

Creating Citizens Speaker Series

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Project Summary

Young people’s voices are an integral part of our democracy. Yet, Gen Z and Millennial voters consistently turn out at lower rates than older generations. To inspire youth civic engagement, the Associated Students of the University of California Vote Coalition and the Commonwealth Club launched a first-of-its-kind partnership: the Creating Citizens Speaker Series, in 2022. This speaker series gives UC Berkeley students and community members the opportunity to listen to and ask questions of leading minds in politics, media, and education as they learn how to become better, more involved citizens.

In 2023 and 2024, we took what we learned from our incredible past events with speakers like CA Attorney General Rob Bonta, Vice Chair of the CA Democratic Party Betty Yee, and Tennessee State Representative Justin Jones, and expanded the program to reach more students and engage them more directly with our democracy. We hosted three events, “The Influence of Environmental Activism on Gen Z Voting, Additionally,” “Passing the Torch: A Conversation with Barbara Lee,” and “Are We Too Polarized to Govern?: The Importance of Working Across Political Divides.”

Impact

Over the course of the three events, we hosted over 700 students, faculty, and community members in conversation about these critical issues for our student body. Since all three events focused on the importance of youth voices being centered in politics and the need for difficult conversations with people you disagree with, we are confident that this message had a significant impact on its attendees, particularly during the 2024 primary election and lead up to the 2024 general election. Additionally, through our social media outreach, we have reached thousands of other students and community members, and even more through the Commonwealth Club of California’s YouTube channel, podcast platforms, and radio affiliates. We accomplished all of the objectives we had set out to reach, particularly by continuing to provide UC Berkeley students with access to elected officials and community leaders who had expertise to share. Every event ended with long lines of students and community members waiting to take a photo and have a conversation with our esteemed guests.