



CAMPUS ELECTION ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Coronavirus as a Teachable Classroom Moment Engaging Students Across the Curriculum

If you're connected with a university, you and your school are likely in survival mode. Your campus has shifted to online courses, and you're figuring out how to teach them. Student lives and dreams have been shattered, and you're trying to support students falling through the cracks. You're trying to avoid receiving or spreading the virus. It's understandable that both you and your students feel overwhelmed.

But the COVID-19 crisis also gives a chance for students, and all of us, to have a sense of purpose. We can use classroom conversations to try and understand the choices that led to our current situation and the choices being made to address it. And then encourage students to voice their views on the critical continuing decisions, and to commit to vote and elect the political leaders who will guide our decisions going forward. The national NSLVE studies [have found](#) that the more students talk politics the more likely they are to vote. So this makes this both a profoundly challenging moment and a profoundly teachable one, even if your classroom is now virtual and your campus physically closed.

To help, we've pulled together examples from diverse disciplines of issues to address in the classroom, listed [below](#), and some quick suggestions for ways to approach them:

Highlight the choices: Decisions being made by the President, Senators, Congressional representatives, Governors, legislators and mayors matter more than ever given the crisis. So did those they or their counterparts elsewhere made leading up to the arrival of the virus on our shores. That's true whether we're talking [ongoing cuts to US public health funding](#), delays in testing in the first critical weeks, or the successful ways that [South Korea](#) planned, prepared, and is now containing the virus, or that [Norway](#) and [Germany](#) have contained their mortality rates.

Virtual community is better than no community: Given how profoundly student lives have been upended, your supportive and listening presence can be key. As much as you can, lean into this existentially challenging time to get students talking, telling their stories, reflecting together on its broadest implications.

Give students a voice: To help students weigh in on the decisions being made in this crisis, and those that led up to it. CEEP has created a resource [to help them have a voice](#) on everything from safeguarding November's voting, to asking that government address their shattered economic lives. Some will be too overwhelmed to act, but for those who can, helping as many as possible find their voice can nurture a sense of common purpose, which itself can help get them through.

Discipline-by-Discipline Suggestions

Here are some brief discipline-by-discipline questions to help tie the epidemic and all it's affecting to your courses. Please add any other ideas [using this form](#), and also check out political

scientist Elizabeth Bennion’s [online engagement ideas](#). However you approach your conversations, we hope these initial suggestions will give your students a sense that they can influence how our country responds, now and as we emerge from the pandemic:

Allied Health fields How the disease has spread, but also the impact of [public health funding cuts](#), access or lack of access to health care and universal sick days, how we have or haven’t assured the safety of health providers and ensured sufficient supplies of key equipment, and what the consequences were of relying on [developing our own tests](#) rather than the one the World Health Organization was distributing. Who should take responsibility for these choices, and how do we allocate them where we don’t have enough? How has our particular health model handled the epidemic, and what we can learn from other countries [like Korea](#). What can we learn to create a better US health care system?

Anthropology: How do language and culture shape the different responses to the disease that we see in different countries? How do our tendencies toward tribalism impact our individual or common responses? How can this disease specifically, which most severely affects the elderly, reflect ways in which societies value and support aging? As in-person interactions are paused, how are online modalities being used for schooling, caregiving, and other key cultural functions—and how does this change their nature?

Arts programs: Given the current practical constraints, how can artists respond to the crisis in ways that help give us the imagination to respond? With social distancing closing music venues and theatres, how should we collectively support artists and others who can no longer make a living?

Biology and Environmental Studies: How is the way this virus has spread similar or different to viruses like Dengue Fever and Zika, whose prevalence has been increased by climate change? How is COVID a warning for climate change disasters, and how could they interact? How do we create policies to mitigate these kinds of risks? How will the pandemic affect responses to climate change?

Business & Economics: What does the epidemic suggest about the appropriate balance between private enterprise and public investment? And about the vulnerabilities of global supply chains and how to address them? How are states and markets interacting? Which sector is influencing which, and which should have priority? How should we support [local businesses threatened with going under](#) due to external catastrophes--like small shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues, artists who can no longer perform, or Seattle’s [weekly newspaper](#), 90% of whose revenue comes from now- cancelled events. How should governments and corporations support businesses and individuals in these contexts, and how have they? Who has the responsibility [for workers who aren’t given sick days](#), and what are the consequences if they stay on the job?

Communications and Journalism: What’s the responsibility of media outlets in covering an epidemic like this? Giving key practical information? Holding elected officials accountable? Tracking impact in local communities? Tracking and challenging disinformation or the lack of clear information? How have they lived up this challenge here in the US? Is this different from coverage of the pandemic in other countries? How has coverage been effected by the erosion of

local newspapers, with [ads drying up](#) because local events are cancelled and people aren't going to stores? Is there an appropriate government role to help support local publications, like New Jersey's nonprofit [Civic Information Consortium](#)? How do we prevent this crisis from [further destroying local newspapers](#)?

Computer Science and Computer Engineering: How will social distancing impact bandwidth and internet capabilities? Do peak load times need to be regulated? What are the cybersecurity impacts of people working from home on personal computers vs company IT departments? Replicability of South Korean model of [apps and GPS tracking](#) to follow and contain the spread of the virus, and trade-offs with a surveillance society? How coronavirus is affecting the logistics of how people can vote.

Education: How should K-12 and higher ed institutions balance public health and community needs in this situation? If schools are closed, how do you handle students who depend on schools for meals, jobs, or special needs services? How does our education system balance a sense of common connection with individual academic achievement, and how does that shape our responses to this crisis? How should we educate students to think about big picture public choices and their role as educators in shaping them? Possible exercise—have students role-play as stakeholders at a school board meeting debating whether to close or reopen the local public schools.

English, Composition, ESL, Public Speaking and Rhetoric: Have students write or give talks about what elected leaders are saying, and how those from different political perspectives frame the crisis. Explore documentation for various claims and the assumptions behind various arguments. Interview fellow students or their families by phone, and describe their experiences. Explore how information and disinformation has travelled and its impact on the epidemic's spread, including the initial suppression of information in Wuhan. Read accounts of previous epidemics, or novels like Albert Camus's *The Plague*. Write essays assessing what the government has done or is doing about the crisis, who is acting and how. Create arguments for policies you believe should be enacted.

Geography: How can Geographic Information Systems be best deployed to visualize the spread of disease? How have migration patterns, population shifts, urbanization, and transportation technologies made our lives more or less susceptible to epidemics?

Government, Political science and Public Policy: How have governments around the world responded to the crisis? What can we learn from them, immediately or to create a better US health care system? Should we subsidize testing, sick leave, additional nutrition and unemployment benefits for affected populations? What about non-citizens? How much should we invest resources in planning for emergencies like epidemics, vs dealing with other health priorities. How should we incentivize production of critical drugs or vaccines if the market may not pay back all the costs? How should states and our national government work together in a crisis? How are they actually relating? How are states and markets interacting? Which sector is influencing which, and which should have priority? If the virus doesn't recede quickly, how do we conduct the 2020 campaigns and elections in a manner that minimizes risk?

Graphic Design: What are the most effective ways to visualize the spread of disease? Social distancing? Hand-washing techniques? How has graphic design contributed to awareness of the disease and the actions needed to stop it? Could students do a service project for local authorities creating online images that could help support necessary public actions.

History: How have outbreaks and epidemics been managed and mismanaged in the past? How have communities responded during and after these destructive events? Comparisons between COVID-19 and the 1918 flu, [for instance](#). Examples of how other previous threats have been combated, like Ebola, SARS, and the H1N1 Swine Flu.

Hospitality & Travel Industry: How should international travel, hotels or the cruise ship industry address the potential for global pandemics? How should they ensure worker and client safety? Are there regulations that would have helped or could help in the future? Is there a public responsibility to bail out industries focused on recreation?

Engineering: How do we create and manufacture the technologies needed to combat this virus, like medical supplies and tests? How governments work or could work with manufacturers to speed production in a crisis. How we have or haven't adequately prepared for this crisis. With this moment's massive shift to working remotely from home, and other digital-assist social distancing, how will this burden our electrical grid & digital infrastructure -- and exacerbate various digital divides? How should we have addressed these divides or the lack of productive capacity in key areas before the crisis hit?

Law and Criminal Justice: How do pandemics like this affect prisoners? Immigrants and their rights? How do you balance the necessities of public health with the social needs of communities, and the economic needs of the businesses that will be shut down? How do you address the urgencies of defeating the virus without creating precedents for problematic governmental actions in other spheres?

Math and Statistics: The role of statistics and data in understanding this crisis and in public conversation on the key related issues. How do we understand and teach concepts like exponential growth in an epidemic, particularly to a population that lacks quantitative literacy? How are political leaders and the public using or misusing the relevant statistics?

Psychology, Sociology, Urban planning: What kinds of approaches work to further voluntary social distancing? How do we maintain health and hope with the stresses created by these situations? How do we create community models to support the health and hope of others? What are the social impacts of social distancing, and are there alternatives—including online alternatives--that will be safe but that will still nurture community? How do we deal with the vulnerable in times of acute crisis? What are the appropriate roles for elected officials in promoting effective approaches on areas that depend on voluntary action? In supporting institutions, like the small businesses that make communities vital? How do we conduct efforts like the Census or political campaigns if in-person interaction is paused?

Philosophy and Religion What will the epidemic teach us [about who we are as a society](#)? How do congregations keep community while maintaining safety? Can we apply philosophical and

religious lessons about our connections with each other to the current situation? What choices would they suggest? What responsibility do elected leaders have to address the situations of the vulnerable? How do we weigh the costs in shutting down universities or businesses and potentially saving lives? What makes governmental decisions in this area legitimate?

Social Work: Could classes take social histories by phone and use them to develop recommendations to help people cope with the pandemic? How can social work programs support vulnerable people in isolation?

These are some initial ideas. Please [add others](#). However you engage the crisis in your courses, we hope give your students a sense that they indeed still have power, both now, and come November, when they elect the leaders who will help us emerge from it.