

Towson University
All In Campus Democracy Challenge
Democratic Engagement Plan

Kevin Albano, Coordinator of Civic Engagement

Overview

Towson University prides itself on being dedicated to civic engagement and voting. In the past, research into student voting practices have revealed that TU students vote at an above average rate compared to all other higher ed institutions. TU is interested in the All In Campus Democracy Challenge because it gives the school the opportunity to showcase just how important it considers the political engagement of its students to be. Participating in the All In Challenge program would allow Towson University to learn best practices from other schools in addition to sharing the university's own best practices to help bring other colleges and universities along. The top three goals for democratic engagement during the fall semester are as follows: first, to get over 70% of our student body registered to vote. This will be done through a combination of utilizing TurboVote and holding information sessions on the registration process. Second, it is our goal for over an increase in the percentage of the student body that is registered to vote that actually vote in the election. The third and final goal is to engage with other higher ed institutions and share best practices for democratic engagement. Towson University has a great deal to offer in terms of strategies, but a great deal to learn as well, and the opportunity to expand our knowledge while simultaneously lifting other institutions is appealing.

Coalition

Towson University's All In Campus Democracy Challenge team is made up of a combination of Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and University Administration professionals, plus involved students and community partners.

Member of the coalition will meet once at the end of July and once on October 4th for a progress update. There will be an optional update meeting on September 12th geared towards members who have so far had to communicate via email.

Academic Affairs:

- **Dr. John McTague, College of Liberal Arts** – A partner with the school's Political Engagement Living Learning Community, he is using his service learning course to do voter education of campus.
- **Dr. Jim Roberts, College of Liberal Arts** – experienced debate moderator, has various political community contacts
- **Dr. Gary Homana, and Dr. Deborah Gartland, College of Education** – both are committed to expanding political engagement to the College of Education, showing that it affects everyone, not just political science majors.

Student Affairs:

- **Kevin Albano, Office of Civic Engagement & Leadership (CEL), Coordinator** – Will be coordinating the Voter Friendly Campus Designation efforts and the All In Campus Democracy Challenge, utilizing the resources of CEL, the office set up for political engagement on campus.
- **Lisa Parlade and Aisha Folkes, Housing and Residence Life (HRL), Building Coordinators** – Residence Life Coordinators who will be implementing voter engagement into their building engagement plans.

- **Other Residence Life Coordinators, HRL** – Pending assignment by complex coordinators.

University Administration:

- **Rich Reinhardt, Assistant to the President for Government Relations, Office of the President** – Expert on legislative affairs, will help advise on coordinating with political community partners
- **Gay Pinder, Director, Media Relations, Publicity & Media Relations** – helping coordinate with community partners, news outlets.

Students:

- **Director of Civic Engagement, Student Government Association (SGA)**
- **Director of Civic Engagement, University Residence Government (URG)**
- **Black Student Union (BSU) Representative**
- **Greek Life Representative**

Community Partners:

- **Matt Tharp, TurboVote** – providing support via TurboVote assistance
- **Collegiate Readership Program, New York Times** – outreach/ Academic Affairs Support
- **Usjid Hameed, CEL Student Fellow/Andrew Goodman Liaison** –Andrew Goodman Foundation liaison, working to increase voter registration on campus.

Strategy

Towson University's plan is dedicated to the four buckets of voter engagement: voter registration, voter education, ballot access, and voter turnout.

I) Voter Registration:

Voter registration at TU is centered around partnerships in Student Affairs and utilizing TurboVote.

- **TurboVote/Voter Registration Drives** – Two major voter registration drives will take place before October 13th. Both will be partnerships with Housing and Residence Life, Campus Democrats and Republicans, and Student Government. They are held in public places with giveaways for registering or showing your registration with TurboVote. The drives will also feature instructions for the process of getting fully registered to vote in each of our primary feeder states, and the opportunity to register online for students from Maryland who have not already done so.
(Smaller drives will also take place throughout the semester in the form of tabling events.)
- **TurboVote Hall Programs in Residence Halls** – utilizing HRL as a portal through which to engage students and encourage them to take the time to get registered with TurboVote.
- **Making voter registration instructions readily available via TU website, social media platforms, and reference sheets to be provided on campus.**
- **Partnership with the Andrew Goodman Foundation on Voter Registration Drives** – Towson University has a student serving as an Andrew Goodman Foundation Liaison. He will be providing support with his budget for food items and additional voter education and registration supplies.

II) Voter Education:

- **Voter Education Drive** – Dr. John McTague of the Political Science Department will be using his senior seminar and PoliSci 103 classes to put on a voter education drive. Dr. McTague will partner with the Office of Civic Engagement & Leadership to present research on presidential elections to the student body, faculty and staff in the week leading up to the election.
- **Debate Viewing Parties** – The Office of Civic Engagement & Leadership is partnering with local newspaper *The Baltimore Sun* to host an official presidential debate viewing party followed by a panel discussion. Academic Affairs will be providing extra panelists to supplement those provided by the *Sun*.
- **“New York Times Talks”/“Campus Conversations”** - The Office of Civic Engagement & Leadership puts on these small, 30 participant discussions twice a month. These facilitated discussions center around relevant issues in the news, and this semester will primarily focus on voting and campaign platform issues.
- **Voter education information, from candidate platforms to “How to Vote” to polling place information, will be made available to the campus via social media, handouts, and website.**
- **Partnership with the Andrew Goodman Foundation for additional Voter Education events** – our liaison will help organize and distribute voter information using his own resources.

III) Ballot Access:

Towson University has the benefit of being a polling place, both for early voting and election day. Ballot access efforts will therefore focus on encouraging Maryland students to utilize the polling place in our Admin building the week before the election for early voting. This will be done by providing golf cart shuttles to the polling place, utilizing the message boards in Freedom Square (a free speech hub in the center of campus) to advertise the locations and rules for early voting, and using handouts to explain the entire early voting/absentee ballot/election day voting process.

IV) Voter Turnout:

The strategy for voter turnout will be similar to the strategy for ballot access. Early voting opportunities, both on campus and off, will be stressed as options for those who are not voting via absentee ballot and are not going home to their precinct on Election Day. This will be available both online and in handout form, in addition to tabling efforts and utilization of Freedom Square.

Timeline

“Star-Spangled September”

- New York Times Talks/Campus Conversations [2] (promotional flyers, social media outreach, food for event, facilitator)
- 9/1 to 9/14 – The Office of Civic Engagement & Leadership will be giving voter registration seminars at student group meetings
- 9/12 – Optional catch-up meeting for Voter Friendly Campus Designation Council
- 9/14/ - Voter Registration Drive (student volunteers, tables, tents, iPads/laptops for registration, food/prizes, voter information handouts)
- Tabling for TurboVote and Voter Registration throughout the month (same general materials as the major Drive). This will involve coordination with the Andrew Goodman Foundation Liaison.
- TurboVote/Voter Registration Hall programs with HRL (Laptops, prizes)
- Social Media campaign for voter registration/ballot information throughout the month
- 9/16/16 (Pre-)Constitution Day Tabling with voting information, information on how to get involved with upcoming voter engagement events, and Rita’s Italian Ice.

October 1-18th

- New York Times Talks/Campus Conversations (promotional flyers, social media outreach, food for event, facilitator)
- 10/4 – Progress meeting for Voter Friendly Campus Designation Council
- 10/3 to 10/10 - The Office of Civic Engagement & Leadership will be giving voter registration seminars at student group meetings
- 10/11 to 10/12 - Voter Registration Drive (student volunteers, tables, tents, iPads/laptops for registration, food/prizes, voter information handouts)
- Tabling for TurboVote and Voter Registration [2] (same general materials as the major Drive). This will involve partnership with the Andrew Goodman Foundation Liaison
- *The Baltimore Sun* Presidential Debate viewing party [date TBA] (student volunteers, panel members from faculty and *The Baltimore Sun*, viewing location on campus, marketing material)

October 19-31th (At this point, gears will change from stressing voter registration to voter turnout)

- New York Times Talks/Campus Conversations (promotional flyers, social media outreach, food for event, facilitator)
- Tabling for Voter Turnout information, polling places, and how to complete your absentee ballot. This will involve partnership with the Andrew Goodman Foundation Liaison, SGA, and URG
- Marketing campaign for early voting on campus and in nearby states, online and around campus (marketing material, flyers, social media)

November

- New York Times Talk/Campus Conversations (promotional flyers, social media outreach, food for event, facilitator)
- 11/1 and 11/3 – Dr. McTague’s Voter Education Drive (students from two of Dr. McTague’s classes will give poster presentations twice each day on topics dealing with presidential elections. Marketing material, the students, and support from the Office of Civic Engagement & Leadership will be in support)
- Early Voting Shuttle services will be available all Early Voting Week (10/27 – 11/3)
- Tabling and marketing for early voting in the Admin Building all Early Voting Week (10/27-11/3)
- Tabling and marketing for voter turnout information, polling places, and precincts.
- 11/8 -Tabling on Election Day providing last minute resources to those who have questions about how to vote

*Tabling events are not given specific dates because spaces are reserved the month of the event.

** New York Times Talk/Campus Conversations dates are fluid and subject to change

Success

Success at Towson University should be measured in three main ways, each corresponding to one of the aforementioned goals of Towson University for the Campus Voting Plan. First, showing through institutional research that by election day, over 70% of the student body is registered to vote. Every two years, the school receives a Campus Voting Report from Circle. We can then assess the success of our voter registration efforts. Along the way, we can chart the progress of the university using TurboVote's assessment and research tools to look at registration numbers. These tools will also allow us to track those students that actually ordered an absentee ballot through the service. Our second goal would also utilize assessment metrics, so we could see whether or Towson University students voted at a higher rate in 2016 (in respect to the percentage that are registered) than they did in 2012. Third, our program can be considered successful in part if there is an increase in communication and effective exchange of best practices with other higher ed institutions. This exchange of ideas is important if institutions are to continue to adapt to the changing political attitudes and worldviews of new generations of students. The program could be considered more successful if TU implements at least one best practice from another institution, and at least one other institution implements a best practice from TU. Success can also be measured by logging the number of attendees to events and administering surveys at the end of larger ones to gauge the effectiveness of our efforts. Reaching out to student groups that partner with the Council will allow us to track progress on a smaller scale; that is, how many students in the group registered over the course of the semester, how many attended a political event, how many voted, etc. In short, a successful voter turnout campaign at Towson University would be one that left students enthusiastic about both voting and their roles in the political process. Success would be a tangible increase in voter knowledge and participation, measured through surveys and voter turnout data.