The Promise and Perils of Interpartisan Friendships for Fostering Democratic Learning and Reducing Values-Based Polarization on Campus

by ***Tara D. Hudson, PhD***

by ***Alyssa N. Rockenbach, PhD***

Table of Contents

Background and Objectives 2

Methods 6

Findings: Key Themes from the Stories of Participants' Interpartisan Friendships 8

- How Did the Friendship Develop? 8
- How is the Relationship Shaped by Their Campus? 12
- What Challenges and Conflicts Have they Experienced? 17
- How Do the Friends Sustain and Deepen Their Relationship? 25
- How Has the Friendship Challenged and/or Changed the Friends' Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes? 29

Participant Recommendations 32

- Recommendations for Campus Educators 32
- Recommendations for College Students 41

References 44

Appendix A: Interview Participant Demographics 46

Appendix B: Participant Narrative Accounts 47

- Ajay 47
- Chase 48
- Ellery 50
- Georgianna 52
- Grace 54
- Jack 55
- Jessica 56
- John 57
- Katherine 59
- Margo 62
- Mary 63
- Max 65
- Moses 66
- Selena 68
- Vanessa 69

1. Background and Objectives

While political divisions within the U.S. are not new, divisiveness based on partisan identity has become especially intransigent in recent years, often manifesting as disparagement of and outright animosity toward those on the political "other side" (Hartman et al., 2022; Spinner-Halev & Theiss-Morse, 2024). This tribalism is a particular threat to our democracy today, amplifying anti-democratic attitudes and prejudice and discrimination toward members of minoritized groups, as well as undermining social support systems and trust on a societal level (Hartman et al., 2022; Patel, 2018). Indeed, only about 1 in 5 U.S. adults has a friend who identifies with the opposing political party (Dunn, 2020). These sentiments have only amplified in the wake of the 2024 presidential election. College communities are not insulated from the effects of partisan divisiveness and rhetoric, as recent events such as campus protests related to the Israel-Hamas war have demonstrated.

Higher education has long touted its civic mission of preparing students to thrive in a democratic and pluralistic world (Hurtado, 2007), and colleges and universities hold unique promise for developing students' facility to engage constructively across political boundaries (Hartman et al., 2022; Luo, 2021). Yet without intervention by educators, the increasing campus polarization—across partisan divisions as well as other sociocultural boundaries, with which political beliefs are often deeply intertwined (Hartman et al., 2022; Iyengar et al., 2019; Morgan, 2021)—makes this mission increasingly challenging to achieve. However, as Nossel (2023) observed,

> Amid the turmoil, there is a chance to ask how our campuses reached this point and, more important, what they can do to become places where differences of background and viewpoint serve as catalysts for understanding and growth rather than for tribalism and conflict. (¶2)

How can we employ the potential of higher education to heal these social divisions?

Over the last decade, our research has examined how college students' boundary-crossing friendships—that is, friendships that transcend sociocultural differences such as race, ethnicity, and religious belief—can serve as powerful sites for college students' democratic learning, enabling them to develop and exercise critical attitudes and skills such as appreciation for pluralism, enhanced empathy, and the ability to have conversations in which they respectfully explore and engage with their differences (Hudson, 2022; Hudson & Rockenbach, 2025a; Hudson et al., 2021; Rockenbach et al., 2019). Recently, we have turned to exploring friendships that cross the social boundary of political belief or partisanship (i.e., interpartisan friendships), given the bridge-building potential of such relationships to counter divisiveness in the current U.S. political climate (Rockenbach & Hudson, 2024; Rockenbach et al., 2024). We define interpartisan friendships as close relationships between individuals who support different political parties or hold divergent political views (Rockenbach et al., 2024).

Our work is founded in the theory of civic friendship, which posits that by developing an individual's empathy for a friend who differs from themselves, we can reduce social stratification and enhance solidarity and unity throughout society (Kahane, 1999; Rawlins, 2009; Shady, 2022; Vela-McConnell, 2011). An extensive body of research, including but not limited to college students, has demonstrated that these effects are real, not solely theoretical. Notably, the reductions in prejudice and social distance as well as enhanced empathy and appreciation for pluralism fostered by boundary-crossing friendship often generalize beyond the two individuals within the relationship: Through the extended contact effect, prosocial outcomes diffuse throughout the friends' social networks (Paolini et al., 2007; Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020;

Zhou et al., 2019), and through the secondary transfer effect, outcomes may generalize beyond the friend's social group to other groups not represented within the friendship (Pettigrew, 2009; Rockenbach et al., 2019; Vezzali et al., 2021). These mechanisms reflect civic friendship's core tenet that friendship enhances solidarity and unity by helping us to develop empathy for and recognize the humanity of those different from ourselves, thereby reducing campus polarization.

One notable finding from our previous research has been the foundational role that opportunities for informal socialization, and the conversation between students that takes place during these moments, play in the development and sustainment of boundary-crossing friendship (Hudson, 2022; Hudson & Rockenbach, 2025a, 2025b; Hudson et al., 2021, 2023; Rockenbach et al., 2019). In a recent manuscript utilizing qualitative data from focus groups with students attending multiple institutions (Hudson & Rockenbach, 2025a), we highlighted how having open, exploratory conversations with boundary-crossing friends about their differences helped participants to humanize the difference between themselves and their friend (i.e., to see the friend, and other members of the friend's social group, not as abstract, monolithic stereotypes, but rather as individuals worthy of relationship, care, and respect) as well as to develop empathy for the friend's social group and foster a desire for justice for the friend's social group—all outcomes associated with the transformation that can occur through civic friendship (Kahane, 1999; Rawlins, 2009). We also found that when participants engage in conversation with each other to explore and learn from their differences, they are often actively showing respect for the ways in which they and their friend differ, helping them build skill in respectful dialogue across differences as well as navigate the dissonance they may experience when their beliefs may be challenged by the friend—key components of the democratic learning colleges and universities aim to foster (Hudson & Rockenbach, 2025a).

In summary, political polarization is undermining the ability of colleges and universities to achieve their civic missions. Yet we know many college students (41%) form meaningful relationships across partisan differences (Rockenbach & Hudson, 2024), and the theory of civic friendship, along with limited evidence from our prior qualitative work in this area, suggests that when students do form these relationships, they engage in conversations to respectfully explore those differences, thereby developing empathy and appreciative attitudes toward the friend and the friend's group—that is,

they learn to see those on the political "other side" not as enemies but as fellow humans worthy of relationship and respect. These effects may then generalize throughout students' social networks, helping to heal divisiveness on their campuses. Despite the powerful educational potential of these relationships, however, only minimal research has been conducted to date on understanding college students' experiences within interpartisan friendships; more research is needed, especially research that can inform educational interventions educators can deploy to support these friendships.

Therefore, the purpose of our project was to explore the experiences within and outcomes of college students' interpartisan friendships. As we noted in our prior work on college students' interpartisan friendships, these is a need for additional "research that delves more deeply into the stories of college students' political boundary-crossing … to advance our understanding of both the promise and perils these relationships introduce" (Rockenbach & Hudson, 2024, p. 12). The political dimension of college student friendship networks has yet to be explored in depth within higher education scholarship; thus, this study makes an important empirical contribution. The heart of this project, though, centers educational practice for democratic learning. Our primary goal was to develop practical guidance for college and university educators to encourage and support these educationally vital relationships, and the democratic learning they foster, among their students.

The overarching research question guiding this project asked, What are the stories of college students' interpartisan friendships? Sub-questions included:

- How did the friendship develop?
- How is the relationship shaped by their campus?
- What challenges and conflicts have they experienced?
- How do the friends sustain and deepen their relationship?
- How has the friendship challenged and/or changed the friends' beliefs, values, and attitudes?
- What are participants' recommendations for fostering interpartisan friendships more widely on their campuses?

This project was timely and necessary in this pronounced moment of rampant partisan animosity. Hartman and colleagues (2022) contend that deeper engagements across partisan lines will be vital to turning the tide and reducing animosity in a way that endures. They suggest, "It may be easier to change discourse norms of more local institutions, especially universities, because many people there are committed to the civil exchange of ideas" (p. 1198). This project was a response to that call, as we translated our findings into a toolkit featuring actionable strategies and educational interventions to counter the tide of values-based polarization and political partisanship in higher education and foster democratic learning and dialogue across difference.

Nossel (2023) notes that universities must engage in "teaching students the values and skills they need to resist polarization and ensure the survival of our teetering democracy" (p. 4) and adds that "They need to take an active role in creating lively, engaging spaces where students can cross boundaries, open up, tell their stories and be heard" (p. 19). We learned from students who have taken steps in their own lives to disrupt the polarizing impact of remaining in divided echo chambers. Their stories, insight, and recommendations offer a foundation from which campus communities—including campus administrators, student affairs staff, faculty, and many others—can create opportunities, curriculum, programs, and spaces that set the stage for interpartisan engagement, bridge-building, and relationships. Our toolkit offers campus educators a rationale for initiatives as well as a path forward that considers the potential challenges, identity-related nuances, and contextual factors evident in students' stories. On campuses that take a proactive approach to supporting students' interpartisan friendships, guided by the strategies in our toolkit, we anticipate positive civic outcomes for the students in the friendships. We also expect cultural shifts within the campus at large as the effects of these relationships amplify throughout students' social networks and influence campus norms to make crossing partisan boundaries and countering the divisive forces of political polarization more likely.

2. Methods

We utilized narrative inquiry to explore the stories of college students' interpartisan friendships, including how the friendship developed; how the friends sustain and deepen their relationship; challenges and conflicts they've experienced; how the friendship has challenged and/or changed the participant's beliefs, values, and attitudes; how the relationship is shaped by their campus environment, including support they've received or needed; and recommendations for fostering interpartisan friendships more widely on their campuses. Narrative inquiry is particularly useful for illuminating complex human phenomena that occur across time, under particular personal and social conditions, and within specific contexts (Clandinin, 2023), as college students' interpartisan friendships do.

We recruited participants attending colleges and universities across the U.S. through social media, higher education-focused professional networks and listservs, and organizations that work with college students on civic engagement and related topics. The timing of our recruitment and data collection—taking place in fall 2024, just before the U.S. presidential election—meant that many college students were frequently navigating partisanship and political polarization within their everyday peer interactions and campus experiences. The flyer and recruitment email directed interested students to an online survey to confirm eligibility and answer demographic questions. Potential participants had to meet three eligibility criteria:

- They must be a current student at a U.S. college or university.
- They must be at least 18 years of age.
- They must have, or previously have had, at least one close college friend who is politically different from themselves.

We defined "close friend" as someone with whom the potential participant spends (or spent) a lot of time and who is (or was) one of their best friends.

A total of 115 participants met eligibility criteria and completed the survey. The survey collected demographic information about participants and their interpartisan close friend, asked whether the participant was still friends with that friend, and posed four open-ended response questions (wording in parentheses was for participants who indicated their friendship had ended):

1. Please share the story about how you and your (former) close politically different friend met.
2. How do (did) you and your (former) close friend experience the political differences in your relationship?
3. What do (did) you value most about your (former) close friendship with your politically different friend?
4. What is one thing colleges and universities should do to support students' friendships across political differences?

All participants completing the survey were entered into a drawing for one of four $25 Amazon gift cards.

Of the 115 participants who completed the survey, 60 (52%) agreed to be contacted for an interview. We reviewed survey responses to identify demographically diverse and information-rich cases to contact with a request to participate in the interview portion of the study. Of the 60 survey respondents who consented to being contacted for an interview, we emailed 34 with information about interview participation, and 15 (44%) participated in an interview. Each interview participant received a $50 Amazon gift card. Appendix A provides demographic information for these 15 participants. Participants attended eight different institutions located in six U.S. states; six institutions were public while the remaining two were private non-sectarian.

We utilized two data generation strategies that enabled these 15 participants to express their interpartisan friendship stories in multiple ways: creation of a visual collage followed by a one-on-one interview. First, each participant received a prompt to guide their creation of an artistic representation of their interpartisan friendship. Producing the collage allowed participants to reflect on their friendship stories in advance of the interview, enhancing the quality and validity of the interview data (Glegg, 2019). Second, each participant engaged in an interview with one of the researchers via a virtual platform (Zoom or Microsoft Teams). During the interviews we asked participants to share the story of their friendship using a semi-structured interview protocol that invited participants to share the life story of their close friendship as they see it and asked about the critical incidents (Mertova & Webster, 2020) that came to mind as they reflected on the friendship. We also asked each participant to walk us through their collage.

We engaged in two steps to analyze the data from our interview transcripts with the goal of illustrating similarities and differences in participants' friendship journeys as well as the contexts and conditions that have influenced their journeys. For the first level of analysis, we developed a narrative account for each participant that centered key moments in their interpartisan friendship, aligned with our research questions. Through this process, we identified narrative threads within each participant's friendship story (Clandinin, 2023). For the second level of analysis, we engaged in coding to identify themes across narrative accounts, engaging in both inductive and deductive coding associated with the paradigmatic mode of analysis (Kim, 2016).

3. Findings: Key Themes from the Stories of Participants' Interpartisan Friendships

Here we present key themes from the stories participants shared with us about their interpartisan friendships. We present the themes pertaining to each of the subquestions guiding our study: how the friendship developed; how the relationship is shaped by their campus; the challenges and conflicts they experienced; how the friends sustain and deepen their relationship; and how the friendship challenged and/or changed the friends' beliefs, values, and attitudes.

3.1 How Did the Friendship Develop?

3.1.1 Retracing the Beginning: Stories of Friendly First Encounters

Early in each interview, we invited participants to share the story of how their interpartisan friendship began. We asked them to recall those first moments and conversations with as much detail as possible to give us insight on the conditions that set the stage for these unlikely friendships to unfold. Although most participants met their friends on (or near) campus during college or graduate school, several others shared stories of friendships that pre-dated college or had off-campus origins.

3.1.2 Friendships with Pre-College or Off-Campus Origins.

The longest standing friendship in our study was that of Moses and Sally, who were childhood friends and whose relationship continued the tradition of friendship between their two families. Moses recalled,

> Me and Sally pretty much grew up together. We had parents that lived in the same town, grew up in the same little part of our county, and went to high school together, did all the things that I'm doing now with my friend, you know, back in the day.

Reflecting on elementary school, when he remembers initially encountering Sally, Moses went on to share his first memory of his childhood friend:

> My earliest memory was probably when I was about – because, like I said, even before we went to school together, we were family friends. So, when I was about, I'd say nine or something like that, her mom was throwing this play … She was doing *Little Shop of Horrors*, and I was the plant or something. And that's my earliest memory that I have.

John and Ryan's friendship also got its start prior to college when they were teenagers. The two had initially gone to different high schools in the same town and had mutual friends. When Ryan switched schools and began attending John's, the two became acquainted when John offered Ryan wardrobe support as they prepared for a school dance. Including a picture of a bow tie in his collage, John recounted the story:

> And then there's a homecoming dance. And then randomly, he'd just text me on Instagram [to ask] what I was wearing, and then I told him I was wearing a bow tie. And then he asked if he could borrow one. And then I didn't even know him at the time, but that's kind of just how little boys are, right, like help each other out. So, then I gave him a bow tie. And then, yeah, that's history.

Ajay and Kartik initially encountered one another in high school when Ajay "had a statewide leadership position in high school for a student organization," but their friendship did not take shape until college, during the pandemic, when on Zoom in

> Some 200-person class … I had one person message me saying, "Hey, I recognize you there. Any chance you want to work together?" And so I was like, "All right, yeah, let's work together, why not?," and then formed a study group in that way. So that's how we met.

Grace and Jack—who met at a gaming store where Grace worked while attending community college—illustrate a final example of friendships initiated outside the college context. Grace described feeling left behind as her high school friends went off to other colleges but moved on herself and "found a community at a local game store." Grace's close friend, Jack, "was a regular customer, he and … his girlfriend at the time, now spouse, and a group of three other individuals would play at the game store weekly. Every week we would chat it up." Grace eventually joined the tabletop role-playing game that Jack and his partner hosted at their house—in fact, Grace ran the game, creating storylines for characters for several years.

3.1.3 Friendships Originating within Higher Education Settings.

All other friendship origin stories that surfaced in our study were more explicitly tied to participants' experiences within higher education settings. We heard stories of friendships that began in classrooms, shared academic majors, residence halls, co- and extra-curricular communities, campus coffee houses—or simply through introductions made by mutual friends.

The classroom served as a site for friends to meet and find common ground in their shared interests and experiences. Georgianna found a friend she admired in Annie when

> We met in German class, and we just had so many things – I'm a language learner and she's a language learner as well. She speaks Arabic, Spanish, French. She's a genius, and I have a lot of respect for her intellectual abilities.

The classroom setting gave Georgianna an opportunity to observe about Annie that "she makes sense, you know, like the way that she speaks, you can tell that she's thought a lot about her beliefs and … she researches everything." Georgianna's confidence in Annie's thoughtfulness paved the way for a meaningful friendship across their political differences.

Jessica and Jamie found common ground in their shared experiences as two of few women majoring in engineering when they first met in their physics lab. Jessica recalled,

> I was early, so I was the first one at an empty desk. And I was like, you know, I'll just, I'll try my luck. I'll see who sits with me today because we can't change lab partners. And so she came and sat down. I'm like, "Oh, good! It's at least a girl." And so we joked about that. And she's like, "Yeah, I feel the same way."

As the two left the lab that day, "we stayed a little longer in the building, just to get to know each other, exchange numbers … I feel that we got deeper in conversation than most people do the first time meeting."

Other friendships blossomed beyond the classroom as students encountered one another in other spaces and communities around campus. Mary met her friend Luke "on my hall in my freshman year dorm … I think [we] met like the first night, because one thing about [my university] is they really emphasize house community. They call your dorm your house." Although Mary and Luke were initially part of a "pretty big friend group," the group ultimately became smaller, featuring "me and my roommate and then these two guys who live down the hall. It was the four of us." That her "roommate, Ann, had a crush on Luke also … kept us hanging out … we were pretty good friends all of freshman year." Co- or extra-curricular opportunities brought other friends together, like Vannessa and Jenn, who met through sorority recruitment and Katherine and Marisol who connected in peer leadership training and discovered they shared a major (psychology) and minor (Spanish) and were in classes together. Katherine reflected,

> I don't really know if we would have become as good of friends had we just met in a big psych class or even a Spanish class. But because we were in this [peer leader training] class together, we were able to become better friends, which is really cool.

Chase and Melanie ultimately drew closer as friends through residence life, but their first encounter happened when they were both finalists for a university scholarship program, which

> She did not end up getting … but that's how we met … And then we ended up kind of seeing each other in person for the first [time] at our convocation freshman year. And then we ended up living in the same residence hall and becoming friends.

Informal settings—from peer networks to social spaces—played a role in bringing friends together, as in the case of Margo, who met Eve one summer when her "boyfriend was like 'Oh, I want you to meet so and so … She'll be around all summer.'" Likewise, Ellery met Piper because:

> She knew my roommate, and then I found out she was in my class, and I was like, "Oh, come sit with me in class." And we just got to talking, and … I was like, "Oh, I really like this girl." So we would hang out, go to dinners together in the dorms last year, go to [a] dining hall, and all that stuff. So we got really close because she knew my roommate, and I really liked her and she was in my class.

Selena and Christina met at Starbucks in the campus library on Selena's birthday. Selena described the scene:

> We just started talking about my birthday, what we were doing, who she was, who I was. And you know, we just hit it off, and that's exactly how I meet a lot of my friends … I'm just also a social butterfly. And we just started talking.

Finally, some friendships emerged as one friend befriended another experiencing isolation or bullying. In their first year, Jack met his friend George who he saw "repeatedly, every day." Jack was feeling "isolated" and thought George might be as well. On one occasion Jack decided to "go sit closer to him. And I was just kind of scared to start up a conversation. So, I just took a while and just asked his name." As another example of befriending, Max observed Blake being bullied for being feminine, and Max stood up for him, knowing the pain of being bullied as bisexual. Max explained, "I had to speak up for him."

In sum, college friendships that bridge political differences are forged under a variety of circumstances and across myriad contexts. What many of these stories share in common is an early bonding and reinforcing feature: the spark that is felt when someone's sense of humor or interests are mirrored in the friend, the bolstering effect that comes from shared ties to family and peer groups, or the deepening connection that comes from encountering one another in multiple settings (e.g., in a co-curricular space and in the residence hall; in the peer group and in class). As it turns out, the historical moment in which we interviewed participants was a critical backdrop to their friendship development and lived experiences as friends, which we explore next.

3.2 How is the Relationship Shaped by Their Campus?

3.2.1 Encountering Charged Political Climates with Minimal Support: Campus and Societal Contexts

Politically Active Environments On and Beyond Campus.

At the time we conducted the interviews—in Fall 2024, around the time of the U.S. presidential election—participants described a wide range of political activity and activism on campus. There were movements for justice, controversial speakers, a climate of division and sometimes fear, and dialogue around the issues of the day. Many participants referenced the campus protests surrounding the Israel-Hamas war. Akin to what many participants had witnessed, Moses observed, "It's kind of fizzled down now, but there at the beginning of the conflict in Gaza, after October last year, and after a few months … there was a lot of protests." On the issue of controversial speakers, Selena and her friend were on opposing sides when "we had Kyle Rittenhouse come here, and that was a lot of craziness. And my friend actually was a part of the group that brought him here, and this was … a very scary time." Later, Selena lamented that it

> … just got worse. We had a kickoff event for the LGBT+ Center … and two non-students went on stage and were making transphobic remarks, saying that there's only two genders in front of a room of like 300 plus people … And then, recently, we just had … an incident where somebody wrote on … the wall of one of the dorms "[anti-LGBTQ slur]."

Summing up her experience on campus as a queer person, Selena contended, "it's hard feeling safe."

The election was top of mind for many students, and the uncertainty left some participants feeling fearful, whether on their campus or in society at large. Katherine acknowledged feeling

> … afraid, like not really knowing what's going to happen. Because in my head … whoever gets elected, whatever happens, the other side potentially is gonna be very upset and, you know, it could just go really bad. And part of that does bring in [my university] because I know … we have different people on different sides who are very vocal, and it does kind of scare me a little bit to be like, "OK, you know, this is gonna be a big thing."

Grace, a trans person, also expressed "a lot of worry in terms of the future about being open, about being safe. And, well, that's not directly [about] my campus, specifically, it is just the overall zeitgeist that I feel." When we interviewed Margo shortly after the election, she confided about the public university where she was attending graduate school, "it did feel very cold around campus, like it was very, like, a heavy feeling." This sense of her institution's climate offered a compelling contrast to the

religiously-affiliated institution she had attended as an undergraduate the year prior where "there wasn't really much of a range of political views … It wasn't talked about as much."

Some participants applauded efforts on their campus to assuage political conflict and its impact. Katherine's story illustrated that the campus climate is not a monolith; rather, conflicts and bridge-building were occurring in tandem. On her campus, the same day students protested a controversial speaker,

> We had this interfaith event where we had our priest, a rabbi, and then a minister from a Protestant church all come in and talk about Easter and … what that means to them. So on the day of the protest, I went to that event and I just was like, "OK. This is really cool that we're celebrating differences here at this event," and all this crazy stuff's going on over there, but I'm just gonna try to step away.

Alongside bridge-building events, other campuses were readily offering emotional support in the wake of a contentious election. Vanessa was pleased to see her campus provide

> … mental health resources, post-election, to just talk about how you're feeling, whether you're disappointed, whether you voted for the party that won and want to talk about that because you can't talk to your friends, or whatnot. So, they've been really good about supporting, I guess, the student body.

Other students pointed to the presence of differing points of view on their campus. Ajay, upon characterizing his institution's stance as largely neutral on the issues of the day, affirmed that his university "is not necessarily an echo chamber of solely liberal ideas. There are people that are going to be pretty vocal about their differing beliefs." A number of students called to mind examples of other campuses where protests were more intense than their own and where hostilities between groups were more pronounced. The notion of "it's worse elsewhere" was reiterated by Ellery, who said, "comparatively, it's been pretty tame. The Palestinian protest that they did here was not as bad, I would say, as [a neighboring university's], not bad, but it wasn't as full-force as theirs was." Georgianna, who was actively engaged in the pro-life movement, reflected, "so we're pretty blessed to have a relatively peaceful campus … Stuff gets crazier at other campuses."

What did the political climate on campus and beyond mean for participants' interpartisan friendships? Many participants were not convinced that the multilayered political climate had a direct impact on their friendship. Ajay summed up this perspective when he surmised about the Black Lives Matter protests during the pandemic, "So it didn't necessarily have too much of an impact on us. Of course, we had discussions about that, but yeah, nothing was too impactful." For others, the political backdrop factored into the friends' experiences and conversations—sometimes yielding conflict or tension between them and sometimes offering an opportunity for finding common ground.

Childhood friends Moses and Sally felt the effects of the broader political climate intensely. They argued routinely—and heatedly—and experienced hurt and frustration, according to Moses, who relayed their exchange on election night in 2024:

> I congratulated her the [election] night, because obviously I was up, you know, I was up and watching and watching the swing states, and I—when it was decisive, I just texted her, I said, "Congratulations, Trump won." And then that was met by something that actually made me really upset. She just kept on telling me that she loved me, and that she was grateful for our friendship, and that she was grateful that I was able to sit there and type out that text … and, you know, she's being super nice about it, being super supportive, which honestly made me even more frustrated, to be completely honest, because I just didn't understand *how*. *How*.

Unlike Moses and Sally, Ellery and Piper felt friction between them as the election approached. While there were "a little bit more disagreements" between them, in the end they "talked a lot less politics." Ellery conceded, "So I think we've both been kind of quiet just to not rock the boat, basically."

A protest was a source of tension between Katherine and Marisol when Marisol missed a class they shared without explaining why and asked Katherine for her notes. Katherine was surprised to see Marisol at a protest for a leftist cause while Katherine was tabling for a pro-life student organization. Katherine confided, "So it was kind of a weird time, because I was there for pro-life things and she was there for the protest. … I felt like she maybe felt uncomfortable telling me that." However, they never talked about it.

Selena was frustrated by Christina's decision to not vote in the election, but also felt supported by Christina when hateful acts toward the LGBTQ+ community took place on campus. Feeling solidarity across their political differences, Selena said of her friend, "She hated what happened with the incident."

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and ensuing concerns about women's reproductive rights brought some women together across the political spectrum. Illustrating this bridge-building effect, Vanessa shared,

> She was in favor of the women having their rights and everything, so she felt very strongly about that. I do, too. I was like, "Yeah, I'm here for it." We just never actively went to any protests or anything. But we're on the same page about that.

Even though some of their activist engagements were disparate, confronting issues of racial inequity and a proposed anti-DEI bill brought Katherine and Marisol together to work toward a common goal:

> So her and me, my friend and her girlfriend, actually went to … a kind of a protest that [my university's Black student organization] was putting on, and she was like, "Do you want to come?" And I was like, "Sure."… I wanted to just see what it's about. So that was a really cool moment for me because it did bring up some, you know, political discussion, and I just was like, "Yeah, from what you are telling me about how bad this bill is and how it could really hurt minority students in particular, like it's just crazy." Just being able to talk about that and going to that demonstration was super cool. And that's where the activism kind of comes in, just like being activist and standing up for what you believe in.

3.2.2 Minimal Intentional Support for Interpartisan Friendship from Campus Educators.

There was little evidence that staff, faculty, and administrators—or any campus programming— were helping participants develop, sustain, or negotiate differences within their interpartisan friendships. When we posed the question about whether any educators or leaders on their campus supported their friendship, some participants simply said, "I don't think so. No, not any that I can specifically think of" (Vanessa), or "Yeah, I don't think they care about that" (Max). Margo indicated, "Nothing was ever said for or against it. So, I would assume that I guess it was supported."

Other participants offered further reflection on, or interpretation of, the lack of explicit support for interpartisan friendship. Ajay proposed, "Maybe that's an approach that a lot of faculty members use at the institution, of just don't – if it's gonna lead to potential negative discourse, then just don't address it." Katherine commended faculty at her institution for "being politically neutral." Indirectly, she felt their neutrality was helpful for "friendships like ours, where it's like they don't really make another side feel outcasted, which I think can deter people from one side with talking to people from the other side." Chase's institution was making a concerted effort to address student mental health, and in his view, "I think indirectly supporting mental health has really helped friendships around campus."

A few participants provided examples of approaches that did feel more supportive, even if limited or indirect. Jessica described email communications from student involvement staff in her first year on campus:

> I did get a lot of emails my freshman year for equity and that type of thing and having different friendships or how to combat different issues with your friends … but I'm not really getting too much right now.

Co-curricular spaces, like honors and scholarship programs, supported some students' civil conversation skills that could prove useful in interpartisan friendship. Ellery explained:

> In my honors forum … the thing we're doing is called Think Arguments, and it's a course you can take within the forum, like you can choose to opt into it. And they kind of started it by saying, "This is kind of to teach you how to civilly discourse with people that may not agree with you." And I would say that's where it's been the most represented … but that's really it. None of my political science professors … they were accepting of different ideas, but … they didn't outright say, like, "Oh, you guys should be friends with whoever you want." That was never a topic of conversation. But I would say the honors forum is where I found the most support.

Only Selena described direct support for her friendship with Christina. About student affairs staff, she remarked, "I can go to them if I'm having a problem with my friend." Trusted staff gave her advice on maintaining friendships, reminding her that, "You're not gonna let people who don't know you ruin your friendship; it's not worth it."

3.2.3 Physical Spaces as Connecting.

When participants talked about how their campus shaped their friendship, many referenced the physical spaces that brought them together—and kept them connected. Participants reminisced about meeting in the physics lab, catching up at a favorite coffee shop on campus, studying in the library, and living together or nearby in campus housing.

Jack included a picture of a tree in his collage to represent the setting where he met his friend George on campus. As the two became closer, Jack made sure to "catch up with him in the library." Selena and Christina met in the library coffee shop and continued that tradition as their friendship grew. The central location and late-night availability of the space was a particular perk, according to Selena: "Everybody goes to the library to study … it's like the easiest Starbucks to get to, because it's at a center point [on campus], and … that one stays open later … So that's the one that we always go to." Jessica and Jamie lived close to one another on campus. Jessica appreciated "the convenience of it all" and suggested,

> It's nice to be able to … spontaneously see each other, maybe at the library or different buildings. So it's made it easier to see each other rather than having to plan a time out to see each other. So I can be like, "Hey, are you at the library?" And she'll be like, "Oh, yeah, I'm leaving. But, you know, I could say hi!"

As Katherine described the deepening of her friendship with Marisol, her recollections revolved around physical spaces that were meaningful to their friendship:

> When we started hanging out outside of class, it was mostly at the library to study or to write a paper for Spanish or things like that. And I would say that's kind of where our acquaintanceship kind of grew into more of a friendship because we were hanging out outside of it. And then that gave us the opportunity to have conversations about our lives and things like that. We would get food together at the [dining hall], I remember, after our classes, and that was really good … So we met in the spring of our first year. And then that summer we actually went to the Natural History and Art Museum together as just a fun thing to do, celebrating the year being done. And I would say especially then, that was the really, really fun day for both of us. And that's kind of when we grew into more of a friendship, because we were able to just kind of be nerdy walking around museums together, it was just really fun. And it wasn't so school-related, too. So I think it was just a matter of getting outside of that, like, "we are studying together" into, like, "we are hanging out together" and having fun instead. So that was probably that moment where we kind of just grew from acquaintance to friends.

In the absence of explicit support from campus educators for interpartisan friendship development and sustainment, informal spaces made their mark as the friends embarked on their bridge-building journeys together.

3.3 What Challenges and Conflicts Have they Experienced?

3.3.1 Navigating Political Difference: Deep Divides and Challenges Meet Multifaceted Boundary-Crossing Strategies

Conversations with participants revealed, in the main, that the friends knew one another well; they were able to articulate their own and their friend's political leanings—as well as the differences between them—perceptively and with nuance. The friends experienced political divergence in their outlook on the most contested social issues. Different beliefs about abortion and reproductive rights were a noteworthy difference in many friendships. Georgianna and Annie's incongruity on the matter was illustrated in Georgianna's collage:

> And then there's the little baby … in the bottom left corner, that's about abortion. So that's our biggest disagreement … it's so funny, our biggest disagreement is abortion, but some of the things that we both get so enthusiastic about … is children's rights and protection for children.

Other participants explained how they differed from their friend on the 2024 presidential candidates. Ellery brought to light how she and Piper deliberated about their voting decisions:

> When it comes to the two [presidential] candidates right now, Kamala and Trump, she very much stands with Kamala … she's very "Kamala or nothing." And I kind of am sitting in the middle right now where I'm struggling to even decide who to vote for. And she kind of is confused about the fact of why I'm confused on who to vote for, because she thinks Trump is just not a good candidate and it's a no-brainer. So we differ on that, of who should run and kind of what the best option is, because I kind of want to look at it a little bit more than just party lines.

In addition to being quite aware and knowledgeable about the ways they differed politically from their friend, participants were also conscious of the ways in which other social identity differences added further complexity to the political divides between them. In other words, as political orientation intersected meaningfully with religion, immigrant status, social class, gender, and sexuality (among others), the friends had to be even more thoughtful about bridging differences in the friendship. Ajay spoke to both his shared identities with Kartik as well as their distinctions:

> We are both of Asian heritage. But the difference would be that … we do follow different religions. And that friend actually is more closely tied to Christianity … [and] very, very active in that, in faith and things like that … What else differs? … I was an immigrant. [He was] born in the U.S. and [his] family's been here for some time, so that's also a difference there.

Continuing on the theme of naming religious differences, Jessica indicated about herself and Jamie, "I believe in things she doesn't because of my religion, and she is not religious at all. She is also not straight, and I am." In fact, religious beliefs were frequently referenced by participants as driving political and social views, particularly on issues like sexuality and abortion.

As a final example of the most salient social identities that reinforced political differences, Moses illuminated the dynamics of class and race in his friendship with Sally:

> … she's a little farm girl. She grew up raising animals, and she has a working-class family, a blue-collar dad, that supplies most of the income. And then a mom … who has a side business. Definitely … people that I would imagine … tend to have a little bit more conservative values … I don't know if you can picture a middle aged, conservative, white dad. And that's what Sally's dad looks like.

In sum, political differences between the friends could be pronounced and deeply felt—and often other social boundaries between the friends were interwoven with and extended beyond politics. Given that the friends were readily aware of and able to name (often in detail) their differences, what challenges and conflicts arose between them and how did they navigate those?

3.3.2 Power Dynamics Shape Authenticity.

When asked directly whether they perceived power differences in their interpartisan friendship, most participants were quick to reject the notion that power imbalances were at play. Representative of this sentiment, Ellery responded, "I really don't think so … we come from very similar backgrounds and very similar families, and I don't think I've ever felt like I was better than Piper or Piper was better than me." But as we had further conversation with participants, their stories and observations suggested power dynamics were at work in certain ways within their friendships.

One telling storyline that surfaced among some participants had to do with their inability to be fully open and authentic with their friend. As friends negotiated their political differences, at times they avoided going too deep in conversations about their differences so as not to have conflict or offend one another. We heard revelations about mutual tiptoeing, agreeing to disagree, emphasizing similarity, "moving on," and not always being their fullest selves—while they shared more genuine connections around shared interests and activities that were not political in nature. In many ways, vacillating in authenticity stands as a key strategy as friends navigate their differences and maintain their bonds (which we explore in a later section). Yet, in some friendships it was evident that there were inequities regarding *who* in the friendship could be more forthcoming, which resulted in uneven sharing. In these friendship contexts, one of the friends had more freedom to express their political opinions openly while the friend simply listened or felt fearful about the repercussions that could come with expressing their views. This dynamic tended to play out among friends where there was, in fact, a power differential of some kind—with the friend who kept quieter feeling less educated on the issues or having vulnerabilities because of their marginalized identity.

Grace's collage depicting her friendship with Jack included a picture of a closet where she concealed her identities as trans and autistic. She feared "all the things in the closet … might spark an argument." Grace reflected,

> I'm a very much people-pleaser kind of person. In all of my friendships, in all of my contexts, I have always been the less powerful, and not out of the fault of any other. It is just the way I operate because I try so much to hide myself.

Meanwhile, Jack, a conservative Republican, was much more inclined than Grace to share his opinions within their friend group.

As a paleoconservative, Georgiana felt politically marginalized on campus and described her friend Annie as

> probably more the dominant front in the relationship, you know. Just because … I'm not in the political majority. And so nationally, internationally, me, myself, and who I am is viewed as incorrect, wrong, you know, just in my constitution, in the way that I am, the way that my feelings lead me and the way that my brain and my proclivities lead me, is considered to be wrong. And so I have to cede in areas like that because I am not with the prevailing winds. And so, with the instance of pro-life … she's very confident, she's very assertive, and so she will push, and she will push back … So in that area, I can't really fully be myself and fully relax when speaking with those topics … It makes me feel small … and it makes me not wanna hang out with her anymore.

For Margo and Eve, personality differences and level of knowledge contributed to imbalances in their sharing. While Eve is "very extroverted and opinionated," Margo avoided articulating her opinions as openly because she "didn't really want to say the wrong thing or say something that I wasn't supposed to say just by accident." Margo also expressed not feeling "educated enough to be able to rebuttal." The friends seemed to hold an implicit "agree to disagree" understanding—but Margo said of Eve, "I kind of just let her speak."

3.3.3 Enduring the Stress, Pain, and Tension of Political Discord.

Navigating political—and other salient identity—differences were sources of pain and stress in many of the participants' friendships. Some friends had heated conversations with one another that were difficult to resolve, while others abstained from impassioned debates but lived with "tension in the air." Political differences could become deeply personal sources of strain.

For instance, Moses, who came from a family of immigrants, and Sally, who was a Republican and Trump voter, had maintained their childhood friendship in the face of a falling out between their parents over politics while Moses and Sally were in middle school (soon after the 2016 presidential election). Moses said of their parents' conflict that Sally's parents had expressed

> some things that they didn't really like about immigrants. And obviously my mom—and then my other friend's mom—being products of immigrants weren't exactly super happy about that. And in their mind it's like, "Well, how can you sit here and … say you love me and support me when you don't support the people that I come from?"

The feud among the parents paralleled his friendship, as Moses lamented, "And that is kind of where that same conflict lies in me with Sally." Feeling this conflict deeply, Moses and Sally's conversations at times devolved, as Moses explained:

> I told her that she was voting against her self-interest … I told her that she was voting against our self-interest as middle-class Americans. I told her that she was voting against the Constitution, and I told her that she was voting for bigotry or something like that. And then … she was like, "same to you," and I was like, again, "same to you." … At that point, that's where I put the cork in, because I just knew, even after the words had left my mouth, I knew that I had taken it a little bit too far.

Other participants who felt the personal impact of a friend's beliefs included Selena, who experienced hurt in her exchanges with Christina about abortion because she had a family member who died in the 1950s lacking access to safe abortion. Georgianna illustrated in her collage the pain from holding a religious faith that her friend, Annie, couldn't understand or appreciate:

> The biggest void in our relationship is that I'm a Christian. I believe Christ died for my sins. And that's kind of a core part of my identity, and it's frustrating that I can't fully share in that part of my life with her, you know, she's not gonna understand.

While many friends were able to maintain their friendships, sometimes friends grew apart amidst their differences. Mary and Luke, who had become friends in their first year while living in campus housing, felt their bond diminish once they no longer lived in proximity and also due to fractures in their small friend group of four. Mary described Luke as:

> … very homophobic and racist and misogynistic. But he wasn't trying to be any of those things, if that makes sense. He just didn't realize—he had only been around other people exactly like him who were brought up in the same way he was. And so he didn't understand when he was being racist or when he was being misogynistic or when he was being homophobic.

Mary's friend, Ann, had a "big falling out" when Luke sent Ann, who is Jewish, "some kind of meme about Hamas killing Jewish people or something. But it was very insensitive and it really upset her." Luke didn't understand why Ann got so offended, because it was "just a joke." Mary felt put in the middle of the situation and that her role "was to kind of comfort Ann and not really … tell Luke what he said was wrong." She also didn't understand why Ann got so upset in this instance because this was "unsurpris[ing]" behavior for Luke. Luke was prone to acting this way, according to Mary: "I think he was kind of misogynistic and a lot of times would take that out on me," in part because Mary is a gender studies major, and she felt like Ann would encourage Luke rather than take her side in those moments.

John and Ryan did not experience a dramatic fall-out over their conflict, but rather a gradual cooling of their relationship. Although in high school they bonded over late-night discussions about religion and existence, John confided that Ryan (since college) had started to "shut down the thinking" that questioned Christianity's accepted answers. John, a Hindu, was

> just not satisfied with those answers, and I keep trying to learn elsewhere. And that's just like one of the things I like to talk about, and I've always liked to talk about, probably since, well, at least after the first maybe two years of our friendship. And now it just kinda seems like … I probably shouldn't bring that up with him. But it doesn't feel like maybe even respectful anymore … But I think for me it just, I guess, hurts a little bit, because I don't necessarily have those answers in my life. And that's kind of a spot of questioning and maybe even pain for me. And I guess it just helps sometimes to know that I have friends that are in that same boat with me. And now … I guess it just doesn't feel like he's in that boat anymore.

All told, the friends were not strangers to the pain that can come from deep differences in political—and often interwoven religious—beliefs. Yet many participants were adept at identifying practices aimed at maintaining their relationships. Next, we highlight these strategies participants relied on as they navigated the challenges that political differences brought into their friendships.

3.3.4 Letting Differences Just Be.

Earlier we explored challenges surrounding authenticity. While it's true that some friendships were affected by inequities that led to power differences and uneven sharing, it's also the case that a "let it be" strategy amid tension and conflict could be restorative to the relationship. Jack remarked on his friendship with George that "Sometimes we tend to disagree and we just let it go … We won't press an issue, like, I'll surrender and say, 'Yeah, you win,' to just kind of cut it out." Moses and Sally would "put a cork in it" when their debates became too heated, and Selena and Christina knew when to take a break in tense conversations. When she needs to focus on working or studying rather than a political debate, Selena recognizes, "I don't have the mental capacity to do this right now. So we're gonna just put a pin in this." In addition to hitting pause in a stressful moment, letting differences lie was foundational to the bond that friends Jessica and Jamie shared. Jessica explained,

> I know that she is LGBT and … I don't agree that it's a right thing to be. But I've never brought her down … I know she does appreciate that, but we just really never talk about conflicting values, in a way … So I think that's one of the things that keeps us together in a friendship is she knows how I feel about things, but I don't ever bring it up in fear of, you know, making her feel bad or uncomfortable in any way. So we both very well know how each other feels about big things that impact our lives and how others should go about them. But we never accuse each other [of] being wrong.

3.3.5 Relational Softening.

Many participants normalized conflict, recognizing that differences were to be expected and need not lead to the friendship's demise. To ease their conflict, the friends used a variety of softening relational strategies—including, curiosity, humor, and apologizing—to help assuage tensions when they were not on the same page.

Ajay's spirit of curiosity was a helpful approach when his friend Kartik decided to buy a gun, a move that was difficult for Ajay to comprehend:

> So I kind of approached that more with curiosity, less than judgement. Especially because, you know, living in a purple state … I've kind of had to grow up with that tolerance of, okay, this is how things work, you know, and other people will be doing this, even if I might personally feel like I don't wanna involve myself in that … I think since we've had so many conversations in the past about ideological beliefs, there was no sense of kind of having to tiptoe around the topic or anything like that. So they were very open and very encouraging in that sense.

Selena and Christina used humor to soften their disagreements about abortion, as Selena relayed:

> I also helped with the abortion … tour that we just had, and I was a part of it, because I'm part of our reproductive justice and gender equality [campus organization]. And I got [a] hat … and she was like, "I want that." So, then she started wearing my hat, and I was like, "You know, you're not for abortion at all." And she's like, "Yeah, I know that. But this head is cute, and they don't even know that." I'm like, "Yeah, that's fair." … It was funny.

Max and Blake were at a restaurant together when a significant altercation unfolded between them. Max admitted that he "was actually pissing [Blake] off at the moment." In response, Blake "actually got upset and he spilled his coffee" on Max. The situation became so heated that Max and Blake began yelling at each other and name-calling. Max reflected,

> I wasn't going to be his friend again, and he wasn't gonna be mine. And we're going to be calling off our friendship right now … Funny enough, the next day, we actually had a whole lot of conversation, like we hadn't said that.

In the end, Max apologized to Blake, mending their friendship.

3.3.6 Practicing Civil Discourse.

Other participants brought their civil discourse skills into the friendship, some of which they had developed through co-curricular courses and workshops offered in conjunction with honors and scholarship programs. Ellery said of her friendship with Piper that their conversations about political differences never escalated into conflict or "yelling [at] each other." Instead, Ellery described their exchanges as "pretty civil":

> I would be like, "Oh, I see what you're saying, but this is my view on it," and she'll be like, "Oh, I see what you're saying, this is my view on it, I kind of agree with the points you're saying." … I try my best and Piper does very good at just providing points for each other, and if that works and we're able to sway each other's opinion, great.

Ellery credits an honors course she's taking focused on civil discussion for helping her understand that "even if you have differing points of view, raising your voice is not gonna change anyone's perspective. It's the points that you give them and the evidence you provide."

3.3.7 Valuing and Bridging Differences.

Our conversations with some participants revealed the ways in which they valued exposure to difference. Holding to this value was a strategy—a framework—that helped them make sense of and appreciate differences in their friendship. Ajay observed, "I should never dig myself in or I should never get myself into an echo chamber … I do value that difference in opinion." Likewise, Jessica remarked, "I think it's very valuable to have someone that can challenge your views … and even sometimes change how you feel about them." Beyond acknowledging and valuing differences, participants were adept at bridging them. Chase's collage included symbols emphasizing the unifying bridging work he and Melanie accomplished in their friendship:

> And then the one in the middle, that was just, those are just hands passing over a torch. So I think that was kinda meant to show, you know, like support and respect for one another, but also a shared light, and maybe, I guess, the importance of remaining close despite differences that we may have. And then the puzzle pieces joining, so this one's kind of similar as well, but I think it just shows like the fitting together of a friendship despite differences as well. And then the two trees growing close together, I think that shows that like—I picked that one because it kind of reminded me of two people growing alongside each other, even if you believe in different things. And I think this is important as well, but surrounding yourself with people that aren't like-minded with you, I think it can help you grow as well and help you gain different perspectives … And then the bottom left, that one was a bridge. And I think that the bridge kind of just showed – I think the bridge was just representing the friendship between different viewpoints on each side, the left to right side of that bridge.

3.3.8 Empathic Humanizing.

A final strategy for navigating differences and conflict that surfaced in the stories participants shared was that of empathic humanizing. Moses and Sally used a variety of strategies in their friendship, from "tiptoe[ing] around each other" to "try[ing] to be as respectful as possible," to "know[ing] when to cut off the conversation." Perhaps most powerfully, Moses expressed the capacity to humanize Sally, "to distinguish a good person from … a political ideology that you disagree with." Moses described the way he was able to empathize with Sally in the fullness of her humanity, rather than reduce her to a caricature of a political other:

> Sally's political views do not define her as a human being. You know, what defines her as a human being is her experiences, and how they affected her, and how … she chooses to carry herself now … As if we could possibly confine people into two parties, you know, as if that could somehow scratch the surface of human emotional complexity … It's not red and blue. It's, you know, me and you.

Finding pathways forward as the friends discovered diverging beliefs and values required varied strategies that were sometimes used in tandem and that depended on the unique qualities of the individuals in the friendship and the particularities of their bond. Next, we turn to exploring friendship bonds in greater depth—beyond the challenges and conflicts they faced—to offer insight on the most sustaining features of their relationship.

3.4 How Do the Friends Sustain and Deepen Their Relationship?

3.4.1 Sustaining Friendship Bonds: Shared Interests, Peer Networks, and Positive Relational Qualities as the Cornerstones

Enduring interpartisan friendships shared in common several key features. Perhaps the most fundamental feature was that friendships with staying power were based on mutual interests. Participants' stories lifted up the fun present in their friendships. Vanessa's friendship with Jenn evolved from their first meeting during sorority recruitment. They had friends in common through the sorority, went on vacation together, enjoyed activities like watching movies, and eventually lived together in Vanessa's junior year. Vanessa said of her friend:

> I really liked her. I liked her vibe, or fun look on life and everything, and we shared the same favorite animal. So I was like, "This girl, this is my type of girl." Like not many people love alpacas the way I do. So we really bonded over that.

Like Vanessa and Jenn, Margo and Eve bonded through lighthearted pastimes when they became fast friends one summer, enjoying a 4th of July cookout, sand volleyball, movies, card games, and a lot of laughter. Offering insight on the significance of shared enjoyable activities like these, John considered his friendship with Ryan and reflected,

> I'd say the biggest reason that I think we are able to have a lot of these conversations is because we have a close friendship, like I was saying with the intramural soccer, that's built on something else [other than politics]. If you try to build it, like you're instantly jumping into opposite sides of the pool on whatever it is, like partisanship, religion, anything, I think it's gonna be really hard for you to come together like that.

Some friends built their relationship around shared activities that were more than pleasant diversions and reflected their deeper values. Ellery and Piper, who were collectively committed to civic engagement, participated in the university's pre-law/pre-government fraternity and went to the organization's events together, which facilitated a closer friendship. Given their mutual dedication to inspiring political participation, the friends got involved volunteering with on-campus voter registration. Looking to the future, the friends hope to have internships in Washington, D.C. next summer and plan to live together if they do.

Ellery and Piper's friendship revealed another key sustaining feature of interpartisan friendship: the bolstering effect of the friends' peer network. Other friends routinely played a part in keeping friends connected. Ellery explained how a roommate brought Piper into the fold of the friend group:

> It was just me and my suitemates, really, in the beginning of the year, and I think we were like, "Oh, we'd like some more friends to bring into our group." And my roommate who brought her [Piper] around had her roommate [come] with her, too. And we kind of just gelled with them … And so we would do dinners with them, and then we were like, "Oh, we'll watch *The Bachelor* together." We'd have them over for dinner once a week. So yeah, it's like we just kept doing stuff with them because we … liked having them around and they were very similar people to us.

Relatedly, Ajay and Kartik found their friendship strengthened by a tight-knit peer group during the pandemic. They and some other friends would have weekly board game nights to counteract the limited opportunities for social interaction during pandemic restrictions. Although Ajay lived at home, the friend group lived on campus, so Ajay spent a lot of time at their apartment with Kartik and the others. Chase and Melanie, who had the memorable experience of planning a vacation for their friend group, became close through their one-on-one time together (e.g., having lunch, meeting for coffee, studying, taking the same classes) as well as spending time with other academically-oriented friends. As Chase recalled,

> Honestly, you know, my [residence hall] floor was all guys, and then the top floor was all girls … and that's kinda how we made our friend group. But one of the nights, the girls were making cookies and they invited us all. And then after that, it was kind of just history, and we were all a friend group after that … We were all in the same dorm … We were in the Honors Village too, so I think we all were similar-minded in that we were passionate about our studies and … I think a little bit different mindset than some of the other dorms we could have been in on campus.

There is also much to learn from friendships that were not sustained in the long run, like Mary and Luke's, whose relationship eventually cooled after their first year in college. In addition to Luke's insensitivity (on matters of gender, sexuality, race, and religion)—and the falling-out he'd had with Mary's roommate, Ann—Mary surmised the friendship lacked staying power without proximity. She used magnets in her collage to symbolize her friendship with Luke, and reflected,

> I just put opposites repel, kind of, for the magnets, because … I felt like he and I were very opposite. And a lot of our friendship, I enjoyed being friends with him … you went through so much together that if … he and I had lunch today, we could laugh and talk about so much stuff from freshman year, we had so many funny freshman year memories together … But fundamentally we're two very different people. It was just kind of like we were brought together by forced proximity, kind of, living on the same floor, having a lot of similar experiences or going through a lot of similar experiences together. But in reality, we're very much two different people. So that's kind of why the friendship didn't really sustain into sophomore year, because we weren't really put in this forced proximity anymore.

Beyond shared interests and peer groups, friendship-sustaining qualities were evident in the friendships that were maintained. Among these qualities were lengthy histories as friends, admiration, support, advocacy, and love.

3.4.2 Shared Histories.

For Moses and Sally, the significance of their shared history as childhood friends ultimately fortified their relationship. Moses observed, "most of my fondest childhood memories involve her and also the other way around. So it's like we have a lot, obviously, we have a lot of shared history. So it's kind of hard to ignore that." Maintaining his connection to Sally in the long run, Moses tried to keep many important points in mind:

> It's just like the biggest thing that helps us stay close is just remember that—remember how it started. Remember why you're friends. Remember how long you've been friends. And remember why you chose to have that person in your life, and if that … hasn't changed then at the end of the day … they're still the same person that you chose to have in your life.

3.4.3 Admiration.

Deeply knowing and admiring her friend, Marisol, helped Katherine in sustaining their close bond. Katherine articulated the strengths in Marisol's character and underscored the identities that shaped Marisol's lived experiences. Katherine's reflections reveal the respect and appreciation embedded in their friendship:

> She's very bold … she will fight for what's right, which I admire about her so much. So I'd say a value for her would be advocacy. Because she is Latina, so part of a minority population there. And she also is lesbian, so another part—like two minorities that make up her identity. So she's always … had to advocate for herself for her whole life, because she is in these minority situations. And so advocacy, for her, I would say, is huge. Which is really awesome.

3.4.4 Advocacy and Support.

Friends who sustained their relationships stood up for one another and offered unconditional support. When Blake was bullied for his feminine attributes, Max, who knew the pain of being bullied as a bisexual, said, "I had to speak up for him." Friends were advocates even when they didn't fully understand an aspect of their friend's identity. The way Jessica and Jamie were willing to live with some dissonance to support one another is a prime example of how friends expressed care amid their differences:

> And so I recently got baptized … and when I told her … she was so excited. And to see that from someone that really has no interest in that [religion] right now is, like, "Wow, they just care about how I feel about it" … I know that I've put aside my views sometimes to be able to be excited for her, especially concerning her relationship [with a woman] that that one semester. I was, like, as I said, I don't agree with it, but I was like, "Oh, my gosh! Let me know more about her. I want to meet her," and [I] was really enthusiastic about it … It was so freeing to be able to know that I can also talk about my Christianity with her. And not only does she not feel uncomfortable, but she's excited for me.

3.4.5 Love.

Interpartisan friendships that transcended differences and endured across time shared another quality in common: love. Grace said of her friendship with Jack and the others in their game-playing friend group: "I love my friends. I enjoy them deeply, and even with the different views." Max expressed about his connection to Blake, "Our friendship is not just the kind of a normal boys' friendship. Yeah, there's actually love." This love and care extended to taking turns caring for each other by, for example,

covering the other's meal if one was out of cash, or lending a listening ear when the other wanted to talk about problems with family or other relationships. Selena described the mutual support she and her friend, Christina, offered one another this way: "It's us just comforting and loving each other." Georgianna observed that her friend, Annie, had a "heart for people around her; she's just very loving." Witnessing the loving nature of her friend, Georgianna concluded, "That's kind of what made me love her back, you know? She showed me love and that made me love her back."

Taken together, the most resilient friendships had certain defining hallmarks: they were built on mutual interests (that downplayed their political differences), reinforced by a shared network of friends, and strengthened by key relational qualities, like admiration, support, and love. Through friendship, participants developed new ways of thinking and relational capacities that will serve them well through life. We next turn our attention to how participants grew and evolved through their friendships.

3.5 How Has the Friendship Challenged and/or Changed the Friends' Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes?

3.5.1 Growing Together: The Evolution of Beliefs, Values, Attitudes, and Personal Strengths

Participants' stories of interpartisan friendship illuminated the multidimensional opportunities for growth that came about as they engaged their friends. Most participants were inclined to describe broadening their worldview as their friends introduced new perspectives for their consideration. Participants also became more open, developed vital personal and relational strengths, and discovered a humanizing outlook on others.

3.5.2 Facilitating Openness and New Ways of Thinking.

Many participants were moved by their friendships to undergo an evolution in their own thinking. For instance, Margo credited Eve for helping her "to see things a little bit differently … and be able to understand that people have different opinions than me." For some participants, a first meaningful step was simply to open up and recognize the need for a shift. In his friendship with Kartik, Ajay found value in the way their relationship

> kind of opened my eyes to kind of start to question things that I see around me and kind of genuinely consider if things are beneficial to me or if I'm just kind of following along for the sake of it, you know, because that's what I've always seen and so that's what I should always continue. And so, from that sense, I think I do benefit from that open-mindedness … Which I think I'm very grateful for, because I am able to question things. I'm also able to fairly question whatever they believe and disagree with them in that sense. So I'm not necessarily kind of worried about, you know, being a bit of a pushover or anything like that, but I do value that difference in opinion.

Civic learning was at the heart of Katherine and Marisol's friendship. Katherine underscored the value of the civic skills they were developing together and was ready to engage the new insight that memorable experiences with Marisol were revealing to her. Through the protest she attended with Marisol, Katherine came to understand that she had much to learn:

> And from what I can understand … my role right now is just to listen and just to be an ear, and to listen, and to just think and not really give my opinions necessarily. Not that I have negative opinions against anyone from a minority group, but just to listen and to hear their stories that haven't been heard for so long. And so going to that protest, while it was uncomfortable, was really eye-opening for me to start kind of thinking in that way. I need to change my view, I need to change my thinking, I need to listen, I need to open my ears.

Chase readily pointed to the value of having a friend, like Melanie, whose political beliefs are distinct from his own. He noted the importance of "surrounding yourself with people that aren't like-minded with you," because doing so can

> … help you grow as well and help you gain different perspectives … There's millions of points of view, you know, there's millions of perspectives, and it's important to listen to the person sitting across the table from you and to learn from them.

In reflecting on what he had learned from his friendship with Melanie, Chase named his growing appreciation of perspective-taking:

> But I think, too, it's important to always try to see the other side, or always try to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Yeah. Because I think there's issues that maybe I'll never experience, especially regarding racism maybe … but it's important in all that I do to put myself in their shoes, because I know that this isn't something I'll experience.

Chase recounted a memorable conversation in which he listened and learned from Melanie's perspective when she shared her frustration about how men doctors don't believe women patients: "It's something that I hadn't really thought about before, I think, because I'm a male, you know? … And it just, it kind of made me think, you know, that's not right." He reflected, "I wanna carry that out with me when I'm hopefully practicing as a dentist [his career goal]."

3.5.3 Developing Personal and Relational Strengths.

As participants described the impact of their friendships, it was clear that the personal and relational strengths they cultivated had expansive implications beyond friendship and beyond politics. Vanessa's peer network grew because of her friendship with Jenn, and with Jenn's support Vanessa "came out of my shell more" and became "a more social, outgoing person." Mary said of her friendship with Luke, "it changed my sense of humor." Georgianna shared that her friend, Annie, "helps me out of my comfort zone in a lot of areas, and she's helped me be bold with my parents and with different aspects of my life." Connected by their neurodivergent identities, Georgianna was further appreciative that Annie had "given me a lot of information. She likes giving information … some of our favorite things are information loading or information dumping." Articulating how she has grown through her friendship with Christina, Selena remarked, "…she helped me with my relationship problems. And how to be more open, and how to be more patient, how to give grace."

Humanizing their friends—that is, coming to understand them as whole people rather than reducing them to stereotyped political "others"—was not merely a strategy that friends relied on to navigate their differences. The capacity to humanize others could extend to people outside of the friendship too. As a compelling example of this phenomenon, Katherine was inspired by her friendship with Marisol to humanize queer communities and encourage other Catholics to do the same:

> Catholics view homosexuality as, I guess we would say, a sin … Because I was told that [growing up], I never really knew how to view people who were a part of that community, and I was just like, "Oh, they're bad," in a sense. … and I met my friend, and I was like, "But she's just a person."…I stress to my friends who kind of have that belief about it [homosexuality] … that in the eyes of Catholics, we're all sinners, because, you know, we all mess up. And just because someone's sin is more outward and you can see it doesn't mean that that makes them any less than you are. And I think a lot of Catholics don't agree with that and will make comments about that community or hold really negative beliefs about that community. And it really breaks my heart because that's where I was a few years ago. But … getting a better picture of that community has really helped me open my eyes to be like, everyone's just a human being and deserves to be treated with the same amount of dignity and respect. And I do owe a lot of that to my friend, just being able to kind of walk with me through that and just accept, you know.

In sum, interpartisan friendships brought about the potential for students to open their minds, consider new perspectives, and nurture key personal and relational assets. The relationships that students forged offer a hopeful vision of bridge-building in a time of heightened polarization.

4. Participant Recommendations

Beyond exploring participants' stories of interpartisan friendship, an additional objective of our project was to gather their recommendations for fostering interpartisan friendships more widely on their campuses, honoring the expertise they've gained through their lived experiences within these relationships. The survey asked respondents, "What is one thing colleges and universities should do to support students' friendships across political differences?" Further, during the interview, we asked participants, "What would you recommend to your college/university to help foster friendships across political differences?" We also reminded them of their survey response and asked them to elaborate on it. Here we share the recommendations we heard from participants, grouped into two broad categories: (1) recommendations for campus educators (including student affairs staff, faculty, and administrators) and (2) recommendations for their fellow college students. We have also integrated, where relevant, insights from our own and others' prior research on boundary-crossing friendships, to augment participants' wisdom with empirical support.

4.1 Recommendations for Campus Educators

Participants' recommendations for campus educators addressed the need to develop students' knowledge, skills, and abilities for engaging in constructive and respectful political conversations; foster a campus climate that supports diverse political beliefs and perspectives; offer guidance on how to navigate political differences within friendship; help students find common ground across political differences; create programming and opportunities focused on students in their first year on campus; and invest in language classes. In making these recommendations, participants identified existing resources on their campuses as well as resources they would like to see or felt are needed in order to support their own and peers' interpartisan friendships.

4.1.1 Equip Students with the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Needed to Constructively and Respectfully Engage in Political Conversations

Many participants reflected on the discomfort and reluctance they've felt, or witnessed campus peers feeling, around interacting with others on campus who don't share their political beliefs or affiliation. These concerns are valid, given the divisiveness surrounding them in our larger social context. And yet despite popular rhetoric suggesting that meaningful interpersonal relationships across political differences are difficult if not impossible, most of the participants in our study deeply valued having a close friend who didn't share their beliefs. Their lived experiences demonstrate that many college students desire—and are capable of developing and maintaining—these relationships. However, participants also highlighted (with a few exceptions) that they received little to no preparation or support for reaching across political divides on their campuses. Thus, many of their recommendations

focused on the kinds of support they wished they had received or that they felt would benefit other college students who may need more structured programming to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to engage respectfully and courageously with peers across political differences.

One broad area of programming participants recommended was mediated discussions to help students learn more about current political issues and policies from varied perspectives without the fear of getting into conflict with those on the "other side." As Moses discussed, the goal of these discussions is to not change anyone's political beliefs but rather to become more educated about different perspectives. He reflected, "I feel like if you can talk to somebody in a civil tone with somebody there to keep you both in check, then it's a lot easier to just educate yourself rather than to become upset at the opposition. … An environment where they feel comfortable will make them less defensive, more inclined to listen." As Chase noted, the goal of these conversations is not "changing anyone's viewpoint"; rather, "I think it helps in being able to understand someone else's point of view or to put yourself in their shoes."

Ajay highlighted a specific structured mediated discussion program, the Campus Conversations Project, in which he has participated at his university. Campus Conversations is a program developed by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' (AASCU) American Democracy Project and the November Fifth Coalition, and they offer a toolkit for campuses who wish to launch this initiative. Ajay felt that participating in these structured conversations helps to reduce "echo chambers" on campus, opening students to the possibility of learning from others who don't share their beliefs or values through civil conversation—which in turn creates the possibility for deeper interaction and potential friendship. Aligned with this idea, the website for Columbia University's Campus Conversations describes it as

> a dialogue-based initiative created to promote understanding across differences. It offers students, undergraduate and graduate, a way to learn critical listening skills, manage difficult conversations, and talk about identity. Join a Campus Conversation and you will make a friend, have a real conversation and build community at Columbia.

Another participant, Ellery, discussed how an honors course on civil conversation she's taken in college as well as a similar course she took prior to college have helped her understand how to approach conversations across political differences, a skill she's drawn upon in developing and sustaining her own interpartisan friendships. Mary suggested using first-year common reading programs as an opportunity to begin developing students' knowledge, skills, and abilities before they even arrive on campus. Her university recently required the book *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times* by Mónica Guzmán: "I think that book was really good to read because it kind of humanized people from different sides of the political spectrum and gave you resources to have conversations with people from different political backgrounds."

Two participants discussed the importance of developing students' knowledge about current events and issues, so that they can engage in conversations about political topics in an informed and open-minded way with peers who hold differing perspectives. Moses emphasized the value of "making sure that everybody has a solid knowledge base. … about things that are important to them, so like education about relevant issues, education about policies." Once students have a deeper understanding of these topics, "you can start moving on to making the students more open-minded" toward interacting with peers across the partisan divide. Margo commented on the particular need for opportunities to learn more about what's going on in the world for students "who maybe are closed minded, or haven't ever really had exposure to those things, or are uneducated on those things, and don't feel as if they can always talk about it," as a way of preparing students to meet and engage with people across those differences. She herself felt "very overwhelmed by everything" transitioning from her religiously-affiliated undergraduate institution where "politics weren't really talked about much" to her public graduate university: "I was like, I don't know what any of this stuff means, I've never really had exposure to these things. … I feel like I've kind of been closed-minded my whole life and not really looked at other political points of view." As a result, she felt unable to engage in conversations on campus about political topics without fear of saying something wrong or coming across as "uneducated," preventing her from appreciatively interacting with peers whose political beliefs differed from her own. Margo emphasized, "I feel like it doesn't matter what type of university you're in, there's going to be people who are different than you. And I think being able to just have more exposure to those things" coming into college would be helpful in fostering interpartisan friendship development.

A final point we want to emphasize was made by Chase, who recommended that programs to develop students' knowledge, skills and abilities in navigating political differences should be incorporated into existing classes (e.g., general education requirements), rather than making it something extra for time-crunched students to add to their packed schedules. Making it a course requirement would also reach a greater proportion of students—not just those who choose to make it a priority. Several participants in our study were part of honors programs on their campuses that incorporated programs such as Campus Conversations, but these opportunities should not be required only for select populations; indeed, as Margo highlighted, the students who may need these programs the most may be those whose pre-college backgrounds tend to be underrepresented within honors programs. When the majority of students are prepared to engage respectfully and constructively with peers who hold opposing beliefs, and who can approach such interactions with a willingness to listen rather than with defensiveness or trepidation, the possibility of interpartisan friendship development is far more likely.

> *Campus educator recommendation #1: Offer programming to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to constructively and respectfully engage in political conversations, and incorporate this programming into the curriculum to reach the widest number of students.*

4.1.2 Foster a Campus Climate where Diverse Beliefs and Perspectives are Supported

The larger context in which friendships are situated can either support or inhibit their development (Adams & Allan, 1998; Vela-McConnell, 2011). On college campuses, one of the contextual factors influencing boundary-crossing friendships is the campus climate. In a climate where students' identities are supported, where they feel they can be their authentic selves, and where they see other students crossing social boundaries for interaction and friendship, these relationships thrive; the opposite is also true, with negative climates creating a context in which students feel uncomfortable or unsafe reaching across social boundaries (Hudson et al., 2023; Hudson & Rockenbach, 2025; Rockenbach & Hudson, 2024). Although the participants in our study did not use the term "climate," a couple of them made recommendations showing they recognized the role of campus climate in fostering—or inhibiting—interpartisan friendships.

Katherine felt her university and most of her professors create an environment that's "open to all people" and "neutral … acknowledging of both sides." She reflected, "I think that is very important to friendships like the one that we have, because I think a big fear with people talking to people from like another side or people who are different is that they're just gonna lash out at them, or they hate them, or even that they're less than them." Similarly, Georgianna believes it's important for colleges and universities to support campus groups representing a range of political beliefs and perspectives, in part to counteract negative media messaging, especially about conservative people and issues.

Georgianna also encourages institutions to allow faculty members to more explicitly express their political beliefs, especially conservative faculty members. As she shared, "In order to have a safe place for political friendships, you have to be allowed to have those ideas." We reached a similar conclusion based on prior research using national survey data: "A classroom environment where political differences are assumed and honored may go a long way toward helping students realize the potential for reaching across partisan differences and establishing friendships" (Rockenbach & Hudson, 2024, p. 11). Students are perceptive to the environment around them, and when they see faculty or other members of the campus community (from any point along the political spectrum) suppressing their perspectives, the message they receive is that their own political beliefs will not be welcomed by others on campus or even met with hostility, precluding authentic interpersonal relationships across differences. She also noted, "a lot of conservative groups are … afraid of violence happening," and she herself has heard about violence toward pro-life organizations on other campuses.

In a climate where students fear that engaging with peers across political divides may lead to violence, interpartisan friendships are unlikely to develop. Campus educators may try to discourage students' political expressions in an attempt to reduce divisiveness on campus, yet doing so may instead *enhance* divisiveness by communicating that conflict is inevitable across political differences and therefore students should suppress their beliefs when interacting with others who may not share them. As many of our participants' experiences have shown, bridging differences in political beliefs within a close, interpersonal peer relationship is both possible and meaningful.

Finally, Katherine noted the importance of institutions providing training to politically oriented student organizations on how to "be more open to having conversations [with someone else on the other side] and making sure that's a part of the clubs." Such training can improve the campus political climate by providing students with the tools to engage respectfully across political identities and beliefs as well as by establishing a campus norm that politically oriented student organizations are expected to bridge—rather than reinforce—political differences. We agree with Katherine's recommendation, and want to expand it to emphasize that fostering a climate that is supportive of interpartisan friendship necessitates equipping students with knowledge, skills, and abilities to respectfully engage across political differences (per our previous recommendation), in conjunction with welcoming diverse political perspectives.

> *Campus educator recommendation #2: Foster a campus climate conducive to interpartisan friendship by welcoming respectful expression of diverse political identities and perspectives and by expecting and training student organizations to bridge political divides.*

4.1.3 Model How to Navigate Political Differences within Friendship

Building upon the previous recommendation, multiple participants described a need for programming that models how to navigate political differences within interpersonal relationships such as friendship. Jack mentioned the need to develop students' "understanding that these political differences shouldn't lead to hatred among each other," while Selena advocated for programming related to "how not to let political views affect friendships." In other words, college students are hungry for institutional support that helps them and their fellow students see that conflict and hatred are not inevitable when interacting with a peer who holds different political beliefs. What might this look like? Our participants had some insightful ideas.

Katherine identified a need for

> more training on how to just be civil and to listen, and to know that we can be wrong and that's okay, and that we can still walk away from that conversation with our belief but not have to make the other person feel terrible … no matter what side you're on, we're gonna give you just some, like, 101 training, just like, "These are some tips we have."

Like many of our participants, Katherine observed her campus peers struggling with misperceptions and fear of conflict that often color interactions across political differences, thwarting the possibility of seeing peers across the aisle as potential friends.

Vanessa recommended "a class or a workshop" specifically addressing "how to navigate political differences in friendships." She suggested

> bringing in students that have a healthy political, different friendship to kind of be like, "This is how we did it" and talk about the challenges that they faced and how they overcame them. … I think things like that, being able to actually show that it can happen and it can work, would be something good for colleges to maybe offer their students.

She also suggested bringing in married couples who hold different political beliefs "because a marriage is still a friendship."

As with the previous recommendation regarding programming to prepare students to engage in political conversations, programs that model how to build bridges across political differences within friendships should be incorporated into the curriculum, to have the widest reach and minimize demands on students' time. Further, embedding these programs into the curriculum communicates two important ideas to students and other campus stakeholders: (1) that the ability to navigate political differences within interpersonal relationships is a critical prosocial outcome necessary for participation in a democratic society that all graduates of the institution are expected to attain, and (2) that friendships crossing political (and other) boundaries have educational value.

> *Campus educator recommendation #3: Establish programming that models how students can navigate political differences within friendships, and incorporate these into the curriculum to underscore the educational and civic value of this ability.*

4.1.4 Help Students Find Common Ground across Political Differences

While helping students develop their facility and comfort with political conversations and navigating political differences within their friendships is important, it is also important to help students recognize the similarities and common ground they have with politically different peers, so they can break out of established patterns of homogeneity. Our own prior research on friendships crossing the social boundaries of race and religious, secular, and spiritual identities (RSSIs) has revealed the importance of providing campus spaces and opportunities that allow students to discover and build upon their similarities to cultivate friendship (Hudson, 2018, 2022; Hudson et al., 2023). We were excited to discover that participants in the present study made congruent recommendations through reflection on their own interpartisan friendship experiences.

John stated on the survey that universities should "host events that should not normally engage people in political conversation but rather enjoy each other's company and humanity, performing some other activity or attending some other event." Elaborating on this idea in the interview, he

explained that focusing on activities that allow students to engage with each other without involving politics, such as through recreational sports, can lead to friendships across political boundaries: "I have no idea what their political affiliation is, right? We still play soccer together for 90 minutes, and then sometimes we'll go out afterwards … the focus in this is on soccer," not politics. In contrast, at events centered on politics, such as the debates hosted by his university prior to the November 2024 presidential election, it's unlikely students will reach across their differences; he believes such events instead reinforce divisions.

Prior research on boundary-crossing friendships confirms the power of John's recommendation: when college students discover shared interests in activities (e.g., sports, video games, cosplay), academics (e.g., major), or tastes (e.g., movies, music), or identify similarity along other dimensions (e.g., a shared faith background, coming from the same part of the state or country), it provides a foundation upon which they can build and sustain a friendship that transcends their differences (Hudson, 2022; Wimmer & Lewis, 2010). Many of the participants in our study talked about shared interests or other similarities that drew them together and kept them connected, such as a shared major or classes, membership in their institution's honors program or a sorority, interest in languages or musical theater, playing sports or games, studying or eating together, and attending their institution's football games. None of the participants described engaging in political or partisan activities together as a factor that drew them together or kept them in relation, aside from Ellery and Piper's shared involvement in voter registration on campus.

Accordingly, Ellery discussed the need to intentionally de-center political differences to support interpartisan friendships. In the survey, she encouraged colleges and universities to "talk more about how political beliefs cannot define the relationship and most relationships can function with different political beliefs." During her interview, she shared her frustration with people who say they could never be friends with someone who identifies with the opposing political party: "that just always upset me, because I was like, people are so much more than what they believe." She noted that she and her friend Piper often find common ground despite identifying with opposite political parties, and that they "don't talk about politics all the time, nor do I want to. And there's so much more to Piper than just what she believes politically." Her comments point toward the need for colleges and universities to challenge many students' assumption that they couldn't possibly share anything with a peer who holds a different partisan identity, and instead to help them find common ground and see each other as multifaceted individuals rather than narrowly comprising their political beliefs. While learning how to navigate political differences within a friendship is important, learning when and how to move beyond those differences and focus on similarities is equally important for developing and sustaining interpartisan friendships.

Finally, Max encouraged colleges and universities to offer programming that helps students learn about different identities and beliefs—to "clarify that we are all different"—so they can look beyond their differences to identify potential friends rather than relying on stereotypes or assumptions that

reduce someone to one aspect of their identity. Although Max focused his suggestion on race and sexual orientation, the alignment between these identities and partisanship (Hartman et al., 2022; Iyengar et al., 2019; Morgan, 2021) suggests that such programming may also support interpartisan friendship development, fostering greater heterogeneity within peer networks on campus. Such initiatives may prove especially powerful for students coming from homogeneous pre-college backgrounds, and may have the greatest potential impact in the "critical window" of the first year on campus, which we discuss next.

> *Campus educator recommendation #4: Provide co-curricular programming and social/recreational opportunities that enable students to recognize and build upon what they share—despite their political differences—as a basis for friendship.*

4.1.5 Establish Boundary-Crossing Interactional Norms Early in Students' First Year on Campus – and Beyond

Prior research, including our own, has emphasized the importance of establishing interaction across social boundaries, including across political identity and beliefs, as a norm during the "critical window" of students' first year—and even first weeks—on campus (Hudson, 2018; Hudson & Rockenbach, 2025; Newcomb, 1962). The interaction and friendship patterns students develop during this time are likely to persist throughout their time in college (Wimmer & Lewis, 2010); during this time, educators have the opportunity to shape those patterns so that crossing social boundaries, rather than polarization and homogeneity, become the expectation and norm.

One participant, Mary, provided recommendations aligned with this idea, drawn from her own experiences as a first-year student as well as what she has learned as an orientation leader. As she observed:

> I think [my university] does a really good job of having that house community and encouraging people to like, be friends with people in their house. … that house community is one of the first communities you have at [my university], and it's like, you're not picking it. So I think that really does a good job of exposing you to different people who might have different political beliefs than you, or just like different backgrounds in general.

Indeed, Mary met her own politically different friend this way: "Especially since like the first night of college, you go eat dinner with them. And that was kind of how I met Luke, and I met a lot of people who are extremely different from me through that."

Mary also commended her university's intentionality in creating diverse orientation groups, which meet regularly for the first six weeks of students' first semester. Through these "forced proximity

groups," as she described them, "you're kind of forced to be … with people who have nothing in common to you besides the fact that you're both freshman," leading students to interact and even develop friendships with peers whom they otherwise might never have encountered, interrupting the tendency toward comfortable homogeneity. In our prior research, we've termed what Mary refers to as "diverse propinquity"—when students from diverse social and ideological backgrounds are placed in proximity to one another. Whether through residence hall assignments or orientation groups, students can interact with each other in informal, comfortable environments, and discover what they have in common across their differences. Through these experiences, boundary-crossing friendships have an opportunity to bloom (Hudson et al., 2023; Hudson & Rockenbach, 2025).

> *Campus educator recommendation #5: Be intentional in creating first-year experiences (e.g., orientation groups, residential communities, first-year experience courses) that are politically as well as socioculturally diverse and that provide informal, social opportunities through which students can build friendships.*

Although the first year is a critical window for fostering interpartisan friendship, we also want to highlight a recommendation by another participant, Jessica. She advised campus educators to not just target students in their first year on campus with emails or other communications about campus events. Rather, they should reach out to students throughout their years on campus because students' beliefs and values may be changing and they may engage with something in their third or fourth year that they wouldn't have in their first year: "people's views do change … So it definitely should be an ongoing thing rather than just an initiative email thread for incoming or transfer freshmen."

> *Campus educator recommendation #6: Continue offering programming and other opportunities (e.g., residential experiences) to support interpartisan friendship development for students throughout their time on campus, rather than limiting these opportunities to first-year students.*

4.1.6 Invest in Language Classes

Finally, we want to amplify an insightful recommendation made by Georgianna. She believes that language programs and classes are "friendship incubators" because "in these language classes, you can see a lot of cross-cultural and cross-ideology relationships. … language programs really allow you to have that external view in life, of like the view outward of understanding." Adding to their power as friendship incubators is the fact that language classes tend to be smaller than many other classes undergraduates take, especially at larger institutions, and they require a lot of interaction among students. She reflected, "I've met so many different types of people in my language classes," including the politically different close friend she discussed in her interview, "and I'm definitely better because of them."

Yet despite the value of language classes, many colleges and universities have reduced the number of classes and majors they offer in foreign languages in recent years (Fischer, 2023; Palmer, 2024). And while language classes are not essential for interpartisan friendship, they provide a context that may be uniquely conducive to fostering the development of these relationships, as Georgianna noted.

> *Campus educator recommendation #7: Communicate the value of and (re)commit to investing in language classes, which provide a uniquely supportive context for the development of interpartisan and other boundary-crossing friendships.*

4.2 Recommendations for College Students

In addition to recommendations for how their campuses can support interpartisan friendships, several participants had recommendations for how their fellow students can nurture these meaningful relationships on their campuses and in their own lives.

Complementing her recommendation that colleges and universities provide training to politically-focused student organizations so they can better engage in conversations with those on the other side, Katherine also encouraged members of such organizations to prioritize and advertise making their groups open to those who may hold different perspectives. A member of a pro-life student organization at her university, she wanted her organization to do a better job of welcoming and engaging the perspectives of pro-choice students on campus so that the two sides can learn from each other. She believes that organizations like her own should advertise, "This is open for everyone and we want a conversation to happen here," rather than excluding and demonizing those whose views don't align with the organization's. She also wants to see more of her fellow students attending events sponsored by organizations they may not agree with—but she also recognizes that without training on how to have open and constructive conversations across differences, many students are fearful of doing so.

> *College student recommendation #1: Be intentional about openly engaging in conversation* with individuals and organizations on campus whose political views may differ from your own.

Several participants had recommendations for students who, like themselves, have a friend who may not share their political identity or affiliation. Margo, who had a friendship that ended, emphasized the importance for college students in interpartisan friendships of "just kind of understanding other people's differences, and like taking the time to learn from others. We can find just how special each of our opinions are, and how our differences are important to one another." When friends are open to learning from each other rather than assuming that differences can only cause conflict, they will likely be more successful in sustaining their relationship. Katherine and Marisol modeled this in their friendship, welcoming the other to "walk with me."

When conflict does arise, Vanessa recommended reflecting on whether a friendship across political differences is a "healthy relationship." She advised,

> If you're always going to constantly be butting heads and not able to agree, unfortunately, maybe you shouldn't be friends, because that's not gonna help foster a healthy relationship for you. A matter of differing opinions is always going to be present in a friendship, and that's okay. … You have to sit down with your friend and be like, "Is this going to cause us more harm than good? Can we disagree and still be cool in a couple days? That's fine if we get in a heated argument, and you're mad at me for a few days, and vice versa. But can we get over it?" … That's what I want in my friendships.

Vanessa is suggesting that some friendships across political differences are worthy of maintaining—even when conflict arises—if the friends ultimately respect each other as people and "value my friendship more than my political identity." Aligned with Vanessa's idea, we've found in prior research with a national sample of 5,762 students at 118 U.S. institutions that a majority (65%) of participants had disagreements with their friends about politics and yet successfully navigated those conflicts to sustain their relationship (Rockenbach & Hudson, 2024). But some friendships across political boundaries may not be healthy relationships if one or both friends aren't able to put their relationship before their differences, or if they can't see the other as more than their political beliefs; in that case, the friendship may not be worth preserving.

Similarly, Moses emphasized the importance of "mutual understanding" in his own friendship. Although he and Sally did experience conflict around their differing political beliefs, they also were intentional to "try to be as respectful as possible," "know when to cut off the conversation," and, when things get heated, to "put a cork in it" and later make amends. In contrast, other participants in our study reported being hurt when their friend dismissed or mocked their beliefs, refused to listen, took an argument too far, or didn't apologize for hurting them. Moses addressed a recommendation to those who may not have the same "mutual understanding" with their friends as he does with Sally:

> It probably just [is] important to verbalize to your friend and make sure that you know what is important to you and your boundaries are communicated. And then at that point, hopefully, you can continue [the friendship] without any difficulties.

Both Moses' and Vanessa's recommendations recognize that while conflict around political differences will arise in an interpartisan friendship, in a healthy relationship, the friends are intentional about centering their love and care for each other as people and taking steps to repair any relational damage they may have caused.

> *College student recommendation #2: Understand that friendships across political differences will likely involve conflict, but that conflict doesn't have to damage the relationship if you and your friend demonstrate mutual respect for each other as people who are more than their political beliefs.*

> *College student recommendation #3: If this mutual respect is lacking, or if your friend is causing you to feel more pain than love, consider whether the friendship is worth sustaining—especially if you feel dismissed, dehumanized, or unsafe with your friend.*

5. References

Adams, R. G., & Allan, G. (1998). Contextualising friendship. In R. G. Adams, & G. Allan (Eds.), *Placing friendship in context* (pp. 1-17). Cambridge University Press.

Clandinin, D. J. (2023). *Engaging in narrative inquiry* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Dunn, A. (2020, Sept. 18). *Few Trump or Biden supporters have close friends who back the opposing candidate.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/18/few-trump-or-biden-supporters-have-close-friends-who-back-the-opposing-candidate/

Fischer, K. (2023, November 15). It's a bleak climate for foreign languages as enrollments tumble. *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* https://www.chronicle.com/article/its-a-bleak-climate-for-foreign-languages-as-enrollments-tumble

Glegg, S. M. (2019). Facilitating interviews in qualitative research with visual tools: A typology. *Qualitative Health Research, 29*(2), 301-310. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318786485

Hartman, R., Blakey, W., Womick, J., Bail, C., Finkel, E. J., Han, H., Sarrouf, J., Schroeder, J., Sheeran, P., Van Bavel, J. J., Willer, R., & Gray, K. (2022). Interventions to reduce partisan animosity. *Nature Human Behaviour, 6*(9), 1194-1205. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01442-3

Hudson, T. D. (2018). Random roommates: Supporting our students in developing friendships across difference. *About Campus, 23*(3), 13-22. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086482218804252

Hudson, T. D. (2022). Interpersonalizing cultural difference: A grounded theory of the process of interracial friendship development and sustainment among college students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 15*(3), 267–287. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000287

Hudson, T. D., & Rockenbach, A. (2025a, forthcoming). "This is how we heal these divisions": Exploring prosocial outcomes of college students' boundary-crossing friendships. *Journal of College Student Development.*

Hudson, T. D., & Rockenbach, A. (2025b). "We met in a place that fostered exploring": Campus environments that influence boundary-crossing friendships. *Innovative Higher Education, 50*, 461-485. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-024-09743-3

Hudson, T. D., Rockenbach, A. N., & Mayhew, M. J. (2023). Campus conditions and college experiences that facilitate friendship across worldview differences. *The Journal of Higher Education, 94*(2), 227-255. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2022.2082785

Hudson, T. D., Rockenbach, A. N., Mayhew, M. J., & Zhang, L. (2021). Examining the relationship between college students' interworldview friendships and pluralism orientation. *Teachers College Record, 123*(7), 1-36.

Hurtado, S. (2007). Linking diversity with the educational and civic missions of higher education. *The Review of Higher Education, 30*(2), 185-196. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2006.0070

Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science, 22*, 129-146. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034

Kahane, D. (1999). Diversity, solidarity and civic friendships. *The Journal of Political Philosophy, 7*(3), 267-286. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9760.00077

Kim, J.-H. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry.* Sage.

Luo, J. (2021). Interaction across ideological boundaries and college outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education, 92*(1), 56-83. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2020.1738162

Mertova, P., & Webster, L. (2020). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An introduction to critical event narrative analysis in research, teaching, and professional practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Morgan, D. L. (2021). Nuancing political identity formation in higher education: A phenomenological examination of precollege socialization, identity, and context. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 14*(1), 12-24. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000153

Newcomb, T. M. (1962). Student peer-group influence. In N. Sanford (Ed.), *The American college* (pp. 469-488). Wiley.

Nossel, S. (2023, Nov. 17). A free-speech fix for our divided campuses. *The Wall Street Journal.* https://www.wsj.com/us-news/education/a-free-speech-fix-for-our-divided-campuses-b9919e9c

Palmer, K. (2024, May 15). Defense department cuts 13 of its language flagship programs. *Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/news/global/study-abroad/2024/05/15/defense-department-cuts-13-its-language-flagship-programs

Paolini, S., Hewstone, M., & Cairns, E. (2007). Direct and indirect intergroup friendship effects: Testing the moderating role of the affective-cognitive bases of prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33*(10), 1406-1420. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207304788

Patel, E. (2018). A nation under two flags: Liberal education, interfaith literacy, and the new American holy war. *Liberal Education*, *104*(3). https://dgmg81phhvh63.cloudfront.net/content/magazines/Archive/LE_SU18_Vol104No3.pdf

Pettigrew, T. F. (2009). Secondary transfer effect of contact: Do intergroup contact effects spread to noncontacted outgroups? *Social Psychology*, *40*(2), 55-65. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335.40.2.55

Rawlins, W. K. (2009). *The compass of friendship.* Sage.

Rockenbach, A. N., & Hudson, T. D. (2024). Transforming political divides: How student identities and campus contexts shape friendships between liberals and conservatives. *AERA Open*, *10*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584231222475

Rockenbach, A. N., Hudson, T. D., Mayhew, M. J., Correia-Harker, B. P., Morin, S., & Associates. (2019). *Friendships matter: The role of peer relationships in interfaith learning and development.* Interfaith America [formerly Interfaith Youth Core]. https://www.interfaithamerica.org/research/friendships-matter-the-role-of-peer-relationships-in-interfaith-learning-and-development/

Rockenbach, A. N., Hudson, T. D., Shaheen, M., Chinoun, R., & Kanwal, A. (2024, November). Friendship as political bridge-building: Ideological and attitudinal change among students with interpartisan friendships in college. Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.

Shady, S. L. H. (2022). E pluribus unum? Empathy as an antidote to populism's antipluralism. In G. R. Peterson, M. C. Berhow, & G. Tsakiridis (Eds.), *Engaging populism: Democracy and the intellectual virtues* (pp. 131-146). Palgrave MacMillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05785-4_7

Spinner-Halev, J., & Theiss-Morse, E. (2024). *Respect and loathing in American democracy: Polarization, moralization, and the undermining of equality.* The University of Chicago Press.

Vela-McConnell, J. A. (2011). *Unlikely friends: Bridging ties and diverse friendships.* Lexington.

Vezzali, L., Di Bernardo, G. A., Cocco, V. M., Stathi, S., & Capozza, D. (2021). Reducing prejudice in the society at large: A review of the secondary transfer effect and directions for future research. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *15*(3), e12583. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12583

Wimmer, A., & Lewis, K. (2010). Beyond and below racial homophily: ERG models of a friendship network documented on Facebook. *American Journal of Sociology*, *116*, 583–642. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/653658

Wojcieszak, W., & Warner, B. R. (2020). Can interparty contact reduce affective polarization? A systematic test of different forms of intergroup contact. *Political Communication*, *37*(6), 789-811. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1760406

Zhou, S., Page-Gould, E., Aron, A., Moyer, A., & Hewstone, M. (2019). The extended contact hypothesis: A meta-analysis on 20 years of research. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *23*(2), 132-160. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868318762647

6. Appendix A: Interview Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Year in College	Age	First-Generation Student	Racial and Ethnic Identity[1]	Gender Identity[1]	Sexual Orientation[1]	Political Affiliation[1]	Political Orientation	Friend Pseudonym	Still Friends	Friend's Political Affiliation[1,2]	Friend's Political Orientation[2]
Ajay	5th or beyond	21	No	Asian	Male	Straight	Independent	Liberal	Kartik	Yes	Republican	Conservative
Chase	4th	-	No	White (American)	Male	Straight	Republican	Conservative	Melanie	Yes	Democrat	Liberal
Ellery	2nd	19	No	White	Female	Straight	Moderate Republican	Moderate	Piper	Yes	Democrat	Liberal
Georgianna	4th	21	No	White	Female	Straight	Paleo-conservative	Very conservative	Annie	Yes	Libertarian/ liberal	Liberal
Grace	5th or beyond	25	No	Hispanic	Woman	Asexual	Democrat	Very liberal	Jack	Yes	Republican	Very conservative
Jack	3rd	26	Yes	Black American	Male	Heterosexual/ straight	Democrat	Liberal	George	Yes	Republican	Conservative
Jessica	3rd	20	Yes	Caucasian/ Polish	Female	Heterosexual	Independent	Moderate	Jamie	Yes	Democrat	Liberal
John	3rd	22	No	Indian/South Asian	Male/ man	Heterosexual	Moderate Democrat	Liberal	Ryan	Yes	Republican	Very conservative
Katherine	5th or beyond	21	No	White	Female	Straight	Republican	Conservative	Marisol	Yes	Democrat	Very liberal
Margo	4th	21	No	White/ Caucasian	Female	Heterosexual	Republican	Conservative	Eve	No	Democrat	Very liberal
Mary	3rd	20	No	White	Female	Heterosexual	Democrat	Moderate	Luke	No	Republican	Very conservative
Max	2nd	27	Yes	Black American	Male	Bisexual	Democrat	Liberal	Blake	Yes	Independent	Moderate
Moses	3rd	20	No	Mexican	Male	Heterosexual	Democrat	Liberal	Sally	Yes	Republican	Conservative
Selena	5th or beyond	29	Yes	Mixed race	Cis woman	Bisexual	Democrat	Moderate	Christina	Yes	Republican	Very conservative
Vanessa	5th or beyond	23	No	White	Female	Heterosexual	Republican	Moderate	Jenn	Yes	Democrat	Very liberal

1 Participants were asked to describe each identity in their own words via an open response question on the survey: "How do you describe your [identity]?"
2 As described by participant

7. Appendix B: Participant Narrative Accounts

7.1 Ajay

Ajay identifies as a continuing generation, domestic student; his sociocultural identities are Asian, male, and straight. He began as an undergraduate at his university in the fall of 2020, when students couldn't live on campus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During his time as an undergraduate, he was a member of the university's prestigious scholarship program, and he completed his bachelor's degree in December of 2023. At the time of the interview, he was working on his master's degree (engineering) at the same university and completing an internship in a different state. Discussing the political climate on his campus, he believes the university "has done a pretty good job of remaining neutral … and as a result, my time at the institution has probably been better for me to interact with people that have viewpoints outside of what I'm used to." However, he feels like his fellow engineering students are not very politically active or aware given all their academic demands; his exposure to diverse viewpoints comes from other places on campus and through his scholarship program.

Politically, Ajay identifies as an Independent, with a liberal political orientation. He and his family immigrated to the U.S. when he was a child and naturalized, and he credits his background as an immigrant for his liberal political orientation. However, he identifies as an Independent "to try and ensure that I don't immediately tear down, or immediately build up any barriers with, anybody that I interact with," and also because he knows voter registration data is public and he doesn't want his political affiliation to potentially be used against him by future employers.

He met his friend Kartik as an undergraduate because they were in the same major working on projects and studying together, and then they and some other friends would have weekly board game nights to counteract the limited opportunities for social interaction during pandemic restrictions. Although Ajay lived at home, the friend group lived on campus, so Ajay spent a lot of time at their apartment. Ajay described Kartik as Republican and conservative. Although both Ajay and Kartik are Asian (from the Indian subcontinent), Kartik grew up in the U.S. and has a strong Christian faith, unlike Ajay. Ajay approaches his differences with Kartik from the perspective of curiosity. For example, when Kartik recently bought a gun, Ajay "was curious when I heard that they did and I was intrigued about that process," even though he has always been afraid of guns, and Kartik was "very open and very encouraging" about sharing his perspective in response to Ajay's curiosity. Ajay shared that he and Kartik have never had a conflict over their differing political beliefs; instead, "we have definitely had talks of like, 'Why would you do that?' You know, questioning each other. But yeah, at the end of the day, kind of just leaving things as it is, don't want to ruin what we already have, I suppose, and let politics get in between that."

In making recommendations for what his campus can do to support friendships across political differences, Ajay stated on the survey, "Try to dissuade echo chambers from forming. No matter which side, the ability to meet with your people and civilly speak about issues is important." In the interview, he recommended the Campus Conversations Project, in which he's participated, as a way to do this; it hosts mediated discussions among diverse viewpoints on issues: "I think those conversations are actually really great opportunities for students to try and pull themselves out of … echo chambers."

7.2 Chase

Chase identifies as a continuing generation, domestic student; his sociocultural identities are white (American), male, and straight. He's in his fourth year at his university. He's a member of the prestigious academic scholarship program at his university and grew up in a neighboring state. In terms of the political climate on campus, he reflected, "I feel like it's [political topics] not freely talked about that much. I think you find your group and you talk about it with your group, but it's not like people are – I don't think people are talking about things just to kind of stir up drama, but I also don't think people are talking about things enough at times." Instead, he sees more political activity online and in the downtown area of the city where his university is located. Because he's a biomedical engineering major, there have been some political discussions in his classes (e.g., about abortion). He doesn't always engage in political conversations: "I also recognize that a lot of times I'm not the most qualified to be talking about these situations, or different, I guess, different problems that we're seeing, or different disagreements between the parties. So in that way, sometimes I kind of step back and say like, 'I'm not the most qualified to be talking about this, so I'll stay out of it.'"

Chase describes his political orientation as Republican and her political orientation as conservative. His beliefs stem from how he was raised; his family and the area where he grew up in Virginia is conservative. His Christian faith also plays a role in his beliefs leaning toward the conservative side. But at college, he's "surrounded with more liberal people than I was growing up, or more of a mix. … I know I've gained a ton of different perspectives being at [my university] than I would have gained if I would have, you know, stayed close to home."

Chase met his friend Melanie when they were high school seniors and both attended a Zoom session for the university's scholarship program (this was during COVID), although Melanie ended up not receiving the scholarship. Once they were both on campus, "we ended up like kind of seeing each other in person for the first [time] at our convocation freshman year. And then we ended up living in the same residence hall [for students in the university's honors program] and becoming friends." Chase lived on a men's floor of the residence hall and Melanie lived on a women's floor, and the two floors ended up becoming a friend group, starting when the Melanie and her floor mates baked cookies in the first week on campus and invited Chase and his floor mates to join them: "after that, it was kind of just history, and we were all a friend group after that." Chase and Melanie would also spend time

together apart from the others, getting lunch or coffee or studying together; they're both engineering majors and so they had some classes together. To maintain their friendship, Chase and his friend group (including Melanie) go to football, volleyball, and soccer games together and also have dinners to celebrate each other's birthdays. The two of them continue to study together, having a shared major; they also participate in honors program events together, and their apartments this year are "side by side." One of the most memorable experiences he and Melanie have had was when the two of them planned a trip to Florida for their friend group during their sophomore year.

Chase identified Melanie as a Democrat and liberal. Chase described Melanie as being "concerned with, like, her own rights, like women's rights, like gender gap, wage gap, stuff like that. But also, abortion was a big one for her." In contrast, Chase feels that because he's a man, these issues aren't as important to him; he's more concerned with issues like the economy. Despite their different beliefs, Chase emphasized "unity" in his collage, rather than their differences or disagreements. He chose several images to symbolize how he and Melanie stay friends and grow together despite their differences, including two trees intertwined, a torch with shared light, two puzzle pieces fitting together, a bridge, and two roads merging. Chase reflected, "I think there's always common ground or something that people can, you know, respect the other's point of view and find a way to – I guess, find a way to respect the other person's point of view, or find a way to put yourself in their shoes, even if you don't see it yourself." He also shared why he values having a friend like Melanie who holds different political beliefs: "surrounding yourself with people that aren't like-minded with you, I think it can help you grow as well and help you gain different perspectives. … there's millions of points of view, you know, there's millions of perspectives, and it's important to listen to the person sitting across the table from you and to learn from them." Chase recounted a memorable conversation in which he listened and learned from Melanie's perspective, when she shared her frustration about how men doctors don't believe women patients: "it's something that I hadn't really thought about before, I think, because I'm a male, you know? … And it just, it kind of made me think like, you know, that's not right." He reflected, "I wanna carry that out with me when I'm hopefully practicing as a dentist [his career goal]."

Despite their differences, Chase believes "there's more similar between the two of us than different, to be honest," including their shared Christian faith. He continued, "I think I try to see that in people a lot, maybe, the similarities more so than the differences. And I think that's important in maintaining a friendship even when there are political differences. I think it's important to, you know, at times take politics out of the equation and kind of establish like, 'This is why we're friends and this is what we agree on. And this is what has kept us together in a cohesive friendship.'" But he also noted that Melanie, and others in his friend group, tend to post political things on social media rather than having in-person conversations about their political beliefs. He noted that they don't really have "big disruptions" about their different beliefs, but rather "it's just comments." For example, Melanie once commented, "I can't believe you would be drinking Starbucks!" when she saw Chase holding a Starbucks cup, "while there was a boycott on Starbucks because they were supporting Israel." But Chase felt it was "a light-hearted comment; it wasn't like a hostile comment." Afterwards he "just

brushed it off. Nothing really happened."

Chase commented that attending a "bigger school" allows more opportunities to develop and sustain "multiple circles" of friendships through things like clubs and sporting events, which "gives an outlet that's not academics. For people to relax, to have fun, and to just enjoy time with their friends, that might not be studying with them where you're quiet." He also commends his campus for providing a lot of outreach and support for students' mental health: "I think a lot of times friendships might decline when someone isn't in a good mental state, or something along those lines, just because – I don't know, your mood can affect multiple friendships. And your mood – one day you might lash out, and then one of your friendships could be ruined. So I think indirectly supporting mental health has really helped friendships around campus. In terms of recommendations, Chase mentioned the Campus Conversations program: "we'll find there's always disagreements at the table, but you learn so much from the disagreements, I think. And then even if you disagree, I think you go home and you think about what the other person said, and maybe then something sparks in your mind where you actually might agree with them. … I don't think it has to help in changing anyone's viewpoint, but I think it helps in being able to understand someone else's point of view or to put yourself in their shoes." He suggested that colleges might make these conversations a class requirement, especially for required social sciences or humanities courses: "because then you're not putting something on another student's schedule, just another thing that they have to do, it's already in their class time."

7.3 Ellery

Ellery identifies as a continuing generation, domestic, female student; her sociocultural identities are white and straight. She's in her third year at her university. Ellery describes the political climate on her campus as "pretty tame," noting "people aren't talking like a crazy amount of politics," but she has noticed that "a lot of people my generation are for like Kamala [Harris for U.S. president], and there's a lot of like that." Ellery volunteers on her campus with registering people to vote; she's motivated because she feels that local elections are even more important than federal elections.

Ellery describes his political orientation as moderate and she identifies as a moderate Republican. She discussed how her political beliefs are a combination of her parents'; her mom is a Democrat and her dad is a Republican. "We do talk a lot of politics in my house, I would say, more than probably most … so I'm able to, like, weigh both of their opinions." They modeled for Ellery that it's possible to have close interpersonal relationships across political differences.

Ellery met her friend Piper in a political science class they both took during their first year:

> She knew my roommate, and then I found out she was in my class, and I was like, "Oh, come sit with me in class." And we just got to talking, and I was like, oh, I really like this girl. So we would hang out, go to dinners together in the dorms last year, go to [a] dining hall, and like all that stuff. So we got really close because she knew my roommate and I really liked her and she was in my class.

During that first year, Piper joined Ellery and her suitemates in weekly dinners and watching *The Bachelor*, becoming part of their friend group. Now, in their second year, their friend group goes to football games on the weekends and still gets together once a week to go out to dinner or other activities. Ellery and Piper are also members of the university's pre-law/pre-government fraternity, so they go to those events together, which has helped them become closer. Piper was also involved with Ellery in the on-campus voter registration volunteering, because they both value political participation. They're both hoping to have internships in Washington, D.C. next summer and plan to live together there if they do.

Ellery identified Piper as a Democrat and "not crazy liberal, but she is more liberal, I would say, than most people." An interesting point where they agree is holding similar views about the value of trucking and truckers, and she recounted a conversation they had about that (something she also included on her collage). They're also both in favor of legalizing marijuana use. Ellery described one area in which they hold different beliefs: "She wants to give foreign aid more to people, more to countries than like, I differ on that a little bit." Ellery believes the U.S. should prioritize giving aid to those who need it in the U.S., particularly in the wake of the destruction in the western part of the state where their university is located due to a hurricane that occurred about a month before the interview.

The two also differ in who they plan to vote for in the upcoming presidential election; Piper is a strong supporter of Harris, whereas Ellery is "sitting in the middle right now where I'm struggling to even decide who to vote for. And [Piper's] kind of is confused about the fact of why I'm confused on who to vote for, because she thinks Trump is just not a good candidate and it's a no-brainer. So we differ on that, of who should run and kind of what the best option is, because I kind of want to look at it a little bit more than just party lines." Ellery recalls having a conversation with Piper about who they were voting for after one of the presidential debates. She noted that their conversations about political differences never escalate into conflict or "yelling [at] each other." Instead, "we're usually pretty civil in our conversations … I would be like, 'Oh, I see what you're saying, but like this is my view on it,' and she'll be like 'Oh, like I see what you're saying, this is my view on it like I kind of agree with the points you're saying.' … I try my best and Piper does very good at like just providing points for each other, and if that works and we're able to sway each other's opinion, great." Ellery credits an honors course she's taking focused on civil discussion for helping her understand that "even if you have differing points of view, raising your voice is not gonna change anyone's perspective. It's the points that you give them and the evidence you provide." However, Ellery shared, "with the election coming up, I think there's been a little bit more like disagreements" between her and Piper, and "I think we've both been kind of like quiet just to like not rock the boat."

Ellery feels like she's grown through her friendship with Piper in a couple of ways. First, Piper has emphasized the need for Ellery to check her facts rather than accepting something she's heard without question: "I think she's made me be like, 'You know what? You need to look into this a little bit more before you start saying, like, repeating what's been said,' you know. And so I've definitely been fact checking myself because I know she's gonna fact check me. And so that's been like a big thing, I think, is she's made me really know my information because I could be wrong and a lot of times I can be." She also feels like Piper has "definitely kind of pulled me more like towards the left a little bit," by emphasizing the human rights implications of the upcoming presidential election.

In terms of recommendations, Ellery discussed how the honors course on civil conversation she's taken in college as well as a similar course she took prior to college have helped her understand how to approach conversations across political differences, a skill she's drawn upon in developing and sustaining interpartisan friendships. And although she didn't explicitly say so, her comments about finding common ground or shared beliefs across partisan differences points toward a possible recommendation: that colleges should help students find that common ground rather than assuming they couldn't possibly share anything with a peer who holds a different partisan identity. Ellery has never been able to understand people who say they couldn't be friends with someone who holds certain beliefs because "people are so much more than like what they believe," and also because "I can have values from the left and the right and still be able to talk to you and like agree with you on some of your points." (Ellery briefly noted that she's no longer friends with her high school best friend, who told Ellery she could never be friends with a Republican.)

7.4 Georgianna

Georgianna identifies as a continuing generation, domestic student; her sociocultural identities are white, female, and straight. She's in her fourth year at her university. Her experiences around politics on her campus revolve largely around her membership in the university's pro-life club; she often engages in tabling and chalking on campus, and has experienced a lot of anger and hostility directed toward her from other students and staff as a result, although she says, "We're pretty blessed to have a relatively peaceful campus. … stuff gets crazier at another campuses."

Georgianna describes her political orientation as Paleoconservative and her political orientation as very conservative. Her political beliefs are influenced a lot by her religious identity (Catholic): "And so for me, like the most important issue is pro-life," but "I'm not fiscally conservative." She relies on statistics and psychology books she's read to inform her beliefs. When she was younger, she was "a radical atheist" and questioned her sexual orientation, so she sought out information, and based on that information, she ultimately decided to identify as heterosexual and Catholic: "I did a lot of self-reflecting and looking at statistics and what type of life I want to lead, what the healthiest lifestyles are." She seeks out resources from a range of perspectives: "I read stuff that's written by liberals, and

I'm like, I'll listen to it, I'll be like, 'Mmm, that's a good point.' And then they have a different conclusion from me, and I'm like, 'I'll just hold my breath for that part.' And like I understand how they got there … just because they had a different conclusion than me doesn't mean that their thought processes are completely wrong. Like if you listen to anything, you're going to get something out of it."

Georgianna's friend Annie grew up in a conservative Christian family with creationist beliefs, but she no longer identifies as Christian or with those beliefs; this creates a "void" in their friendship, because for Georgianna, Christianity is "a core part of my identity, and it's frustrating that I can't fully share in that part of my life with her." They met in German class, discovering a shared love of languages and sense of humor; Annie "showed me love, and that made me love her back." Georgianna commented, "I have a lot of respect for [Annie's] intellectual abilities. … you can tell that she's thought a lot about her beliefs … she researches like everything," like Georgianna. She added that she and Annie are both neurodivergent. Annie is a Libertarian, and many of her beliefs differ from Georgianna's: "she's pro-gun, she's pro-homosexual marriage. She's pro-drug use. … she's pro-Israel, which is different from me because I'm pro-Palestine." Even though they have different political identities and beliefs, Georgianna feels that Annie's "beliefs are guided by, like, very similar things, like empiricism. But, like, we have the same thinking mechanism, we're guided by the same principle." They share a passion for children's rights and protection that is a source of common ground when they're discussing their differences.

However, Annie tends to get "heated" about the issues she supports, especially abortion access, and Georgianna, in response, will "just listen to what she's saying" because she believes their relationship is more important than their differences; "it's not worth the emotional pain for me to be talking about this with her." Georgianna also noted, "when there's something that I disagree with, I'll just listen and ask questions and try to understand what [Annie's] saying." Georgianna feels there is a power difference between her and Annie, because Annie is "very confident, she's very assertive, and so she will push, and she will push back … I can't really fully be myself and fully relax when speaking with those topics" like abortion and Christianity. Georgianna says that when Annie shuts her down, "it makes me feel small and it makes me not wanna hang out with her anymore," but she hasn't told Annie how she feels.

In terms of recommendations, Georgianna believes that language programs and classes are "friendship incubators" because "in these language classes, you can see a lot of like cross-cultural and cross-ideology relationships"; language classes also tend to be smaller and require a lot of interaction among students. She also believes it's important for colleges and universities to support campus groups representing a range of political beliefs and perspectives, to counteract negative media messaging, especially about conservative people and issues. She also encourages institutions to allow faculty members to more explicitly express their political beliefs, especially conservative faculty members: "in order to have a safe place for political friendships, you have to be allowed to have those ideas."

7.5 Grace

Grace is a Hispanic woman who is a continuing-generation, domestic student and asexual. She is enrolled in a higher education master's program at a public university and has a job in the admissions office. She attended community college at the start of her undergraduate journey before transferring to the public university and later beginning her graduate program at the same institution. During the interview, Grace shared more about her experiences as trans and autistic and how both identities shape the way she engages friendships—as well as her fears about revealing her identities in the friendship context. Grace expressed concerns about the political climate at large (not just on her campus, where she felt less connected)—including the anti-DEI movement—and was worried about broader impacts on her ability to be open and safe. She said, "it feels very heavy everywhere," as the 2024 presidential election loomed in the near future.

Grace identifies as a Democrat—reluctantly—and is very liberal politically. As the child of immigrants, Grace's disdain for Democrats has to do with how moderate she perceives them to be, especially on immigration and foreign policy (e.g., Israel-Palestine).

Grace's friend, Jack, is a very conservative Republican who is religious (Christian) and a Trump supporter. The friends met six years ago when Grace was attending community college and worked at a local game store. Jack was a regular customer at the store and eventually invited Grace to join the tabletop role-playing game that he and his partner (now wife) ran at their home. Grace explained, "I currently run a game with the two of them, we meet biweekly at their house to play." Jack and his wife are white and heterosexual, adding further dimension to the differences—and power imbalances—between Grace and her friends.

Grace said she "was very much in the closet with a lot of things with my friends." Grace also described herself as fairly reclusive, non-confrontational, and "not a very open person about my beliefs." She feared that "all the things in the closet…might spark an argument." Even so, Grace shared, "I love my friends. I enjoy them deeply, and even with the different views, because they're nice to me, and they're really the only friends I see on a regular basis and talk to on a regular basis." As Grace anticipated needing to reveal her identities as she moved forward with her gender-affirming transition, she described her anxiety and the risk of loss: "I know that eventually I'll have to come out of the closet. And will they be supportive? Honestly, they probably will in the end. They probably will, because I'm their friend. But I'm just terrified of actually opening up on the off chance of it falling apart."

Grace expressed her worldview and political beliefs by subtly weaving in characters and storylines within the role-playing game to reflect her interests and values. At times, Grace and Jack experienced conflict around Grace's storylines when Jack disagreed with the direction of the game and the implications for his character. Grace experienced distress in these moments and often resorted to people-pleasing when she would "do all this grand stuff to try and make it work just to please him."

On recommendations to support interpartisan friendship on campus, Grace pondered in her survey response, "I do not know. Is it the college and universities' responsibility to do that? It is to encourage students to learn both how to research, to discuss, and to grow. To learn the most about life and all around them. Such is life."

7.6 Jack

Jack identifies as a first-generation, domestic, Black American, male, and heterosexual/straight student. He's in his third year of college. In talking to other students on his campus about politics, Jack said, "There are kind of some basic rules which I follow. To me, I would just like, talk or maybe [unclear] concerning my speech, in order to not hurt the next person … I keep my things, you know, playful and, you know, push them, your opinions today or try to like address while I'm, you know, I've stand my ground and be comfortable as a Democrat."

In addition to identifying as a Democrat, Jack describes his political orientation as liberal. (On the survey he responded "very conservative," but in the interview, he clarified, "I think there is a kind of a little bit of error. I was about to keep that liberal.") He developed his political beliefs observing his dad and other people in his community: "I just tend to like, observe to see what they're actually doing, concerning leadership and things like that, how does that reflect back to their political background."

Jack met his friend George in his first year of college. He saw George "repeatedly, every day" (possibly in class, but it's unclear). Jack was feeling "isolated" and thought George might be too, so as Jack recounted, "One day I decided to go sit closer to him. And I was just kind of scared to start up a conversation. So I just took a while and just asked his name and that." A memorable moment in their friendship was when Jack was sick, and George checked up on him regularly: "kind of to encourage me to kind of get better and to that. So I found that his presence was amazing to me, you know that also helped in my quick recovery, my healing time." They play basketball and work out together and hold each other accountable for completing class assignments and readings. Jack and George are both Christian, and so they sometimes read the Bible together. Jack trusts George to keep his secrets, and that trust has helped bring them closer.

Jack identified George as a conservative Republican. Jack shared that "I just tend to keep cool with any people who tend to be Republicans," and he also described how he tends to avoid engaging with George's political beliefs: "[George] has the like, the [unclear] tendency to like, you know, stand his ground no matter what. You know, he has a strong belief that that he says is kind of right and that. So sometimes I don't really try to like, oppose that motion for him, because in our [unclear] political discussion that, you know, something might occur. But I don't intend to, like, challenge him a lot when he tends to like, you know, just trying to get his ground, so, stand, like, said what he said, but I can't believe what he say. So I just accept that."

Jack says he and George haven't experienced much conflict around their differences, just some occasional disagreements: "Sometimes we tend to like disagree and we just let it go. … we won't press an issue, like I'll surrender and say, 'Yeah, you win,' to just kind of cut it out." When those disagreements occur, Jack reflected, "that kind of hurt a little bit, because when you finally kind of find out that maybe you're right, and you kind of tend to like not believe the other side." Jack feels like he and George participate equally in their conversations; he doesn't feel there are any power differences between them.

In terms of campus recommendations, Jack replied on the survey, "Total understanding that these political differences shouldn't lead to hatred among each other." When asked to elaborate on that during the interview, the audio wasn't clear enough to understand his response.

7.7 Jessica

Jessica is a white, female, heterosexual, first-generation, domestic college student. As a third-year student, she recently changed her major from engineering to agribusiness management. Jessica described the political climate on campus as "good" and "not toxic," with ample information available and opportunities to learn about different political perspectives and voting. She also observed demonstrations taking place on campus, but none that escalated to violence. Jessica identifies as a moderate Independent and described herself as "not really extreme…a little neutral when it comes to affiliations." She uses a moral compass to determine how she votes and said, "it's hard to find a middle ground." As a woman, she is concerned about reproductive rights being taken away entirely—but her views on abortion are also moderated by her Christian faith.

Jessica and Jamie met in their physics lab on the first day of class. As two of few women in their major, they immediately connected and worked together as lab partners. Soon after meeting, they bonded over similar religious lineages (Catholicism) within their families and enjoyed shared activities like going to the gym, the coffee shop, or the library on campus. They have similar views on women's rights, which provides some political common ground. Jamie participates in Greek Life, which Jessica is somewhat wary of because she worries for her friend's safety. The friends became closer as Jamie supported Jessica's transition to a new major and they had meals and played games at Jessica's apartment.

In addition to their political differences (Jamie is a liberal democrat), Jamie is non-religious while Jessica is committed to her Christian faith. Jamie is part of the LGBTQ+ community and Jessica is straight. While Jamie supports LGBTQ+ rights, Jessica is less supportive of this movement—though she supports her friend—citing her Christian beliefs. Jessica commented, "She knows how I feel about things, but I don't ever bring it up in fear of, you know, making her feel bad or uncomfortable in any way." Jessica lived into this tension, expressing warmth and support, relishing the chance to meet Jamie's new girlfriend. And while Jamie did not identify with Jessica's Christian faith, she expressed

support and excitement when Jessica decided to be baptized.

In her survey, Jessica reflected on the differences in her friendship with Jamie: "I believe in things she doesn't because of my religion, and she is not religious at all. She is also not straight, and I am. We both know where each other stands and even though we agree on some things and disagree on others, we respect each other and never really have political conversations." In other words, the friends know about their differences, but tend to be cautious about bringing them up. On issues of human rights, Jessica noted that the war in Ukraine is a major issue for her and LGBTQ+ rights are a major issue for Jamie. Jessica explained, "I think we kind of go back and forth of like the concern for each other when, you know, rights come up." The friends supported one another and gave each other safe space to change and evolve as people, according to Jessica who went on to say, "it's more of [an] experiencing change in each other's life instead of influencing it."

Jessica recalled some campus email communications about equity, friendships, and navigating differences in her first year, but otherwise didn't feel there were intentional efforts directly supporting her friendship with Jamie. On recommendations for supporting interpartisan friendship on campus, Jessica indicated a preference for an apolitical, non-coercive approach in her survey response: "I feel like many colleges try to encourage political conversations, and we shouldn't. If you want to join a group of like-minded people, that's fine, but don't pressure other random people when you're tabling or in a friendship." She also felt that support for navigating friendships across difference—like the email she received—should be offered to students beyond the first year on campus, and that efforts to bring students together across demographic differences for conversation in group settings would be worthwhile.

7.8 John

John identifies as a continuing generation, domestic man; his sociocultural identities are Indian/South Asian and heterosexual. He's in his third year at his university. John began his college journey at a community college near the university that he now attends. Describing the political climate on his campus, John mentioned having seen some protests related to the Israel-Hamas conflict and a third-party political candidate tabling for support. Additionally, at the time of the interview he was taking a class on the U.S. government and the Constitution, so he's had some discussions about politics with peers in that class. The university has also organized some debates on campus related to political topics.

John describes his political orientation as liberal and is a moderate Democrat. In high school he identified more as a Republican, explaining, "I didn't really understand, and I was still kind of a kid with a lot of maybe like Republican Caucasian friends and kinda getting influenced like that." But then he started learning more about philosophy, law, and government because he was interested in those topics, and he also had powerful conversations with his cousin; all of these things helped him form his more liberal beliefs.

John met his friend Ryan in high school when they were both 15, and they've been friends for eight years since. Ryan had just moved to John's high school, and he asked John to borrow a bow tie before the Homecoming dance: "I didn't even know him at the time, but that's kind of just how, like little boys are, right, like help each other out. So then I gave him a bow tie. And then, yeah, that's history." One of their most memorable moments that brought them closer together in high school was when they attended a Wiz Khalifa concert together and got caught by the police for smoking pot. John went to a university in a neighboring state, so they haven't seen each other as often in college as they did in high school. John credits Ryan for modeling how to be more responsible, when they were in high school: "he always had a way to balance his real responsibilities and his social responsibilities, where I would probably let some things fall through the cracks. He was always really good at that, so I learned from him in situations like that." Now when they spend time together, they're often playing golf or drinking beer; "at the end of the day when we just like sit down and like talk about a lot of other things, have a beer, and like just kinda appreciate the other aspects of our friendship, especially as kids and all the other things we learn and did together. And now how far we've come without necessarily, like, having to have animosity towards each other." John also recounted a long phone call with Ryan recently that went until 6:00 in the morning where they discussed religion.

John identified Ryan as Republican and noted that while Ryan would probably describe himself as very conservative, John wouldn't describe him that way. He shared that he and Ryan "had pretty much the same beliefs" when they were in high school, and they would often have philosophical conversations about their shared beliefs about the world. They would also discuss religion; John is Hindu and Ryan is Christian. But John described Ryan's family as very conservative and noted that Ryan and his family have become closer over recent years, and "after that I started hearing a lot of different things come out of his mouth." He also wonders if the fraternity Ryan joined at his university has also led him to become more conservative. John reflected, "since then we'll talk, and I just started just hearing, like, different things that I had not remembered. And maybe he did believe those things in high school but I'm just not remembering them. Maybe I, like, wanna just not remember them. But I'm very, very sure that he just wasn't like that" in high school. Their religious differences have become more salient in recent years too; John shared, "now it just kinda seems like that's more of like, I probably shouldn't bring that [religion] up with him. But it doesn't feel like maybe even, like, respectful anymore. … I guess it just doesn't feel like he's in that [same] boat anymore," as a friend who is also questioning religion and their beliefs about the world—what John called "ultimate truth." John described Ryan holding what John would consider Democratic views about abortion and gun restrictions, but what "we have very different beliefs in is the giving of government funds to maybe people who are in assistance in different areas … [he's] less willing to give to people in poverty." When asked if he and Ryan have talked about how they're planning to vote in the upcoming presidential election, John said, "I don't know if he is voting for Donald Trump, but I do know he's not gonna vote for Kamala Harris. Which I do think is pretty important as educated Americans in this next election. We probably will have a conversation about it; I don't really know how it's gonna go."

In terms of recommendations, John stated on the survey that universities should "host events that should not normally engage people in political conversation but rather enjoy each other's company and humanity, performing some other activity or attending some other event." Elaborating on this in the interview, he explained that focusing on activities that allow students to engage with each other without involving politics, like recreational sports, can lead to friendships across political boundaries: "I have no idea what their political affiliation is, right? We still play soccer together for 90 minutes, and then sometimes we'll go out afterwards, right? … the focus in this is on soccer," not politics. Whereas at political events, like the campus debates mentioned previously, it's unlikely students will reach across political divides. Reflecting further on his friendship with Ryan, John commented, "I'd say the biggest reason that I think we are able to have a lot of these conversations is because we have a close friendship, like I was saying with the intramural soccer, that's built on something else [other than politics]. If you try to, like, build it, like, you're instantly jumping into opposite sides of the pool on whatever it is, like partisanship, religion, anything, I think it's gonna be really hard for you to come together like that." Having a "solid foundation" for a friendship first, built on something other than politics, enables the friends to have conversations about their differences.

7.9 Katherine

Katherine identifies as a continuing generation, domestic student; her sociocultural identities are white, female, and straight. She's in her first year in a graduate program (counseling) at her university, and she attended the same university for her bachelor's degree, graduating the spring prior to the interview. Reflecting on her university's political climate, Katherine shared, "my first two years of college, like, I wasn't super affected by it because I just kind of went to class and kind of did my own thing and I didn't really try to get, like, super involved in really a ton. Then my last year that I was an undergrad, specifically in that spring, I remember the protest against Kyle Rittenhouse. And that was something that, for me, was kind of my first, I guess, like, taste of kind of like that politically charged atmosphere, or just really a lot of conflict, a lot of protest and just a lot of differing opinions." She noted that she hasn't seen much on campus about the upcoming presidential election other than a few conversations in her classes. She worries about the aftermath of the election on her campus because "we have different people on different sides who are very vocal, and it does kind of scare me a little bit to be like, okay, you know, this is gonna be a big thing. So I would say around that feeling, I do feel fear, but I trust everything will be okay. … I do feel a little bit nervous, afraid of what could happen."

Katherine describes her political orientation as conservative and her affiliation as "a moderate Republican … I lean more right than left." She's Catholic, and so much of her experience of the university's political climate is through the lens of her Catholic beliefs and especially her involvement in the university's Catholic Student (Newman) Center and pro-life student organization, both of which she joined as an undergraduate and continues to be involved with as a graduate student. When she first came to campus, she found it hard to be surrounded by so many left-leaning people and took

refuge in the Newman Center and made friends who shared her beliefs. But she eventually realized she didn't like being "stuck in a bubble," and says that now, "while I do still hold true to a lot of the Catholic beliefs, I really love talking to people about different beliefs and trying to understand where they're coming from." She appreciates that the beliefs she and her family/community held growing up have been challenged and that she's "been challenged and made me think and kind of take things on for myself throughout my experience at" her university. She's also tried to make sure her younger siblings don't grow up in the same bubble by challenging things family members have said about the LGBTQ community.

Katherine met her friend Marisol in the spring of their first year as undergraduates; they were both enrolled in a peer leadership training course. They started talking and realized they were both majoring in psychology and minoring in Spanish. Their friendship deepened as they took classes in both subjects together; they would study together outside of class and get meals at the dining hall together, which "gave us the opportunity to have conversations about, like, our lives and things like that." The summer after their first year of college, they went to a museum together to celebrate the end of their first year, which Katherine identified as a key moment when they "grew from like acquaintance to friends." They both graduated at the same time and are enrolled in the same graduate program, so now they go on double dates, Zumba classes, and campus plays to spend time together outside of classes. They also spend time together as a foursome with their respective romantic partners during the summer because all four live relatively close to each other.

Katherine identified Marisol as a liberal Democrat, and also a Latina and a lesbian—all identities different from Katherine's. Katherine shared that because of her multiple minoritized identities, Marisol "will fight for what's right, which I admire about her so much. … I really haven't had to advocate for myself, which is a terrible thing with our world. … but she's doing something to change that. So I guess I really look up to her in that way." Katherine discussed the "conflict" between her Catholic beliefs and Marisol's lesbianism:

> Catholics view homosexuality as, I guess we would say, a sin. … because I was told that [growing up], I never really knew how to view people who were a part of that community and I was just like, 'Oh, they're bad,' in a sense. … and I met my friend, and I was like, 'But she's just a person.' … I stress to my friends who kind of have that belief about it [homosexuality] is bad is that in the eyes of Catholics, we're all sinners, because, you know, we all mess up. And just because someone's sin is more like outward and you can see it doesn't mean that that makes them any less than you are. And I think a lot of Catholics don't agree with that, and will make comments about that community or hold really negative beliefs about that community. And it really breaks my heart because that's where I was a few years ago. But having a – getting a better picture of that community has really helped me open my eyes to be like, everyone's just a human being and deserves to be treated with the same amount of dignity and respect. And I do owe a lot of that to my friend, just like being able to kind of walk with me through that and just like accept, you know.

Katherine stated that she and Marisol don't really talk about their differences; instead, "It was just kind of like a mutual acceptance of and acknowledgment of each other's differences and just choosing to respect it." However, she did describe one conversation they had about Catholic beliefs "about homosexuality and why the church views it as a sin," but added, "it's just kind of been a thing where we're like, we accept it, we respect it, [but we] don't really dive into it too deeply."

A memorable moment Katherine included in her collage was going to a protest with Marisol against an anti-DEI bill proposed in the legislature of the state where their university is located. Even though Katherine felt "uncomfortable to kind of be at like a protest like that at the protest," especially because she was one of few white students there, she learned "how it could really hurt minority students in particular, like it's just crazy." Through experiences like this that she's had with her friend Marisol, she feels "being able to grow in that way, and being a little bolder, and being more understanding of different populations has really, really been helpful for me" as a person and as a future mental health counselor. She's come to realize, "I need to change my view, like I need to change my thinking, I need to listen, I need to open my ears." However, a protest was also a source of tension between them; Marisol had missed a class they shared without explaining why and asked Katherine for her notes, and then Katherine saw Marisol at a protest for a leftist cause when Katherine was tabling for the pro-life student organization, and Katherine was surprised Marisol didn't mention it to her. Katherine commented, "So it was kind of a weird time, because I was there for like pro-life things and she was there for the protest. … I felt like she maybe felt uncomfortable telling me that." However, they never talked about it. Overall, though, Katherine appreciates being close to someone who's different from herself in multiple ways: "I'm really grateful for, like, our friendship, because … I can see from both sides."

Katherine commented that her university and most of her professors create an environment that's "open to all people" and "neutral … acknowledging of both sides." She reflected, "I think that is very important to friendships like the one that we have, because I think a big fear with people talking to people from like another side or people who are different is that they're just gonna, like, lash out at them, or they hate them, or they're like – or even that they're less than them." She'd like to see colleges and universities "offering training on, like, how to have civil conversation … no matter what side you're on, we're gonna give you just some, like, 101 like training, just like these are some tips we have, it doesn't matter what side you're on, but like how to be an active listener." She'd also like to see more of her fellow students attending events sponsored by organizations they may not agree with: "better advertise political orgs and saying like, this is open for everyone and we want a conversation to happen here … even training clubs that are more politically charged on how to do that, like how to be more open to having conversations [with someone else on the other side] and making sure that's a part of the clubs." She recognizes her peers might be afraid of conflict, and so "we need a lot more training on how to just be civil and to listen, and to know that we can be wrong and that's okay and that we can still walk away from that conversation with our belief, but not have to make the other person feel terrible, like that's possible. I just think giving examples and showing that it is possible to have a productive conversation is great."

7.10 Margo

Margo is a white, female, heterosexual, domestic, continuing-generation student. She attended a religiously-affiliated undergraduate institution (where she met her friend Margo) and is currently a first-year master's student at a public university. At the public university she currently attends, Margo described a hate-speech incident targeting the LGBTQ+ community and a "heavy" feeling on campus after the 2024 presidential election. Considering her religiously-affiliated undergraduate institution, Margo "felt like politics weren't really talked about much," leaving her feeling "unexposed to a lot of those things."

Margo, a self-described Republican with conservative leanings, said her political identity was shaped by growing up in a small town with a religious upbringing and a dad who worked in law enforcement. Margo noted that she has been "shifting my point of view on some things" through the "eye-opening" learning she's been engaged in as a graduate student. She said she had been "closed-minded" throughout her life and hadn't really considered other political points of view. Now, she feels her political orientation is becoming more moderate and she agrees with Democrats on certain issues, including providing gender-affirming care to trans people.

Margo and Eve met through a mutual peer (Margo's then-boyfriend) when they both attended the religiously-affiliated college as undergraduates. Margo's boyfriend introduced the two of them during the summer. With few other students around that summer, Margo and Eve became fast friends, enjoying a 4th of July cookout, sand volleyball, movies, card games, and a lot of laughter. Eve's identity as a very liberal Democrat marked her as politically distinctive in a largely conservative campus religious environment. Margo described a memorable moment when Eve saw a Trump flag hanging up in someone's dorm room and expressed that she could never be friends with a Trump voter. Margo was also supportive of abortion rights, which she talked about when *Roe v. Wade* was overturned.

While Eve is "very extroverted and opinionated," Margo avoided sharing her opinions as openly because she "didn't really want to say the wrong thing or say something that I wasn't supposed to say just by accident." Margo also expressed not feeling "educated enough to be able to, like, rebuttal." The friends seemed to hold an implicit "agree to disagree" understanding—but Margo said of Eve, "I kind of just let her speak." Over a meal in the dining hall one day, Margo and Eve did discuss their different views on abortion more openly—and Margo "felt okay because I felt it wasn't an argument…we both stated our views and that was that."

Their shared interest in sand volleyball brought the friends together. Eve helped Margo learn the sport and proved herself to be patient and caring as Margo learned. As Margo practiced cheerleading that summer, Eve supported her, "kind of like a mom" (Eve was a senior when Margo was completing her first year). Eve would also at times hold Margo accountable and call her out for things she said or did. Margo credited Eve for helping her "to see things a little bit differently…and be able to understand that people have different opinions than me."

Margo didn't perceive their campus as having much impact on her friendship with Eve. She would see Eve at the rec center (where Eve worked) and they had some professors in common, but there was "nothing specific" about the campus that advanced their friendship. Margo recommended that campuses offer workshops and educate students on politics. She felt she lacked political education and was close-minded as a result, and she thinks exposure to diverse views is important.

Margo and Eve are less close now than they were, but this has less to do with their political differences and more to do with being in different places in life (i.e., Margo attends graduate school at another institution and Eve holds a full-time job) and no longer sharing a peer in common once Margo and her boyfriend broke up.

7.11 Mary

Mary identifies as a continuing generation, domestic student; her sociocultural identities are white, female, and heterosexual. She's in her third year at her university. She's involved as an orientation leader. Her university has a large Jewish student population, and so Mary felt there was a lot of conflict on campus in spring 2024 (the semester before the interview) around the Israel-Hamas war. One of her orientation group first-year students was suspended for taking part in a sit-in in the Chancellor's office in support of Palestine. Because Mary has a lot of Jewish friends on campus and saw her the protests made them feel unwelcome, she "ha[s] felt kind of like I need to support my Jewish friends, but also I don't really know if Israel's in the right because people that I would tend to align with support Palestine more." She adds, "I don't know much about the issue, so I don't really have an opinion." Mary reports not noticing much campus conflict over partisanship, however; she feels most students on her campus are anti-Trump, although "the people I do know who are super conservative are kind of friends with the other, like they're all in a club together."

Mary describes her political orientation as "in between moderate and left, like somewhere in the middle there. Definitely left-leaning though," and identifies as a Democrat. She described herself as being "very left, very liberal" when she was younger and attribute that in part to social media, but "as I got to college, my political beliefs have kind of become a little bit more moderate," which she feels may be because there's now a Democrat (Biden) as president, so she feels less passionate about politics than when Trump was president. Mary describes herself as an "issue voter" dedicated to "women's issues," especially abortion (she's pro-choice).

Mary met Luke, whom she identifies as Republican and conservative but "doesn't really have super strong political beliefs," during their first year on campus; they both lived on the same hall in their "dorm house." As an orientation leader, she's noticed a lot of first-year friendships form this way because the university "really emphasize[s] house community," but then often don't last beyond the first year; yet her friendship with Luke did. Initially they were both part of a large hall friend group, but

then it whittled down to a four-person group consisting of Mary, "my roommate [Ann], and then these two guys who live down the hall," Luke and Miles. She described it as "a convenience friendship kinda, just because, you know, we were like the first people to meet. Like when I got back from classes I could just go down the hall and see them." However, during their sophomore year Luke and Ann had "a big falling out," and as a result Mary doesn't really spend time with Luke or Miles anymore: "if I see Luke or Miles, I'll like say hi … I'll be happy to see them. But like, we're not, we don't hang out anymore or like, it's we're more like acquaintances, like past friends." She also feels like the loss of "forced proximity" (living in the same dorm house) made it less likely their friendship would continue because they're "very much like two different people."

Mary commented that Luke is "very like homophobic and like racist and, like, misogynistic. But he wasn't trying to be any of those things, if that makes sense. He just, like, didn't realize – he had only been around like other, like, people exactly like him who were brought up in the same way he was. And so he didn't understand when he was being racist or when he was being misogynistic or when he was being homophobic." The "big falling out" between Ann and Luke happened because Luke sent Ann, who is Jewish, "some kind of meme about Hamas killing Jewish people or something. But it was very, like, insensitive and it really upset her." Luke didn't understand why Ann got so offended, because it was "just a joke." Mary felt put in the middle of the situation; she "felt more kind of like I was really upset with what he had sent her, but I wasn't going to, like, take action against it because it didn't feel like my battle, which is maybe wrong. I felt like, more like my role in the situation was to kind of comfort Ann and not really like – and, like, maybe, like, tell Luke what he said was wrong." She also didn't understand why Ann got so upset in this instance because this was "unsurpris[ing]" behavior for Luke and Ann had never been offended before. Mary had many previous experiences of Luke acting this way: "I think he was kind of misogynistic and a lot of times, like, would take that out on me," in part because Mary is a gender studies major, and she felt like Ann would encourage Luke rather than take her side in those moments.

In terms of recommendations, Mary shared, "I think [my university] does a really good job of having that house community and encouraging people to like, be friends with people in their house. … that house community is like one of the first communities you have at [my university] and it's like you're not picking it. So I think that really does a good job of exposing you to different people who might have different political beliefs than you, or just like different backgrounds in general." She also commended the orientation groups, which continue to meet for six weeks into students' first semester on campus: "I think it's really great that [my university] puts you in these random like forced proximity groups right at the beginning of college, because you don't really know anyone and you're kind of forced to be in these groups with people who have, like, nothing in common to you besides the fact that you're both freshman at [the university]."

7.12 Max

Max identifies as a first-generation, domestic, Black American, male, and bisexual student. He's in his second year studying psychology at his university. His professional goal is to become a psychologist. He identifies as a liberal Democrat. He believes that people should have the right to choose their elected officials, and describes himself as "a big fan of Abraham Lincoln. … the governments of the people, by people and for the people."

In terms of how they met, Max described how Blake was being bullied for being feminine (even though Blake is straight), and Max stood up for him because he's experienced being bullied himself for being bisexual: "I had to speak up for him." As they became friends, some people told them they "should be intimate," questioning whether two men can have such a close friendship without having a sexual relationship, but "we actually respect each other's privacy." They did, however, kiss once: "… we're like, 'Did we do it?' … Blake [was] like, 'Hey, Max, you're not gonna be trying that shit again.' I was like, 'Oh, am I gonna be trying this shit again?' Like he never liked it. You know, we just have to laugh about that." Max and Blake are both psychology majors and have some classes together. To stay close, "we're doing almost everything together. Go to classes together, we go to lunch together, we do a lot of things together." Max described how he and Blake like to win arguments and discussions (some, but not all, of which are about their political beliefs); the loser has to pay for the winner's next meal. Max reflected on their relationship, "Our friendship is not just like the kind of a normal boys' friendship. Yeah, there's actually love." In addition to the difference in their sexual orientations, Max noted that Blake is white. Max reflected, "I just feel like the most important thing that actually keeps I and Blake's friendship really going fine is the fact that we understand ourselves." They take turns caring for each other by, for example, covering the other's meal if one is out of cash, or lending a listening ear when the other wants to talk about problems with family or other relationships. He added, "Sometimes we defend ourselves when we get in trouble. So that's what our friendship is supposed to be. And I'm having a best friend."

Max identified Blake as a moderate Independent: "Blake actually doesn't have, is not actually a big supporter of, you know, political parties." When they attend political events together on campus, Blake will support Max's political affiliation and orientation, but in private always reminds Max of his beliefs: "Blake is my friend, and you know, my friend, so he tries to support me. … because yeah, I'm right here supporting Democrats and Democrats. So he just has to stand with me. Yeah, do that. But we'll get back home, he's actually gonna say, 'I'm independent.'" Max described Blake as believing that "everyone has to rule their home. … people should have tools and control of themselves." This is a point of difference between Max and Blake, because Blake believes in political leaders being elected through the popular vote. Yet because Blake supports Biden, Max reflected, "I just wish someday I'm going to win him over."

One challenge they've faced in their relationship is that they both have girlfriends, and "they both did complain that we didn't spend time with them. We actually have to spend a whole lot of time with ourselves. And I just had … to tell my girlfriend she needs to understand that." This caused a conflict between Max and Blake, when Blake came to Max with complaints Blake's girlfriend had raised about their friendship: "I was trying to ask Blake, could we have a friendship for quite a long time before we met those girls, so we can actually leave them. And Blake was actually saying he was not gonna leave his girlfriend." Another conflict occurred at a restaurant; Max shared, "I think I was actually pissing [Blake] off at the moment. And he actually got upset and he spilled his coffee on me." (It's not clear if the argument was about political beliefs or something else.) The situation became heated, with Max and Blake yelling at each other and name-calling. Max reflected, "I was like, I wasn't going to be his friend again, and he wasn't gonna be mine. And we're going to be calling off our friendship right now, you know. … Funny enough, the next day, we actually had, you know, had a whole lot of conversation, like we hadn't said that," and Max apologized to Blake.

Max feels like his university is welcoming to a diverse range of people and beliefs, which supports his friendship with Blake; he feels like friendships across social boundaries like theirs are "pretty common" on campus. However, he hasn't perceived any encouragement (or discouragement) from faculty or staff: "I don't think they care about that. … they just basically try to you, know, be really interested in the students." One thing Max values about his friendship with Blake is that Blake doesn't see Max as "weird" for being bisexual, and therefore Max would like to see his university host "issue programs" on, for example, racial and sexual orientation identity differences "to clarify that that we are all different and we have the right to choose who wants to be as friends."

7.13 Moses

Moses is a Mexican, male, heterosexual, continuing-generation, domestic college student. He is a third-year undergraduate majoring in biology at his public university. Moses described the political climate on his campus as left-leaning, but he feels people are trying to be open-minded. He has observed protests on campus focused on the war in Gaza—though this activism has "fizzled"—as well as some religious proselytizing. Yet, none of the activity amounted to the activism, including encampments, at the state's flagship university and other institutions known to be more politically active.

Identifying as a liberal Democrat, Moses pointed to his parents as a major socializing political influence as well as life experience. As a Hispanic person and the grandchild of immigrants, Moses shared, "when you get to a certain age…you realize that a certain party sets a better path for what's gonna do better for you and your people." Moses expressed openness to others and humility in his own understanding, as he reflected, "I'm there to learn. I'm there to learn from other people. I don't know everything."

Moses and Sally have been friends since childhood and attended the same school from 4th through 8th grade. Their parents had been friends since high school. Moses' first memory of Sally was when he performed in a play that Sally's mom led. While the friends were in middle school—and shortly after Trump was elected president in 2016—their parents had a falling out during a family get-together at Sally's house. Although the parents never reconciled their friendship, Moses and Sally remained friends, even as they went on to college at different public universities.

Sally is a white conservative Republican who grew up in a blue-collar farming community. Moses explained that the conflict between their parents is similar to the primary conflict he and Sally continue to navigate: that is, Sally and her family support political leaders whose policies threaten immigrants, including Moses' Mexican family and community. Naming the struggle between them, Moses reflected, "I'm thinking in my head, like, how can this person that, like, claims to love me, love somebody that would say these things about me…but you can't think that way, because when you start thinking that way…you start to develop resentment." Moses felt that Sally's political views were largely due to her family socialization and that she was still working to develop a political identity based on research and critical reflection—and Moses felt some frustration with his friend at times. Although Moses did not initially agree that he and Sally had power differentials in their friendship (noting, "it's not me versus you, it's like us versus the world"), he went on to acknowledge the differences in power between their families and contrasted his immigrant lineage with her family's privilege as white with more opportunity to acquire generational wealth.

Moses and Sally negotiate their differences in a variety of ways. At times they "tiptoe around each other." When they are feeling more transparent, they "just try to be as respectful as possible, and, like, know when to cut off the conversation." Their exchanges have become heated, with voices raised—sometimes they intentionally provoke one another to enter these dialogues—but they've learned to "put a cork in it" and later make amends. Moses also shows the capacity to humanize Sally, "to distinguish a good person from…a political ideology that you disagree with."

Their shared activities and shared history tie the friends together. Moses expressed, "most of my fondest childhood memories involve her and also the other way around." Together they "kind of meander"—enjoying coffee, drives, going to the beach, hiking, and attending parties. To stay close, they "remember how it started. Remember why you're friends. Remember how long you've been friends."

Moses recommended in his survey response that campuses "encourage cross-political education. Empathy is the enemy of spite. Everyone has the same basic needs: food, water, electricity. We share the same struggles, but where those struggles [differ] is where political values also differ. Understanding the views of another person is what allows you to empathize, see yourself in their shoes, and understand why that might be frustrating." He advocated for political education to help students become more knowledgeable about the issues most important to them, and he

encouraged campuses to help students become more open-minded and have civil conversations in an environment that lowers defensiveness and opens up the possibility to learn.

7.14 Selena

Selena is a mixed-race cisgender woman who is bisexual and a domestic, first-generation college student. She is a second-year master's student in criminology at a public university. Reflecting on the political climate on campus, Selena observed "a lot of, like, drama and things like that that's been going on, especially because of the election year. And it's just causing a lot of, like, problems. And people are being a lot more out there. And there's a lot more hate going on, and a lot of criminal damaging happening around campus." In addition to expressions of transphobic speech and homophobic vandalism, a controversial conservative speaker had been invited to campus. Selena described participating in frequent protests and canvassing activities. All told, the political climate on campus was stressful to Selena.

Selena identifies as a moderate Democrat and explained, "There are things I disagree [on] with the Democrats, and there's also things I disagree [on] with the Republicans. But there's also things I agree with [on] both sides." While many of her views were more aligned with the Democratic party (e.g., on abortion access), she found common ground with traditionally Republican viewpoints on "ending the drug crisis and having border control."

Selena and Christina met at a Starbucks in the campus library on Selena's birthday. They "just hit it off" from the start despite their different views on just about everything. Christina is a very conservative Republican who is very opposed to abortion, supportive of veterans, and "anti-vax." They share common ground in their support for the LGBTQ+ community, of which Selena is a part. Christina supported Selena during the vandalism incident on campus targeting the LGBTQ+ community.

The friends enjoy shared activities like studying and going to lunch, the coffee shop, and parties together. Selena described the mutual support they offered one another this way: "it's us just comforting and loving each other." The friends have decorated their computers with stickers indicating the causes they care about—and this has led to conversations between them about their differences. At times, they use humor as they navigate their different views on abortion. They also are able to have respectful conversations about abortion—and know when to take a break if the conversation becomes too tense. When she needs to focus on working or studying rather than a political debate, Selena recognizes, "I don't have the mental capacity to do this right now. So we're gonna just put a pin in this." Selena also experienced hurt in their exchanges about abortion because a family member had died in the 1950s lacking access to safe abortion. Articulating how she has grown through her friendship with Christina, Selena shared, "…she helped me, like, with my relationship problems. And how to be more open, and how to be more patient, how to give grace."

Selena felt her friendship with Christina was supported through the mentorship of student affairs staff; these were individuals she felt she could turn to during conflicts with Christina and people who encouraged her not to "let people who don't know you [politicians] ruin your friendship; it's not worth it." Selena recommended more education on campus on "how not to let political views affect friendships."

7.15 Vanessa

Vanessa is a domestic, continuing-generation student who is white, female, and heterosexual. She is a master's student in a higher education and student affairs program at a public university and serves as an RA within a sorority house. She knows her campus well, having attended the same institution as an undergraduate. While her undergraduate experience was shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic when campus life came to a halt, Vanessa has been able to observe more political activity in recent years. She says the campus leans Democrat and liberal with "on and off" protests and rallies—and a heated political moment when a conservative speaker was invited to campus. With the 2024 election, activity on campus was somewhat muted according to Vanessa who said "there hasn't been much discussion about it from, like, the student body." To support students during election season, she said the campus provided mental health resources but little else.

Vanessa, who is Republican and moderate and strives to "live my life just like very peacefully," generally doesn't see herself as a very political person, and is "still coming into my political identity." She doesn't feel she has the knowledge to engage in significant political conversations and has concerns about how others will react and whether they will be respectful. Although her family has influenced her political identity as a Republican, Vanessa sees herself as continuing to grow and evolve and at times finds herself agreeing with those who don't share her political identity. Her frame of mind on politically different friendship elevates the relationship over political divides, as she shared: "I value my friendship more than my political identity, I guess, because…I love my people. I love my friends, and I want them to stay in my life no matter who they support."

Vanessa and her friend Jenn met in Vanessa's first year of college during sorority recruitment (for a sorority Jenn was already in). Vanessa immediately liked Jenn's "vibe," and they spent their first day together hanging out at the library and going to a sorority event. In their first meeting, Jenn pretended that she had, like Vanessa, been in musical theater in high school—perhaps as a way of forging a connection with Vanessa. They had mutual friends through the sorority, went on vacation together, shared a love of alpacas, enjoyed activities like watching movies together, and eventually lived together in Vanessa's junior year. Vanessa did not observe power differences in their friendship, as they were both white women and continuing-generation students. Jenn was older than Vanessa, but that difference didn't play much of a role in their friendship.

As a very liberal Democrat and feminist, Jenn is quite open about her political beliefs and her ardent dislike of Trump and support for women's rights. Vanessa explained that "political views and whatnot have never gotten in the way of our friendship" and that the two share an implied understanding that "we can have our differences and vote for different people, and that, like, not affect us as friends." Vanessa and Jenn didn't have direct conflict over their political differences, but Vanessa did describe a tense political moment between Jenn and two roommates in their shared living space. When *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, Vanessa and Jenn agreed about protecting women's reproductive rights and were "on the same page about that." Vanessa's peer network grew because of her friendship with Jenn, and with Jenn's support Vanessa "came out of my shell more" and became "a more social, outgoing person."

Vanessa didn't feel her campus explicitly supported her friendship with Jenn, but she did have recommendations for what could be done to support interpartisan friendships generally: "they could offer like a class or workshop just to kind of navigate those political differences." She also thought it could be helpful to "[bring] in students that have a healthy political, different friendship to kind of be like, 'this is how we did it,' and, like, talk about the challenges that they faced and how they overcame them." In general, Vanessa's recommendations for campuses can be summed up this way: "I am a firm believer in respectful communication. I think colleges or universities should create workshops or educational programs about effective communication regarding conflicting opinions."