



# Building Tomorrow's Leaders, Today

An Action Plan for Increasing Civic Engagement, Service Opportunities,  
Leadership Skills, and Research Abilities of Students at Southern Utah University

## About the Michael O. Leavitt Center for Politics & Public Service

The Leavitt Center was founded on November 16, 1998, on the campus of Southern Utah University (SUU) in Cedar City, Utah. The founder, professor Craig Jones, was a political science professor who envisioned the center as a place for students to become involved, active citizens.

The center was founded on four pillars: leadership, citizenship, research, and service. Leadership was intended to broaden a student's career and professional opportunities by providing internship and leadership experiences. Citizenship was designed to increase political participation by promoting citizenship awareness. Service was used to support civic service and volunteerism by providing opportunities for humanitarian service. Finally, research allowed students to explore public policy issues and begin to understand the world of politics.

Leadership for the center has always been comprised of students. There are currently three members of the Leadership Team, ten Executive Council members, and twenty Fellows. The Leadership Team consists of a Student Director, Internship Coordinator, and Director - the only staff member on the team. Executive Council members assist in planning events, fulfilling office hours, and moderating Pizza & Politics. Fellows work with Executive Council members in committees, helping with planning and execution of events. All branches of the center are overseen by the Board of Advisors, a group of eighteen working professionals in law, lobbying, higher education, and more.

The Leavitt Center aims to provide an open environment for all students on SUU's campus, as well as all community members, no matter political affiliation. As a nonpartisan center, the students, Director, and Board of Advisors work to maintain the legacy of the center, all while providing a copious amount of opportunities for all who seek out a chance to become involved.

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## Executive Summary

This action plan was created by the student leaders in the Michael O. Leavitt Center for Politics and Public Service. Students involved include the Student Director, Internship Coordinator, Executive Council, and Fellows. Each student planned and executed events, research, service projects, and voter registration. They all gave input and helped form the structure of the action plan.

The goal of the action plan is to define how to increase civic engagement in both the campus and local community. SUU had a 49.7% voting rate among students in the 2016 election. That number was up 1.1% from 2012. The campus was below average in voting rate for all institutions. Through this action plan, the Leavitt Center hopes to increase voter turnout rates and see the campus rise above the national average.

The plan will be implemented through the Leavitt Center at SUU. The campus is located in Cedar City, Utah, a small town in the southern part of the state. The Leavitt Center is a nonpartisan political center that seeks to increase civic engagement. It is located within the Student Center, giving it access to a high number of foot traffic each day.

Work done for this action plan was developed because of the passion and drive that students possess within the center. SUU became a Voter Friendly Campus after the 2016 election and the Leavitt Center was the driving force behind the initiative. The center wants to build off of the work done in previous years, engaging more students with politics and increasing the voter turnout rate.

The action plan starts at the beginning of the 2018 fall semester and ends in the 2019 spring semester. The plan is flexible enough to start in at any time and finish approximately eight months later. The reasoning behind the fall to spring plan is to work with the school calendar. Students that start in the fall at SUU are likely to return in the spring, giving the Leavitt Center a base of people to keep civically engaged throughout their time at school.

The plan will be implemented through events, service projects, voter registration initiatives, discussions, panels, and more. All work will be planned and executed by student leaders in the Leavitt Center. Initiatives will be for both the campus and local community, engaging everyone from freshmen in college to retirees in Iron County. Through the hard work and dedication of students in the center, SUU will see an increase in voter engagement and an overall civically minded community.

# Leadership

The work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement at SUU will be spear-headed by the Michael O. Leavitt Center for Politics and Public Service. The center is dedicated to increasing student awareness on their civic responsibilities. The Leavitt Center is the host of the action plan and the expert in the field of politics on campus.

Of the Leavitt Center, the Leadership Team is in charge of making decisions and leading everyone involved. The Leadership Team is comprised of the Marketing Director, Internship Coordinator, Student Director, and Director, who is the only staff member involved. Of the student leadership positions, the Student Director is in charge of making the finals decisions. The person in that position is the voice of the center and ensures that what is plan, gets accomplished.

The Leavitt Center provides an important service on SUU's campus as an interdisciplinary hub for leadership opportunities, experiential learning, civic engagement, humanitarian service, and public policy research. This nonpartisan center works to disseminate political information and spark debate about the ever-changing world of politics and the issues that have an impact on the people of Utah and the nation.

Members of the center are chosen via an application and interview process. First, the Director chooses the Leadership Team. Then those members open applications and conduct interviews for both the Executive Council and Fellows. Students who apply designate their choice of either the Executive Council, Fellows, or both. There are ten spots for Executive Council and twenty spots for Fellows. Once the team is decided, all other applicants are placed on a waiting list.

Responsibilities of those in the Leavitt Center include events, service projects, political 'Did You Know', Pizza & Politics, and more. Each week the center hosts at least one event. These events have covered topics from majoring in political science to differentiating credible sources from fake news. Service projects are typically monthly and benefit SUU and the community. Political DYK is a chance for students to research and work with a graphic designer to create posters for students to read. These posters cover topics from impeachment to local government, helping to disseminate political information to all who pass the center. Finally, the bread and butter of the Leavitt Center, is Pizza & Politics. These weekly discussions give students a chance to comment on the latest political topics. Conversations cover everything from the War on Drugs to Climate Change.

The Leavitt Center always strives to include and impact as many people as possible. The number one way students are inclusive of different campus and community stakeholders is by partnering with events. Over the past year, the center has partnered the most with the Center for Diversity and Inclusion and the Veteran Affairs office. By partnering with campus entities, the center is able to impact more people and have political discussions that affect a diverse crowd. Partnerships with community members allow for the center to impact Cedar City and Iron County residents. Coming up in January, the center is hosting the swearing-in ceremony for Cedar Highlands, a new town located outside of Cedar City. Other partnerships include internships in city offices, the 5th District Court, the Children's Justice Center, and having board members who are active in their communities.

# Leadership

Academic departments that work closely with the Leavitt Center include the Political Science and Criminal Justice department, the School of Business, and the office of Student Affairs. The center provides internships, many of which are filled by students from the School of Business and the Political Science and Criminal Justice department. The office for Student Affairs works to get students to events, assists with funding, and ensures that the center is a welcoming environment for all.

A large amount of administrators on campus are involved with the center. The Vice President of Student Affairs and the Dean of Students help to guide students to the center if they wish to get involved. The President of SUU and the Vice President of Advancement are both on the Board of Advisors. Their involvement ranges from funding to internship opportunities. The Vice President of Alumni Relations teaches students how to plan events, which helps to better prepare for Leavitt Center events. Other administrators on campus play a role in getting political speakers, finding funding, guiding students to the center, and more.

All Leavitt Center events are open to SUU students are free to attend. Student organizations that the center often partners with include: the Center for Diversity and Inclusion (Black Student Union, Native American Student Association, Arabic Club, Latino Student Alliance, Polynesian Club, and Pride and Equality Club) , Presidential Ambassadors, Veteran Affairs, SUU Student Association, International Affairs, Care and Support Team, Legal Scholars, Student Programming Board, and First Year Experience.

Community organizations that work with the Leavitt Center typically house interns. In Cedar City, the center works with the 5th District Court, Children's Justice Court, Mayor's office, City Manager, Frontier Homestead State Park, and others based off of student interest. On the state level, interns are sent to the Capitol during the legislative session. Students have also had opportunities to intern with the Sutherland Institute. Interns sent to Washington, D.C. work in congressional offices for Utah's senators and congressmen.

For voter registration and questions, the Leavitt Center works closely with the Iron County Clerk. Each semester the Executive Council is trained on how to register voters, sign up for absentee ballots, and answer frequently asked questions. The relationship built with the County Clerk allows for the office work to be done more efficiently and the Leavitt Center students to learn more about the civic process.

The Executive Council and Leadership Team meet every Tuesday at Noon. This ensures that everyone can be on the same page with events, topics can be discussed, and the team can bond and work better together. The committees, comprised of an Executive Council member and two Fellows, stay in touch every week but meet when it is time to prepare for their event and other responsibilities. Interns stay in contact with the Internship Coordinator, the marketing team meets weekly, and the center communicates effectively with all involved.

# Commitment

The leadership of SUU has mission to engage students in experiential education, leading to personal growth, civic responsibility, and professional excellence. The core themes of the university are explore, engage, and excel. Leadership is committed to supporting student learning outside of the classroom, help all understand and appreciate varied perspectives and ideas, and to involve students in practices that lead to higher participation rates in community service and democratic processes throughout their lives.

The commitment to civic engagement and general political involvement is stated in the university's mission, as well as in its plan to fulfill said mission. The mission and vision are communicated throughout the university, from faculty and staff to students and visitors. Those involved with the university in any way know the goals of leadership and understand their daily work is geared towards accomplishing the goals.

SUU's commitment to excellence is communicated outside of the university through marketing efforts and word of mouth. The marketing efforts that come from SUU's Marketing Communication office range from billboards and large advertisements in bustling cities to tailored videos sent to a person's email. Those involved with the school, whether talking to donors, potential students, or anyone asking about the university, echo the words of the mission and vision and acknowledge the work done by leadership. The community of Cedar City is familiar with the goals of SUU and work to combine the city's goals with the school's in order to accomplish more.

Educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is part of the system of SUU. It is ongoing, consistent, systematic, and sustainable across all programs. By having the goal of increasing civic engagement in all students, each faculty and staff member take that and apply it to their classrooms. Students have seen first hand the importance of civic engagement, through field trips, professional presentations, or classwork assigned by professors in all fields. The institution is dedicated to the betterment of students, inside and outside of the classroom.

From the Provost's office, who is over academics for the school, are the goals of academic quality, institutional accreditation and accountability, and a positive learning environment. Through the Provost's office, all curriculum planning must be checked. This check ensures the inclusion of civic learning and democratic engagement as part of the curriculum.

The campus of SUU is more than committed to increasing civic engagement for its all members of the campus community. Students have a chance to learn about their civic duties both inside and outside of the classroom. From top leadership down, the university has goals to have students involved during their college years and beyond, as their involvement and work is what shapes the future.



## Landscape

Essential learning outcomes for SUU are: civic engagement, communication, creative thinking, critical thinking, digital literacy, ethical reasoning, information literacy, inquiry and analysis, intercultural knowledge and competence, integrative learning, knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, lifelong learning, problem solving, quantitative literacy, and teamwork.

SUU received data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), which offers colleges and universities an opportunity to learn their student registration and voting rates. The feedback given allowed for the leadership in the Leavitt Center to begin to understand the campus climate for political learning and engagement.

The report offered a baseline measurement of student engagement in democracy in 2012 and 2016. The numbers were compared to other institutions as well. SUU saw a 49.7% voting rate among its students in the 2016 election. This number was up 1.1% from 2012. The 2016 voting rate for all institutions was 50.4%.

The registration rate from 2012 to 2016 decreased to 70.6%, down 5.8%. The voting rate of registered students, however, increased to 70.4%, up 6.8%. Most students voted by mail, most likely because Iron County became a vote by mail county between the 2012 and 2016 elections. Also because most students receive an absentee ballot to vote in their home towns.

Breaking down the voters by age group, each group saw an increase in voters from 2012 to 2016, except for the 40-49 age group. The highest percentage of voters came from the 50+ group with 83.7% of students voting. More part-time students voted than full-time, with 62.8% showing up to polls over 37.4%. Women voted more than men, and top areas of study for voting were Public Administration and Social Services, History, Education, and the Humanities.

The data provided by NSLVE offered many insights for the Leavitt Center to use in future planning. The first was that the younger population needs to increase its voter turnout. With this information, the center gears most events towards traditional college students, trying to increase awareness and civic engagement. The next insight that greatly affected the work of the center was the limited turnout of voters in areas not in SUU's College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Though civic engagement is part of many areas of the school, such as the mission and learning outcomes, it is clear that not all areas are stressing its importance. Though the Leavitt Center and many humanities departments have civic learning and democratic engagement as a main focus, it can become more of a focus in areas such as science and engineering.

Internal barriers are few and far between at SUU. However, struggles that the center often faces are due to external barriers, mainly the political climate in the United States. Cedar City is a rural, conservative community that does not offer diverse political opportunities. The center works with many students who seek internships and other leadership opportunities, but who do not want to constantly work with a group whose political agenda differs from their own.



## Landscape

Though there are some external barriers, there are also many opportunities for students to succeed. The school has many resources available to help increase civic engagement and democratic practices. The main resource for students is the Leavitt Center. Through school funding, student fees, and private donors, the center finds funding to pay student leadership, interns, student workers, and events that serve the campus and local communities. Other resources on campus include clubs and organizations, such as the Young Democrats and Young Republicans clubs that encourage students to become politically involved.

Ideally, additional resources that would help the university with civic engagement goals would be to have a more inclusive environment in Cedar City. Students who are not conservative are surrounded; from Cedar City to Salt Lake City, the majority of Utah is conservative and not budging. Additional resources from a state or local level could provide more opportunities for students to see different sides and find ways to become involved with politics that they are passionate about.

## Goals

The first long-term goal of SUU and the Leavitt Center is to increase voter turnout by 10% in the 2020 election. The center saw a 49.7% student voting rate in 2016, and within four years the number should increase. Each election after that, so every four years, the center would like to see a steady increase in vote turnout until an average can be determined. From there, a new goal will be set at maintaining a high voter turnout.

The next long-term goal is to have a larger emphasis on civic engagement and democratic practices in all academic fields. At SUU, the largest academic area is the College of Science and Engineering. The majority of students are not receiving an education that promotes civic engagement during or after their college years. Through work done by top leadership, each classroom should have an emphasis on civic engagement. The school will know when this goal is achieved by seeing the results from the NSLVE after each major election.

In 2018, a short-term goal of the school is to increase voter education and engagement with local elections. The numbers were much higher for voter turnout in the 2012 and 2016 national elections when compared to the 2014 state and local elections. The Leavitt Center has goals to host at least two state or local candidates each semester, with another goal of having at least one event or discussion topic cover local politics.

Another short-term goal of the Leavitt Center is to increase student involvement with events and other initiatives. The center specifically wants to see attendance diversify and increase at Pizza & Politics discussions. Though diversity can be difficult to measure, the center can keep attendance and see if the number increases. Inferences can be made from attendance numbers, such as a higher number in attendance could relate to the social topic discussed as opposed to the research topic discussed last week. The goal for the spring 2018 semester is to have an average Pizza & Politics attendance of 85. In the fall, the average is around 85, but participation always drops in the spring. The center will strive to keep attendance up and maintain a steady flow of visitors.

## Strategy

The Leavitt Center has the following events, political DYK, and Pizza & Politics discussion topics planned for the spring 2018 semester.

Events: Game Show Politics, Student Fee Review Committee, trips to the Utah Capitol, Speed Debating, Political Impersonations, Public Lands Panel, Women in Law, White Collar Crime Panel, Which Political Party are You?, Voter Registration, and a discussion with Professor Erica George of the University of Utah.

These events allow for participation from a medley of students. Whether a student is politically active or just dipping their toe in the water, they will have a chance to participate in events that require an array of political knowledge.

Political DYK: Meet the Leavitt Center, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Internship Opportunities, Diversity in Law, Black History Month, Presidential Affairs, Presidents, Public Lands, International Working Women's Day, Iron County Legislators, International Politics, White Collar Crime, and Climate Change.

These topics will have researched graphics that are displayed outside of the Leavitt Center. The information presented will allow for students to learn about the topic of the week. Most students that interact with the graphics enter the Leavitt Center to ask questions or discuss politics. The political DYK allows for diverse subjects to be present, in addition to weekly events and discussions.

Pizza & Politics: Net Neutrality, Money in College Sports, DACA, LGBTQ+ Rights, Sex Education in High School, Legalizing Marijuana, Conspiracy Theories, Sexual Assault, Artificial Intelligence, and Climate Change.

Every Wednesday, the Leavitt Center hosts Pizza & Politics. This event has become the most known piece of the center. The topics discussed are hard-hitting, up to date, and relevant to the students. By having topics that a student can discuss, they become involved with politics and soon attend events and discussions that cover topics they may not know about.

Each event and political DYK is planned by a committee of the Leavitt Center. The committee is comprised of one Executive Council member and two Fellows. The Pizza & Politics discussions are moderated by two Executive Council members. Each committee or partnership is in charge of planning and executing the event. The Leadership Team oversees the work completed and ensures quality of each event.

All work completed in the center is done by students for students. Though community members are often encouraged to attend events that pertain to them, students are always encouraged to attend as each event covers topics that affect their future. The audience for each event is comprised of a medley of students from different academic disciplines. The majority of those involved are from the humanities, but the center interacts with all areas of campus.

## Strategy

The majority of events hosted by the Leavitt Center occur within its walls. The center is located on top real estate in the Student Center, located in the center of campus. Every part of the process takes place in the Leavitt Center. From planning to hosting the event, students are able to have a consistent location for everything put on by the center.

The Leavitt Center hosts one event, one Pizza & Politics discussion, and one political DYK each week. Weeks where there are not five full days of school might still have a political DYK, but not always an event or discussion. The timing of the day depends on the audience marketed. Community members attend events in the evening as most people do not want to take work off to attend an event. Students will stop the Leavitt Center for quick events around lunch time, or attend evening events on Wednesday and Thursdays as not much else happens on campus during that time.

The purpose of the work done by students in the Leavitt Center is to increase understanding of leadership, service, research, and citizenship. Each activity is implemented to engage an array of students around campus. Ideally everyone would attend every event, but having different topics allows for students of all areas to attend events that relate specifically to them. The goal for each activity is to engage students in democratic practices and encourage civic engagement on and off campus.

## Reporting

Internally, SUU's Marketing Communication office sends weekly bulletins to inform faculty and staff about campus happenings. The Leavitt Center would work with the Marketing Communication office to send reports out that cover the action planning process.

For students on campus, the Leavitt Center will use their own marketing team and the marketing efforts of the student association. Between social media, digital signage, and paper advertisements, the marketing efforts of both organizations should reach a majority of students. The Leavitt Center also has an option to post online information on the student's portal, which is a place each student logs into when they need to access classes and other account information.

External reporting will start with local news organizations. In Cedar City, there are two newspapers that locals read. There are also news outlets in neighboring cities and towns that could release the information. From there, marketing efforts would move to state news agencies.

The plan will be made public by posting it on the Leavitt Center's website. The plan will be in PDF format, giving visitors a chance to read what was planned from the beginning. Updates and reports can also be added to the website, allowing visitors to see the progress made.

The NSLVE data will also be made public. In the past, the Leavitt Center has been unsure on how to make the information available to all. But now, through work with different student leaders, the NSLVE data will be made available on the Leavitt Center website.

## Evaluation

The purpose of evaluation of the action plan is to ensure that the work of the Leavitt Center is following the guidelines and interacting with as many students as possible. SUU and the center specifically want to know if students are voting more in elections. Ideally students will vote the same in local and national elections, but it is not anticipated that that will happen. The school wants to see an increase in voter engagement and a chance for students to have their voices heard.

Evaluation of the plan will be carried out by members of the Leavitt Center, including the Director. The Director will be in the constant in the center, especially since students have a quick turnover rate in higher education. The Director will work with student leadership to evaluate efforts implemented, look at data provided by NSLVE, and how to move forward to continually increase voter engagement.

The evaluation will be completed over the summer of each year. Ideally the plan starts in the fall and ends in the spring, giving center leadership a chance to work on the plan while students are off campus. The summer months can be used for planning and adjusting the action plan, while the fall and spring can be used for students to implement events, discussion topics, and more.

The information that must be collected are the voter turnout numbers from NSLVE. These numbers will be the sole indicator if the efforts by the Leavitt Center and campus community have increased voter engagement. Other goals, such as increasing attendance and having more diversity in political discussions, can be measured by numbers obtained by the Leavitt Center. The main numbers that internal and external audiences will want most will come from the NSLVE.

Information will be analyzed by any breakdown given by the NSLVE. It will be important to see how other areas besides the humanities encourage civic engagement amongst its students. For analyzing goals like having more diversity, it will be best to monitor comments and engagement to see if all sides are represented. In other words, if a Pizza & Politics discussion only has conservative comments, the Leavitt Center would need to go out and find those that have different viewpoints to add to the conversation.

Results of the evaluation will be shared through the Leavitt Center internally, on social media, and on the website. These outlets will allow for a majority of people to see the progress made by the Leavitt Center and campus through the action plan.

