

Vincent Munoz:

I think what we need to do is explain how our principles of free speech, free inquiry will help serve the cause of justice.

Betty Friendan:

The First Amendment, the constitutional freedom of speech and freedom of conscience that is the bulwark of our democracy.

Bettina Apthekar:

There was a passion in what was being said, affirming this, what people considered a sacred constitutional right, freedom of speech and freedom of association

Michelle Deutchman:

From the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, this is SpeechMatters, a podcast about expression, engagement, and democratic learning in higher education. I'm Michelle Deutchman, the center's executive director and your host. It's the beginning of a presidential election year, which means Americans across the country are being exposed to politics constantly as they begin voting in primaries and caucuses to select each party's presidential and down ballot candidates. But while public attention is following candidates on the campaign trail, some practitioners like our guest today, Jen Domagal-Goldman, executive director of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge at Civic Nation, and Alex Edgar, a student civic leader at UC Berkeley, are focused on one particularly important group, the youth vote.

Young voters consistently vote at the lowest rates of any group and the statistics are particularly bad when you look at college-aged voters. With new legislation popping up daily, making it more difficult for college students to vote by restricting their ID usage, moving polling locations, and otherwise attacking their access to the ballot, it is more important than ever to elevate the stories and struggles of those working to encourage students to head to the polls. But before we talk with Jen and Alex, let's turn to Class Notes, a look at what's making headlines.

A new report from the University of Florida Brechner Freedom of Information Project seeks to understand freedom in college newsrooms through evaluating their financial and editorial structures. Researchers found that over half of the student newspapers get some direct or allocated funding from their associated university or college, and that more than a half of the outlets are advised by a university-paid faculty or staff member. These can be problematic circumstances for student free expression as it leaves student journalists vulnerable to efforts of influence on the work they produce. Read further about the key findings and others in the full freedom in college newsrooms report.

As the war and Gaza stretches into its fifth month, protests have continued on campuses across the country. Many universities are still grappling with the best manner of addressing protests and how to support both student speech and safety. Some universities are trying out new policies, such as one at American University, which banned all indoor protests and required organizations to be welcoming to all students and to promote inclusivity through their activities. Administrators at American argue that the new policy is needed in response to recent acts of antisemitism on campus in order to preserve student safety and belonging. In a statement, the university's American Association of University Professors Chapter disagrees saying that the new policy is in direct conflict with the university's longstanding commitment to free expression and urges the president to withdraw the policy.

Throughout the month of February, UC campuses honored Black History Month through events and conversations encouraging community engagement. We want to spotlight some of those efforts. The UC San Diego Black Staff Association held their annual President's Day forum, this year focusing on issues

around the 2024 presidential election. UCSF celebrated the fifth year of the Black Women's Health and Livelihood Initiative, which aims to address the current realities of healthcare inequities for Black women. At UC Santa Barbara, the Office of Black Student Development, a current VOICE Initiative recipient, held a community event focused on the theme of "I Am My Ancestors' Wildest Dreams." These are just a few of the many initiatives that have taken place across the UC system during the past month and will continue throughout the year highlighting a key tenant of our UC community that it belongs to all of us.

So now back to today's guests. As I mentioned at the top, Jennifer Domagal-Goldman is the executive director of the All IN Campus Democracy Challenge at Civic Nation, where she leads a team of student vote experts that focus on the intersections of civic learning and nonpartisan political engagement and higher education to develop a more vibrant democracy. Prior to joining the challenge, Jen directed the American Democracy Project, a national civic learning and democratic engagement network of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

Alex Edgar is a senior at UC Berkeley, go Bears, studying political behavior and public policy. He serves as the external affairs vice president of the Associated Students of the University of California. In recognition of his civic work, Alex was a 2022 recipient of the John Lewis Youth Leadership Award by the National Association of Secretaries of State and the 2023 California Young Stewart Leader Award from California Forward. He's traveled the country speaking about the importance of increased advocacy and funding for intentional youth engagement, particularly in support of their voting and civil rights. He's also been published in Forbes, featured in CBS News Bay Area and provides civic engagement consulting for nonprofits, foundations and college campuses.

I'm exceptionally proud to share that Alex has been the center's student intern for the past two years and is responsible for sporting programming and outreach efforts. Alex first became involved with the center as part of the 2022 class of VOICE Initiative recipients. As part of voice, he led Voicella, a civic engagement music festival at UC Berkeley that garnered thousands of attendees, registered hundreds of students to vote and helped elevate civic education materials.

Both of you are true civic engagement superstars and we're thrilled to have you on SpeechMatters. In the midst of an academic year that's been so focused on speech, we're especially grateful to be able to highlight the important electoral work happening on college campuses nationally. Thanks for being here and welcome.

Alex Edgar:

Thank you so much for having us and it's great. I also, not in the bio, did intern for ALL IN before, so this is a combination of two places that I love.

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

I was going to say we can just have a love fest here and then fight over custody of Alex because you're right, I mean, all of the things you just said about him are correct. He's fabulous. Frankly, if he represents the student level of engagement in our democracy, we're set. The older adults can all sit down and things will be fabulous. But I think that said, we collectively have a lot of work to do and Alex shines as an example of how to do some of that work.

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, I'm sure we're going to agree on many things, but I'm glad we're going to start there. Obviously, both of your work currently centers around youth and democracy, and I'm hoping each of you could share a little bit about the work that you do and also what drew you into the youth engagement space. Alex, why don't you kick us off?

Alex Edgar:

Yeah, I definitely didn't have the most traditional start in youth advocacy. I wasn't really involved in politics at all until around the time that the pandemic started. I was a junior in high school and I had been doing a lot of community service up until then, but primarily through Boy Scouts and PTA and other things. But it was when I was stuck at home and was watching the news constantly and was just feeling more and more disconnected from the world and from my community and then started to see how a lot of people in my local government were intentionally disregarding particularly the voices of young people and people of color in my community.

That started me down a path of voter registration and voter advocacy that has led me to where I'm today, doing a lot of the same things, but on a bit larger of a scale both now at UC Berkeley. But I've done a lot of work across the state and country trying to focus on how can we bring youth to the table in a way that is intentional, that is not just having a flashy face on a panel or something like that, but really engages with young people and their ideas and their experiences in order to make sure we're reaching as many young people as we can, especially given the high stakes of this and every election season.

Michelle Deutchman:

I have to say as well, as you know, people, it's always fun to learn more about them and I did not know that backstory and about how out of COVID actually something really wonderful came in terms of your involvement with voting and voter registration. Okay. Jen, tell us a little bit about your journey to the pinnacle of civic engagement.

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

I don't think it's the pinnacle, but the work that's drawn me here, and I was saying to some of you before we started recording that when I was a college student, the fall of my freshman year was a presidential election. I knew who I wanted to vote for, but I was really busy as someone who would eventually major in English, trying to pass a calculus class, trying to get along with my college roommate, trying to figure out my place on campus and in the world. I wouldn't have cast my ballot if my parents, particularly my mom hadn't sent me the paperwork to apply for an absentee ballot and get it. Part of that was because while my college was an amazing experience and I was on a residential campus and in a state that for the time was fairly easy to vote, it wasn't really part of the conversation.

We talked a lot about community service. In fact, during orientation, we had a citywide community service event. We did a lot of other things, but voting and political engagement weren't really explicitly talked about. I'm a little older than Alex and it was a while ago, but some of the same laws that require college campuses to make a good faith effort to help register students to vote were in place then and weren't actually happening. So as my career progressed and I've worked in higher education, as you talked about in my bio for a long time, I really thought about the importance of what higher education and colleges and universities have on their communities and on student learning. I studied for my doctorate how faculty learned to teach for civic purposes and with civic pedagogies in the classroom. I brought that work to AASCU with the American Democracy Project.

As on my personal life, I was engaged in politics and voting and doing political campaigns on the side and those kinds of things. I watched the work we are doing very much talk about community engagement and still leave out the political part, that we shied away from it too often that we weren't talking about that piece that we were creating generations of students who are really talking about how they could make change in other places and ways and that's important, but they also need to understand the political environment and our electoral process and frankly need to be invited in particularly if they don't have a parent like mine who's going to do that for them. So many of them are showing up on our campuses ready to be first-time voters and underprepared either in terms of the civic education they've been given or

maybe they were already registered to open our campuses. That's where my career took a little bit of a shift slightly.

I came in 2018 to join the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. At this point, we're a national nonpartisan initiative that supports and recognizes colleges and universities as they work to improve what we call nonpartisan democratic engagement. We define that as having three parts, civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation. So as we work to make nonpartisan democratic engagement programs a defining feature of campuses and culture, we are working with almost a thousand campuses at this point across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, including UC Berkeley and many of the other UCs, including my own alma mater, the University of Rochester. Those institutions collectively represent almost 10 million students. So that work that we're doing to help create support and recognition for campuses to do this work, I think, is helping to change some of the narrative and means that more students are being asked and invited into a process that then allows them to become habitual voters and really participants in our democracy in a way that we really need.

Alex Edgar:

One thing I just wanted to add in based off of what Jen said that I think is so important is the discussion of having a parent or a trusted messenger introduce you to voting because so often our K through 12 education system does not. We see in studies and surveys that most students and most young people don't actually get introduced to what is voting, what is this process like, what is politics, how can I get engaged sometimes until they are government class at the end of senior year of high school when at that point most of us are checked out anyway, or they're in college and they're on their own for the first time and having to make this really big decision of, "Do I vote? How do I vote? What is this even like?"

So I'm sure we'll talk about it more later, but I think really emphasizing having trusted messenger like yourselves there who can actually talk to other people in your communities in older age groups to be like, "We need to connect with young people. We need to hold that hand out to them," so that way they can more readily and more willingly be able to get involved is so, so important.

Michelle Deutchman:

First of all, just a small point of correction, you are the youngest person potentially on this podcast, but we are young, just younger.

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

Young at heart, Michelle. We're young at heart.

Michelle Deutchman:

Yes. Age is just a state of mind, right? It's actually making me reflect. I did have a trusted, like a parent and family that was part of what we did. I took my kids at a very young age to vote with me to stand in the ballot box and help me put the envelope in, but it just making me realize I took AP government. Why didn't we make a field trip to do that? There are so many opportunities. Just to actually go and stand there and see people sign in and see what it looks like. It seems so obvious to me now that that's part of it.

The other thing I really wanted to respond to, and I think we'll get into this later, is that especially Jen, the way you described the three-pronged approach that you're connecting, and this is something Alex and I have spent a lot of time talking about, voting with civic learning, that it's not just... Because I do think I was raised like you voted and that was your civic engagement, just doing that, that I don't think it was the idea of opening up civic engagement to be something that you could do every day. You just didn't have to wait for a primary or a presidential election.

So we're certainly in a very unique time right now, is in the run-up, the very long run-up to this presidential election. I'm curious, each of you have different vantage points and I'm wondering if you could share what are you hearing from students right now during this academic year. Let's start there.

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

Michelle, such a great question. I think to connect what you were just saying and that end piece with the question you're asking now, I think we really believe at ALL IN, and I really believe passionately myself, that civic engagement is something that happens every day that we need to be engaged day in and day out, that we need to think about things and that elections are a piece of it and not just big elections like this national presidential election in 2024, but they're always what are often referred to as down ballot and more local elections and pieces like that, and that is incredibly important, and frankly, that the student government elections happening on campuses are important.

The other aspects of that, of the voice that our youngest members of our democracy have is really important. I think this is the most diverse generation our democracies had and they bring a diversity of experiences and thoughts and ideas with them about all of this. So I think we're hearing a number of different things, right? I think much of it echoes the broader conversation, right? I think we know that it's presumed at this point that two maybe young at heart, but definitely older than any of us on the podcast, white men are likely to be are presumptive nominees for the highest office in the land. Many people, including many young people in college students find that unexciting.

I think we have grown to the point where we have started to expect it to be exciting or sexy or to want to have beer with the candidate or wine or coffee or whatever your beverage of choice is. I think there's an aspect of that doesn't need to be the case, right? We need to help pick who's best from our choices, who's the best suited, who meets the policy needs we most stand by, who has the combination of knowledge and experience and aptitudes and whatever else you want to fill in to do that work. I have not always been excited about the people I have chosen personally to cast ballots for and I presume that that will continue to be the case at different points.

We also then need to get young people to run for office and we're seeing them do that, right? We're seeing them, they're not one issue voters just like most other people aren't. So they are caring about it. It's frankly despite the fact that it somehow is almost March of 2024 and the fact that this election seems to have been talked about for a long time already, we're not there yet. We're still in the primary season. Yes, I want students to vote in the primaries. That is particularly confusing for a lot of young people who don't necessarily affiliate or have an affinity to a particular political party and all of a sudden realize maybe they can't vote in a primary in some states if they don't declare it by a certain time.

So I think there's a lot of work to be done, but I'm also seeing leaders like Alex and leaders of on-campus nonpartisan campus voting coalitions and groups on campuses do the work and show up and they're talking to their peers and they're demanding that their campuses have policies and procedures in place that are going to allow them to have access to what they need to make sure that they're registered and ready to vote. So I'm cautiously optimistic and hopeful and also ready to do the work to help convince young people that their voice matters and that too many people want them to sit out the election. Alex, I'm really curious though what you're hearing from your peers.

Michelle Deutchman:

I'm also really curious and since you raised it, Jen, if you could also touch on this issue of age and whether you think that it really is playing a role in terms of how younger people are responding to this particular presidential election.

Alex Edgar:

Yeah, I'll actually respond starting off with a story just from last week. I was doing a voter registration, an education training for a club on campus and had just wrapped up my presentation explaining we have a primary in California on March 5th. It'll be very interesting. It's the first really competitive Senate seat we've had in quite some time. Also, in Berkeley where I'm based out of, we also have representative seat, the state Senate seat. We have so many really interesting elections going on that's been awesome to talk to students about. I actually at the end was asked the question whether someone could register to vote or register with a party preference before the primary and then change their party preference to no party preference after the primary just because they wanted to have their voice be heard inside the political party and the two-party system were in, but don't feel like either party represents them in reality.

I think that was a story that showed what I've been hearing in general on campus, where we have a bunch of young people, gen Z students who really feel like neither party is connecting with them and really feel like in particular, given the two candidates, don't really have a connection to the candidates that are running and are feeling like, "Is there a point in voting when I don't feel like either one of these options represent me and my values?" I think that has been across the board, something I've heard and even coming to the primary election where you have a lot of candidates, even on the Senate race in California, but students just aren't excited by most of them and feel like a lot of the narrative hasn't even really been reaching us as college students.

So I think the general vibe has been a lot of lack of excitement, a lack of connection, and genuinely a lack of outreach from any political candidates to young people in any of the places that they exist. There's been minimal on our college campuses, but honestly not even as much on social media. I mean, just was it a couple weeks ago, Joe Biden's campaign finally joined TikTok, which has been the most influential social media site for months, if not years now. I think there is a slow shift going on where both parties are realizing that they need to talk to young people and they need young people to vote for them if they want a chance to win, especially in Battleground states.

My worry is just from talking to lots of students on the ground is it might be too little too late. As I think Jen mentioned, people are becoming less of, "I'm this party voter," and it's more like, "Okay. What issues have I interacted with? What am I passionate about and how is that actually reflected?" So I think a lot of young people are tired of being judged for not wanting to vote with the party on either side that they might've traditionally been a voter for, and instead are really trying to use their voices and their votes and their advocacy to hopefully get someone to listen. I think that is the theme of this year is how can we get politicians to listen to young people?

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

Alex, I think that story is compelling and I think I always learn more as we have conversations. I think what's interesting to me too is Circle has some recent data out that says not only is it important for campaigns to reach young people... And that can be hard to reach, some of the youngest voters who haven't yet voted because they're not in the mix. They're not on the email list. They're not on the registration list that they can get access to and gain. So some of the ways they do that is by showing up on college campuses and things like that obviously. Some of that happens usually often more once primaries are over. So I think there's some time here, but you're right. But one of the pieces the Circle report found was that too many young people report feeling too unqualified or uninformed to participate in our democracy.

I think the piece of it we have to remember are those often aren't the students I'm talking to, right? I'm often talking to the Alex's, right? That's the joy of my life, but I'm talking to the students mostly who are on the campuses doing the work and they're talking to their peers. But it also tells us that not only do they not feel like they're being reached by the campaign, so they don't know somewhere, particularly with some local elections, whatever. And then I think, Alex, you're still going to school in California, but you're not school in the school where home is. So getting that information about whether you choose to vote as you are allowed to where you're at school in Berkeley or you choose to vote further in Southern

California where home is, you have that obvious option. But if you choose to vote at home, you don't get some of the same information, even if they're trying to get it to you, especially as we've seen the degradation of a lot of the more local press.

So I think there's this piece, and that's part of where higher ed needs to step up and do its role. That role is not just students doing the organizing that Alex and others are doing, but campuses saying, "Okay. We have a role to play here. How do we help them understand where to find more information about their candidates? How do we invite candidates to campus so that our students are hearing from them?" I think that's where this synergy that at some of the best places exists so that students can figure out how best to reach their peers and talk to their peers, but it happens within our broader civic learning culture.

Michelle Deutchman:

We're going to turn to the role of institutions in a minute, but I want to just go back to something I just pull a little bit on this thread of the inevitability of it being a two party race, and even in this case, the almost inevitability of who the candidates would be. I'm thinking in my lifetime of Perot or Nader, but this idea that a third party hasn't appeared to be a "realistic option." So if students feel like it's all kind of inevitable, well, not just students but adults, but what do you say to younger voters who are either, "What's the point? We can't change the two-party system. It seems like we're having the same candidates. We're not uplifting younger voices"?

How do we help them? Well, and then I would even add in that in certain states in particular, I know I felt like this as a voter in California, almost like, "What's the point, right? We're a very blue state. I sort of know how things are going to go, and so does it really matter if I go?" So sort of these different levels of inevitability and this idea of, "Is what I cast my vote for, does it really matter?" How do you counter that question or feeling?

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

I mean, we're both looking at you.

Michelle Deutchman:

I know. Well, it's a really hard question, so I don't think there is an answer. I guess I'm just interested in when you have these conversations, well, I'm assuming you have them, which I probably shouldn't do, what are some of the things that you say?

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

So we're both frantically nodding at you that clearly we have the conversations and since the listeners right now can't see us doing that, I'll just articulate that. I think it's a couple of things. I think from my vantage point, part of what we're looking at is the data and then hearing stories from campuses. So I was expecting to start to hear... Because I lived through some of the Perot and Nader and other pieces like you, Michelle, in our young at heart lives, and so I was expecting to hear some of that happening and it could still. What I've been hearing more so is this like, "I may sit the primaries out and then vote. I may pull my nose and vote. I may just vote dumb," that kind of thing. I'm not hearing a lot around third-party candidates right now in young people. That doesn't mean it's not happening. It's early and often that stuff comes a little bit later.

What I am hearing though is that where the excitement is where they start to see themselves represented, and I think the data plays that out. The representation happens in that we're starting to see the first gen Z folks in office. We're seeing more and more of them run for office. So I think we've seen Vice President Harris start to have some really great conversations with college students and young voters, and I think some robust conversations happening that way. I think we're seeing it in different places around the country happening. I think the other thing they're paying attention to is the issues that they care about.

They're just not, as we were saying earlier, one issue kind of thing and there's a lot of competing priorities. How do you stack up those issues and where do people stand on it? A lot can change between now and November, and so it'll be interesting to watch it play out.

But for me, as we have some of that conversation, I think a piece of it is saying there are so many people who want you to stay home, right? They're changing voting laws to make it harder that your student college IDs, even at public institutions, can't be used as voter IDs and you can't use that, and then, "we're going to make you jump through these hoops and prove who you are, even though we clearly know." You know what I mean? So I think for me being able to say, "Don't give into that, right? Don't let them silence you. Your voice matters and it matters that you show up and have that say. And then continue to push for that change, continue to push so that we can move to more of a place that has the third-party system or get more folks that you want to run for office. Think through some of those other ways that you want to show up."

That's maybe not a perfect answer and not a perfect answer, but where I'm at right now. Alex, you are nodding with me, and also I'm sure you have some other bite of really important information to share with all of us.

Alex Edgar:

Yeah, I think a couple of things came to mind, both from what Michelle was saying, but also from what you were saying. I think looking from my perspective, I was born in 2003 and growing up didn't really have much of an idea of politics, but growing up during the recession. The first political experience I remember was coming into my middle school classroom the day after Trump's election and seeing myself and tons of my peers visibly shaken by that, but also having an entire other half of the class celebrating and wearing MAGA hats and running around campus, super excited about it. I think that has been the mindset that most gen Z voters have grown up in. It is from the Trump era through COVID-19, through the Black Lives Matter movement, through all of these incredibly powerful, massive, dysfunctional times.

We haven't really seen the, in particular, federal government working in a way that we can really aspire to see change in, right? We've seen dysfunction in Congress and nothing's passing because the filibuster and the House does this. I think for so many young people, we are not just as, "Oh, are we tired of a two-party system that often has candidates that don't represent us?" But it's the democracy that we're participating in hasn't really shown to many of us that it can work, and I think that is part of the problem that many people from even millennials and older generations. They at least can look to a time that it might've been more functional, that the partisan split. We were able to overcome it for something that was important, right?

I was just in class the other day, we were talking about the Voting Rights Act and how it was actually under Republican administration said the Voting Rights Act was re-approved and reauthorized again and again, and that is a perfect example of something that your older generations could look to as we may have disagreements, but we support all young people, all people voting, but for a lot of gen Z, we just don't have that. We don't have a positive political experience to look to as this is why us voting matters. When Roe v Wade was overturned, the immediate response from both parties was, "How can we fundraise? How can we mobilize based off of this?"

The conversation wasn't how can we talk to the people, the American people and be like, "Hey, this is a massive change. Are you okay?" How are we going to move forward in a way that centers the humanity of our population and isn't so focused on we need this political win just to maintain a shred of human dignity? I think that is where the issue has been, is that young voters don't often see that hope that is so often talked about. We definitely see a lot of young people who want to be engaged, and that's why I think, Michelle, you were talking about third parties. We've seen a lot of young people engage with the Green Party or others that might not have been the norm before and even getting involved in primary elections for candidates that they may not think will win.

I mean, even looking at the Republican primary, there was a ton of candidates and a ton of people who are really passionate about those candidates. That is a good sign that we have people who want to engage in this decision-making process. I think it falls back into politicians and broader government establishment to see... We understand that we might not have been showing people that there is someone to put faith into. How can we look towards young people and say, "We actually have something that we want to offer"?

Michelle Deutchman:

I think that's such a critical point, and it's actually making me think of an analogy to how people talk about having dialogue across difference or difficult conversations. I feel like, well, first of all, you have to inculcate the skill, but also where is the role modeling for how to do that? I feel like I think there's a pretty big lack of role modeling. What does that mean? Why are we surprised that people don't have those skills or know what to do? In part because we're not teaching it and also we're not seeing it in society.

I do want to turn to institutions especially because most of the people who listen are part of an institution. I know that one of the main things, Jen, that ALL IN does is you collect these yearly action plans from, if I'm getting it correct, like almost a thousand institutions, and then you review them all, which sounds like a massive job. I guess I'm interested in your sharing what you think has been most impactful and what is working best on the institutional side. I'll start there, and then Alex, we can flip it and you can say right from the, as a student, what do you feel like they're doing well? And then of course, what can be done better?

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

I should clarify and say that we asked campuses to submit an action plan for every two year national election cycle. So we asked campuses to begin turning in what we call civic action plans in December. We have a record number of early campus action plans, which is great. So even more than we had in 2020. We're really excited. Campuses will start to get confidential feedback and scores on those action plans in early March, which is exciting. The next deadline is May 31st.

We don't just do it by ourselves, I should say. We partner with a variety of national coalition partners through the SLSV, Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, folks there, and at the voter-friendly campus initiative through Campus Vote Project, and NASPA, other groups and together have worked on a guide and a rubric. We asked campuses to think about putting their strategy and their goals and really understanding the landscape of who their students are and where they're from and how they're voting, what their local landscape politically looks like in terms of what ID do they need. Is there same-day voter registration? Where is the poll? All of these kinds of things. So the great news is they're looking really strong.

One of the things when we first started ALL IN that we would come across is we would come and we would say, "Okay. Well, to sign up to join, which is free, you have to have a faculty or staff member sign them up." They'd be like, "Well, but this is student work. Our student government does this, this, this, this." We were like, "Yeah, that's great and that's necessary, but it is insufficient because you have an actual federal requirement that you do this work." Thank you, Alex, for doing your little silent snaps in the background that, of course, no one can see, so I'm going to say that. So the best campuses we see have that synergy between the campus administration, which is often this loosey-goosey term we use for the fabulous faculty and staff and other folks that are showing up to do the work day in and day out that are showing up with the students.

So the ones that have created a diverse coalition, so by diverse I mean that have faculty and administrators and local nonprofit groups and students, and ideally a relationship with local elections officials and that those students come from different areas of study, different colleges. If you're a university like Berkeley, different political points of view, but understand that the work has to be

nonpartisan, that they come from different ages and races and gender and all of these things. That's what this robust coalition looks like. The best plans are ensuring that every eligible student is being asked if they are registered or need to update their registration, being given some information about how to do so, and then being helped to be what we call registered and ready to vote, right?

So that means that they have to be invited in. It can't just be students having a table on the quad or in the dining hall, where students who are choosing to self-select to come up or maybe are being chased down by someone like Alex or me to do this because then you're only getting that swath of students who shows up there. Frankly, not every student is someone who is going to a residential college in the 18 to 22, right? So the people who are always meeting students are faculty. So how do we help make sure that students are getting this information, the basic information when they register for classes or when they're in their course management software system, or when they get their student ID, are they being reminded, right? How do we talk about it at orientation? How do we give faculty a couple of slides or the opportunity to have a student come in and talk for a few minutes and say, "This is what's coming up. Here's what you should know." Right?

It's getting that in front of every student, not just the students who are choosing to vote because they're political science majors or are choosing to vote because their mom might yell at them if they didn't, I'm raising my hand, whatever that might be. So the campuses who are doing that are the ones that we're seeing really promise for, that they're creating this infrastructure and these systems that then the students like Alex can show up in and help do more of the motivational piece, help talk about specifics, help really foster conversations, help frankly with a piece of the element that can be kind of a fear factor of even, "How does this work? What's going to happen when I go in there? What's my ballot going to look like? How do I figure out what I'm going to need to know?" All these kind of pieces.

Once you do it once, it's a whole lot easier. You're in the system. You get reminders from the county or the city or the state. So that's the work that we're seeing from these action plans. I think if we can get that synergy between what the campuses are doing and they're showing up in bigger ways than they have before, which I think is really important, then I think it lets the students have that space to do the work that they are the best at.

Alex Edgar:

I really, Jen, want to thank you for how I know ALL IN has been pushing on universities to not let it just be student work because I think that is the fundamental downfall of student voting and why I personally think we see youth voter turnout at lower rates than it really should be is because so often, whether it is young people who are at colleges or universities or even young people who are not are in the workforce or doing other things after high school, is that we feel like it's on students to engage other students. Oftentimes, yes, students are often the best messengers to other students, but there's the belief that they don't need the support to do so that I think causes so many issues. Because even in my experiences at Berkeley, I think so many of the things that we have been able to accomplish have only been because students like myself and others for decades have been pushing the administration constantly, "Can you send out this email to all the students telling them to register to vote?" That's something we just did a little over a month ago.

These are student-led initiatives that need administrative buy-in in order to reach the wide audience. But if it falls on students to lead the charge, the big downfall of university-based organizing is that students graduate. When students graduate, there's almost always a lack of knowledge that it is just not handed over because it's hard to pass knowledge between students as stuff goes on. Students are graduating, whatever it may be. Even if that energy may still be there, if the student who is leading the vote coalition on their campus graduates and never thinks to hand over, "This is the contact we have at the university's registrar office or at the county registrar voters," if we don't have that passed down, then it's like you're back to square one.

I think that's where universities need to be doing more, especially on the administrative side, but also on the faculty side is how can we not rule, not control how we do outreach to student voters, but provide that backbone, that structure of we are here and we will continue to be here long after you're gone? How can that institutional knowledge be used not as a shield to block students from having access to resources or to voting, but instead really use it as that welcome mat that, "Come, come in and we can support the work you're doing"? I think that's where they really have the ability to make such a massive difference.

Michelle Deutchman:

I mean, it sounds like the watch word is partnerships, and then what you said, Alex, institutional knowledge, so a continuum. That was very clarifying. I think a jumping off point, because unfortunately soon we're going to have to wrap up even though we could do hours of conversation, is this idea that with each episode, I want to leave people with some tangible ideas of how they can make impact in the sphere of engagement. Obviously, there's lots of different things I imagine people can do. So I think I'm just going to ask each of you to name one or two or five that people can when they're done listening to this or driving carpool or walking their dog, whatever it is that they can actually go in and do it. So Alex, do you want to start?

Alex Edgar:

Oh boy, good question. Yeah, I'd say the first thing that regardless of who you are or what you do I'd recommend is to reach out to a young person that can help. It can be, I don't know, your kid, your cousin, some student that come to your class or your program, whatever it may be, and reach out and ask first of all how they're doing, always good to lead with that, but also to check in and see how they're feeling about what's going on in our democracy in politics, and if they have any questions that you could help them with, because I think building that relationship with trusted messengers is so critical to getting students to vote. It's less even just saying, "Register to vote. Register to vote," because we're constantly having that shoved in our face and still see how voter registration and voter turnout among young people isn't fundamentally changing. I think by instead focusing it on how can we provide the education and the support to young people, that is really where the conversation needs to start. So that would be my step one.

My second thing would be to really support student-led efforts and initiatives, either on college campuses or in communities, whether that is financially. I promise you, a majority of students who are doing this work are doing it for free, and oftentimes very little resources to even put on events or outreach. But genuinely, whether it's financially or through volunteer hours or just sharing knowledge, providing that assistance to students and other young people who are organizing is so critical. So I think that's really important.

And then the third thing is be involved in your community regardless of whether it's an election season or not. I think showing young people, even if they don't know who you are, showing young people that you are willing to engage in the stuff that they're doing is a surefire way of ensuring that they will engage in our democracy. Because as we discussed before, there is a decrease post-COVID of the feelings of connection to community, of connection to politics given how devices everything has been. So I think role modeling and showing how effective community engagement and partnerships can look like may not be the most apparent and direct way of achieving that goal, but really is a fundamental way of shifting how young people look at politics.

Michelle Deutchman:

Wow, I have conversation, support, be involved, role modeling. Do you want to add anything to the list, Jen?

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

I mean, I want to double down on what Alex just said, but I do have a couple of specific things that, particularly your listeners, Michelle, that are coming from positions on college campuses or working with college campuses as faculty or administrators could particularly do as well as the students who are listening. Before I get them specifically, I should just say that the campuses that are participating in ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and are submitting action plans and doing the work that we really talk about, we saw in the last presidential election that their students turned out more than two percentage points higher than other peer institutions. One of the things we launched ironically, or maybe that's not the right word, but during COVID, which wasn't the plan, it just happenstance became when, we launched a president's council and what we call our president's commitment to full student voter participation.

Initially, I thought about it in a lot of ways as something that was symbolic, that we wanted college presidents to be able to say, "This matters. Our campus is about this. We're going to do everything possible to make sure that every eligible student is asked to register and vote." That certainly has that symbolic power. It has also opened a lot of doors and says and signals to the rest of campus that this work matters. So we actually in 2020 also saw over a five percentage point increase in college student voting at campuses whose president or chancellor made this public commitment, and so some of my action items flow out of that.

So the first one is if you are a young person or if you are a young at heart person, please make sure you go to allintovote.org and either check or update your voter registration. Make sure you're ready for primaries coming up. Make sure you're ready for the general election. Make sure you realize if you moved, you have to update it, right? It could be that you just moved across campus or that you move from campus to off-campus, or you moved clear across the state like Alex or you moved out of state. Any of those things, you need to make sure you're doing that and double-checking it and that you're ready.

While you're there, go to the tab at the top that says Pledge To Vote. Make your pledge to vote. I promise you, you'll get an email that just reminds you before a deadline. You're also going to be asked to make a pledge to remind three of your friends or family. And that piece is really important because the data says that young people, they absolutely aren't on TikTok, but they report that most of their trusted messages are their schools and their family. So I think it's really important for us to make sure that we're getting that trusted message and that we're reminding folks and inviting them in. If you want to get more deeply involved, check on our allinchallenge.org website. If your campus participates on ALL IN, check to see if your president or chancellor has signed our commitment. If you need more information about how to do that, you can send an email to allinchallenge@civication.org.

And then we also do work specifically to recognize students like Alex. He's one of our 2023 Student Voting Honor Roll Member nominees. Right now, we have our nominations open so any of our participating campuses can nominate a student by March 26th for our 2024 classification. Finally, we do a lot of work with college athletics. So if you are in an athletic department or work with your athletic department, we have a coaches' pledge. We really encourage coaches to talk to their student athletes because a lot of student athletes are disproportionately not from the community where they're in school and often are busy and traveling and doing lots of other things, and have basically full-time jobs in addition to doing schoolwork. We want to make sure that they get that information and can themselves be ambassadors for this work.

So I really hope that your listeners take time to find hope, like I do, in the work that Alex and students like Alex are doing, to find hope in this kind of next generation and to really invite them in so that we can realize the democracy that we want, even if it's not quite the one we have yet.

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, I'm feeling both inspired and motivated that after we wrap, I am going to be studying a little more closely my March 5th ballot and maybe reaching out to three or more friends or family to make sure

they're doing the same. I just want to reiterate my gratitude to both of you for coming on and sharing with heart and insight and expertise. You have busy work of helping to save our democracy, and so the fact that you took an hour out to share your thoughts with our listeners means a lot and I just want to extend my gratitude.

Jennifer Domagal-Goldman:

Well, we extend our gratitude right back at you, Michelle, and I'm just so grateful that Alex is one of the students doing this work day in and day out.

Michelle Deutchman:

Right. We'll be able to say like, "Oh, we knew him when."

Alex Edgar:

I'm so grateful to both of you for helping me find my place in this work. I really wouldn't be where I am today without either of you. So very, very grateful to be here.

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, that's a perfect way to end.

If you've made it to this point in the episode and aren't already registered to vote, press pause and do so now. No matter where you live, go to vote.org to check your voter registration status, register to vote, and learn more about the election timeline in your state. Primaries and caucuses will commence from now until June all leading up to the general election. Your voice deserves to be heard, so vote. If you haven't already looked through the panelists and topics for the center's upcoming SpeechMatters Conference, Politics, Polarization and Perils on Campus, I encourage you to register and learn more. It's taking place on April 18th. Finally, applications for our 2024-2025 Class of Fellows are open until March 15th. Thank you for tuning in, and we'll talk to you next time.