April 17, 2024

Hello CIVDEM@Mac partners & collaborators, students, faculty and staff!

As we come to the end of another academic year, we have much to share about our accomplishments this past 12 months, and what we are working on next.

For those we may be reaching for the first time, welcome to CIVDEM@Mac – a partnered teaching and learning project at McMaster, supported by the Paul R. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching. This project thinks beyond the walls of the classroom and imagines a lifetime of civic learning and practice. We do this by connecting McMaster students with a network of democracy advocates, innovators, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers who are working to advance civic engagement, enhance democratic processes, and manage fair and transparent elections.

We are pleased to let you know that the new CIVDEM Interdisciplinary Minor has been formally approved and will be available to undergraduate students beginning in Fall 2024. The Interdisciplinary Minor comprises 24 units (e.g., eight 3-unit courses) across three Course Lists (CIVIC vitality; DEMOCRATIC norms and institutions; ELECTION management). Students can take the Minor alongside their Major in any field. Which means that CIVDEM, students will come from a wide range of academic programs and faculties — including Business, Communication Studies & Media Arts, Economics, Geography & Earth Sciences, Health Sciences, Indigenous Studies, Philosophy, Political Science, and more. In our capstone courses, students work in interdisciplinary teams bringing diverse skillsets together as they tackle problems facing democracy.

We are deeply indebted to our partners for their contributions to building the curriculum. They support student learning and help us stimulate excitement about engaged citizenship and what young people can do to meet the challenges facing democracy. They also demonstrate pathways to meaningful careers, which CIVDEM students find particularly helpful! Our list of partners and collaborators is posted on the *CIVDEM@Mac Library Guide*.

We hope to grow and strengthen these partnerships and look forward to further collaborative teaching and learning activities in 2024-25. We are keen to have guest speakers, field trips, case studies, simulations, partnered research opportunities, job shadowing, internships, co-op placements, and more. If you would like to be involved or have an event or opportunity that our students should know about, please get in touch with us.

On the next page, we highlight some of the events and engagements with CIVDEM partners and students over the past academic year. This is just the beginning. We aim to develop even more creative teaching and learning opportunities that will foster students' passion for democracy. We look forward to working with you in the year ahead!

From the CIVDEM team
- *Karen, Joanna, Adrienne, Andrea, Christina, Selena & Maria*

McMaster University

CIVDEM – Year at a glance (2023-24)

Guest speakers and on-campus events

- [Chief Electoral Officer of Canada speaks to McMaster community about the health of Canadian democracy](#) (Feb 26, 2024). The public lecture by Stéphane Perrault was followed by a full day of interactions with the Elections Canada team focusing on collaborative research and teaching opportunities.

- Association of Municipalities of Ontario [Healthy Democracy Project](#) and AMO's [Youth Fellowship Program](#) (Oct. 23, 2023). Stewart McDonough, AMO's Advisor on Municipal Engagement, spoke to CIVDEM students about youth engagement and municipal career opportunities.

- [Charter Challenge for Fair Voting](#) (Oct 16, 2023). Nicolas M. Rouleau (lawyer for the Charter Challenge applicants) and Antony Hodgson (President, Fair Voting BC) discussed the initiative to have the court rule that Canada's first-past-the-post voting system contravenes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This event was co-hosted with the Digital Society Lab.

- [McMaster welcomes Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer to evaluate the health of our democracy](#) (Sept 14, 2023). For the International Day of Democracy, we heard from Greg Essensa about declining voter turnout and declining trust in elections, and what young people can do to help shore up democracy.

- POLSCI 3EL3 (Election Law) Guest Lectures by Lindsay Aagard, private practice lawyer, formerly with the Ontario Liberal Party and the Premier's office, and Andrea Coyne, Elections Manager at the Town of Oakville.

Field trips and off-campus events:

- McMaster field trip to Elections Ontario headquarters (North York, Nov 27, 2023).

- McMaster field trip to [In Defence of Democracy 2023: Lisa LaFlamme in conversation with Nahlah Ayed](#) hosted by the Samara Centre for Democracy (Toronto, Nov 9, 2023).

Curricular development, research, and publications:

- [Partnered research projects](#) in POLSCI 4AA6 Elections & Democracy were presented in April 2024 to the City of Hamilton, the Town of Oakville, Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), Samara, and McMaster's Office of Student Affairs. Topics ranged from strategies to improve vote-by-mail turnout, to toxicity on Twitter, and political polarization on TikTok. [Research briefs are posted here](#).

- [Democracy @ Work Podcast series](#). Working with Dr. Chelsea Miya (Postdoctoral Fellow, Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship), our Level IV undergraduate students have created an exciting podcast series on career paths in democracy. Have a listen to our series trailer and first episodes! (Password: *MacPod*)

- [Building voters' confidence in the municipal election process](#), by Andrea Coyne and Andrea Lawlor, *Policy Options* (February 21, 2024).

What we are working on now/next

Let us know if you are interested in partnering with us on any of these projects!

- **2024 Students as Partners Community Forum**. Our CIVDEM student partners and faculty will be participating in a two-day event showcasing experiences and insights related to student-faculty partnerships. Hosted by the MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation & Excellence in Teaching, the event takes place May 28 (virtually) and June 26 (in-person).

- **May is Teaching and Learning Month at Mac**. Hosted by the MacPherson Institute, the aim of [Teaching and Learning Month](#) is to provide a variety of professional development opportunities to educators across campus and to celebrate teaching and learning as a professional practice. We hope to use this opportunity to host an informal discussion with our CIVDEM partners and collaborators on *bridging the university classroom to the world of democracy and elections*. **Let us know if you are interested to collaborate with us!** A short application is due Monday, April 22nd.

- **CIVDEM research skills modules**. We are hiring a team of students this summer to help with ongoing development and refinement of a set of introductory and intermediate level instructional modules to improve and expand students' research skills. We have piloted or are working about a dozen modules, including:
  - Resources/databases on democracy and elections
  - Using SPSS to analyze C-DEM datasets
  - GIS and spatial analysis for democracy and election management
  - Data visualization for democracy
  - Podcasting for democracy
  - Q-Method explorations of democracy

- **CIVDEM at APSA**. Our team will be presenting a paper at the American Political Science Association's (APSA) Teaching and Learning Conference. Tentatively titled *Bridging the Canadian University Classroom to Democracy and Elections*, our paper will examine existing scholarship and draw on our experiences in CIVDEM to highlight areas for future work.

- **Online teaching resources**. We aim to apply for an [Open Educational Resources (OER) grant](#) to create an online textbook/workbook using the e-Campus Ontario platform. Tentatively titled "*Teaching Democracy across the University*," this resource would be unique in approaching core themes and challenges to democracy from an interdisciplinary perspective. Pending a successful application, this project would be developed collaboratively by McMaster faculty and students, together with our partners. Deadline for applications is May 30.