

PREPARING FOR THE DAYS AFTER AN ELECTION

The upcoming US elections pose historic challenges and opportunities, given ongoing division, disinformation, and disillusionment with democracy. By thoughtfully preparing for the aftermath of the 2024 elections, colleges and universities can foster a supportive and constructive environment, helping students, faculty, and staff navigate this moment with knowledge, understanding, empathy, and resilience.

Plan ahead.

Leaders, faculty, staff, and students share responsibility for post-election responses. Well before Election Day, engage campus stakeholders in conversations about how to navigate conflict and politicized discussions. You will need to balance conflicting preferences. Some stakeholders will want to discuss the election, while others will be tired of talking about it.

Post-election gatherings should be optional. If the locus is in the classroom, where attendance is mandatory, consider letting students take breaks as needed. Beyond the classroom, create opportunities for affinity groups to meet and communicate options for additional counseling and mental health support.

Compile and share lists of post-election activities, resources, support services, safety tips, and emergency systems that you can activate after the election.

Consider the possibility of violence. Know what safeguards are in place if there is violence on campus, in a classroom, in a workspace, or in the local community.

Set ground rules for post-election interactions.

Many campuses spent last summer updating student conduct codes; non-discrimination practices; time, place and manner restrictions on protests and gatherings; and campus security procedures. It's good to remind the campus community of these policies, but consider sharing something inspirational as well.

Send the campus community a compelling vision for the norms and behaviors you hope to see modeled on campus. Examples might be truth, inclusion, compassion, decency, and shared responsibility for each other's experiences on campus. Communicate these norms and behaviors as aspirational, not new rules or limitations to speech.

Design campus resources that are empowering and compassionate.

Defend academic freedom and your institution's autonomy to educate for democracy.

Create opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to express their views. Recognize that some will be upset by election results, and others may not trust the results. Faculty and staff need to prepare now for classes and interactions with students the morning after the election.

Counter disinformation. Lies and opinions that cannot be supported by evidence should not be expressed without accountability.

Treat elections as teachable moments.

No matter the outcome of the election, you can appreciate campus participation in democracy.

You can also recognize learning from the democratic process, maintaining decency and community, establishing or using intergroup dialogue and relationship-building structures that will pay dividends in the future, and building a culture of caring for individuals from disenfranchised or marginalized groups.