

CAMPUS CONNECT 2026

# How to Engage in Politics as Faculty

*A small menu for an unsettled moment.*

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The question we're all asking

*“What should I be  
doing?”*

*Most faculty I talk to are asking some version of this. So am I.*

# Why the question gets stuck

*Four versions of the same paralysis.*

1

## **Scope feels infinite.**

Everything is political. There is no obvious starting point, so we stall at the menu.

2

## **Partisan-nervous.**

We worry about the classroom, colleagues, and our standing. So we say less than we could.

3

## **Performative fatigue.**

One-off statements feel hollow. Signing every letter loses meaning fast.

4

## **Comparison to activists.**

We are not full-time organizers. Measured against them, we always come up short.

THE REFRAME

**The highest-leverage move**  
*is the one that uses what you already  
have.*

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*Pre-existing skills · authority · standing communities.*

# What you already have

## Skills

- Analysis
- Writing
- Teaching
- Mentoring
- Research methods

## Authority

- A title
- A classroom
- A committee seat
- A professional voice
- Earned trust

## Communities

- Your students
- Your department
- Residential college
- Lewisburg & beyond
- Your discipline

*These are leverage. Most plans for “engagement” underuse them.*

# A menu of high-leverage moves

*Four places where what you already have is worth the most.*

- 1 In the classroom.**  
Where your standing is highest.
- 2 In your department.**  
Where the decisions actually get made.
- 3 In the institution.**  
Committees, policy fights, public scholarship.
- 4 Beyond campus.**  
Local first. Long horizons. Be one node in a network.

# In the classroom

*Your standing here is the highest it will ever be. Use it carefully, not loudly.*

- 1 Treat political content as a methods problem.**  
Show how someone in your field would analyze the moment. Methods are content; methods are also neutral ground.
- 2 Name the unspoken — without taking sides.**  
“I know some of you are thinking about X.” Acknowledgment lowers the temperature; pretending lowers trust.
- 3 Teach disagreement explicitly.**  
Make civil disagreement a learning outcome, not an accident. The modeling is the lesson.
- 4 Lower the stakes for student speech.**  
One-on-ones, ungraded reflections, anonymous polls. Most students will say more in a 1:1 than in a seminar.

# In your department

*Most decisions are made by whoever shows up. Showing up is engagement.*

1

## **Show up for governance.**

Attend the meetings. Read the documents. Cast the votes. Departmental policy is national politics in miniature.

2

## **Mentor differently in real moments.**

Career advice changes when the country does. Be available for the conversation students aren't sure they're allowed to have.

3

## **Bring this moment into the curriculum.**

One course, one unit, one reading. Permanent enough to outlast the news cycle.

4

## **Be a known quantity on the question.**

Colleagues route students to whoever is reliably thoughtful. Earn the routing.

# In the institution

*Pick fewer fights, finish them. Half-done is worse than not started.*

- 1 Pick one committee where the work actually happens.**  
Academic freedom, free expression, governance, hiring. One real seat beats five attended-occasionally.
- 2 One policy fight — completed.**  
A finished smaller thing changes more than five half-finished bigger things. Choose the closeable one.
- 3 Public scholarship at Bucknell scale.**  
Op-eds, podcasts, local press, alumni audiences. Lewisburg and your discipline matter more than the New York Times.
- 4 Be useful to administration in good faith.**  
Better outcomes than being absent. Disagreement lands when it comes from someone who has been in the room.

# Beyond campus

*Local first. Long horizons. Be one node in a network, not a solo act.*

1

**Vote, donate, knock on doors — as one node.**

Your hour is one hour. The point of the network is that it's not just your hour.

2

**Local races over national ones.**

More leverage per hour. The school board, the council, the DA — these are where your skills are actually scarce.

3

**Use professional skills where they're rare.**

Policy comments, expert testimony, briefings, statistical review. Faculty who do this are uncommon and load-bearing.

4

**Long time horizons.**

One org for five years beats five orgs for one year. Trust compounds; reputations don't fast-forward.

# What NOT to mistake for impact

*Visibility is not influence. The two trade off more often than we admit.*

- 1 Hot-take posting.**  
Feels like action; rarely changes anyone's mind or vote.
- 2 One-off panels.**  
Stand-alone events that don't connect to a sustained body of work.
- 3 Statement-signing fatigue.**  
Signing every letter dilutes the meaning of signing any letter.
- 4 Substituting noise for standing.**  
Loudness can spend down the very authority you're trying to use.

THE ASK

**Pick one thing.**

*Do it for a year.*

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*The communities you are already in are the ones with the most ambient trust. That is leverage that takes a long time to build — and a short time to spend.*

## FOR DISCUSSION

# Some questions to chew on

- 1 What does political engagement look like for you right now? What are you actually doing?
- 2 Where do you draw the line in your classroom — what comes in, what stays out?
- 3 What's a political conversation with a student that's stuck with you?
- 4 Who on campus do you talk about this with — and how did you find them?
- 5 What stops you from doing more?

# A note on how this deck was built

I used **Claude** (an AI assistant from Anthropic) to help structure this talk and draft the slides.

The thesis, the perspective, and the editorial calls about what to keep are mine. The outline, the layout, and a lot of the phrasing were drafted with AI and then edited.

*Felt worth being honest about — especially in a building where this morning's keynote was about how we should think about AI in our work.*

## The split

### Mine

Thesis · examples · judgment · final cut

### AI-assisted

Outline · phrasing · slide design

THANK YOU

# Questions?

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