

“Engaging in Political Advocacy” versus “Teaching Political Engagement”: What we can do, what we cannot do and what we should do

In this fall’s election campaigns there are many ways we can engage our students in the arts of democracy in ways that promote our college’s mission and enhance student learning in our classrooms.¹

As most people know, it is perfectly legal for students to engage in political advocacy efforts. In fact, this is a constitutionally protected activity. It is also perfectly legal *for faculty and staff* to do the same. What you **CANNOT** do is use *PUBLIC RESOURCES* for partisan or political purposes (advocating for the passage or defeat of ballot measures or the election or defeat of candidates).

How does this play out in the course of our jobs on campus? Faculty and staff are able to engage in partisan and political advocacy efforts on their own time as much as they want. Staff, can engage in advocacy work when on breaks and “off the clock.” For faculty, because in general “assigned hours of work” are officially classroom time and office hours, what is done in the rest of their time is generally entirely up to them.

When we do engage in advocacy, of course, we should not use district resources to do so—phones, photocopiers, computers, etc. But, if you have your own cell phone and/or your own laptop, go at it. And, just as students and the public are able to tap into district wireless networks for their own purposes, faculty and staff are able to do the same if they are using their own computers or smart devices.

We should also not create the impression that we are representing the District or one of our Colleges in our activity. But, just as groups like Greenpeace, CalPIRG and U.S. military recruiters roam the campus talking with students about their issues, so can we use any public spaces in the same way.

How about what faculty do in the classroom? Obviously classroom time is both a “public resource” and specifically dedicated to student learning. If an instructor finds a legitimate educational purpose in taking a position, then it is within the discretion of the instructor to do so provided that the purpose is educational and not for the purpose of influencing the outcome of the election. Just ask yourself this: for the particular group of students in your classroom in relationship to the learning goals you are pursuing, what is the best path? Even more specific, for the fall election issues what will foster an atmosphere of open inquiry and discourse, *as well as* engaged action among our students—not to advance a particular electoral outcome, but to advance the learning goals of the classroom and of the institution?

¹ See Section 7054 of the Education Code. <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=edc&group=07001-08000&file=7050-7058>

Please note the De Anza College mission statement at the bottom of this memo. Even if the election is not related to the specific objectives of your class, if you believe engaging the election helps you to further the pedagogical objectives embodied in the college's mission, then you can engage the election in your class.

Just as you are allowed to talk about partisan issue as part of your class, you are welcome to invite people to your class. They can advocate particular views, as long as you are open to having people of opposing views also speak to you class, if you think having such views represented furthers your pedagogical.

For all staff and faculty:

- You can advocate on campus, as long as you are not using “public resources”
- Students can advocate on campus and in the classroom
- You can invite “partisan” visitors to your class, as long as you are open to welcoming people from both sides of an issue
- Staff and faculty can wear political buttons to work.
- You are allowed to express your political opinions at work.
- In class you can express you political opinions as long as you are doing it for pedagogical reasons and not to influence the outcome of an election
- It is our responsibility to foster a sense of engaged citizenship in our students. That means that we should engage with the elections, no matter what role you play on campus. All of us are preparing our students to be global citizens who are able to engage the world in which they live.

Mission:

De Anza College provides an academically rich, multicultural learning environment that challenges students of every background to develop their intellect, character and abilities; to realize their goals; and to be socially responsible leaders in their communities, the nation and the world. De Anza College fulfills its mission by engaging students in creative work that demonstrates the knowledge, skills and attitudes contained within the college's Institutional Core Competencies:

- Communication and expression
- Information literacy
- Physical/mental wellness and personal responsibility
- Global, cultural, social and environmental awareness
- Critical thinking

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