

NEWSLETTER

In 1954, Congress passed a federal law:
Election Day will be the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November.

Why November? Harvest was over but weather still mild to travel to polls.
Why Tuesday after the first Monday? That takes longer to explain,
but you can [read more here](#).

What's inside?

- Letter from the Editors p. 1
- Bowdoin's Points and Suggestions regarding the election p. 2
- Pedagogically preparing for the election..... p. 3
- Pedagogically responding to the election p. 4
- What's on our desks? p. 5
- Monthly Teaching Challenge p. 6
- Pedagogical POV: Pavel Bačovský Talks "Teaching U.S. Parties & Elections" p. 7
- Upcoming Events & Programming..... p. 8

A Letter from the Editors

It is November, the month of national deviled eggs day (11/2), the end of daylight savings time (11/3), the Bates Harvest Meal (11/20), and the Election (11/5).

Yes, in case you missed the signage, advertisements, and groans, election day is drawing nigh. Elections allow many of those who call our campus home* to vote for ballot measures and candidates at the local, state, and national levels.

In our teaching and learning spaces, elections can be challenging (they can polarize, otherize, and increase anxiety) and exciting (they spark opportunities for critical thinking, diverse perspective sharing, and content-real world connections). So, this month we do what everyone else is doing: We focus on this election. We provide guidance for preparing for and responding to the election in learning spaces (p. 2-4); reading materials for thinking about and distracting yourself from the election (p. 5), a teaching challenge that is much more teaching reward (p. 6), and we hear from Assistant Professor of Politics Pavel Bačovský: What is his favorite activity in his U.S. Parties & Elections course? (p. 7).

* Bates has faculty, staff, and students from around the world, many of whom are either from U.S. territories or are not U.S. citizens. Yet these individuals live with us, here in Maine USA. Although they cannot vote, we believe their perspectives are important.



Points and Suggestions From Bowdoin



This month we highlight a great resource from Bowdoin that helps us navigate reasons for and reasons for not holding space in our learning environments for discussing the election.

Below is an excerpt from that resource, along with a link to the full resource.

Start with the WHY

We encourage you to consider your own emotions and the range of feelings your students may be experiencing. Take some time to consider whether you would like to hold space in class and why. This may be different for each class you are teaching. What pedagogical philosophy/values or intentions are guiding your thinking? What are the likely influences of your decision on your classroom dynamic?

We ask you consider your “why” to help guide your “how” or “what you will do”

Reasons why you might WANT to hold space:

You want to hold non-partisan space for students, particularly first time voters to process

The election process fits into your curriculum

You value your class being a place where students can process personal experiences and emotions

Reasons why you might NOT WANT to hold space:

You are uncomfortable and prefer not to facilitate this conversation

Your curriculum has no connection to the election

You want your classroom to be an escape for students from what’s happening now

You may have students who do not vote in this country

You have not had to facilitate challenging dialogue in this class to date and are not ready to do so

Strategies for:

- Before Class
- During Class

*Refer to resource

Strategies for:

- Supporting yourself
- Supporting your students
- Moving forward

*Refer to resource

Strategies for:

- Before Class
- During Class

*Refer to resource

[Visit this resource](#)



Pedagogically Preparing for the Election

Beyond Bowdoin's, there are many resources out there to prepare for the election. From them, we have pulled the following three ideas.

Idea 1: Consider your Values and Goals

Who are you responsible to in your work as an educator? What do you owe them? A recent guide posted by the teaching center at Boston College poses these two questions, and a few others, to help educators reconnect with their core pedagogical values and commitments.

Articulating who you are doing this work for and to what end might provide you with the energy, motivation, and accountability you need to get through this next week or so.

Your values hopefully tie to specific goals you have for your teaching spaces. You might consider: Do you want to prioritize learner well-being and belonging, help learners better understand the election, or encourage civic involvement. You may not be able to do all; that's okay.

[Visit BC's Guide](#)



Idea 2: Discuss Boundaries

What will and will not be okay in your teaching space? Certain topics? Certain ways of speaking or being? Setting discussion norms with your learners can help make your boundaries transparent and easier for learners to navigate. You might review active listening ([Active Listening Skills](#)) or model how to hold others accountable, perhaps through "if...then" statements. A recent Inside Higher Ed article included a few, such as:

"If a student/peer makes a generalization about a group of people based on their political affiliation, then I will ask them to be more specific."

This article also included some phrasing to bring the discussion to the meta level. Here is one example that could help prepare you for the upcoming election:

"I'm not comfortable with talking about X in this space and will stop those conversations."

[Visit this article](#)



Idea 3: Plan for Flexibility & Offer Resources

There's a fair chance we, along with our colleagues and students, are tense and distracted in the days leading up to the election. Although it may seem counterintuitive, we can help with the uncertainty of the election by being flexible. Consider moving around big meetings or important discussions so they aren't scheduled immediately around the election, and proactively communicate your expectations and any built-in grace you'll offer.

This is also a good time to name campus or local resources and where to locate them.

Here at Bates, there is [Bates Votes](#), which supports those eligible to vote in exercising their right; the [Harvard Center](#), which runs Bates Votes and more generally focuses on community and civic engagement; and CAPS, which promotes students' psychological health and the Office of Equity & Inclusion, which helps all Batesies build the skills and capacity needed to center equity and justice. And then there is CITL. We are a resource for all educators at Bates to discuss teaching and learning.

Oh! And AAC&U (American Association of Colleges and Universities) has a [Help Desk Inquiry Form](#) at their Institute on Democracy and Higher Education designed to provide free & timely advice for educators facing difficult dialogues.

Pedagogically Responding to the Election

Beyond Bowdoin's, there are many resources out there to respond to the election. From them, we have pulled the following two+ ideas.

Idea 1: Acknowledge the Election

Our campus members are involved in this election, and we don't want to infantilize or ignore that, says Nancy Thomas, executive director at the AAC&U's Institute for Democracy and Higher Education and recently interviewed by the Chronicle. So, she encourages us to acknowledge the election in our teaching and learning spaces. If she were teaching this semester, she says, she might plan to use the first half of the class after the election to give learners time to talk about their reactions, what comes next, and how democracy/election results connect to content.

If this doesn't suit you or your content, you might say:

"I feel that today is a challenging day to think about [content]. I also imagine that being here today, like me, you find some reassurance in observing this moment as a community. I want to now turn to the topic scheduled for today, even though it may be difficult to focus."

(adapted from Brown's center for teaching and learning [article](#)).

You may also record the lesson or hold additional office hours for those who struggle to keep up.

Another option for (additional) office hours comes from a recent article from Boston College's center for teaching and learning: Create optional times to debrief. The center suggests giving learners opportunities to respond to the election with you or other members of the learning community. This can alleviate pressure on learners to participate.

"It's going to be a day of conflict," says Thomas. "Conflict is an opportunity for learning." Though, if you are nervous about bringing "conflict" into your classroom, CITL has a resource: [Strategies for Difficult Dialogues](#).

[Chronicle Article](#)

[BC Article](#)

Idea 2: Consider What's at Stake

During the 2020 election, U Michigan's center for teaching and learning posted various resources for educators. One included the following question: What is 'at stake' for students and instructors in discussions about the election?

The election has the potential to reproduce harm and magnify risks; the UMich center urges educators to consider the following when acknowledging, discussing, or ignoring the election.

- Academic Consequences: What are the academic consequences for sharing or opting out of sharing one's perspective during an election-related discussion?
- Experience of Vulnerability: How might a discussion make visible personal experiences, held beliefs, or political investments? What are the implications of any vulnerability in making these visible?
- Social Relationships & Belonging: How might social relationships or support between peers, between colleagues, or between educator/learner change in the course of a discussion? In what ways might a discussion signal belonging or exclusion within that learning space, in that content area, or at the institution?
- Experience of Harm: What forms of harm (e.g., harms related to systemic injustice) could be produced in real-time during the discussion? How do we distinguish between actual harm and feelings of productive discomfort when challenged?

[UMich Article](#)

What's on our desks?

Wells: This may or may not surprise you, but I've been reading about misinformation, disinformation, and, well, bullshit. More specifically, I have on my desk: *Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a Data-Driven World* (Bergstrom & West, 2021) and *Lies that Kill: A Citizen's Guide to Disinformation* (Kamarck & West, 2024).

Although I'm deeper into the former than the latter, I'll share terminology and strategies I've learned thus far:

Terminology:

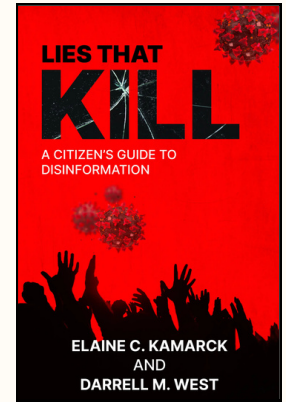
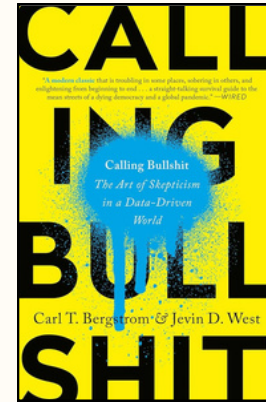
- misinformation (incorrect information)
- disinformation (incorrect information intended to mislead, e.g., fake news, deep fake, hoax)
- bullshit (information intended to persuade, without care for correct/incorrect)

#1 Strategy: Critical Thinking:

- Consider context: What's the who, what, where, when, why, and how of this information?
- Question assumptions and bias baked into how information is presented (e.g., graphic design)
- Identify logical fallacies (e.g., straw man arguments, false analogies, ad hominem attacks)
- Break out of echo chambers (i.e., closed system of information that confirm existing views)
- Examine potential motivation behind information: How is the creator or disseminator benefiting, perhaps through personal gain, political agenda, or emotional manipulation?

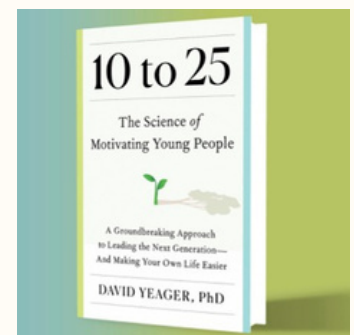
While reading, the educational theories of constructivism and situated cognition are also on my mind: We construct our own understandings. Knowledge is bound to context. In this head space, truths are not absolute entities that exist independently of human experience; there is a relativity to truth.

I remember telling my students once: There are multiple truths and multiple falsehoods, and it's our responsibility to distinguish between them. I think I still believe this... but this topic can get me quite turned around. If you ever want to join me for some truths/untruths/lies philosophizing, I'm in Dana.



Lindsey: I may have been inspired to pick up **10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People** by **David Yeager** after some delightful (read: chaotic) experiences with my own 10- and 12-year-olds. If I can harness even a fraction of the insights from this book, maybe I can finally get them to clean their rooms!

Yeager emphasizes adopting a mentor mindset to motivate Gen Z and Gen Alpha students, holding them to high standards rather than coddling them. It's all about validating their perspectives instead of dismissing them, asking the right questions, and being transparent about my beliefs and goals—because let's be honest, they're not mind readers! It's easy to make the connection to why we as college educators should pay attention to these strategies, too. Understanding how to motivate younger generations can enhance classroom dynamics and foster an environment where students feel supported and challenged. **Carol Dweck** asserts that "this book will change millions of lives", while **Laurie Santos** describes it as "life-changing". If that's true, check in with me next month to see if I'm not only better equipped to engage my first year seminar students in new ways and inspire my kids to tackle their responsibilities with newfound motivation!



If you would like to come find us (and our messy desks) to discuss these topics, we're in Dana. Stop by any time!

Monthly Teaching Challenge

November
2024

CITL offers a monthly teaching challenge—and that challenge might sound different or difficult, but we encourage you to try it out and see if it works for you, your course, and your students.

In addition, we would love to hear from you during the month. What has it been like to incorporate **this** teaching challenge into your current course? Write us or stop by Dana to share.

Visit the CITL Lounge

This month's challenge is straight forward: Visit the CITL Lounge, located on the second floor of Dana building. There are cold & warm and caffeinated & non-caffeinated drinks, as well as sweet & savory and nostalgic & unconventional snacks. The chairs are comfy. The lights are better than most.

There's a lot going on this month:
Take a moment to walk across campus and see our space.

Want to "up" this challenge?

- You could grade at a lounge table?
- Chat with a colleague as they stop by for a coffee?
- Escape the cold for a few seconds as you walk from Lane to Ladd?
- Or just close your eyes for a few seconds on the couch?

We hope to see you this month!

(Last Month's)

Last month we challenged you to compliment yourself. We heard that...

"When I thought about it: I actually do some good things, but I always focus on the not good parts."

If you do try out this teaching challenge, please consider letting us know how it went.

What worked and what did not work?

We highlight individuals who share their experiences with us in next month's newsletter.

So please reach out or stop by to share.

Pedagogical Point-of-View:

Pavel Bačovský

Politics Department

Late October. Second Floor Dana: I sit across from the amazing Pavel Bačovský. Creativity, compassion, and playfulness radiate from him as we chat about his **U.S. Parties and Elections** course. It's quite clear: This election cycle is draining, for him and his students, but they are finding ways to imagine, laugh, and learn.

For this month's POV, I share the takeaways of our conversation together, which focused on examining what is and what isn't, rather than what should and should not be, as a mechanism for healthy detachment from a draining topic.

Wells: What activity works well in your course?

Pavel: I ask students: What would our political system look like if we didn't have parties, primaries, etc.? This encourages the **students to be creative thinkers**. But first we discuss the purpose of these features, what they do and what they don't do. For example, a few weeks ago we "abolished" political parties, and students ultimately articulated that perhaps it's not that political parties are problematic (they seem essential for a democratic system), it's how we are enacting and embodying them.

Wells: Discussions ripe for conflict and contention! How do you help students navigate this?

Pavel: I've been trained to teach political science using a positivist, empirical approach, figuring out what something is and isn't. Students struggle with this lens; they don't see the value and are more interested in thinking about meaning, what should be, and how to make change.

This said, even though I offer students opportunities to do political science through this normative approach, I've noticed they don't feel confident speaking their minds or sharing their truths—I only get this when assigning papers and asking them to defend a position. **Students are nervous**.

So, how do I help students navigate this? Well, I like to begin every class with the following question: What have you seen in the media that relates to the election? Here is where I see the most engagement. Students will share a piece of media because it's no longer their idea or their opinion, it is coming from elsewhere and it is a thing we can deconstruct without implicating the sharer.

And if I don't have the time or expertise to address that newsclip then and there, I come back to it another class period. I show students that **it's okay to take time to work through something**.

Wells: This sounds great, but what are students learning through such activities?

Pavel: As they analyze the role of features, such as political parties or primaries, they must grapple with their purpose and what they are and are not. This is the knowledge they gain. As they analyze and grapple, they are developing critical thinking skills. Hopefully they get to the point of: These features aren't good or bad, they just have problematic parts and productive parts. Beyond this, they build skills in talking through and working through something without closure. They must learn open-mindedness.

Wells: Again, this sounds great, but how might these activities be translated to teaching and learning beyond the political science classroom?

Pavel: Students are distressed; they feel their world is falling apart. But when we ask them to imagine scenarios that seem impossible or distant in the future, there is some healthy detachment. We can then ask: What features are in that imagined scenario (what can we make sense of)? And then we can consider: How might we get there? This is the hopeful lens that Jane McGonigal puts for in her book *Imaginable: How to Create a Hopeful Future*. It's good. Read it.

Wells: Ha! That can be my "what's on my desk" next month! Thanks for sharing with us, Pavel.



Thinking about teaching and learning? What is on your mind?

We are looking for contributions for this newsletter! Reach out if you are interested.

November Lunch & Learn

End-Of-Semester Feedback

Join us for a timely discussion and workshop on
End-of-Semester Feedback!

More specifically, we'll dive into:

- Your options for end-of-semester feedback this semester*
- How to encourage learners to provide, fill out, or complete feedback
- How to interpret the feedback you receive

Date: Friday November 22

Time: 11:30am--1:00pm

Location: Commons 221/222

Go through the Commons Line (password: CITL) and then join us upstairs!



FEEDBACK

* Although this discussion will center on end-of-semester student feedback provided to educators teaching Fall 2024 academic courses, we hope that those not teaching will still find this lunch & learn interesting and enlightening.

for more information,
see our website's event page: [HERE](#)