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Utica University Panel Examines Balance of Power Ahead of Midterm Elections

Faculty experts and NAACP community leader call for informed participation in the democratic process.

UTICA, NY — Just days before the November 3 midterm elections, Utica University brought together faculty experts and a local NAACP leader for a discussion of the balance of power in Congress, voting rights and the decisions that shape Americans' daily lives.

"The 2026 Midterm Elections," held Thursday, October 29, from 5 to 7 p.m. at Hislop Auditorium in Thurston Hall, examined the battle to control both houses of Congress and the ballot. Organizers also provided an option to attend by Zoom. Audience members were invited to ask questions about the stakes of the election and the implications for their communities.

The discussion was moderated by Clemmie "Clem" Harris, Ph.D., associate professor of History and Public Affairs and director of Africana Studies. Harris underscored the value of respectful dialogue, including the conversations about politics that take place around kitchen tables, where people can listen and learn from one another.

PANEL PARTICIPANTS

Clemmie "Clem" Harris, Ph.D.
Moderator; Associate Professor, History and Public Affairs; Director, Africana Studies

Jun Kwon, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Political Science

Kira Maddox, MBA
Director, Office of Community, Belonging and Engagement; NAACP Communications Committee Chair

Rick Fenner, Ph.D.
Professor, Economics

Luke Perry, Ph.D.
Distinguished Professor, Political Science

Daniel Tagliarina, Ph.D.
Professor and Department Chair, Political Science

Maddox, director of Utica University's Office of Community, Belonging and Engagement and Communications Committee Chair of the Oneida County Branch NAACP, emphasized the importance of civic involvement, making a voting plan and getting engaged in local communities beyond Election Day. She urged participants to connect public policy questions to concrete actions that strengthen civic life.

Suggested statement for Aaron Woodman's approval (not a verified quotation):

> *"Civic engagement begins with helping young people understand that their voices matter. Kira Maddox is a change-maker who shows how education, participation and service can strengthen democracy. We need more conversations like this to inspire the next generation of voters and leaders."*

Woodman serves as vice president of the Oneida County Branch NAACP and uses podcasting to encourage civic engagement among young people. The panel's central message was clear: democracy depends not only on Election Day, but also on ongoing listening, learning and participation in community affairs.

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PHOTO SHEET | 2026 MIDTERM ELECTIONS PANEL

Utica University • October 29, 2026 • Hislop Auditorium, Thurston Hall



PHOTO 1 — Panelists discuss the 2026 midterm elections at Utica University. Participants included moderator Dr. Clemmie Harris; Drs. Jun Kwon, Daniel Tagliarina, Rick Fenner and Luke Perry; and Kira Maddox, MBA. Photo submitted by Dr. Clemmie Harris.



PHOTO 2 — Scholars and community representatives address questions about the balance of power in Congress and the importance of voter participation. Photo submitted by Dr. Clemmie Harris.

EVENT FLYER | OCTOBER 29, 2026

