



CCN Election Assignment Templates

Assignment 6: Electoral College Project

The Center for Community News' Election & Democracy Program has created a series of sample templates for faculty to give to students. Faculty are welcome to use any and all of these and amend them as they see fit for their classes.

For any questions, comments or suggestions, email CCN Program Coordinator Sarah Gamard at sarah.gamard@uvm.edu.

When to assign this project: You can start this project as early as September and do it in pieces throughout the semester till winter break. You can also take pieces of this assignment and do it piecemeal anytime before or after the election.

Why: The Electoral College is an integral part of U.S. presidential elections. But how many U.S. citizens – or political journalists for that matter – understand how it works? This project can fill a gap in professional election coverage that puts weight into the horse-race elements of elections instead of the logistics of results. It's also a great way for students to understand the complexities of their political system, as well as the average citizen's understanding – or lack thereof – of it.

How: Below is a multi-step, multi-assignment project proposal on covering the Electoral College to both teach students and inform readers about the process.

A note on this template: The University of Oregon's Will Yurman, professor in journalism, came to us with this idea, and deserves the credit. He kindly provided his email, saying he'd be happy to collaborate and brainstorm ways to improve this idea. Reach him at yurman@UOregon.edu.

1. **IN-CLASS:** Open discussion

What questions or misconceptions are brought up. Set a baseline of information.

2. **ASSIGN** them to define the Electoral College, with sources, in a way that is understandable and even interesting. ~200-250 words.

- A chance to think about how to write clearly, and what kinds of sources are trustworthy.

3. **IN-CLASS:** Person on the Street - Interview strangers about the Electoral College.

1. Ten people with names and contact info. Photos of at least two of them.
2. What is the Electoral College? How does it work? Why does it matter? Is it good or bad?
3. Interview practice. Also a chance to see what people do or don't know – hopefully helps them frame their stories moving forward.

4. **ASSIGN:** Divide the class to research different topics related to the Electoral College.

Topics:

1. What is the history and origins of the Electoral College? Think about how it came to be and why.
2. How do other countries run democratic elections? What other systems exist beyond ours?
3. Electoral College vs. The Popular Vote: What are the pros and cons of each? Why is there often a push to change our system, but it hasn't happened? What are the changes that have been proposed and what are ongoing movements to change the system?
4. How did the Electoral College fit into the issues surrounding the 2020 election? Look forward to this year: What role might the Electoral College play in a close election. Consider proposed changes to state laws and policies.

4a. **ASSIGN:** Individually so each student does their own research and writing.

4b. **IN-CLASS:** Work together in teams to edit each other's work, fact-check and create a single story.

4c. **IN-CLASS:** Edit another team's work. Submit a final draft. Present to the class.

5. **IN-CLASS:** Collaborate as a class to build an Electoral College Guide.

- The guide will be part of the election website we're producing for the journalism program.

6. **ASSIGN:** Interview a current or past Elector.

- This can be a "bonus" assignment depending on time left in the semester and feasibility.