

(From University of MN)

Context

The Prevention, Wellness, and Training committee of the Provost's Council for Student Mental Health (PWT) is composed of 15 members of the University community (6 students, 9 staff/faculty). The committee anticipates that students will need support in the lead-up to and following the 2020 Presidential election. Here is a brief overview.

- The University was perceived as being unprepared to support students after the 2016 presidential election;
- the University should be prepared to support students emotionally before and after the 2020 presidential election;
- students will feel supported by knowing that there are plans in place in advance of the election (ie: communicate proactively to students);
- it is highly likely there will be a period of waiting before final results are announced due to voting by mail (and students express concern about civil unrest during the period between results + inauguration)--this will be unsettling to students; and
- students of all political beliefs must feel supported by the U as a whole and in all smaller University spaces.

Without knowing the results or the timeline of the Election, University staff and faculty may consider the following strategies to support students and reduce the need for last-minute adjustments to accommodate uncertainty, safety concerns, and heightened mental health needs related to the election.

For the purpose of these recommendations, the committee recommends considering November 4-15 as the period after the Election while awaiting and processing results that students may need the most support.

Tangible ideas developed by the Provost's Council on Student Mental Health

Student-serving units

- Provide more drop-in hours for students and increased access to direct services,
- Focus on the concerns expressed by your students and do not assume you know students' values, political beliefs, or concerns,
 - Remind staff of the responsibility to serve and support all students regardless of political alignment. This may include imagining ahead of time how you might professionally interact with and provide support to someone with different political beliefs, and
- Consider how each of the following outcomes might affect the students served by your unit. What implications would each of the following have on the services provided by your unit and the needs of students served by your unit?

- Trump - Pence re-election
- Biden - Harris election
- Long period of uncertainty, contested results
- Protests and civil unrest regardless of the outcome
- Increasing targeted attacks on certain populations (BIPOC, LGBTQI, immigrants, etc.)

Supervisors of student employees

- Allow students to change or block off some work hours, in advance if possible, ● Shift work duties to less taxing activities and have flexible staff scheduling contingencies prepared,
- Plan meetings that have less urgent agenda topics in case of absenteeism or distracted participants,
- Acknowledge that students may feel distracted and disengaged from their work in the lead up to and following the election,
- Provide opportunities for optional virtual and in-person (within health and safety guidelines) check-ins for individuals and groups, and
- Note scheduling considerations for students who may become more concerned about their safety traveling to and from work, and provide flexibility or accommodations when possible.

Classroom settings

- Refrain from giving a high-stakes assessment between November 4-13,
- Provide more drop-in office hours for students, and
- Allow students to request a no-penalty extension on an assignment.

Suggested timeline

Week of Suggested actions

October 5 ● Consider plans for your unit

- Begin implementing/delegating

October 26 ● Communicate proactively with students about your plans for the coming weeks

- Plan for student employee work plans to shift to less taxing activities
- Normalize that stress and worry are common emotions during

periods of uncertainty

November 2 & 3 • Remind students to vote ([OCL voter resources site](#)) November 4-15 •

Encourage students to attend to their physical and mental

health (sleep, eat, play, connect with others)

- Implement your unit's strategies to support students as the nation awaits and processes the election results
- Model attending to your own needs during this time of increased stress, allowing students permission to care for themselves as they pursue academic and professional goals
- Offer students, colleagues, and yourself radical empathy as we come together across our differences as one University community
- Refer students to [campus mental health resources](#) as appropriate