

**PORTMAN CENTER  
FOR POLICY SOLUTIONS**



**A YEAR OF  
Firsts**

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024

University of  
**CINCINNATI**



### ABOUT FORMER SENATOR ROB PORTMAN

A native of Cincinnati who still resides here, Portman recently concluded more than three decades of public service, including representing Ohio in the U.S. Senate from 2011 to 2023. He is known for his grasp of a broad range of complex issues, civility, and bipartisan approach. When he was a U.S. Senator, Portman was highly ranked in terms of a bipartisan voting record. While serving in the U.S. Senate, Portman was known as one of the most prolific legislators of his generation, with a remarkable 228 of his bipartisan bills signed into law by Presidents Obama, Trump and Biden. He was routinely ranked in the top 5 on the Lugar ranking for bipartisanship. (The Lugar Center and Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy have produced a non-partisan ranking of how often each member of congress works across party lines.)

Locally, Portman will likely best be remembered for his support and Senate leadership related to the bipartisan passage of the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, designed to make historic improvements to the nation's roads, ports, rails, bridges, and more, including paving the way for a new Brent Spence Bridge. He has also been involved in efforts to end human trafficking; provide funds for drug rehabilitation efforts, including the opioid crisis; strengthen retirement security; enhance the nation's cyber security; expand land conservation efforts, and more. In 2018, he and Ohio Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown joined together in supporting a major criminal justice reform bill. He played a key role in U.S. foreign policy through his seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and as co-chair and founder of the Senate Ukraine Caucus.

Prior to his two terms in the U.S. Senate, Portman served six terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. Portman has sent his congressional and senatorial papers to UC. In the administration of George W. Bush, Portman served in two cabinet-level roles, as Director of the Office of Management and Budget and U.S. Trade Representative.

### MISSION

TO ENCOURAGE CIVILITY, BIPARTISANSHIP, AND FINDING COMMON GROUND TO ACHIEVE POLICY SOLUTIONS. THIS INCLUDES THE PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE PUBLIC SERVANTS FROM ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM WHO ARE COMMITTED TO CIVILITY, OPEN AND INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE, AND BIPARTISAN ENGAGEMENT. THE CENTER AIMS TO INSPIRE STUDENTS, FACULTY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO GROW AS CITIZEN-LEADERS WHO ADVANCE THE PUBLIC GOOD, AND THROUGH ITS MISSION, ALSO INTENDS TO INFLUENCE THE NATIONAL POLITICAL CLIMATE AT A TIME OF GROWING PARTISANSHIP AND INCIVILITY.



# NAVIGATING TOWARD Results

LAUNCHING A NEW DIALOGUE

**ABOVE:** Dr. Andrew Lewis, Rob Portman and Senator Kyrsten Sinema kick things off at the Opening Ceremony

**BELOW:** Leaders from across the city, state, and nation gather for the ribbon cutting

## THE PORTMAN CENTER FOR POLICY SOLUTIONS' INAUGURAL YEAR IN REVIEW

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01 **A YEAR IN REVIEW**
- 02 **CULTIVATE CIVIC LEADERS**
- 04 **CONVENE INFORMED CONVERSATIONS**
- 06 **TIMELINE**
- 08 **CHAMPION POLICY SOLUTIONS**
- 10 **MEET THE TEAM**
- 11 **STUDENT FELLOWS**
- 12 **WHAT'S NEXT**
- 13 **AT-A-GLANCE**

We face challenging political times. Polarization is high and trust is low. Our governments seem unable to make progress on our most pressing issues. According to a recent Pew survey, 63% of Americans have little or no confidence in the future of the U.S. Political System. Amid these challenges, I am confident that we have something better to offer. In this critical moment, the Portman Center is going to be part of the solution.

On October 23, 2023, we celebrated the grand opening with a ribbon cutting and remarks from leaders from the University, city, state, and region. Speakers highlighted the need to develop the next generation of leaders, to engage in civil discourse, and to work with people with different views. Senator Portman modeled this during his career, and the Center's mission is to replicate

this commitment to bipartisanship, civility, and common ground policy solutions.

Over the next seven months, we put our mission into practice. We invested in future leaders, by launching of the Portman Center Fellows Program. Thirteen outstanding undergraduates comprised the inaugural class of Fellows. They learned first-hand from elected officials, nonprofit leaders, and scholars, with many students finding for the first time some hope for a productive, bipartisan future.

This past year was certainly a "year of firsts." We set a positive course, and we are excited to build upon these initial efforts to have an impact in Cincinnati and across the country.

**ANDREW LEWIS**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PORTMAN CENTER FOR POLICY SOLUTIONS





# CULTIVATE CIVIC Leaders

**ABOVE:** Undergraduate Fellows enjoy a discussion with Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus and pose under Senator Portman's kayak.

## CIVIL, FREE EXPRESSION

At the Portman Center, we are investing in the next generation of civic leaders. We intentionally mentor students to encourage them to be active citizens and problem solvers. Civility and free expression are two of the core values of the Center. Civil discourse conveys respect and dignity for our fellow citizens, even when we disagree. Civility emphasizes respect, humility, and understanding. It demonstrates our underlying unity, and it promotes the finding of common ground.

We pair civility with free expression. The exchange of ideas, even fiercely held ideas, is critical to the pursuit of truth and good policy. We believe

strongly that this can be done in a civil, respectful, and productive way. At the Center we create an opportunity for ideas, viewpoints, and priorities to be discussed and contemplated. In the process, we learn much about ourselves and our world. Free expression helps make us better citizens and it can lead to improved outcomes.

All our public events demonstrate our commitment to civility and free expression, but we intentionally bring in speakers to discuss civility. In February 2024, we hosted former North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp, who currently serves as the Director of the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago, for the inaugural lecture in the Hayden Program in Applied Civil Discourse. Senators



Developing educated and engaged graduates is fundamental to fulfilling our Next Lives Here strategic direction. It is our duty to ground the next generation in values and skills that will equip them to be transformational citizen leaders for society. The Portman Center for Policy Solutions stands as an invaluable and timely resource in our pursuit of this mission.

**UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI PRESIDENT NEVILLE PINTO**

Heitkamp and Portman discussed “Civility in Polarized Times,” discussing lessons learned during their careers in public service.

## EVIDENCE BASED

For ideas to be effective, they need to be rigorously scrutinized. It takes more than an idea to be successful. The best ideas – the ones that stand the test of time – are examined, researched, and tested. This process involves iteration, critique, and creativity. At the Portman Center, we want our future leaders to promote lasting policy solutions to big challenges.

During the year, we heard from many public officials, both at the national and local level, who described their process of tackling problems and creating coalitions for legislation. They intentionally listened to those who had different perspectives to theirs, they sought expertise, and they considered downside risks. In Washington, DC, we heard from congressional and committee staff members about their day-to-day processes of gathering evidence to craft policy.

We also traveled to the University of Chicago’s Institute of Politics, where we heard from non-profit leaders who are working on creative policy solutions to bridge urban-rural divides. These leaders engage in examination and testing to craft effective policy. This will be a model for us going forward.

## BIPARTISAN

Solving policy problems requires working together and working across party lines. Future leaders will need to successfully navigate our polarized party politics. Throughout the year, we hosted conversations between Democrats and

Republicans, liberals and conservatives, to hear about how they have engaged in bipartisan work. Our first public event in October 2023 featured a conversation between Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema and Senator Portman, discussing how they build a coalition to pass the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which will result in significant investment in Cincinnati and Ohio. The Senators discussed how they developed support for the bill, starting with a small group aligned Republicans and Democrats and working to build support from members of each party, as well as key legislative leaders and President Biden.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Portman Center is engaged in the local community. An important part of our mission is to serve the University and Cincinnati region. We also realize that citizens can have a big impact on improving local problems – and at the local level bipartisan coalitions can develop more easily. We have worked to partner with institutions at the University that overlap with our mission, including the Warren Bennis Leadership Institute in the Lindner College of Business, the Cincinnati Ethics Center, and the University of Cincinnati College of Law. We have started developing partnerships with the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce and the Cincinnati Nature Center, and we are connecting our students to internship and volunteer opportunities with local governments and nonprofits.

We held events with Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus and with City Council Members Reggie Harris and Liz Keating. They discussed their approach to solve problems, their success in building coalitions, and the ways young people can make an impact.



The fellowship expanded what I would have been able to learn in a textbook, leaving an immeasurable impact.



**MACKENZIE COLLETT**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE,  
CLASS OF 2024

**BELOW LEFT:** Fellows pose at the Lincoln Memorial

**BELOW RIGHT:** Fellows meet with Portman at the Capitol during the DC trip



# CONVENE INFORMED Conversations



LEFT + BELOW: 'Civility in Polarized Times' event held February 5, 2024 featuring Senators Heidi Heitkamp and Rob Portman



“ Rob Portman knows how to get things done. Rob understands that to deliver lasting results — like our bipartisan infrastructure law — you bring people together from all backgrounds with shared goals of doing what’s right for our country. ”

**SENATOR  
KRYSTEN SINEMA**

In politics, there is plenty of punditry and an emphasis on soundbites. Attention-seeking is often more prevalent than wisdom. The Portman Center is a place where informed conversations occur. Our conversations are civil and timely. They feature expertise and thoughtfulness. Our conversations are also intentionally bipartisan, because the competition of ideas often yields better outcomes and bipartisanship is necessary to achieve policy success.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2021, a divided government passed the most important infrastructure bill in the last half-century - The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Senator Portman and Senator Krysten Sinema (Arizona) led the negotiations and assembled a core coalition of Democrats and Republicans to shepherd the bill through Congress. The bill eventually passed both houses of Congress with bipartisan support and was signed into law by President Biden.

In October 2023, we hosted a Question-and-Answer panel with the architects of this bill, which will fund the new Brent Spence companion bridge in Cincinnati. Senators Sinema and Portman discussed why the infrastructure bill is so important for the region and the country, the challenges the bill faced, and how they worked to overcome barriers. In the midst, they helped convey lessons for civic leadership during polarized politics.

## CIVIL DISCOURSE

In every conversation that we hosted, we asked civic leaders about how they promote civility and engage with those who are different with them. From the U.S. Senate to the Cincinnati City Council, we heard examples and stories of how these leaders fostered working relationships, and even friendships, with people from different parties. They expressed how important it was civil, and they demonstrated that it was achievable.



“The Portman Center takes what was once very elusive and felt unattainable – leading on a government level – and showed me the possibilities. Being in this program feels empowering.”



**MALLIKA DESAI, MEDICAL SCIENCES, CLASS OF 2025**



These discussions about civility were some of the most enlightening, especially for the Portman Fellows. Most young people have only experienced highly partisan, pejorative politics, and it was informative (and a breath of fresh air) to hear respectful conversations, to learn about common ground, and to see bipartisan friendships in action.

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial Intelligence (AI) captured the attention of the country and the policy community this past year, with the proliferation of AI technology. In April 2024, we made AI policy the focus of our inaugural Portman Center Policy Symposium. We brought together leaders in the policy space, including leaders from the White House's Office of the National Cyber Director, a trade executive who represents large technology companies, a founding member of the Senate AI Caucus, and the Cincinnati City Manager.

At the symposium, the panel discussed principles for regulating AI, with a particular emphasis on seeking to strike a balance between innovation and safety. They discussed ways that government entities and technology companies are thinking about the future of AI, policy challenges that are on the horizon, and potential workable solutions. Several members of the Ohio Cyber Range Institute also attended the AI policy symposium and engaged in Q&A with the panel. These interactions provided productive insight into the way the state of Ohio is thinking about technology policy challenges.

**ABOVE:** Portman Fellows outside the US Capitol during trip to Washington, DC

**BELOW LEFT:** Commissioner Driehaus Discussion with Portman Fellows held on February 28, 2024

**BELOW RIGHT:** 'Working Across the Aisle' with Council members Reggie Harris & Liz Keating on March 27, 2024

# A YEAR OF Firsts

From our grand opening event to our inaugural class of undergraduate fellows, we charted new territory and laid the groundwork to have an impact at the University, in the community, and across the country. While there are many exciting things to come, there will never be another first year.

**01.22.24**

Board & Fellow Breakfast



**MORE > P11**

**02.05.24**

Civility in Polarized Times  
with Senators Heidi  
Heitkamp & Rob Portman



**MORE > P4**

**10.23.23**

Opening Ceremony with Senators  
Kyrsten Sinema & Rob Portman



**MORE > P1**

**MORE > P5**



**03.27.24**  
Working Across The Aisle  
with Reggie Harris &  
Liz Keating

**MORE > P2**



**02.28.24**  
Discussion with Hamilton  
County Commissioner  
Denise Driehaus



**03.11.24 - 03.17.24**  
First Portman Center  
delegation to  
Washington, DC



**MORE > P3,5,9**

**04.15.24**  
First Portman Center  
Symposium on AI with Daniel  
Ragsdale, Chip Pickering,  
Sheryl Long & Rob Portman



**MORE > P8**



**ABOVE: 'AI Policy Symposium'** event held April 15th, 2024 featuring policy discussions with Daniel 'Rags' Ragsdale, Chip Pickering, Sheryl Long and Rob Portman

# CHAMPION POLICY Solutions

## LEVERAGE RESEARCH

The Portman Center's mission has an explicit emphasis on applied policy solutions. We mentor students to be solution oriented, and we help civic leaders and public servants find common ground policy solutions.

To achieve lasting solutions, it is crucial to conduct research and develop expertise. The Portman Center brings together scholars, policymakers, and thought leaders to pursue effective solutions. In our first year, we started this process by engaging with civic leaders to assess how they gathered and used information, as well as what information would be helpful in the public policy space.

We also engaged students in research and the development of expertise. In Spring 2024, the Portman Center taught a policy solutions capstone course, focused on Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy.

In this simulation course, undergraduate students role played staff members for Senators in the AI Caucus. They worked in groups to identify problems and develop bipartisan solutions. At the end of the semester, the groups presented their legislative proposals to high-ranking public officials at the Policy Symposium event focused on AI.

In the 2024-25 academic year, the Portman Center is going to sponsor more independent research on policy problems. We plan to bring in Research Affiliates to the Center and have our Fellows partner with them. We will then work with policymakers and local partners to effectively shape policy proposals.

## FIND COMMON GROUND

To champion policy solutions, it is necessary to focus on common ground solutions. While not always easy, finding common ground is achievable.



**450+**

**ATTENDEES AT  
PORTMAN CENTER FOR  
POLICY SOLUTIONS  
EVENTS**

“ Rob Portman and I are two people from opposite sides of the political spectrum who respect each other, and who worked hard for the benefit of what they thought was the best outcome for the country. I hope that gives [students] hope, that once again, we can get there. ”



**SENATOR HEIDI HEITKAMP**



**ABOVE:** 2024 Fellowship Class visit Washington, DC and has meetings with Senator Brown, Representative Carey, Representative Landsman, and Representative Wenstrup

The Portman Center assists policymakers and organizations as they navigate the finding of these solutions.

As we hosted public conversations over the past year, we asked elected officials how they developed common ground and build coalitions. We uncovered that some key components of this process are identifying common problems and understanding how people who are different think about policy issues. Therefore, cross-party dialogue is critical to finding common ground solutions. In the first year of the Portman Center, we have been a place where

these intentional, policy-oriented, bipartisan conversations happen.

Finding common ground also involves engaging stakeholders. Building relationships with policymakers, as well as local organizations and individuals who would be impacted by the policy change. We have started building these local networks and laying the groundwork for this coalition building. In the 2024-25 academic year, the Portman Fellows are going to partner with local organizations and researchers to help find common ground solutions.



“ Through my experience, I found that the political landscape was much more hopeful than I had previously thought. ”

**ALEXANDER CALDWELL  
POLITICAL SCIENCE,  
CLASS OF 2027**

# MEET THE Team



**ANDREW LEWIS**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PORTMAN CENTER FOR POLICY SOLUTIONS  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

The Portman Center is led by an Executive Director, and it is housed in the School of Public and International Affairs within the College of Arts and Sciences. The Center has oversight from an external Board of Advisors, made up of individuals from various industries and from across the political spectrum.

## BOARD



**TREVOR BROWN**  
Dean of the John Glenn College of Public Affairs, The Ohio State University



**DENISE DRIEHAUS**  
Commissioner Hamilton County



**MICHAEL FISHER**  
Managing Director, Winding Way Advisors and Investors



**MEL GRAVELY**  
CEO and Chairman of the Board, TriVersity Construction Company



**RICHARD HARKNETT**  
Director of the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA), University of Cincinnati



**DAVID JAHNKE**  
Attorney at Law, Katz Teller



**VALERIE LEMMIE**  
Director of Exploratory Research, Kettering Foundation



**DAVID NIVEN**  
Professor at the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA), University of Cincinnati



**ROB PORTMAN**  
Founder/Board Chair, Portman Center for Policy Solutions



**SALLY PORTMAN**  
Chief Operating Officer, TAG Strategies



**LORI ROSS**  
VP for Legal Affairs and General Counsel, University of Cincinnati

## STAFF



**SHAWN ADKINS**  
Program Manager, Portman Center for Policy Solutions, A&S Portman Center



**MEGAN VON LEHMEDEN**  
Co-op Student

# UNDERGRADUATE **Fellows**

The Portman Center for Policy Solutions is committed to cultivating student civic leaders, through a mentored scholarship program for undergraduates with demonstrated potential for to make an impact on campus, in Cincinnati, and across the country. The first cohort of Portman Center Fellows started in January 2024, and future classes will be selected through an application process each Spring, beginning their term with the start of the next academic year.

ABOVE: The Spring 2024 Fellowship Class meets the Board for the Fellowship Breakfast

## SPRING 2024 FELLOWS



**LUC BALSON**

Third-year student  
Political Science  
and Finance with a  
certificate in War Peace  
and Security



**ALEXANDER CALDWELL**

First-year student  
Political Science



**MACKENZIE COLLETT**

Third-year student  
B.A. in Political Science,  
a minor in Criminal  
Justice, and a Legal  
Studies Certificate



**MALLIKA DESAI**

Third-year student  
Medical Sciences with a  
certificate in Innovation  
and Medical Humanities



**INGRID FRETZ**

Second-year student  
Political Science and  
minoring in History



**KELLIE HANNAN**

Fourth-year student  
Business Economics and  
Political Science



**VALERIE HOLMES**

Fourth-year student  
Political Science  
and minoring in  
Environmental Policy  
and Philosophy



**ADAEZE OKOYE**

Fourth-year student  
Law and Society



**TOKHIRJON  
OTAKHONOV**

First-year student  
Law and Society



**JULIA PARREY**

Fourth-year student  
Neuropsychology and  
Political Science with a  
minor in Psychology and  
a certificate in Bioethics



**KENDRA PERKINS**

Fourth-year student  
Political science with a  
minor in PR.



**SERENE TARABISHI**

Second-year student  
Law and Society with a  
double minor in French  
and Arabic, as well as  
a certificate in Middle  
Eastern Studies



**LOUIS WEISS**

Second-year student  
Political Science (Gender  
and Multicultural  
Politics) and a minor  
in Anthropology on a  
Pre-Law track

## LEARN MORE

Visit the application portal for  
future fellowship opportunities.





# WHAT'S Next

WE ARE CONTINUING TO DEVELOP OUR SCHEDULE OF EVENTS FOR 2024-2025. HERE ARE A FEW OF THE UPCOMING EVENTS. PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS FOR MORE UPDATES.

[artsci.uc.edu/departments/spia/pcps.html](https://artsci.uc.edu/departments/spia/pcps.html)



My experience as a Portman Fellow helped me to grow and be ready for the next phase of my life, moving to DC and pursuing a career in public policy.



**KELLIE HANNAN,**  
BUSINESS ECONOMICS,  
CLASS OF 2024

## FEATURED UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 3, 2024 **"UNDERSTANDING THE ELECTION PROCESS"**  
HAMILTON COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Nov. 14, 2024 **"CHARACTER MATTERS"**  
WITH JEAN BECKER

Feb. 2025 **VISIT TO COLUMBUS, OH**

Feb. 2025 **ELECTION REFORM CONVENING**

Mar. 2025 **VISIT TO WASHINGTON, DC**

Apr. 2025 **POLICY SYMPOSIUM**

# GET Involved

→ ATTEND AN EVENT

→ SIGN UP FOR MAILINGS  
AND UPDATES

→ HIRE A PORTMAN  
CENTER INTERN

→ DONATE

MORE



## PORTMAN CENTER FOR POLICY SOLUTIONS

Clifton Court Hall  
5th Floor  
School of Public and International Affairs  
University of Cincinnati  
2800 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0375

**E** [PortmanCenter@uc.edu](mailto:PortmanCenter@uc.edu)  
**W** [artsci.uc.edu/departments/spia/pcps.html](https://artsci.uc.edu/departments/spia/pcps.html)

# AT A Glance



450+ **PORTMAN CENTER**  
Event Attendees



151 **FELLOWSHIP**  
Applications

30  
# **FELLOWSHIPS**  
Awarded




115%  
**INCREASE IN**  
Fellowship Applications




5 **COMMERORATIVE**  
Kayak Paddles Signed  
by Guest Speakers

71  
**DONOR**  
Households



192  
# **PORTMAN CENTER**  
Notebooks Given Out

13  
# **GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**  
Met With



105 **DC SUBWAY RIDES**  
Taken



## **PORTMAN CENTER FOR POLICY SOLUTIONS**

Clifton Court Hall  
5th Floor  
School of Public and International Affairs  
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