Managing the 2020 Election on Campus

Given the likely range of reactions and emotions over the next few weeks concerning the 2020 elections, we need to plan how we conduct these crucial and critical conversations that will happen in all academic spaces on campus.

Plan Ahead
What kind of conversation do you want to facilitate?
How will you moderate discussion?
What level of conflict are you willing to allow in the discussion?
Will you connect the discussion to course topics?

Set Ground Rules
For example:
- Listen with empathy and strive toward understanding
- Speak honestly and without hostility
- Attend to the impact of our words on other people
- Remain in relationship with one another
- Treat one another with respect
- Stay present in the room/discussion
- Request permission to share someone’s words with others not in the room (do not text, tweet, email, or post what is said here without permission)

Emphasize Voluntariness
This will protect those who feel uncomfortable sharing their opinions.

Consider the Psychological Impact
Students may:
- Have difficulty keeping track of tasks
- Have difficulty prioritizing tasks
- Have a hard time engaging with others
- Have difficulty with time management
- Freeze in stressful situations

Practice Humility
Regardless of who wins, encourage students to avoid de-humanizing language and broad blame-casting.

Provide Context
Especially for international students
USA.gov Presidential Election Process
https://www.usa.gov/election
CNN: 2020 election explained
BBC “US election 2020: A really simple guide”

Strategies to Manage Stress
Inform students: talk about ways stress may affect the body and mind
Be aware students are experiencing a high cognitive load, and provide extra attention to guiding them through tasks and skills
Connect with students
Be flexible
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When Difficult Conversations Arise
Open The Front Door (OTFD):

Observe: concrete, factual observations "I have noticed..."

Think: thoughts based on observation "I think..."

Feel: emotions "I feel..."

Desire: specific request "I would like..."

Example: "I'm noticing a lot of murmuring after that last statement and I think some of you might have strong feelings about the topic. I feel that it is best that we stop and take a moment to reflect further because I would like for us all to understand the complexity of this issue."

Other Strategies

Clarification
"What I heard was..."

Depersonalize:
"Why might others disagree as well?"

Inquire Then Feel:
"Let's consider the evidence, because when I hear that, I feel..."

Pause & Reflect:
Stop and write what you think, feel, heard

Connect to Campus Resources

Election Reaction Stress

Our CAPS Staff is here to support you as our nation undergoes the 2020 election period.

1442 Clifton Rd. Suite 235
404-727-7450
8:30am-5pm (M-F)

WE RECOMMEND SEVERAL STRATEGIES FOR SELF-CARE:

1. Unplug
   - limit your consumption of media. Monitor your emotional reactions and set time limits for how long you spend engaging and interacting with social media.

2. Connect
   - Engage with supportive friends and family. Utilize your community or a safe space to ground you and support you. Talk about your reactions but also communicate how you are managing.

3. Take a Break
   - Not everyone will share your perspective. And sometimes it can be difficult to have productive dialogue in a discussion that is going to be hostile or lead to defensiveness.

4. Stay Present
   - Focus on the here and now and try to shift away from a future focus. Journaling, focusing on gratitude, engaging in mindfulness meditation, or connecting with nature can be helpful in staying present.

5. Refuel
   - Counteract the stress and fatigue of engaging yourself. Eat well, get plenty of sleep, keep water, exercise, play, laugh, make art, read something light, watch a movie, go outside, recharge, and avoid unhealthy coping strategies.

6. Acknowledge Feelings
   - Pay attention to your emotions and feelings as an individual. Recognize and give yourself permission to feel the way you do. When you feel emotional before engaging in political discussions.

7. Volunteer!
   - Choose what you feel is positive and meaningful contributions. Join or advocate or support organizations that support your needs and interests.

8. Apps
   - Take a break and access your favorite apps. Use apps for relaxation (CALM, Headspace, Muse, Headspace, Kobo, Audible, & Think, Virtual Hope Box, etc.)

https://counseling.emory.edu/resources/political-climate.html

http://campuslife.emory.edu/about/initiatives/evi/index.html

https://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/about/letters/newsletters.html

Works Cited:

https://blogs.uoregon.edu/keepeteaching/teaching-in-turbulent-times-toolkit/

https://www.coursera.org/instructor/dreilennottmarshall

https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/crisis/

https://www.fearlessdialogues.com/

This resource was a collaboration between: Alexander Bolton (Assistant Professor, Political Science), Amanda Marie James (Associate Dean of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement, Laney Graduate School), Elena Lesley (Dean’s Teaching Fellow, CFDE), and Donna Troka (Senior Associate Director, Teaching & Pedagogy, CFDE).