



INSTITUTE FOR ELECTION ADMINISTRATION
RESEARCH & PRACTICE

Institute for Election Administration Research & Practice

Annual Report
2024



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Note from the Director

Mitchell Brown, PhD

Welcome to the second annual report of the Institute for Election Administration Research & Practice (the Institute), a collaborative project of the Election Center and Auburn University. This has been a pivotal year, as the founder, Dr. Kathleen Hale, retired from Auburn and took up the position of Executive Director of the Election Center. In her place, Dr. Mitchell Brown has now stepped up to be the program director.

This year has included a mix of maintaining and continuing existing programs and developing new ones. Our staff have diligently worked to update the CERA materials as the Election Center developed new branding. We piloted a new version of Course 4 focused on contingency planning and continuity of operations plans which we are excited to bring to the program in 2025. We also started the process of developing a new CERA advisory committee from among the graduates.

On research, we continued to work on reports with the US Election Assistance Commission and the Bi-Partisan Policy Center, and faculty continued work on other research projects to better understand and support elections across the country. The journal took a back seat to the other work during our transition, and we are excited to announce that we have hired a new editorial manager, Brandon Fincher, and onboarded several new members to our editorial team including Chris Cooper (Western Carolina University), Ricky Keech (Loudon County, Virginia), and Kal Munis (Auburn University). We have also continued to support the work of the Election Center in other ways, including the Committee on Ethics in Practice, chaired by Hilary Rudy (State of Colorado), and other projects in New York and California.

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, and jurisdictions began to recognize the value of the CERA certification. A Graduate Certificate in Election Administration launched at Auburn in the MPA Program. In the 2010s, the parameters of the CERA 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.

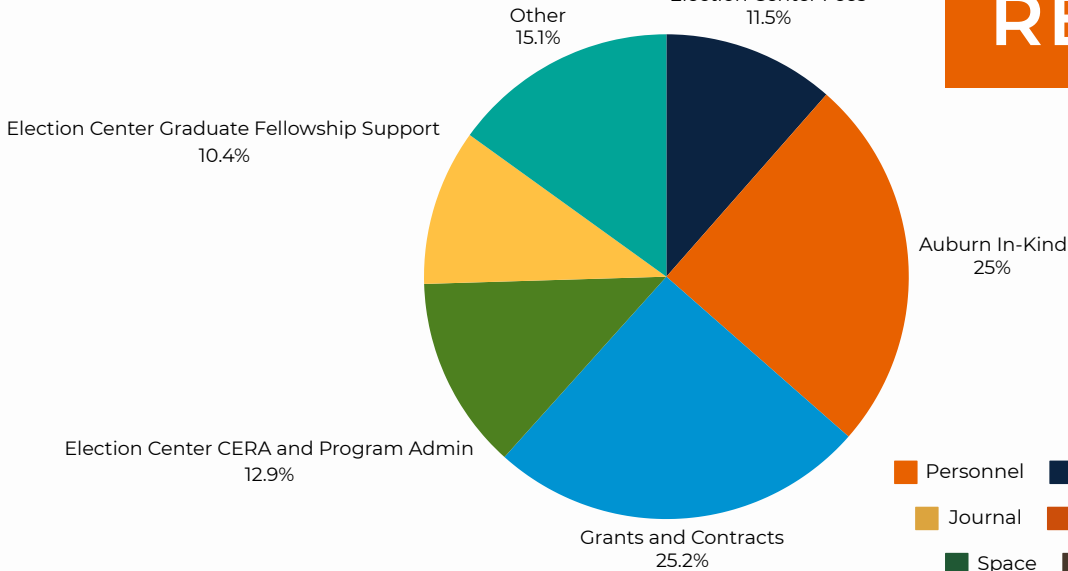
The 2020 election brought members of the Election Center and Auburn faculty into the national spotlight with scores of interviews and appearance on roundtables and discussions around the country. The Journal of Election Administration Research & Practice was launched with an editorial board of 50 election 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. In 2024, the Institute celebrated the largest CERA graduating class in its history, comprised of 121 graduates from across the country committing to lifelong learning and ethical election practices.



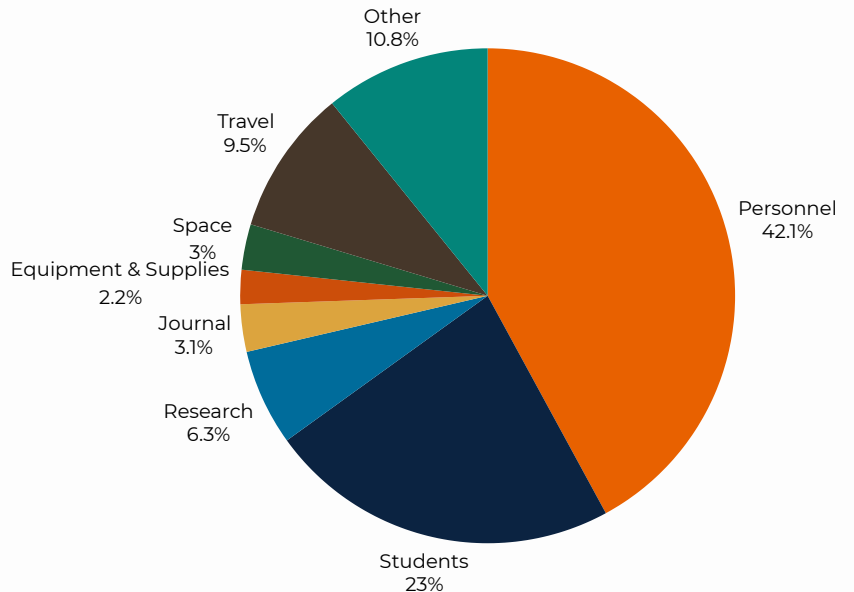
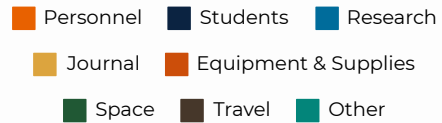
CERA Graduation Ceremony | 39th Election Center Annual Conferences | Detroit, Michigan | September 10, 2024

2024 Financial Report

The graphs below depict the proportion of revenue and expenses we incurred in 2024 by category. We realized "savings" in 2024 as intentional carry forward funds to help support the 2025 Symposium.



REVENUE

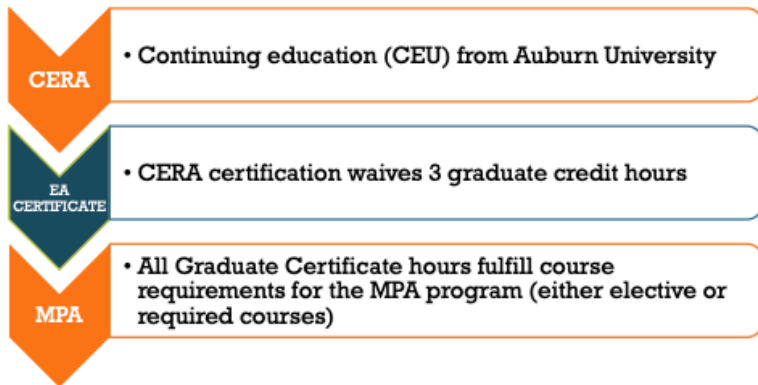


EXPENSES

CERA

Certified Election and Registration Administrator 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 professional certification program. The CERA program is the only continuing professional education program that specializes in voter registration and election administration. Obtaining and maintaining a CERA 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.

The application for reciprocity agreements for other training programs will open in Spring of 2025.

CERA

Certified Election and Registration Administrator 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: Contingency and Continuity of Operations Planning 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

2024 Renewal Topics

- **Leadership in Election Administration**
- **Election Reform Policy Developments**
- **Bipartisanship & Election Administration**
- **Public Opinion & Election Administration**

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 courses and 2025 course offerings, visit the Election Center website electioncenter.org.

CERA

Certified Election and Registration Administrator Program

Quotes from the Graduates

Jessica Aguiar-Koepke, CERA

Humboldt County, Nevada

The CERA program signifies community to me. The networking opportunities and collaborative experiences during the courses have significantly enriched my understanding of Elections. Completing these courses have given me even more dedication to my election administration career and a greater appreciation of my colleagues and those that have come before me.

LaShandra Little, CERA

Fulton County, Georgia

The CERA program has provided me with tremendous professional development opportunities in elections. Networking with others who are doing the same work across the country has enabled me to build my professional network and develop the skills needed to communicate effectively about running successful elections. The certification program brings a wealth of credibility to our work as election officials across the country and enables us to be known as experts in the field. I'm genuinely grateful to have had the experience of being certified as an election official.

Paul D. Lopez CERA

Denver Elections, Colorado

It's more than a standard amongst elections officials, [it's] an act of solidarity and a commitment to protect our democracy.

Brett Riffle, CERA

Fairfield County, Ohio

I started the CERA program to gain a national certification in my profession. I am graduating CERA with a greater understanding of election administration around the country and something far more valuable – strong, lasting bonds with the dedicated and wonderful people who work in elections around our great nation.

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
- Forsyth County, North Carolina Election Office

Election Administration Certificate Student Spotlight

Benton Grubbs, MPA (2024)

Trainer, South Carolina Election Commission



“I have been able to translate what I learned through the certificate program to my current role in multiple ways. I learned how to research and communicate complex topics surrounding election administration through presentations in my courses and my work as a graduate research assistant. These skills have been very useful as I prepare to facilitate courses for poll workers and new county officials, and have allowed me to speak confidently about topics such as voter eligibility, poll worker recruitment, and administrative burden. Election administration is a vast field that can be confusing at times. The program at Auburn allowed me to ask questions to really understand why election policies and procedures are the way that they are.

I would recommend the graduate certificate to others working in elections because the program taught me about elections in different ways, such as writing research reports or observing polling places, giving me hands-on experience that I could directly apply in my new role. I also appreciated how the program facilitated connection with current election experts, both academics and practitioners. These connections allowed me to learn more about elections from those who truly love what they do.

My biggest takeaway from the program is that the election administration community is strong, regardless of agency or job level, built by those individuals who all have an integral role in the process of conducting free and fair elections. My favorite part of the program was the Issues in Election Administration course. This class taught me how to identify and assess challenges in election administration at the federal, state, and local levels while considering the rapidly changing landscape to find innovative solutions.”

2024 Activities



Election Administration Graduate Certificate Open Houses

In 2024, we hosted two open houses for our Election Administration Graduate Certificate program at Auburn University. We played election trivia, enjoyed snacks, and talked about the importance of the program and the opportunities it provides. Undergraduate students are displaying increasing interest in the field, and we strive to involve them in our work and introduce them to the wonderful world of elections!

Undergraduate Student Experiential Learning Trips

In the spirit of introducing undergraduate students to the field of election administration, Dr. Mitchell Brown taught a special experiential learning course on the 2024 Presidential Election, giving undergraduate students the opportunity to travel to meet election officials and witness the processes firsthand. Their trips included the 2024 Election Center Annual Conference in September, visiting several local election offices in Colorado to learn about vote-by-mail processes in October, and riding along with Washington D.C. Board of Elections staff on Election Day in November.



CHAFFEE COUNTY COURT HOUSE - SALIDA, COLORADO



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE BALCONY, U.S. CAPITOL WASHINGTON, D.C.

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

Volume 3 of the Journal of Election Administration, Research and Practice will include a regular issue covering policy and research on a variety of subjects such as staffing, auditing, poll worker recruitment, and election vendor services, among other topics. This regular issue will be followed by a special issue containing white papers collected by MIT's Election Data and Science Lab assessing the current state of election administration research and best practices. JEARP continues to strive toward connecting the variety of communities involved in administering elections in these issues and in future editions.

New Research

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

Evolution of Election Technology and Impact on the Election Administration Workforce

Technology is central to modern election administration, but this has not always been the case. It brings positives (e.g., efficiencies) and negatives (e.g., costs). It also has important implications for the workforce. In this study, the team examined three aspects of technology in election administration: emergence and evolution, impact of automation on workforce size, and impact on workforce characteristics, functions, processes, and other stakeholders. This team included Mitchell Brown (Auburn University Department of Political Science), Alan Seals (Auburn University Department of Economics), Duha Altindag (Auburn University Department of Economics), Ikhsan Darmawan, and Kathleen Hale (Election Center).



Trust in Elections

As mentioned in the 2023 Institute Annual Report, the article “Restoring Trust in US Elections through Effective Election Administrator Messaging” (Mitchell Brown, Kathleen Hale, Soren Jordan, Ryan Williamson) was published in *Public Opinion Quarterly* in July 2024. This piece analyzed the disconnect between messages from election offices and public trust by testing messages collected from election officials around the country using focus groups and a national panel survey experiment.

U.S. Election Assistance Commission Reports

The EAC has partnered with Auburn University to produce four reports on various election administration topics, including poll workers, voter eligibility, recounts, contests, valid votes, and the use of social security numbers. The first report on poll workers, set to be released in early 2025, describes state laws and practices for recruitment and training of poll workers, including content, trainers, delivery, evaluation of, and efforts to improve training programs. The other reports will be released throughout 2025.

Upcoming Projects

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

Looking Ahead at 2025

JANUARY

Auburn University Spring Classes
Begin
Joint Election Officials Liaison
Conference (Arlington, VA)
CERA Courses: 41, 1 (Online)

FEBRUARY

Election Center Special Workshop
(Little Rock, AR)
CERA Courses: 2 (Online), 6, 7, 8, 39

MARCH

Professional Education Program
Special Session (Raleigh, NC)
CERA Courses: 3 (Online), 2, 4, 8, 9

APRIL

Election Center Special Workshop
(Pittsburgh, PA)
CERA Courses: 4 (Online), 9, 10, 38
Election Administration Graduate
Program Open House

MAY

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

JUNE

Professional Education Program
Special Session (Phoenix, AZ)
CERA Courses: 6 (Online), 3, 7, 11, 12

JULY

Summer Session (Boise, ID)
CERA Courses: 7 (Online), 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 37

AUGUST

Auburn University Fall Classes Begin
CERA Courses: 8 (Online)
40th Annual National Conference (Salt
Lake City, UT)
CERA Courses: 5, 6, 37, 41

SEPTEMBER

JEARP Editorial Board Meeting
CERA Course: 9 (Online)

OCTOBER

5th Biennial Symposium (Auburn, AL)
Election Administration Graduate
Program Open House
CERA Course: 10 (Online)

NOVEMBER

CERA Course: 11 (Online)

DECEMBER

CERA Course: 12 (Online)

Our Team

2024-2025

Mitchell Brown, PhD
McKenzie Cooper, MPA
Brandon Fincher, PhD
Lauren Hill, MPA
Avery Hillman
Olivia Phillips
Emily Poudner
Oriana Robles
Isaac Westfall, MPA

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