

Democracy Workshops: Preparing for the 2024 Election

Philip Goodrich, Manager of Campus Life Initiatives,
UC Los Angeles

Project Summary

The Democracy Workshop series was an educational and programmatic effort aimed at preparing UCLA students to engage with democracy – both in the 2024 election season and beyond. While some might have considered the 2023-2024 academic year an “off-season,” we at UCLA Student Affairs viewed it as an opportunity to guide members of our campus community through the skill development necessary to be active participants in the political process ahead of a critical election. During fall 2023, we hosted workshops on “Critical Media Literacy as a Tool for Empowered Civic Engagement” and “Strategies for Talking Across Political Differences During a Polarized Time.” During winter 2024, we hosted workshops on “Understanding Elections with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk” and a special edition watch party for the California’s U.S. Senate debate. And, during spring 2024, we hosted a workshop on “Understanding Your Ballot with staff from LAist,” a local newsroom. Our conceptualization and implementation of the Democracy Workshop series centered student learning, development, and engagement and, thus, each session featured informative presentations from experts in the field, fun and interactive activities, and, of course, free food and drinks.

Impact

Our five (5) Democracy Workshops had a positive impact on the students who attended and UCLA’s overall civic culture. On average, each workshop had around 30 student attendees, primarily undergraduate, who undoubtedly gained knowledge about important civic topics (e.g., media literacy, bridge building, elections administration), networked with key civic leaders (e.g.,

UCLA faculty, staff, county election officials, local reporters), and enhanced their community on campus (e.g., strengthened relationships with peers, learned more about relevant student organizations). Some student reactions to the Democracy Workshops can be found in this [article](#) (hyperlinked) written by the UCLA Newsroom. In addition to project objectives being met through the direct impact on student attendees, there were other positive effects. For example, our session with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (Dean Logan and team) allowed us to develop a better relationship with our county election office and even register a handful of voters in advance of the November 2024 General Election. Further, our special edition watch party for the California's U.S. Senate debate garnered media attention from NBC Los Angeles, allowing us to shed light on these workshops, the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, and democratic engagement writ large.