

Engaging with Sierra College Students in these Turbulent Times

By Leslie Moonshine

Students continue to flock to our table for surveys, snacks, swag, and discussion. Our surveys are the key to our engagement with students, and the current administration provides no end of controversial actions for us to use as survey topics!

In recent surveys we have tried to ascertain both student awareness of key issues and their thinking about them. One survey asked students about that week's top news stories, including the *Signalgate* scandal, Elon's efforts to influence the Wisconsin Supreme Court election, and massive layoffs at the Department of Health and Human Welfare. Another survey asked for students' thinking on Trump "pronouncements," like claiming Greenland and developing Gaza into a resort! Another focused on the controversial Trump tariffs.

We average 40-50 participants per visit. A number of students are our *regulars*, those who eagerly come by each time to see what the day's survey topic will be. These students are often very politically aware and engaged. Some are from conservative families and appreciate having like-minded older adults to engage with in discussion. Most lean Democratic, though are registered as No Party Preference (NPP).

Many of the younger students are still developing their personal political views. A few of them are very independent thinkers! There are also conservative students who come by to take the survey and share their views. These are often the most interesting and impactful discussions we have with students.

With all our interactions, we strive to model healthy and respectful civic debate and provide a safe space for students to share their views. We also encourage evaluation of information and consulting reliable sources. We help students tune in to the world around them and stay abreast of political news. Ultimately, we hope to aid them in finding their voice, and ultimately, casting their vote! Lately, we've helped several students become more active by directing them to rallies, the 5 calls app, and more. (We even ran into one of our "regulars" at the Bernie & AOC rally!)

Though we've registered very few students this semester, we continue to provide information on how to check one's registration, register on line, or re-register if the student has moved. (We have business size cards with a QR code that takes them to the California Secretary of State website.) And, of course, we're ready and able to help them register in person if they choose!

For Sierra College Earth Day festivities on Thursday, April 24, we joined the Placer Action Network (PAN) to make "seed bursts" with students and encourage them to Burst into Action! Robert Sherriff, our Tuesday team lead, will also educate students on the importance of Mason bees in their gardens, complete with example "bee houses." (Due to this special day, we were not be on campus either April 22nd or 23rd.) Look for the full report in next month's newsletter!

We have only a few weeks left to our campus visits for this school year. (***Please help us make sure Sierra students have nourishment for their final exams by bringing your food donations to our May 1 monthly AADC meeting. We will make one final delivery to the Basic Needs Pantry on May 7.***) We do not conduct outreach during the summer semester because of the scarcity of on-campus students and the often-brutal heat! Instead, we will rest up in anticipation of a busy fall season and the beginning of the 2026 election cycle.

Sierra Outreach Survey Report

By Leslie Moonshine

Here are the surveys in full for early April. (We were not on campus the week of April 16.)

The News & You

[conducted on Wednesday April 2, 2025]

For each news item below, put a sticker in one of the three choices.

In a group conversation on **Signal** - with National Security Advisor Michael Walz (who initiated the chat), Vice President JD Vance, Sec. of State Marco Rubio, Sec. of Defense Pete Hegseth, CIA Dir John Ratcliffe, Dir. of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, and by “mistake”, the Editor in Chief of **The Atlantic** magazine --Secretary Hegseth disclosed specific details of an attack against the Houthi militia in Yemen. This was a massive breach of security since **Signal** is not an authorized channel for discussion of secure information. (They also used emojis in a discussion of military operations that imperiled the lives of American service members!)

I know nothing about it	21
I know about it but it does not matter to me	1
I know about it and it is IMPORTANT	23

Another 10,000 employees will be laid off from the **Department of Health & Human Services** to reflect the priorities of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. These cuts include: **3,500 jobs** at the Food & Drug Administration, **2,400** at the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, and **1,200** at the National Institutes of Health. Also, Kennedy recently hired David Geier, (a discredited vaccine skeptic who was once disciplined in Maryland for practicing medicine without a license), to research a long-debunked link between vaccines and autism. As a result, the nation’s top vaccine regulator resigned.

I know nothing about it	9
I know about it but it does not matter to me	4
I know about it and it is IMPORTANT	31

On Sunday, March 30, in a phone interview with Trump conducted by Kristen Welker, (moderator of NBC News program Meet the Press) when asked if he planned to run for a **third term**, Trump stated “I’m not joking,” and later added, “There are methods which you could do it.” [Legal and election experts claim it would be an unprecedented breach of the Constitution – which the President takes an oath to uphold.]

I know nothing about it	12
I know about it but it does not matter to me	7
I know about it and it is IMPORTANT	27

In a special election for a seat in **the Wisconsin State Supreme Court**, Elon Musk attempted to sway the election in favor of the Trump backed candidate by donating \$25 million and giving a \$1 million check to two Republican voters.* Tesla has a pending court case in Wisconsin. Despite this attempt to influence the election, the liberal candidate won. (legality of the \$ giveaway is questionable)

I know nothing about it	16
I know about it but it does not matter to me	4
I know about it and it is IMPORTANT	24

Trump Trumpets Survey

[conducted on Tuesday, 4/9/25]

What is your thinking about these Trump announcements?

President Trump announced that the United States will take over the war-blasted Gaza Strip, expel its Palestinian population, and build a high-end beach resort.	
What would happen to the Palestinians who live there currently?	39
Wouldn't we have to send in troops, and who pays for this?	4
This was just another bad joke and shouldn't be considered serious.	4

President Trump announced that he intends to "take back" the Panama Canal and force Denmark, a U.S. ally, to sell him Greenland.	
Wouldn't we have to violate treaties with these nations?	34
Wouldn't we have to send in troops, and who would pay for all this?	6
This was just another bad joke and shouldn't be considered serious.	4

President Trump made an executive order to find ways to close the Department of Education and has already cut the staff in half.	
How might this effect student loans and grants?	20*
How might this affect handicapped and low-income students?	13
Only Congress can close a department they created. Will they act?	11

*** Several stickers were on the line between the first two choices!**

President Trump made an executive order to require a federal identification check to prove citizenship to be able to vote	
This would make it more difficult for people to vote.	26
This would take away the power of the states to regulate voting.	4
This will help with the very small amount of possible voter fraud.	11

Tariffs

[conducted Wednesday, April 9]

How concerned are you about the Trump tariffs that have caused a steep decline in the stock market?	Unconcerned 3	No opinion 4	Concerned 46
Do you think the tariffs will affect you personally?	Unconcerned 2	No opinion 7	Concerned 44
How concerned are you that Trump is using an emergency declaration to impose tariffs when the Constitution grants the power to levy tariffs to Congress? <i>(Commerce Clause, Article I, Section 8, Clause 3)</i>	Unconcerned 0	No opinion 9	Concerned 43
How do you think these tariffs will affect U.S. trade with other countries?	Positive Effect 2	No effect 0	Negative Effect 50