful discussion (giving others the benefit of the doubt, letting people finish making their point, sharing the conversation, trying hard to be curious about someone else's point of view, etc.). Likewise, have them identify what would constitute a lack of respect (i.e., name calling, sarcasm, cutting someone off, talking over other people, eye rolling, not making an effort to understand, etc.). This is a critical step that

makes it possible for you and your students to respond to problematic comments and derailed conversations.

- Use these explicit expectations about what behavior is expected and what is unacceptable to moderate discussion and watch closely for transgressions. Working with the group, swiftly address behaviors or comments that are out of bounds.
- Find consensus with your students on how to repair when someone goes out-of-bounds or missteps.

**Don't:**

**Do:**

Tell people they are wrong	Ask people what value or experiences led them there
Ask how someone could ever believe something	Ask when a particular belief first started for them
Interrupt people	Give a moment to make sure they are done
Instead of “Yeah, but, what about...”	Try, “ Could you please tell me more...”
Assume you know their motives	Ask about their goals and hopes
Blame them for your anger or frustration	Explain your anger or frustration and take responsibility for it

**Model intellectual humility by using "Fumble Forward"**

To promote open exchange in a charged subject matter, students preface their public commentary by saying “I’m about to fumble with my words.” The community responds as a chorus with “Fumble Forward!” It is a social agreement/contract to let confusion be a vital part of discourse. Perhaps a student is unsure of the terminologies needed to join a conversation. Perhaps they are unsure if their questions will be offensive. Perhaps they don’t have fully formulated ideas and opinions yet. But for the next few minutes, all have agreed to suspend judgement, lean in and help each other clarify through a process of corrective, delicate or clumsy verbal surgery. Fumble Forward allows participants to stay open and speak from the heart with diplomacy, even if their voices are trembling and they can’t find confident, stable ground. Fumble Forward gives all a starting place to back away from sounding off on each other. We can diplomatically move towards true listening and communication.

**Utilize misinformation as an opportunity**

Inspire research and procedures for checking the veracity of sources. Invite all to participate in this shared fact-checking process.

## If you or your students need assistance

Violations of campus policies and acts of harassment should be reported to the [CU Boulder Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#)

Confidential assistance for all CU Boulder students, staff, and faculty with any university-related dispute or concern is available from the [CU Boulder Ombuds](#)

Our campus offers a consultation to explore options for reporting at [Don't Ignore It](#). If you are considering reporting a concern, we encourage you to report:

- Even if you don't know the identity of the person who caused the harm
- Even if you are unsure whether it's something the university could address
- Even if you don't know what you want to have happen
- Even if you think it's not serious enough

CU Boulder's [Red Folder website](#) can support you responding to students in distress.

## Information about Voting Procedures

In Colorado, if you miss online or mail registration deadlines, you will not receive a ballot by mail, but you can still vote in person at a voter service and polling center. Important safety measures are currently active in Colorado to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Exercise physical distancing, hand sanitizing, and mask protocols if voting in person. Remember to bring a blue or black pen or marker!

- Register to vote in Colorado:
  - [Register online](#) by Oct. 31, 2022
  - Register by mail by Oct. 31, 2022: You can register by mail to vote in Colorado by printing a [voter registration form](#), filling it out, and mailing it to your local election office
  - In Colorado, you can register and vote in person on Election Day, Nov. 3: [Register in-person](#) at a [voter service and polling center in your county](#) through Election Day
- Students who are registered in their home county and living away from home have a couple options:
  - They can vote absentee; **or**
  - They can re-register and vote in the county where they are living. [Students may appreciate learning about their options in advance of the election.](#)
- [CU Boulder on-campus voting sites](#)
- Information on how to [vote by absentee ballot](#)

## Inspiring & educational resources

- [Braver Angels](#) is a not-for-profit organization that brings people of disparate views together for civil debate--not to find centrist compromise, but to find one another as citizens beyond stereotypes and assumptions.

- [A Nonpartisan Model for Developing Public-Service Leaders](#) developed by the nonprofit [Partnership for Public Service](#), the model encourages public service employees to develop leadership values and skills towards “stewardship of public trust and commitment to public good.” The framework focuses on professional and leadership development for the future.  
[Faculty and Staff Assistance Program \(FSAP\)](#) is a confidential counseling office made available for staff and faculty employed with the university at no cost. Licensed staff counselors are prepared to support employees through a variety of concerns, including potential stresses related to the election phase. FSAP offers virtual or in-person drop-in sessions from 2-3pm Mon-Fri. Register for your 30-minute Let’s Chat session through [Sign-Up Genius](#), or request a counseling session on our [website](#).
- [Project Pericles](#) provides a set of curricular resources for faculty, across all disciplines, who are interested in incorporating nonpartisan voter education into the curriculum. These modules represent a wide range of geographic regions and can be tailored for the fine arts, humanities, social sciences, and STEM.