

Institute for Election Administration Research & Practice

Annual Report 2023



AUBURN UNIVERSITY
MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Graduate Program in Election Administration



THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of ELECTION OFFICIALS

INSTITUTE FOR ELECTION ADMINISTRATION
RESEARCH & PRACTICE



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Note from the Directors

Kathleen Hale, JD, PhD and Mitchell Brown, PhD

Welcome to the first annual report of the accomplishments and activities of the Institute for Election Administration Research & Practice (the Institute), a collaborative project of the Election Center and Auburn University. We are proud and pleased to share with you the work of the Institute, which is the result of the contributions of many scholars and practitioners. Our collective work demonstrates the power of applied practitioner - researcher collaboratives. We believe in work, hard work.

Nothing demonstrates this concept more than applied research. The ideas in this report have evolved over years and continue to be the result of regular interaction between scholars and election officials across the country. Our four activity areas include professional education through the Certified Election and Registration Administrator (CERA) certification and graduate certificate programs, the Journal of Election Administration Research & Practice, convenings, and applied research projects.

TEN YEAR VISION | 2022-2031

By the 2032 Presidential election, our goal is to be the premiere US institute for research, training, and education about election administration. Guided by a commitment to praxis, the work of the Institute will include regular and timely research reports on topics of interest to election administrators; coordination and dissemination of research across the academic and policy community; development of election officials through expansion of the CERA/CERV professional certification program; and undergraduate and graduate level education at Auburn University to support the field.

History of the Institute

The Institute for Election Administration Research & Practice (the Institute) launched in 2021 as a partnership between the Election Center and the Auburn Election Administration Initiative. The purpose of the Institute is to foster applied collaborative research, practice, and professional development in the field of election administration. The initiative is dedicated to leveraging the strengths of both organizations to further institutionalize the key tenets of the profession. Governance includes a board comprised of Auburn faculty and administrators, and members of the Election Center Board of Directors and executive staff.

The Institute represents the next step in the evolution of the relationship between the Election Center and Auburn University focused on the field of election administration. In the 1980s, the Election Center was launched as the first national organization devoted expressly to the study and support of election administration and the professional development of election administrators and other key stakeholders through education, research, and outreach. Key founders were stakeholders in local, state, and federal government who were responsible for election activities. Dr. Robert Montjoy, Professor Emeritus at Auburn University and founder of its MPA Program, was one of the earliest members, along with Ernie Hawkins of Sacramento County, CA, and Tom Wilkey of the New York State Board of Elections.

In the 1990s, through their efforts, the Election Center launched the nation's first (and still only) national certification program for election administrators. Certified Election and Registration Administrators (CERA) courses were designed to earn continuing education credit from Auburn University and were offered by faculty from multiple universities at various locations around the country in conjunction with Election Center conferences and workshops.

By 2005, federal funds through the Help America Vote Act of 2002 supported training for election officials and certification courses had consolidated at Auburn University, involving 1.5 days of in-person instruction delivered by Auburn faculty. Along the way, the certification expanded to include the vendor community (CERV), and jurisdictions began to recognize the value of the CERA/CERV certification. A Graduate Certificate in Election Administration launched at Auburn in the MPA Program.

In the 2010s, the parameters of the CERA/CERV program were codified in an MOU between the Election Center and the University under its Office of the Vice President for Research in the (then) Office of Technology Transfer. The 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act served as a springboard to launch the Symposium on Election Administration Research & Practice, bringing together practitioners, vendors, and administrators with academics who studied the emerging field of election administration. The Symposium is now offered every odd-numbered year; each convening focuses attention on a specific aspect of election administration community, beginning with the significance of access to the franchise and expanding to include the importance of data and research in the field, resources and expenses, professional development, and, most recently, ethics and standards of conduct. Drawing on these symposia, the collaborative efforts of the Election Center and Auburn faculty resulted in two unique edited volumes focused on the future of election administration and lifting up the voices of election officials as well as scholars.

The 2020 election brought members of the Election Center and Auburn faculty into the national spotlight with scores of interviews and appearance on roundtables and discussions around the country. The Journal of Election Administration Research & Practice was launched with an editorial board of 50 election officials and scholars; the online Journal focuses on the intersection between theory and practice, and provides a platform for the foundation of the profession of election administration as a unique field of public service. New research around ethics and standards of conduct was the focus of Institute efforts in 2023, which will continue as revised, annotated standards are incorporated into training and certification around the country.

By the Numbers

Below are some of the highlight statistics from the founding of the Institute through 2023.

4 Symposia

hosted at Auburn University. See page 9 for more details on the most recent symposium.

1497 Graduates of the CERA program

since the certification was established, including online and in-person students. See pages 6 and 7 for more details on the program.

63 Research and Policy Briefs and JEARP Articles

authored and published by Institute faculty, affiliates, and fellows, as well as pieces published in the JEARP. See pages 10 through 12 for more information about our research and publications.

7 Election Administration Books

published by Institute faculty and affiliates.

94% Election Fellow Placement Success Rate

18

ELECTION FELLOWS

3

POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

16

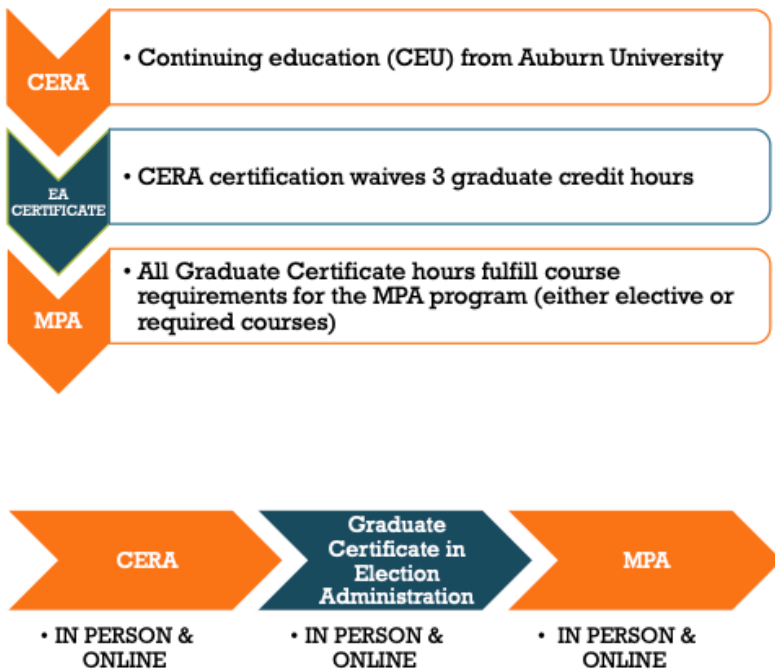
FACULTY AND AFFILIATES

CERA/CERV

Certified Election and Registration Administrator and Certified Elections Registration Vendor Program

Beginning in 1992, the Election Center offered professional education courses for election and registration officials. Several election officials recognized the need for trained, professional election and registration administrators who understand the many factors that impact election administration. There were only four courses offered initially at the 1992 Election Center Annual National Conference, but in 1994 and beyond, the Election Center partnered with Auburn University to create the formal CERA/CERV professional certification program. The CERA/CERV program is the only continuing professional education program that specializes in voter registration and election administration. Obtaining and maintaining a CERA/CERV requires a dedication to the highest professional standards and a commitment to continuing education.

The CERA certification through the Election Center and the Election Administration Graduate Certificate and Master of Public Administration through Auburn University are designed to be pursued alongside one another, should a student choose to do so. While each can be earned independently, the programs are designed to make it simpler for a student to obtain all three degrees/certifications. The flowchart to the left illustrates the long-term goal of offering each certification and degree online and in person. The online MPA program at Auburn is currently in development.



Standards of reciprocity are being developed for training offered by state associations or state election offices.

CERA/CERV

*Certified Election and Registration Administrator and
Certified Elections Registration Vendor Program*

CERA Core Coursework

- Course 1: Election Administration and Voter Registration as a System
- Course 2: Management and Leadership Concepts in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Course 3: Planning and Budgeting for Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Course 4: Information Management, Technology, and Security in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Course 5: Ethics in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Course 6: Communications and Public Relations in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Course 7: Enhancing Voter Registration and Participation in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Course 8: Implementation of New Programs in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Course 9: History of Elections Part III - 1960 to Modern Era
- Course 10: Constitutions, Courts, and Cases to 1965
- Course 11: History of Elections Part I: Antiquity to 1781
- Course 12: History of Elections Part II: 1781 to Civil Rights Era 1960

Recent Renewal Topics

- The Policy Process in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Training in Elections: Reaching All Levels
- Contracting in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Comparative Democracy
- Conflict Management
- Election Law: Constitutional Issues
- Election Assessment: Tracking Performance Across the Election Administration and Voter Registration System
- Recent Research on Election Administration
- Reframing the Public Narrative in Election Administration and Voter Registration
- Election Reform Policy Developments

Faculty are constantly updating material and course delivery techniques to reflect the current state of practice and professional needs. New material and course names coming AY 2024-2025.

For more information about CERA/CERV courses and 2024 course offerings, click [here](#).

Election Administration Certificate

The Graduate Certificate in Election Administration is designed to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to pursue a successful career in the field of election administration. Students in the program learn about the history of elections in the United States, the variety of election administration policies across the fifty states, and the critical issues the elections community currently faces. The Graduate Certificate in Election Administration can be earned independently or while pursuing a Master's in Public Administration (MPA). The certificate requires 15 graduate credit hours (see course outline below). This graduate certificate fulfills the new MPA curriculum requirement (effective Fall 2023) that students choose a graduate certificate to meet elective requirements within their degree.

Election Center Fellowship

One of the great opportunities provided by the Election Administration program is the opportunity to apply for the Election Center Fellowship. Election Center Fellows work with faculty who teach in the graduate program in election administration on a variety of projects related to the field of election administration. Fellows perform tasks that are both administrative and research-focused, and provide support for the Election Center. The fellowship covers tuition and pays a monthly stipend. Recent projects the Election Center Fellows have worked on include funded research projects, event planning, branding and marketing, undergraduate student outreach, and professional education development.

Coursework for Graduate Certificate

- Seminar in Election Administration (Spring)
- Election Policy Reform (Fall)
- Internship (Spring, Summer, or Fall)*

Electives

- Intergovernmental Relations (Spring)
- Program Evaluation (Fall)
- Public Sector Information, Security, and Risk (Summer)
- Comparative Election Administration (Summer)

*To complete a graduate certificate, the internship must be in the subject area, in this case, election administration. The internship requirement is waived for practicing election officials.

Examples of where former students have held internships:

- Alabama Secretary of State
- Mississippi Secretary of State
- U.S. Election Assistance Commission
- Winston-Salem County, North Carolina Election Office

4th Biennial Symposium

*Enhancing the Profession of Election Administration:
Building Community Through Applied Research & Ethics*

Auburn faculty began hosting a biennial Symposium in Election Administration in 2015. Its programming remains unique in its combination of research scholars, vendor representatives, advocacy groups, and practicing election officials.

The Institute's fourth biennial symposium was held at Auburn University October 15-17, 2023. The main themes for the symposium were ethics and transparency, whether and how the voting experience mirrors the American public, and how we study the field to produce results that generate public value. These themes are linked to public trust in election operations and election results, and to our broader ideals about democratic governance.



Past Symposia



SUSAN GILL, CHAIR, ELECTION CENTER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS - 2019

2015: THE EVOLUTION OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION SINCE THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT: 1965-2015

2017: INCLUSION & INTEGRITY IN ELECTION ADMINISTRATION: FEATURING THE US ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION, THE EAVS, AND DATA-DRIVEN CONVERSATIONS

2019: INCLUSION & INTEGRITY II: INNOVATION, INVESTMENT, AND CRITICAL CONVERSATION

Other 2023 Activities

Beyond the Ballot

Beginning in 2021, the Institute worked with the Election Center and its cross-partisan Committee on Ethics in Practice to update the Standards of Conduct for Election and Registration officials to address the new challenges in the field of election administration since the 2020 election. This work was generously funded by the Square One Foundation. These standards have been published as a tool for election officials to maintain an ethical standard for their work and to communicate with the public about their work, and what it means to administer elections with transparency, honesty, and integrity. To read the Standards of Conduct, click [here](#). To access the new Standards toolkit, click [here](#). To view the presentation given at the National Press Club, click [here](#).



State of the Election Administration Workforce

Through a grant from the MIT Data and Science Lab, the Institute developed a report on the current state of the workforce in the field of election administration. The research showed that there are some things that we do know about the state of the workforce, such as the distribution of election officials that are elected, appointed, or hired across the 50 states. However, there are many aspects of the field that we do not know because comprehensive data are unavailable, such as the demographics of the election administration workforce compared to the broader public administration field, how the changing work impacts changes in the workforce, and whether best practices are truly the best for all election officials or only a select few. To read the full report, click [here](#). We have since begun working on a new project through a grant from the Bipartisan Policy Center to further the research on the workforce technology.

Journal of Election Administration Research & Practice

The Journal of Election Administration Research & Practice (JEARP) is a biannual e-journal developed in partnership between the Election Center (also known as the National Association of Election Officials) and the Auburn University Election Administration Initiative. It is designed to address the concerns of the practice, policy, research, vendor, and advocacy communities involved in the administration of elections in the US and abroad.

Journal of Election Administration, Research & Practice

blending theory and practice
to advance the field

The graphic features a dark blue background with eight circular icons in a 2x4 grid. The icons represent: a ballot box, a ballot, a presentation screen, an envelope, a group of people, a group of people, two people, and a bookshelf.

The most recent publication, Volume 2 Issue 1, was released in June 2023 and includes reports on Poll Worker Perceptions of Online Training, Philanthropy and Election Operations, What New Election Officials Need to Know, and policies and practices from several states. We look forward to the next several publications in 2024. For more information about the journal, click [here](#).

New Research

There are new research projects always in the works at the Institute. Two of the most recent publications are outlined below. To see all of our research, visit au-elections.com

Trust in Elections

Between 2020 and 2021 we collected election officials' messages to the public. We then engaged in a two-part study to examine public reaction to those messages. In the first part, we convened national focus groups to discuss trust in elections and elicit responses and conversations about a variety of these messages. In the second part, we selected four of those messages that garnered the most positive reaction and engaged in a national survey experiment to determine whether there was an impact on trust in government by message and messenger. Some of the general findings suggest:

- Neutral messages produced neutral responses
- Shaming messages were unpopular
- I Voted stickers need equal Red/Blue or are seen as partisan

To read the full report and read the other findings, click [here](#). We also have a forthcoming publication on this project in the Public Opinion Quarterly.

Municipal Handcount

In Fall 2023, we assembled a team of faculty and graduate students to observe the municipal elections in five municipalities in four counties in the same metropolitan region. We observed voting in all early voting and election day voting locations, as well as tabulation, particularly for one municipality conducting a novel hand count. Using the same observation procedures in all voting locations, the team observed very few irregularities, and the issues that were observed were both consistent with issues faced in other jurisdictions around the country and rectifiable for future elections with different or additional poll worker training and voter education. In the municipality conducting the novel hand count, the check in and ballot provision process was more time consuming, but the ballot return process was faster than other jurisdictions, including the other hand count jurisdiction. The novel hand count process itself was slow and time consuming, but it was consistent with other hand count practices and, based on multiple observations from multiple observers, produced accurate results.

Upcoming Projects

- Election Innovation in Southeast Asia - Ikhsan Darmawan
- Re-examining Drivers of Innovation in U.S. Elections - Ikhsan Darmawan, Brandon Fincher, Kathleen Hale, and Mitchell Brown
- Professionalization Index Update for 2024
- *Administering Elections: How American Elections Work*, 2nd Edition - Kathleen Hale, Robert Montjoy, Mitchell Brown

Looking Ahead at 2024

JANUARY

Auburn University Spring Classes Begin
Joint Election Officials Liaison Conference
(Arlington, VA)
CERA Course: 1 (Online)

FEBRUARY

Election Center Special Workshop (Nashville,
TN)
CERA Courses: 1, 2, 10, 37

MARCH

Professional Education Program Special
Session (Raleigh, NC)
CERA Courses: 7 (Online), 3, 7, 11, 12

APRIL

Election Center Special Workshop (Portland,
OR)
CERA Courses: 9 (Online), 3, 4, 39
Election Administration Graduate Program
Open House

MAY

Auburn University Summer Classes Begin
Auburn Special Session (Auburn, AL)
CERA Courses: 11 (Online), 1, 5, 11, 12

JUNE

Professional Education Program Special
Session (Phoenix, AZ)
CERA Courses: 2 (Online), 2, 4, 8, 9

JULY

Summer Session (Boise, ID)
CERA Courses: 4 (Online), 6,7,8,9,10

AUGUST

Auburn University Fall Classes Begin
CERA Courses: 6 (Online)

SEPTEMBER

39th Annual National Conference (Detroit,
MI)
CERA Courses: 5, 6, 13, 41, 8
JEARP Editorial Board Meeting

OCTOBER

CERA Course: 10 (Online)
Election Administration Graduate Program
Open House

NOVEMBER

2024 Presidential Election
CERA Course: 12 (Online)

DECEMBER

Election Administration Certificate Alumni
Reunion

Our Team

2023-2024

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Mitchell Brown, PhD
McKenzie Cooper, MPA
Brandon Fincher, PhD
Ikhsan Darmawan, PhD
Benton Grubbs
Noah Hendrix, MPA
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Kathleen Hale, JD, PhD
Soren Jordan, PhD
Dean Logan, CERA
Alice Miller, JD
Tammy Patrick, CERA
Tom Wilkey

Funders and Supporters

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Square One Foundation

The Election Trust Initiative

MIT Election Data Science Lab

US Election Assistance Commission

Alabama Secretary of State



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