Politics in the Classroom

Instructor Resources

I. Difficult Topics—Politics and Current Events

The following are from the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning at the University of Michigan:

- “Teaching in the Current Political Climate:” [http://crlt.umich.edu/blog/teaching-current-political-climate](http://crlt.umich.edu/blog/teaching-current-political-climate)
- “Teaching and Learning in a Tense Election Season:” [http://crlt.umich.edu/blog/teaching-and-learning-tense-election-season](http://crlt.umich.edu/blog/teaching-and-learning-tense-election-season)
- “Returning to the Classroom After the Election:” [http://www.crlt.umich.edu/blog/returning-classroom-after-election](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/blog/returning-classroom-after-election) (published after the 2016 election)


- This guide, published before the 2016 U.S. election, presents approaches and activities for teaching about elections.


- This article offers perspectives on teaching strategies that foster critical thinking and media literacy skills within a supportive classroom environment; it includes examples of class activities.


- This article offers five guiding questions to determine when and if it is appropriate to incorporate current and controversial topics into a course.


- “This issue highlights practices that advance educational goals related to political learning and explores the various roles that students, faculty, and administrators can play in creating a politically engaged and socially just democracy.”


- This article explores how to balance seeking common ground while taking and maintaining firm political stands. It also offers practical tips for engaging with the other side.


- This edition of the Chronicle’s teaching newsletter describes one instructor’s use of Reflective Structured Dialogue to meaningfully discuss current events in the classroom.
“Improving Dialogue Across the Political Divide,” by Laura Hoxworth, UVAToday, August 16, 2019. [https://news.virginia.edu/content/improving-dialogue-across-political-divide](https://news.virginia.edu/content/improving-dialogue-across-political-divide)

- In this interview, Rachel Wahl discusses her research on how people learn from each other across deep political divides, including how we can work to cultivate healthy dialogue on college campuses.


- In this article, Usher describes the politically polarized environment that grew in her class post-2016-election, and she urges faculty not to allow their conservative students to feel silenced.


- This article argues that classrooms and institutions of higher education are not appropriate venues for partisan, political discourse, and political topics should only be discussed in an “academicized” way.


- In this interview, Diana E. Hess and Paula McAvoy, authors of The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education, discuss how instructors can walk the fine line required to create and maintain a political, but non-partisan classroom.

II. Difficult Topics and Civil Discourse—General Guides


- This resource presents “strategies for engaging controversial topics in the classroom, and reflections from thirty-five faculty and staff members who have field-tested the techniques.” It is aimed at instructors who want to “strengthen their teaching and engage their students more effectively in conversations about the most important issues of our time.”


- This guide describes ideas and tools to help instructors prepare their classrooms and students to practice civil discourse, including detailed overviews of four teaching strategies.


- This thorough guide offers advice and strategies about improving class discussion and student participation in general and includes a section on handling divisive topics.


- This article focuses on planned, in-class dialogues and presents guidelines for developing the environment and skills that make difficult dialogues effective learning opportunities.
  - This article guides instructors through preparation, in-class, follow-up, and potential problems with difficult discussion. While the suggestions focus on pre-planned discussions, many are also applicable to unexpected discussions.

  - This website offers a toolkit for teaching with Structured Academic Controversy (SAC), “a type of cooperative learning strategy...designed to engage students in controversy and then guide them to seek consensus.” The site includes research findings on the pedagogical effectiveness of SAC, a how-to guide, teaching examples, and additional resources.

  - This article offers practical guidelines for planning and facilitating discussion on controversial topics in the classroom.

  - This short article discusses how to model civility by practicing humility, particularly within a Christian university context, in order “to mold the classroom as a space of equitable engagement.”

  - This article describes how three key tactics of social and emotional health can reshape public and private conversations.

III. Relevant Resources for the Classroom

  - “One Small Step” aims to bring people with different political views together in conversation in order “to break down boundaries created by politics and remember our shared humanity.” The website includes featured stories and a guide for holding your own “one small step” conversation using the StoryCorps app.

ProCon.org. https://www.procon.org/
  - The mission of this independent nonprofit is “promoting critical thinking, education, and informed citizenship by presenting controversial issues in a straightforward, nonpartisan, primarily pro-con format.” The website includes professionally researched overviews of 80 issues that are controversial and important to many Americans; each overview aims to reflect a broad range of perspectives and opinions that span the breadth of the debate surrounding an issue.

  - This nonpartisan fact tank presents information on a variety of topics based on public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis, and other data-driven social science research, including a section on the 2020 election (https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/2020-election/).

- This report explores how and from whom disinformation spreads online and the media’s role in perpetuating it. The link includes the full report, case studies, and a syllabus for teaching about media manipulation.

Sample ground rules for dialogue, compiled by the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation. http://ncdd.org/rc/item/1505/

IV. Books

- This book shares “clear-cut and actionable pathways for having difficult conversations that matter...With proven exercises and rich examples, this interactive ‘field guide’ walks readers through a process of transforming paralysis and effecting positive change.”


- The authors describe the practice of moral conversation—“an open and frank talking together in order to seek mutual understanding and harmony”—as a way to address volatile topics on campus, from the point of view of a faculty member, student affairs staff person, and a senior administrator.

The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education, by Diana E. Hess and Paula McAvoy (Routledge, 2014)

- The authors explore what good practice looks like in the political classroom, findings about what students experience and learn in these classes, why this work is particularly challenging in today’s political climate, and ethical dilemmas that arise during classroom political discussion. The book is based on findings from a large, mixed-method study about political discussions within high school classrooms.