

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement

2024 Annual Report

MESSAGE FROM THE CENTER'S LEADERSHIP

The higher education landscape shifted dramatically in 2024 as college and university leaders faced innumerable speech-related challenges: debates about institutional neutrality dominated the news cycle, Congressional hearings strove to apportion responsibility and blame and clashes unfolded on campus.

As campuses sought to weather this free speech storm, the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement remained a steady force for education and guidance—pivoting to meet the moment with robust programming and resources. UC President Michael V. Drake called on the Center to help lead the system's response to ongoing events on campus. This included tailored First Amendment workshops for diverse stakeholders in residential life, communications and student affairs.

Responding to emerging events was only part of the Center's story this year. We also continued to sustain impactful research, foster community engagement and nurture meaningful conversations across the country. In the run-up to a contentious national election that spotlighted the importance of upholding democratic values, we sustained our mission of encouraging dialogue, debate and learning. The Center remains committed to upholding these pillars of a thriving campus community, and we are grateful for your partnership.



Erwin Chemerinsky
Dean, University of California Berkeley School of Law



Howard Gillman
Chancellor, University of California, Irvine



Michelle Deutchman
Executive Director



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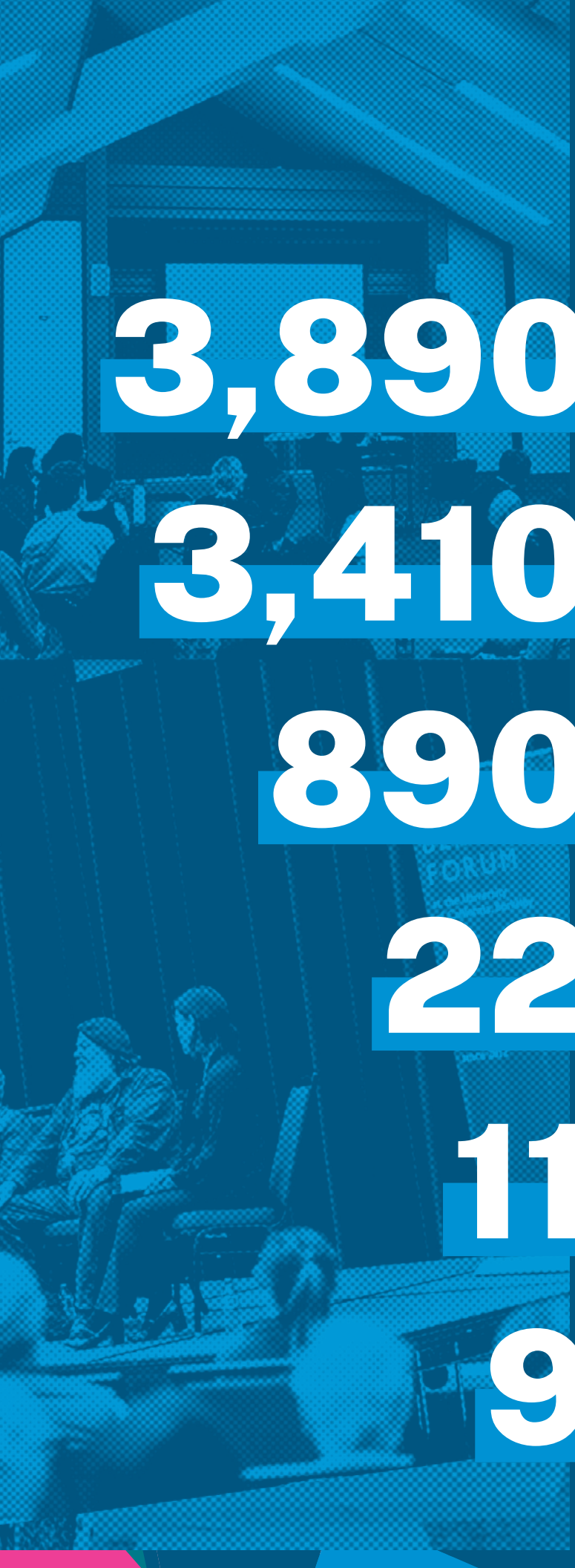
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OUR MISSION

To explore the intersection of expression, engagement and democratic learning and consider what can be done to restore trust in the value of free speech on college campuses and within society at large.



2024 BY THE NUMBERS:

3,890 attendees at Center workshops

3,410 SpeechMatters podcast listens

890 attendees at annual #SpeechMatters Conference

22 Valuing Open and Inclusive Conversation and Engagement (VOICE) Award Recipients Selected

11 2024-2025 Fellows Selected

9 2023-2024 Fellows' Research Projects Completed

PROGRAMS

CENTER FELLOWS

Class of 2023-2024

The Center's sixth class of fellows focused their research on diverse issues such as supporting faculty and staff during incidents of targeted harassment, cultivating a campus culture of civic engagement and democratic learning and understanding marginalized students' experiences of using the bias response process.



Susan Balter-Reitz & Michael Bruner

"The Performance of Argument in University Free Speech Legislation: Lessons for University Leadership in Public Communication"



Kaleb Briscoe

"Dismantling DEI in Higher Education: An Analysis of How Diversity Professionals View Political Bans"



Alex Kappus

"Cultivating a Culture of Civic Engagement and Democratic Learning: Examining Institutional Responses to the California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act (AB 963)"



Frank Fernandez

"Can Universities Support Civic Engagement through Science Literacy?"



Nina Flores
Senior Fellow

"Resources for Supporting Faculty and Staff During Incidents of Targeted Harassment"



Raquel Rall

"The Reach of Civic Engagement: The Impact of Student Trustees on Campus and Beyond"



Sara Johnson

"Role Models as a Motivator of College Students' Civic Engagement"



Eliza Epstein

"Campus Civic Engagement during Turbulent Times: Student Responses to Law Based Threats to Free Expression and Inclusion"



Ashley Robinson

"Institutional Dismissal and Betrayal in the Name of Free Speech: Student Stories of Reporting Bias"

"In short, my time as both a fellow and senior fellow with the Center allowed me to thrive as a scholar and practitioner. The culture that Michelle, Brenda, and Melanie created and foster every day is rooted in openness, inclusivity, intellectual curiosity, and practical possibilities. I can't think of another academic space that parallels this experience."

— **Nina Flores**, Associate Professor, California State University Long Beach; 2023-2024 Senior Fellow

Fellows in Fellowship

The Center's fellowship program offers participants more than the opportunity to further the national conversation about expression and democratic participation on college campuses through their research. It also creates a unique community of scholars, practitioners and administrators who partner to advance democratic principles outside of their individual projects. Here are a few of the ways fellows came together this year:



Senior fellow Nina Flores visited former senior fellow Elizabeth Niehaus at the University of Nebraska — Lincoln, where Nina presented on her project, "Resources for Supporting Faculty and Staff During Incidents of Targeted Harassment," before faculty and graduate students.



Five former fellows participated in a panel at the North Carolina Campus Engagement's 2024 Pathways to Achieving Civic Engagement Conference. Leslie Garvin, Spoma Jovanovic, Alex Kappus, Ryan Miller and Elizabeth Niehaus discussed "Democracy Under the Microscope: Studying Free Expression and Civic Engagement."



At the Association for the Study of Higher Education's annual conference, Center executive director Michelle Deutchman moderated a panel with former fellows Kaleb Briscoe, Eliza Epstein, Ryan Miller and Jackie Pedota, who discussed "Contesting Political and Legal Restrictions on Expression, Academic Freedom and Racial Inclusion."

PROGRAMS

VOICE INITIATIVE

The **Valuing Open and Inclusive Conversation and Engagement (VOICE) Initiative** provides funding for UC students, staff and faculty to conduct research or coordinate programs and activities that further the mission of the Center. VOICE projects focus on creating and strengthening opportunities for students, staff and faculty to impact their UC campus communities.



Creating Citizens Speaker Series
UC Berkeley



Citizens of Today
UC Berkeley



Davis Journal of Legal Studies: Volume IV
UC Davis



All University Leadership Conference (All-U)
UC Irvine



The Local Motive: Building the Muscle of Civic Engagement
UCLA

Democracy Workshops: Preparing for the 2024 Election
UCLA



Restorative Practices & Democratic Civic Engagement: building restorative communication practices & spaces at UCLA in the aftermath of the UAW labor strike
UCLA

UCLA Undergraduate Law Journal, Volume XXIII
UCLA

BruinsVote Social Media Fellowship: Promoting Civic Literacy, Voter Education, & Democratic Engagement at UCLA
UCLA



Reproductive Health Justice Forum
UCLA



Bridging the Great Divide: Exploring the Coexistence of Academic Freedom and Duty to Accommodate
UCLA



How to foster dialogue and promote civic engagement in the classroom
UC Riverside



2nd Decolonial Praxis Conference
UC Riverside



W.A.V.E.S. (Widening Access, Voice, Engagement, & Service): Triton Civic Engagement & Changemaking Initiative
UC San Diego



Campus Dialogues
UC Santa Barbara



Civic Engagement Scholars Program
UC Santa Barbara



Vision Fellowship
UC Santa Barbara

This is Our Future: Take Back the Vote
UC Santa Cruz

2024 VOICE PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Ashlee Priestley's VOICE project, the Vision Fellowship, is a cohort based year-long program. The goal is to support and inspire sustained opportunities for Black student creativity, expression, and innovation by providing student fellows with a diversity of resources, including a stipend, a faculty/staff mentor, a dedicated workspace, and professional development. Student fellows shared their work – including a film, poetry and workshop – with the greater UCSB community.









Center Book Club: What We're Reading

The Center's Book Discussion Group — which began as a VOICE program in 2021 — has grown to include the Center's community of fellows.



"Being able to work with other folks who are part of this VOICE community has been so uplifting and inspiring because sometimes we can feel a little siloed on our own campuses but seeing folks from all across the UC system working on their own unique projects that have a serious positive impact on the community has been so amazing."

— **Ashlee Priestley**, Academic Achievement Counselor, Office of Black Student Development, UC Santa Barbara; 2024 VOICE Recipient

EDUCATION & RESOURCES

MEETING THE MOMENT

As higher education has become increasingly embroiled in our nation's polarized politics and discourse, campuses have been at the center of a proverbial free speech storm. In these chaotic times, the Center remains a steady force for education and guidance – developing programming and resources to meet the moment.

#SPEECHMATTERS 2024

Politics, Polarization and Perils on Campus

Our sixth annual conference explored current challenges and opportunities for learning, activism and engagement.

890 attendees, representing:

132 colleges/universities

54 advocacy groups/associations

5 sessions featuring 16 thought leaders



Programming about Protests

Protests and encampments – and how to manage them – have been a significant part of campus life at numerous institutions. Throughout the year, the Center hosted conversations about past and present protest movements including a panel with PEN America, "Campus Protests: Then and Now," as well as two podcast episodes.

2024 also marks the 60th anniversary of the Free Speech Movement which originated at UC Berkeley. The Center co-sponsored a number of commemorative events including one by the Berkeley Forum, a VOICE recipient, and one by our 2024-2025 senior fellow, Robert Cohen, at New York University.

Educating the UC Community

The Center tailored resources for the University of California's 10 campuses in order to help them respond to and plan for ongoing expression-related challenges. The Center engaged with diverse audiences including residential life, student affairs, marketing and communications and research and innovation.

26 workshops conducted

475+ live attendees

Back to Basics: A Webinar Series for UC Staff and Faculty

In partnership with the Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Equity Affairs, UC Legal and the Office of Systemwide Community Safety at UC Office of the President, the Center developed a toolkit and hosted a four-part webinar series to educate the community about the First Amendment, campus safety, protest management, Title IV and academic freedom.









Sharing with Student Leaders

Michelle Deutchman presented at the 2024 UC Student Leadership Summit, where she discussed the meaning and role of the First Amendment and student expression on campuses today.

Michelle Deutchman poses with UC President Michael V. Drake at left



"I was fortunate to be in attendance at Center programming last year. The event and the experience were invaluable in providing exceptional expertise and perspective on navigating free speech, civic engagement and other competing institutional priorities all within the current higher education environment. Additionally, the event offered a cohort of other professionals around the country and within the field that provide a network of support and knowledge as we continue to traverse complex issues and challenges."

— **Pavan M. Purswani**, Director, Student Support, Office of Student Support and the Dean of Students, University of Baltimore

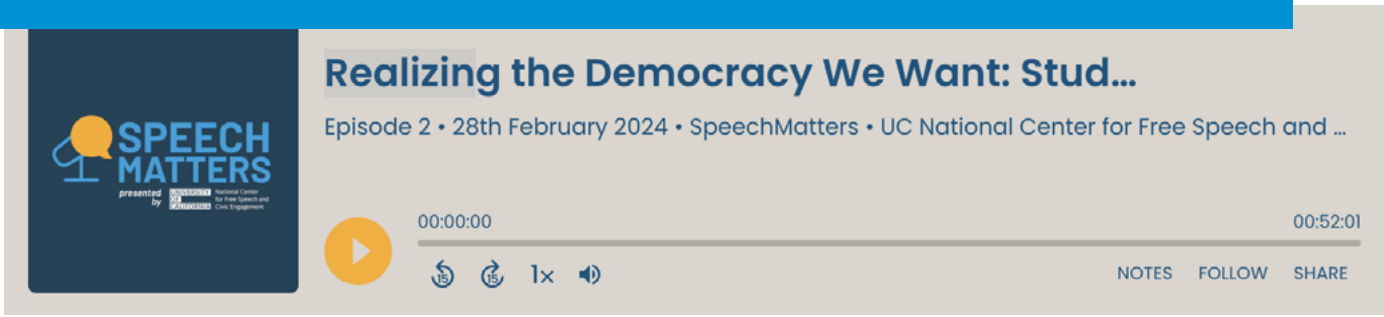
EDUCATION & RESOURCES

GETTING ELECTION READY

In the lead-up to the 2024 U.S. presidential election, the Center community has been hard at work to help prepare different campus stakeholder groups to cast their votes.

"Realizing the Democracy We Want"

Earlier this year, guests Jennifer Domagal-Goldman, Executive Director of ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, and Alex Edgar, then director of the Associated Students of the University of California Vote Coalition, joined the SpeechMatters Podcast to share strategies to increase youth participation in local, state and federal elections.



Votechella

UC Berkeley's Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC) Vote Coalition registered over 300 students at its annual free music festival which has received VOICE funding for three years.



Democracy Workshops

For his 2024 VOICE project, Philip Goodrich, Manager of UCLA Campus Life Initiatives, launched a series of educational sessions aimed at preparing UCLA students to engage with democracy this election season and beyond.

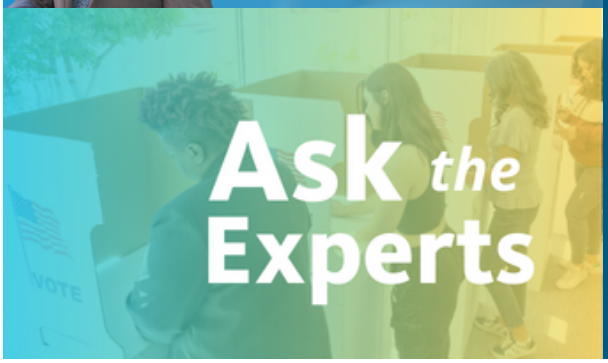




"[The VOICE Initiative] gave us inspiration to think strategically and creatively about how we can further the ideals of democracy and civic engagement and then it provided the resources to make it happen. [The VOICE award] allowed us to go beyond voting and really think about how we in student affairs are educating and inspiring our Bruins to be informed and engaged citizens."

— **Philip Goodrich**, Manager of UCLA Campus Life Initiatives, UCLA Campus Life





Beyond The Election

Voter engagement is critical but civic engagement also includes what happens day-to-day. As part of his 2023-24 fellowship, Alex Kappus helped bridge voting work and cultivating a culture of civic learning with a resource guide and recommendations for university staff who oversee democratic engagement on campus.

In honor of Civic Learning Week, the Center captured insights from four civic engagement experts about how higher education institutions can better incorporate democratic learning into their curriculum and campus life.

SPEECH MATTERS PODCAST

In its third season, the Center's monthly podcast tackled a range of issues. These included the impact of expression-related decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court, tech-enabled threats to democracy and ongoing legislative attacks to diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

"We're really trying to pick things that are of the moment ...always with the lens of what's happening on campuses and in higher education, and how we can extrapolate from campus life to life at large."

C-SPAN



Center executive director Michelle Deutchman discusses the podcast on CSPAN's "Washington Journal"

4,435 all-time unique listeners

3,410 podcast downloads

12 dynamic guests on 11 episodes this season

The New York Times

LISTEN

'SpeechMatters'

The Center's SpeechMatters podcast was recognized in the Footnotes section of the print edition of the New York Times, which suggested a few things for readers "to read, watch and listen to about the history and future of political discord on college campuses."

Listen Here: Listen on Spotify | Listen on Apple Podcasts | Listen on the Center's website









PARTNERSHIPS

We are grateful for the opportunity to work closely with the following organizations, colleges and universities:

Organizations

American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California

Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities

Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities

Association for the Study of Higher Education

Campus Compact

Central District of California, United States District Court

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators

PEN America

Western Association of College and University Business Officers

Schools

Ánimo Pat Brown Charter High School

California State University System

Emory University

Hillbrook School

Santa Monica Community College

Stanford University

University of California system

University of Vermont

IN THE NEWS

Center leadership, fellows and VOICE recipients were vital resources for national media outlets.

Throughout 2024 these included (partial list):

The Chronicle of Higher Education
C-SPAN
The Daily Beast
Daily Bruin
Diverse Education
The Fulcrum
Harvard Magazine
Inside Higher Ed
The Lookout
Los Angeles Times
NBC LA
RealClear Religion



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