

**Arkansas Tech University**  
**Democratic Engagement Plan 2020-2021**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This document serves as Arkansas Tech University's Democratic Engagement Plan for the 2020-2021 academic year. It was developed by the Office of Civic Engagement with the assistance of the Voter Engagement Coalition. This engagement plan details the partnerships, programs, and initiatives that Arkansas Tech University will implement during the 2020-2021 academic year. These partnerships, programs, and initiatives were all designed with the focus on increasing student voter registration, education, and voter turnout.

According to the Arkansas Tech University NSLVE data, our student voter registration and voting rates were lower than the national average. This academic year, it is our goal to increase both numbers by 10%. Along with these efforts, the Voter Engagement Coalition will strive to increase voter education through online and in-person programs. We will be implementing voter registrations drives, an Election Watch Week, and creating a new online module to increase voter education. We will also be mobilizing peers as "influencers" to ask every student about registering to vote. New partnerships will be formed with the Office of Student Transition to create more opportunities for incoming students to get connected and learn about voter registration and education. A focus on asking every student about voter registration will be integrated during this academic year, along with innovative programs, practices, and partnerships.

The engagement plan will serve as a guide and timeline for the Voter Engagement Coalition. This document will help the coalition stay true to our goals and learning outcomes with voter engagement across campus. This will also serve as a resource to increase and integrate civic engagement work throughout the university as we strive to create a campus-wide mindset for civic engagement work.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The Office of the Civic Engagement has assembled a multi-disciplinary team of institutional partners who have all committed to supporting this effort and our ALL IN-Challenge pursuits.

The Voter Engagement Coalition meets regularly during the academic year to set strategic direction, share information, address challenges, brainstorm ideas and plan events and programs

The Arkansas Tech University coalition includes:

**Dr. Keegan Nichols**, Vice President of Student Affairs, Division of Student Affairs

Will serve as the primary liaison to executive-level university leadership

**Dr. Brett Bruner**, Dean of Student Engagement, Division of Student Affairs

**Kara Johnson**, Coordinator of Civic Engagement, Office of Civic Engagement

**Chelsea Lairamore**, Coordinator of Student Leadership, Office of Student Leadership

**Thomas Strahan**, Coordinator of Fraternity and Sorority Life, Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life

**Meighan Burke**, Director of Student Transition, Office of Student Transition

**Dr. Michael Rogers**, Professor of Political Science, Department of History & Political Science

**Dr. Erin Clair**, Associate Professor of English, Director of Operations for the College of Arts & Humanities

**Megan Toland**, Assistant Professor of Journalism, Department of Communication & Journalism

**Dr. Bryan Rank**, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education, Department of Agriculture

**Bethany Swindell**, Instructor of Emergency Management, Department of Emergency Management

**Susan West**, Assistant Professor of Hospitality Administration, Department of Parks, Recreation, & Hospitality Management

**Angie Bell**, Director of Student Engagement, College of Business

The coalition also includes representatives from the Office of Marketing and Communications, Student Activities Board, Student Government Association,

Department of Residence Life, Department of Athletics, Department of International Student Services, and Department of Diversity and Inclusion.

We strategically engaged a wide diversity of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, along with external partners from the Pope County Election Commission, Russellville City Council, and Russellville Area Chamber of Commerce to ensure comprehensive buy-in and multilayered support.

The coalition will meet monthly. These meetings will serve to give status reports and any updates or reflections over programming or marketing strategies. The chairs of this coalition will meet on a more frequent basis, weekly at first, and once the semester starts, they will transition to a bi-weekly meeting. These chairs will focus on specific tasks and will work with coalition members to accomplish these tasks.

The primary point of contact for this initiative and the coalition is:

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Coordinator of Civic Engagement  
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## **COMMITMENT**

### **Arkansas Tech University Mission**

Arkansas Tech University is dedicated to student success, access, and excellence as a responsive campus community providing opportunities for progressive intellectual development and *civic engagement*. Embracing and expanding upon its technological traditions, Tech *inspires and empowers members of the community to achieve their goals while striving for the betterment of Arkansas, the nation, and the world.*

## **Arkansas Tech University Vision**

Arkansas Tech University: where students succeed, innovation thrives, and *communities flourish*.

## **Civic Engagement Learning Outcomes**

Arkansas Tech University is committed to providing an educational foundation for lifelong learning to a diverse community. The Office of Civic Engagement is committed to this mission as well. As a result of participation with The Office of Civic Engagement, students will:

- Develop their own identities and backgrounds.
- Develop and expand their understanding of and capacity for active participation in a community.
- Experience the personal benefits of forming reciprocal relationships in one's community.
- Develop their capacity for empathy, learning to relate to, and appreciate people different from themselves.
- Connect and apply knowledge from their civic engagement experiences back to their areas of study, using these experiences to comprehend, analyze, and/or challenge theories and frameworks.

As shown through the university's mission, Arkansas Tech University strives to inspire and empower its students to achieve their goals and remain civically active. Our goal is to help students develop the knowledge, understanding, values, and skills to sustain a commitment to community wellbeing and civic action throughout their lives.

ATU's president, Dr. Robin Bowen, began her tenure with the creation of an institutional strategic plan. Through the planning process, a strong commitment to civic engagement emerged with the specific goal to "increase ATU's presence and effective participation in our cities, region, state, and the world." This led to our application to join NASPA's Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Lead initiative project and connected that work to our partnership with the American Democracy Project with American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

These initiatives have helped bridge the gap between Division of Academic Affairs and Division of Student Affairs.

We have worked to add these initiatives throughout the Division of Student Affairs. We have created partnerships with the Office of Student Transition to get more civic engagement programming into orientation and our welcome week. We have worked with the Department of Residence Life to incorporate more programming on voter education throughout the residence halls. There has also been a strong partnership with the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life and the Office of Student Leadership to include these programs within these offices curriculum.

ATU's interest in this designation is to enhance the democratic engagement of our students, particularly related to voting and participation in the civic life of their communities.

## **LANDSCAPE**

Awareness of civic learning and democratic engagement at Arkansas Tech University has increased exponentially over the past 5 years. Even so, there are definite areas of improvement concerning CLDE.

Our NSLVE data indicates a 57.3% registration rate for 2012 and a 58.9% registration rate for 2016. The voting rates were 43.4% in 2012 and 40.6% in 2016. We are striving to improve these numbers for the 2020-2021 academic year by exposing students to as much voter information as possible. This includes reminders of important dates, information on the polling location, and information on absentee voting.

The current learning outcomes for civic engagement are based in the Office of Civic Engagement. They do not reach campus-wide; however, civic engagement is present in Arkansas Tech's mission, vision, and strategic plan. As such, the number of faculty including CLDE into their courses has grown. This is most notable in the business and marketing, behavioral sciences, and the agriculture departments. These three academic departments have incorporated some form of civic engagement or community-based class in their curriculum.

The Office of Civic Engagement is housed in the Department of Campus Life in the Division of Student Affairs. This office creates programming, events, and opportunities for students to learn

about civic duties and leadership. These programs include voter registration, voter education, and ballot access.

Some barriers that Arkansas Tech University faces is limited funding and proximity of polling location. There is only one polling station in the city of Russellville, and that polling station is the only polling station for the four surrounding cities of Russellville. This creates some difficulty when students are trying to locate where to vote and have enough time to vote.

To combat this, our university provides shuttles to and from the voting station for early voting and on election day. We also make sure every student knows all the options for voting and how to prepare for the option they choose through informative events and workshops.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, we will also be participating in the Ask Every Student program as a Codesigner Campus. This will give us an opportunity to apply for funding, design, and integrate new practices on our campus. This is a great opportunity for our university to learn from others and be part of designing innovative new programming and practices.

## **GOALS**

### **Learning Outcomes**

Arkansas Tech University is committed to providing an educational foundation for life-long learning to a diverse community. As a result of participation, students will:

- Develop their own identities and backgrounds
- Develop and expand their understanding of and capacity for active participation in a community
- Experience the personal benefits of forming reciprocal relationships in one's community
- Develop their capacity for empathy, learning to relate to and appreciate people different from themselves

- Connect and apply knowledge from their civic engagement experiences back to their areas of study, using these experiences to comprehend, analyze, and/or challenge theories and frameworks

### **Long-Term Goals**

Our three top long-term goals for democratic engagement are:

- Incorporate democratic education in our incoming college 101 curriculum.
- Successful institutionalization of the “Ask Every Student” mindset.
- Take students to an Iowa Caucus and Presidential Inauguration.

### **Short-Term Goals**

Our three top goals for democratic engagement during the 2020-2021 academic year are:

1. Increase the number of students registered to vote by 10%, based on the NSLVE data.
2. Increase voting rates by 10%, based on the NSLVE data.
3. Increase peer engagement and deliberative dialogue using peer influencer program.

## **STRATEGY**

### **Voter Registration:**

The Office of Civic Engagement will be partnering with the Office of Student Transition to provide incoming students exposure to voter registration during orientation and Welcome Week. This year’s orientation program will be held online through a series of videos and modules. As such, we have planned to create quick announcements that will be shown at the end of each video to give students access to voter registration information. There will also be a video dedicated to the Office of Civic Engagement. This will be an opportunity for the Coordinator of Civic Engagement to go more in-depth with voting information.

Our programs will begin after Arkansas Tech University’s Move-In Event and will coincide with Welcome Week. During Welcome Week, we will have multiple opportunities for students to

register to vote. There will be a table at every event encouraging students to stop and get registered. At each table, there will also be a cheat sheet about the election and important dates for students to remember. Along with move-in, TechCONNECT, and Welcome Week, Arkansas Tech will host a Constitution Day, September 17, 2020. This will be a 24-hour day including registration drives, FAQ tables, and other exciting events/workshops throughout the day.

The Office of Civic Engagement will be working with Student Government Association, Student Activities Board, Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, Arkansas Tech University Athletics, and students involved in the Civic Engagement Living-Learning Community to host voter registration drives throughout the fall semester. We are also creating “Voter Registration Tuesday.” This will be a program held every Tuesday until the last day to register to vote. Students will have to opportunity to come to the “Voter Registration Headquarters” and get all the information they need to vote. The Coordinator of Civic Engagement will be there, along with student leaders to answer any questions in terms of voting. Students also can register to vote during these programs. The Coordinator of Civic Engagement will also make special visits to classes to reach students where they are at. This gives students easier access to voter registration information with the hope of increasing our numbers of student voters. Along with these efforts, we will be mobilizing student peers to influence and ask every student to vote. These students will be given the resources to connect and encourage their peers to vote.

The Department of Campus Life will be sending out bi-weekly emails to students with reminders on voter registration drives and updates for the upcoming election. These emails will be sent using the university’s mailing system, which goes to all students registered on the registered student organization website, theLink. From this system, we will gain metrics on how effective the emails were, as well as, what links were clicked on, what information was shown to be most relevant, etc.

All of this will lead up to our participation in the National Voter Registration Drive Day on September 22, 2020. This day will be a feature event of our Election Watch Week. We will host multiple registration drives across campus, pop-up election parties, and a social media trivia



campaign. We will end the day with a big announcement revealing how many students we got to register to vote. This will be announced at an election party and on social media.

### **Voter Education:**

Through our partnership with the Department of History and Political Science and local government officials, we will host an Election Watch Week. This series will host speakers from various political backgrounds, debate watch parties, and the National Voter Registration Drive. The speakers include a state senator, campaign managers, campaign volunteers, non-profit managers, and a social media manager for a local politician. The Civic Engagement Living Learning Community (LLC) will play a big role in planning and implementing this week with the assistance of the Office of Civic Engagement.

Along with the speakers, we will be hosting mock debates on campus and in the local community. We will be working with our politically driven registered student organizations, including Young Democrats and College Republicans. We, as a coalition, believe it is important for our students to be familiar with most of the parties that can be represented. This is also a great way for our students to see debates and how debates work in the overall process of elections. We will be hosting debate watch parties throughout campus. These watch parties will include polls, trivia, and anonymous Q&A from the audience and will be hosted by the Civic Engagement LLC students.

The coalition will also focus on voter education. Passive and active programming will be weaved into the day to day lives of the students at Arkansas Tech University. Passive programming will be presented through social media posts (infographics, videos, trivia questions, etc.), articles, and podcasts focused on non-partisan information regarding civic learning and democratic engagement.

Active programming will be presented through “Political Pop-Ups” held on random days and times, educational workshops, classroom visits, and online activities to increase students' awareness of government. Political Pop-Ups are a new program for Arkansas Tech University. The idea behind these is that it is a way for students to obtain a quick nugget of information

about politics. Topics for the Political Pop-Up could include Types of Party, Election Process, Specific Issue Cheat Sheet, Important Dates Cheat Sheet, and Electoral Votes vs. Popular Votes.

**Ballot Access:**

Arkansas Tech University will be promoting the local polling station in Russellville. The Voter Friendly Campus coalition will be hosting a shuttle service to and from the polling station. There is one polling station in the area, and the Voter Engagement Coalition will be working with the Pope County Election Commission to discuss best times and best practices, so we do not overwhelm volunteers.

Through our partnership with the Pope County Election Commission, we have hosted representatives of this commission on campus and will do so again during Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day. The staff members have been very helpful in ensuring that our student's registration forms are carefully reviewed and processed in a timely manner. This will also be a time for students to ask questions regarding the process of voting and what to expect when voting.

The Voter Engagement Coalition will be asking and promoting student volunteers to work at the polling station. This will create a more student-friendly experience and serve to remind other volunteers that university ID cards are a valid form of ID, and the address on a driver's license (or lack of driver's license) should not deter the ability to register and vote locally.

The week prior to election day Arkansas Tech University plans to distribute and email a reminder to all faculty members that our policy will allow students to receive excused absences on election day and encourage faculty members to offer incentives for students to participate in voting. If the only time a student can vote is during the time of a class, we want the student to be able to fulfill their civic duty.

On the actual election day, we plan to have a social media campaign for live election coverage. This will be in the form of election statistics updates, guerilla interviews across campus asking if students have voted yet, and coverage of the small and large events happening that day and night.

The Department of Campus Life will be hosting an Election Watch Party. According to our NSLVE data, getting out the vote is a huge area of growth for our campus. Therefore, programming on election day will be a huge push to get students out to the polling stations. On Election Day, we will be posting live updates on the Department of Campus Life social media pages. We will also be hosting Election Day coverage in the student food court, which will later turn into an Election Day Watch party. The Department of Campus Life will also provide a shuttle system to take students to and from the polling station.

**Marketing:**

The Office of Civic Engagement will be utilizing the SLICE (Student Leadership, Involvement, and Civic Engagement) Newsletter to alert students about important dates, upcoming events, and quick facts about democratic engagement. This is the Department of Campus Life's newsletter that is curated to include up-to-date information on how to get involved around campus.

Typically, a monthly publication, these newsletters will be sent on a bi-weekly schedule starting in August 2020. These newsletters go to all the students, registered on the Arkansas Tech University registered student organization website, theLink. The goal with this decision is to increase the number of times students see any information about the election, which will hopefully increase their follow through on voting. According to our NSLVE data, this is an opportunity for growth.

This will be in conjunction with all our programs being promoted through our event registration platform, social media sites (we will be cross-promoting in collaboration with other departments/offices/organizations social media accounts), and flyer routes. Utilizing social media to get the word out will be a huge factor for each step of the voting process. As such, the Office of Civic Engagement will collaborate with the Department of Marketing and Communication to create a short video series highlighting each step for voting. This series will include how to get registered to vote, how to keep up to date with the election, how to vote, and where to vote. Each video will be no longer than 2 minutes and will have enough information for students to understand the basics and give details on how to find more information if necessary.

Student Government Association, students in the Civic Engagement LLC, and the students representatives in the Voter Engagement Coalition will be volunteering to run the voter registration booths around campus while promoting Election Watch Week programs, and important dates to remember.

The Department of Campus Life has also teamed up with the Department of Residence Life to have Resident Assistants push important dates, host registration drives, or, as a group, take their residents to the Election Watch Week programs.

We will be reaching out to all faculty members to keep faculty up to date on the events, programs, and opportunities provided for students. This is with the hope that the faculty will speak about it in their classes or offer incentives for students to attend these programs.

Arkansas Tech University will be implementing a new program for online education on democratic engagement, which will be housed on theLink. This will include 3 tiers of online programming for students to work through on their own time. Once a student has accomplished all 3 tiers, they will receive recognition for the civic engagement efforts.

## **REPORTING**

This plan will be shared on the Arkansas Tech University website. Located on the Office of Civic Engagement Page, this plan will be available internally and externally. Along with this plan, all data and resources used to shape this document will be available on the same page.

## **EVALUATION**

The Voter Engagement Coalition (VEC) will evaluate all political engagement programming in several ways.

- The VEC will conduct a debrief after every event and at the end of each semester to go over what worked well, what needs improvement, and potential changes for the future.
- Following a debrief meeting, the point person will complete an event summary which will detail the event, debrief discussion, and any primary metrics and outcomes.

- The VEC will track voter registration numbers and assess which activities are most effective at encouraging student registration.
- The VEC will also participate in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) to track student voting rates.

Once all the data has been compiled and assessed, this information will be shared with the Arkansas Tech University Executive Council, we will also post the results on the Arkansas Tech website for the public to access. This process will take place and be complete by the end of each semester.