Life

MIDTERM ELECTION CONVERSATION OFFERS OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENT DISCOURSE

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The University of Connecticut's Democracy and Dialogues Fellows facilitated an event called "After the Votes: Making Sense of the Midterms" on Wednesday, at the Dodd Center for Human Rights. The event opened a space for students to discuss their feelings about the midterm election results and the state of the United States' government in several participation modules.

"I'm hoping that people will be able to take away that it is okay to create spaces where you can have these kinds of conversations," Saah Agyemang-Badu, the speaker at the event and Graduate Assistant for the Democracy & Dialogues Initiative, said.

The event began with an introduction section, allowing students to introduce themselves to one another at different tables in groups of about four to five students. Then, Agyemang-Badu announced the "table rules" for the evening. One "table rule" Agyemang-Badu said was that the discussion was not a debate, and if students disagree, to criticize the idea and not the person.

"It is okay to have conversations around difficult subjects. It is okay to meet people that you don't agree with," Agyemang-Badu said. "It is the core of what makes us human. If we all agree with each other, we'll just be robots."

Four different sessions followed the introduction of initial questions and rule-setting. Questions from these sessions were shown on a screen for the room to see. The first section was called "Round 1 — Before the Votes."

To challenge the students, Agyemang-Badu said that each person had two minutes to answer the question, and peers could not respond within that time. If the time was running out, students would wait in silence until it did to move on to the next person.

In "Round 1 — Before the Votes," students answered several questions projected on a screen in regard to the weeks leading up to the election. The questions asked students to consider the influences that have shaped their views of the election and their choices.

Then, in "Round 2 — After the Polls," students had conversations with their table group as they responded to questions. The first question was about their personal reactions to the results of the election, as well as what they have noticed about people's reactions. Another question asked about feelings that might influence election responses, and what other questions or concerns students are still sitting with.

"It's always nice to be able to have academic conversations with people from different backgrounds, political parties and perspectives from myself," said Natalie Daponte, a UConn student who is part of the Democracy & Dialogues Initiative.

In "Round 3 — Moving Forward," questions centered around what the results mean for communities, relationships and democracy in the U.S. Students continued to talk in groups at the tables. They were asked to discuss where they see opportunities for greater collaboration across differences, how the nation can move forward together, their personal responsibilities to sustaining a healthy democracy and what they want to understand better about points brought up at the event.

The last round, "Round 4 — Collective Harvest" addressed three main points: what questions students are carrying, what perspectives they are reconsidering and what they believe deserves our attention beyond the event. Then, Agyemang-Badu asked students to share something from the session that they observed before taking an exit survey about their thoughts on the event. Afterwards, students could indulge in the delicious food outside of the room.

The last slide was a thank you that recognized the dialogue in the slides was made in partnership with Nadia Dupuis and Victoria Esteves. Students who enjoyed the program are encouraged to attend any of the upcoming UConn's "Encounters Series" events. Additionally, if students are interested in joining the team of dialogue facilitators, they can let the facilitators know.

"People see this election to have gone their way or not," Agyemang-Badu said. "If it didn't go your way, this is the time to find that. If it went your way, this is the time to actually make sure that whatever policies that you felt that people that you're going to bring this together with are going to do, make sure that they do it."

I'm really glad I attended this event and was able to talk to the students attending. I felt comfortable in the atmosphere, and the students who attended were very involved and open to discussion. Agyemang-Badu was an incredible speaker who knew how to guide a complicated conversation in a way that functioned beautifully.

"No matter who you are or where you stand politically, we are all able to have calm dialogue around a rather emotional and complex topic," Daponte said.



Students participate in a post-midterm election discussion in the Dodd Center on Wednesday. Attendees were able to share their opinions and engage in friendly debate about the results.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JACOB BLACKWELL, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS



Graduate assistant for the Democracy & Dialogues Initiave, Saah Agyemang-Badu speaks at the "After the Votes: Making Sense of the Midterms." This event created a welcoming space for students share their opinions.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JACOB BLACKWELL, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

BENTON HOSTS FIRST THURSDAY



Students decorate their photo frames at The Benton's First Thursday on Nov. 4, 2026, in Storrs. The Benton hosts monthly events called First Thursdays where students can make crafts, pet therapy dogs and participate in other activities.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MADISON HENDRICKS, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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The William Benton Museum of Art began November by hosting its monthly First Thursday, an evening of art activities, therapy dogs and presentations from the University of Connecticut Library. The event gave students a chance to step away from coursework and focus on their mental health.

"We like to host events like First Thursday to remind students that we are a resource for them right here on campus," said Matthew Marshall, curator of education at the Benton. "It's a way for students to remove themselves from everything that they're doing with their studies and take a break for their mental health. They can come here with friends and have social time, or they can come by themselves and have some reflection and a little bit of quiet time."

Students did a little of both. Some sat together crafting and chatting, meeting others who had also come to escape homework and the stress of school. Others wandered the galleries alone, quietly reflecting the exhibits currently on display.

Downstairs at the Beanery, the Student Union Board of Governors hosted an open mic night, where students performed song covers and original pieces. The Beanery offered free drinks to the first 75 students, drawing a crowd that stayed to listen and support their peers.

Even with so much happening, pet therapy remained the most popular attraction. Grant, a 10-year-old golden retriever, drew the attention of nearly everyone in the room as students petted him while his tail wagged. His résumé is impressive: He works as a therapy dog, a reading education assistant and a crisis response dog.

Grant's owner, Sandy Lok, has brought her dogs to UConn for 15 years.

"I just love being able to offer the students some form of stress relief," Lok said. "So many students have said things that show they're just so grateful, and that immediately relieves the stress and the pressure that they're feeling. I'm happy to do it, happy to be here."

Lok said Grant loves being on campus and gets excited the moment they turn into UConn.

Taken together, the night's offerings showed that student mental health can be supported in so many ways, whether through art, music, quiet reflection or time with a friendly dog.

By giving students a place to rest, connect and recharge, First Thursday reminds the campus community that taking a break doesn't distract from academic success and instead is necessary.



The Benton Staff takes a photo of students in The Benton's birthday-themed photo booth on Nov. 4, 2026. Students used their photos to decorate photo frames at The Benton's First Thursday.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MADISON HENDRICKS, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

SUBOG Weekly Events:

November 9th - November 15th

November 9th – Heated Rivalry Trivia @ 7pm in the Student Union Theatre

November 12th – Potato Fest Food Truck Edition @ 2 pm on the SU Mall

Any questions? Email subog@uconn.edu and check out @subogatuconn on Instagram for updates on our events!