

# **CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE**

## **All In Democracy Challenge Action Plan 2019-2020**

**Revised May 2020**



**Office of Community Engagement with We the People Campus Committee**

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# **CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE**

## **ALL IN DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE**

### **ACTION PLAN – REVISED MAY 2020**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is ALL IN to encourage, develop, support and educate about civic engagement and participation in the democratic process. This document was developed by a broad campus constituency, “We the People” campus leadership team that includes administrators, staff, faculty, and students from all divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Student Success, and Advancement. While the team is large and is open to any campus or community member who wishes to join, it is an active and involved group of individuals that are dedicated to increasing and maintaining a sense of civic responsibility at CSUN and in the community that surrounds us. The We the People Leadership Team is chaired by the Director of Community Engagement, Julia Heinen. The Office of Community Engagement which lives in both the Academic Affairs and Student Success Divisions seeks to “prepare educated citizens to become lifelong, civically minded learners and leaders” and is facilitating this effort. This action plan was implemented in August 2019 and will continue as part of the Office of Community Engagement committee structure.

A large, urban campus like CSUN has the responsibility to educate by incorporating civic issues and ideals into the curriculum and campus life. President Dianne Harrison’s recent statement on our more than 33% increase in student voter participation in the 2018 election cycle summarizes the campus commitment from the highest levels at the university.

**“CSUN is committed to our nation’s democratic ideals and is proud to receive this national recognition of our efforts to encourage student voter registration and voting. We want our students and graduates to be civic-minded participants of our democracy, and voting is truly the cornerstone of our political system. Our faculty, staff, administrators, and students worked together to energize and increase student voter engagement, which is critically important as we look to the global**

**challenges facing us now and in the next generation.” – CSUN President Dianne Harrison**

This action plan outlines what the CSUN campus has been and will be doing during the election cycle in 2020 (both primary and general) but also the importance of Census participation. In addition, we are working on plans for continued engagement depending on the outcomes of the November 2020 election. Recently the California State University System announced our plans for the majority of our instruction to be online in the fall. Our campus team was already planning for this contingency and will move to virtual activities and participation.

Short term outcomes defined as this election cycle focus on increased student voter participation and build upon our 33% increase from the 2016 to the 2018 election cycles. Our hopes are to increase student registration rates to 90% (a 9% increase) and student voter participation above 63% (a 15% increase). In addition, education and involvement on issues of national, state, and local importance for our campus community and the effects of the census on these are of utmost importance as we work to include these issues into all aspects of campus life. Long term goals ( by 2028) include increasing voter registration to 100% and participation to 85%. In addition to planning for the various possible outcomes of the November 2020 election cycle and will focus on the effects on our students who are California residents, non-state residents, international students, and our large DACA student population.

CSUN is excited about working on these lofty and important goals. Spearheaded by the We the People Campus Team and the Office of Community Engagement we look forward to the positive changes we make in the community.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The membership in the We the People Team is listed below. Members span all divisions and ethnic backgrounds at the university and include faculty

from each college including Education, Arts and Media, Science and Math, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Humanities, Health and Human Development, Engineering and the Oviatt Library. In addition to these faculty from Academic Affairs we have administrators and staff from Academic Affairs and also faculty senate leadership. Areas from Student Affairs include, Matador Involvement Center, Housing, Greek Life and include student body leadership in the student body president and the president of the Political Science Student Association. Areas from Advancement include Government and Community Relations, Communications, Web Design, and Alumni Relations. Areas from Student Success include Academic First Year Experience, Community Engagement, and leadership from this division. Community organizations include Justice Corps representatives, League of Women Voters, ALL IN Democracy Challenge, and several others who are involved in specific initiatives and activities on campus. Finally, through our Assistant Vice President of Government and Community Relations, we are connected with our local election office.

Succession plans for this committee is an easy thing to accomplish. The committee is headed by the Office of Community Engagement and an important part of the structure in the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Success. Also, since we have an open policy for joining the team (and you can see how much we've grown) we don't anticipate a lack of interest in joining this important work. Also, we will reach out to the newly elected student and faculty leadership each June to extend invitations to our team.

## **CSUN'S WE THE PEOPLE LEADERSHIP TEAM**

- *Julia Heinen, Director of Community Engagement & Faculty, Dept. of Music, Committee Chair*
- *Leslie Aguirre, President, Political Science Student Association*
- *Vicki Allen, Assistant Director, Matador Involvement Center*
- *Patrick Bailey, Executive Director, CSUN Associated Students*
- *Jessica Baty, Faculty, Department of Communication Studies*
- *Amy Cervantes, Educational Psychology Major*
- *Susan Cohen, Faculty, Department of Health Sciences*
- *Deborah Cours, Assistant Vice President of Undergraduate Academic Programs*
- *Claire Davis, Co-Interim Administrator in Charge & Director of Student Housing*

- *Rafael De La Rosa, Assistant Vice President of Government and Community Relations, University Advancement*
- *Yi Ding, Online Instructional Coordinator, Oviatt Library*
- *Cindy Greco, Senior Student Success Strategist*
- *Gwenyth Greco, Geography Major*
- *Olivia Lara Herstein, Editor, University Communications*
- *John Kephart, Faculty, Department of Communication Studies*
- *Pamela Palacios, Community Engagement Analyst*
- *Randi Picarrel, Faculty, Department of Communication Studies*
- *Kira Paczkoski, Senior Program Coordinator, Associated Students Productions*
- *Marcos Pineda, Activities Coordinator, Fraternity and Sorority Life at Matador Involvement Center*
- *Kimon Rethis, Senior Web Producer*
- *Boris Rickes, Faculty, Department of Political Science*
- *Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, Faculty, Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling*
- *Astrid Saenz, Political Science Major*
- *Tovah Sands, Faculty, Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling*
- *Pepper Starobin, Administrative Support Assistant, Department of History*
- *Mary-Pat Stein, President, CSUN Faculty*
- *Kathleen Young, Faculty, Department of Health Science*
- *Diana Vincente, President, Associated Students*
- *Beth Wightman, Chair, Department of English*
- *Natale Zappia, Director, Institute of Sustainability & Faculty, Dept. of History*

## **CAMPUS TEAM MISSION**

Together, we have coordinated and compiled a summary of many of the events and activities for the CSUN campus community during this election cycle which are detailed in the final chapters of this document. In addition to a significant campaign for voter registration and voting participation, our events and activities focus on educating and encouraging students (and others) to participate in the democratic process by analyzing the electoral issues, participating in civil discourse and debate, and a respect for different perspectives. Because of the significant number of international and “Dreamer” students, who are not eligible to vote we encourage ways of participating that build self-efficacy and encourage lifelong civic engagement.

## **CAMPUS TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES**

Our campus team was formed in August 2019 and began with a membership of 15. We have expanded to 30 and still growing. We have an open policy of

membership and anyone who is interested in our work is welcome to join the team. The strength of this group is the excitement and commitment of the people. We are determined, dedicated, and committed to our mission and everyone on the team brings this enthusiasm to all that we do. We have the support of the upper administration and they are eager and willing to advocate on our behalf. In addition, they are cheerleaders for our team and the work we do at all their communications both inside and outside campus. One area that we would like to recruit involvement from is the advising area. While we have representatives from Student Success, we need representation from our newly created central advising "HUB." We have reached out to them with invitations to join us.

## **CAMPUS COMMITMENT**

### **CSUN'S MISSION, VALUES, AND VISION STATEMENT**

CSUN's campus commitment is expressed first in the campus mission, values, and vision statement. <https://catalog.csun.edu/about/university-mission-values-and-vision/>

The prominent placement as the second sentence on the mission statement, "To fulfill this mission, we design programs and activities to help students develop the academic competencies, professional skills and critical values of learned persons who live in a democratic society..." demonstrates the importance the university places on the development and execution of all programs and activities as they contribute to our democracy. In the values section the words and phrases that include "freedom, state and national leadership, respect for all people, climate of civility, collegiality, tolerance, and reasoned debate, and seeking partnerships with government" further demonstrate the strong commitment. Finally, and perhaps the most compelling statement is in the vision statement, "California State University, Northridge is inspired by the belief that our commitment to educational opportunity, inclusion and excellence will extend the promise of America to succeeding generations. Our graduates will be the vanguard of leaders for this century – committed to sustaining a democracy in which diverse people share in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, proficient in applying



technology to wise purposed, and dedicated to securing a humane world community and sustain the bounty of the earth.” This mission and these values are lived by everyone at CSUN daily, but held in the highest regard by all administrators who strive to live these values with all of their actions.

### **ALL IN PRESIDENTIAL COMMITMENT**

CSUN’s President, Dianne F. Harrison has signed the ALL IN Presidential Commitment to full student voter participation and committed our institution to full student voter participation in the 2020 General Election. CSUN takes the responsibility of higher education institutions to prepare students to be informed and active citizens; acknowledges the importance of the student voice in all local, state, and presidential elections; and recognizes the need for both curricular and cocurricular experiences to shape and support the development of college students into becoming life-long voters and engaged community members. <https://www.allinchallenge.org/presidents-commitment-signatories/>

### **CSUN’s GENERAL EDUCATION PACKAGE**

The General Education section of all degree programs at CSUN comprised 48 units of the 120-degree unit total. In many places in this common curriculum is demonstrated an academic commitment to the rights and responsibilities of learned persons but it is summarized nicely in the opening sentence; “The Vision of General Education is to ensure that all CSUN students have a broad background in disciplines at the University level in order to appreciate the breadth of human knowledge and the responsibilities of concerned and engaged citizens of the world.” The 48-units in General Education span the areas of English Language Communication and Critical Thinking; Scientific Inquiry and Quantitative Reasoning; Arts and Humanities; Social Sciences and the U.S. History and Government; Lifelong Learning; and Comparative Cultural Studies/Fender, Race, Class, and Ethnicity Studies and Foreign Languages. The minimum total units students would take in studying U.S. and California History and Government would be 6 units (12.5%) of the 48 in General Education however, a more detailed look at the sections in General Education and the available courses reveal that there are courses in

all sections that teach students to become more civically-minded individuals.  
<https://catalog.csun.edu/general-education/>

The Student Learning Outcomes for the United State History and Local Government Section states that Student Will:

- Describe and analyze the histories of the United States and California over significant time periods.
- Explain the principles and major provisions of the Constitutions of the United States and California.
- Compare United States and California political institutions and practices.
- Describe and examine the histories and development of political institutions as related to diverse peoples in the United States and California.

In addition, there are Student Learning Outcomes in all other sections of General Education that detail principles of citizenship.

In Oral Communications, students will apply critical thinking skills when listening, reading, thinking, and speaking, create, organize, and support ideas for oral presentations, and demonstrate acceptable ethical standards in research and presentation of materials.

In Written Communications, students will analyze and compare perspective and meaning and use logical support, including informed opinion and fact to develop ideas.

In Critical Thinking, students will explain and apply concepts essential to a critical examination and evaluation of argumentative discourse, use investigative and analytical thinking skills to examine alternatives and solve challenging problems, synthesize information to arrive at reasoned conclusions, and evaluate the logic and validity of arguments.

In Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning, students will develop mathematical models of real-world situations and explain the assumptions and limitations of those models.

In Scientific Inquiry, students will recognize the contribution and potential of science in human society and everyday life and demonstrate an ability to apply scientific knowledge to critically assess real-world issues and make sound decisions.

In Arts and Humanities, students will explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and expression in different cultures and analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives.

In Lifelong Learning, students will apply the knowledge and skills of science and technology to evaluate how they impact individuals, the community and/or society.

In Comparative Cultural Studies/Gender, Race, Class, and Ethnicity Studies, and Foreign Languages students will explain how various cultures contribute to the to the development of our multicultural world, describe and explain how race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, sexuality, and other markers of social identity impact life experiences and social relations, and analyze and explain the deleterious impact and the privileges sustained by racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, homophobia, religious intolerance or stereotyping on all sectors of society.

Details on our General Education requirements can be found at:

<https://catalog.csun.edu/general-education/student-learning-outcomes/>

In the College of Humanities, a minor in Civic and Community Engagement was started in 2015 was designed for student who wish to apply what they learn at CSUN toward making positive changes in their communities and the world. This minor provides skills for students to successfully integrate their academic and professional interests with their desire to create healthy, humane, successful, and sustainable communities. Students will combine their coursework and collaborations with community partners to become informed and active members and leaders in society. In addition to having this important minor, we have just completed the articulation process for our community college transfer students from College of the Canyons to transfer their lower division coursework in Civic and Community Engagement directly

into our 18-unit minor giving them the opportunity to complete this with only 9-units done at the upper division level.

<https://www.csun.edu/humanities/civic-community-engagement>

Additional activities that happen in the Academic Affairs Division can be found in the Faculty Events section of this document.

In co-curricular activities, Associated Students has many activities they have done, plan and execute. Details on these can be found in the Students Events section of this document. The Associated Student Senate, the Association of Greek Life through the Matador Involvement Center, and Student Housing all participate fully in civic engagement on campus. It was through the initiative of our students, that CSUN became a Polling Place in the recent Primary Election held in March. These kinds of initiatives are an integral part of making CSUN a civically engaged campus.

## LANDSCAPE

### DATA

Through analysis of our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement Report from September 2019 we can show and are very proud of the fact that we have significantly increased our student voter engagement. Our increases in registration and voting rates of our campus are detailed in the chart below. The Office of Community Engagement at CSUN submitted our 2018 NSLVE Campus Report to ALL IN and received the Gold Campus seal for our 48% voting rate. Our plan is to keep this increase moving ahead and we plan on achieving a 63% student voting rate by 2024.

	2014	2018	Change
Total Eligible Voters	35,804	34,960	-844
Number of Students Who Registered	24,732	28,384	3,652
Number of Students Who Voted	5,240	16,765	11,525
Registration Rate	69.1%	81.2%	12.1%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	21.2%	59.1%	37.9%

Voting Rate	14.6%	48.0%	33.3%
Difference from All Institutions	-5.1%	+8.9%	

## COURSE INFORMATION

In the previous section, details are given on all sections of the General Education curriculum that have democratic engagement as Student Learning Outcomes. We are very proud of the fact that these important tenets are taught in every section of our GE curriculum.

We have a significant number of classes in several departments that teach civic responsibility and democratic engagement. Departments include Political Science, Journalism, Communication Studies, Civic and Community Engagement, Sociology, and Criminology and Justice Studies to name a few. I have listed some representative courses and their descriptions below. All courses by department can be found here: <https://catalog.csun.edu>

### **POLS 197. Racial and Ethnic Politics (3)**

Examination of the problems and politics of racial and national subgroups in America. Focuses on problems of ethnic identity, inequality and discrimination, and the impact of minority group politics on public policy. (Available for General Education, F Comparative Cultural Studies.)

### **POLS 445. Political Behavior (3)**

Introduction to political behavior; the influences of culture, ideology and social structure on political life; group influences on political behavior and major factors in leadership; and psychological bases of participation in normal and extreme politics. Available for graduate credit.

### **JOUR 375. Engaging Diverse Communities (3)**

Prerequisites: JOUR 210/L and JOUR 225. Engagement and multimedia journalism skills, including in-depth reporting, social media and online surveys. Analysis of demographics, community institutions and social issues, to generate engagement with diverse communities with media. Creation of critically informed, visual representations.

### **COMS 315. Communication and Agency (3)**

An examination of the role of agency in human communication, with an emphasis on the relationship between purpose, choice and efficacy in communicative action.

### **COMS 428. Freedom of Speech (3)**

Exploration of freedom of speech in American society. Emphasis given to a communication studies approach to issues in freedom of speech. Focus on contemporary problems of free

speech in the U.S., including sedition, obscenity, advocacy of illegal action, libel, words of provocation, copyright, academic freedom and national security. Available for graduate credit.

### **COMS 444. Political Rhetoric (3)**

Prerequisites: COMS 327; Completion of the lower division writing requirement. Study of rhetoric of recent U.S. political campaigns, both local and national, including persuasive techniques, ethical considerations and effectiveness. Practice in planning and developing rhetorical messages for political campaigns. Regular written assignments are required. Available for graduate credit.

### **CCE 200. Introduction to Civic and Community Engagement (3)**

Prerequisite: Completion of the lower division writing requirement. Introduces students to the rewards, opportunities and challenges of collaborating with community service partners, which can include charitable or nonprofit organizations and government offices or agencies. Students will learn how to identify opportunities for civic and community engagement, how to locate resources for such projects, and how to collaborate effectively with community partners. Requires at least 20 hours of community service.

### **SOC 370. Political Sociology (3)**

Lecture-discussion of the social and cultural bases of political ideologies and processes. Study of power and its varying relationships to decision making at community and national levels. Analyses of the roles, structure and interaction of voluntary and political organizations in the political system, including conflict and its resolution. Sociological interpretations of contemporary American political behavior.

### **SOC 426. Social Legislation and Social Policy (3)**

Prerequisite: Completion of the lower division writing requirement. Study of the historical, social, and political aspects related to the development of social policies. Learn how to apply a practitioner policy analysis perspective to pertinent social welfare policies, including TANF, managed mental healthcare, Social Security, substance abuse policies, and child welfare policies. Regular written assignments required.

### **SOC 476. Social Movements (3)**

Prerequisite: SOC 150. This course is an overview of the core sociological concepts and perspectives in the social movement literature. This course will examine the factors that lead people to participate in social movements and how social movement participation shapes people's lives. The course will explore theoretical perspectives developed in the study of social movements such as countermobilization and repression.

### **SOC 484. Progressive Community Organizing (3)**

The course examines the history of community organizing in the United States; explores the different theories and approaches to effective grassroots organizing; and emphasizes the organizing skills necessary to empower people so they can improve their communities. The course intends to translate social work values into community level practice, with a focus on self-determination and empowerment in community organizing and advocacy through the study of barriers to organizing, including the power imbalances in society. There will be

special attention given to organizing and advocacy with economically disadvantaged and historically disempowered communities.

### **CJS 302. Crime, Criminal Justice and Society (3)**

This course provides an introduction to key perspectives, principles, institutions, actors, and issues in the field of criminology and criminal justice. This course takes a critical perspective on current issues and controversies surrounding the attempts to understand the causes of crime as well as the criminal justice response to it. The impact of crime and criminal justice policy on society is also a focus in this course. Special emphasis is given to the application of key material to current policies, controversies, and practical problems in crime and criminal justice.

### **BARRIERS**

Institutional barriers are the same that one would find with an institution of nearly 40,000 students. They are communication across divisions, an inability to be able to send common emails to the entire campus community without cost and permission from 3 different vice presidents, and lack of financial support to the Office of Community Engagement to engage in these activities.

External barriers are very few. The Secretary of State for California, Alex Padilla, has changed the way voters are registered in California. All people applying for a driver's license are automatically registered to vote and must opt-out if they do not wish to do so. Another significant change to the voting process in California is that several counties went to an extended voting period, either 11 or 4 days prior to the election which dramatically increased voter participation this past March. CSUN, through an initiative by Associated Students had an on-campus polling place that opened 4-days prior to election day. That also greatly increased student voter participation.

Additional resources that would be helpful would be additional funds to support the on-campus polling place. This was very expensive for the campus and there was limited support from the state. (Details on this are unknown to this committee.)

### **GOALS**

CSUN students are reaching the Student Learning Outcomes prior to graduation. Current discussions in the California State University 23-campus system is the inclusion of an ethnic studies and/or a social justice

requirement. This discussion is currently at the Board of Trustees for the CSU and has had a first reading. CSUN is further ahead of the other 22 campuses since we have an additional section in our General Education package. The Comparative Cultural Studies/Gender, Race, Class, and Ethnicity Studies, and Foreign Languages Section (Section F) is unique to CSUN and a part of our curriculum that we have celebrating having since the 1960's.

Short Term Goals for the 2020 election cycle are to increase student registration rates to 90%, a 9% increase and student voter participation rates to 63%, a 15% increase.

Long Term Goals achieved by 2028 are to increase student registration rates to 100% of all eligible student voters and student voter participation to 85%.

In addition, we spent considerable time this year designing a community-based learning component to add to our "University 100" course which is taken by 35% of our incoming freshmen. Several of the community-based learning assignment choices have a civic engagement component to them. We plan on tracking the data of the success of this High Impact Practice in regard to retention and graduation rates but also in voting rates of our students. We will know the full results of this study by 2026.

## **STRATEGY**

Details on the planned activities in the short term are in the sections below. We are working hard to engage students in the upcoming election cycle through campus activities, assignments, class discussions, student engagement, and communication from all divisions. CSUN has a strong sense of civic responsibility and is celebrated in the Mission, Values, and Vision and Student Learning Outcomes and courses throughout the curriculum.

The work of the campus is concentrated on the upcoming election but also planning for the various scenarios based on the outcome of the November 2020 elections. Our activities that were planning for Spring, Summer, and Fall are now being moved to virtual events. This has been time-consuming



however it has allowed us some interesting ways to rethink engagement. We are looking forward to measuring the impact of our virtual environment.

Our campus was engaged in a search for a new president when the pandemic hit. Our timeline for a new president has been moved from July 1, 2020 to January 1, 2021. However, with our being in a virtual environment in Fall 2020, that timeline may be extended. What our committee plans is to meet with the new president as soon as they are on campus and determine what additional vision and goals the president may have for the campus. We look forward to opening these discussions with our new leadership and are excited to bring CSUN even further in their commitment to civic engagement.

## **REPORTING**

As mentioned in a previous section, CSUN submitted our NSLVE report to ALL IN CHALLENGE and received a “Gold Medal” award for our student voter participation. We have prominently displayed this on our website and issued a press release with a quote from CSUN’s President Dianne F. Harrison. There was an article published about this in the CSUN Shine publication and the University is using this information in several ways throughout all divisions.

In addition, In February 2020, our campus committee hosted a virtual “kick-off” event to bring campus-wide awareness to the work our committee is doing. The hopes for this event is that it will bring awareness to the upcoming election cycle, inspire the need to get involved, and increase campus and community involvement in our democratic rights and responsibilities.

The All In Democracy Challenge Plan was shared with all divisions at CSUN in January 2020 and the revision will be shared in early June. In addition, once the plan has been reviewed by your organization we will be sharing it on our committee’s website which can be found at:

<https://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/community-engagement/we-people>

## **CAMPUS ACTIVITIES**

### **VOTER REGISTRATION: Ongoing**

We continue to work with Academic Affairs, Associated Students, Student Affairs, Student Success, and Advancement to have a multifaceted approach to encouraging voter registration.

In Academic Affairs, the Office of Community Engagement has reached out to all faculty with voter registration information both online and paper registration forms to encourage voter registration in courses during class but also in the Online Course Management System, Canvas. In addition, we have voter registration tabling events at all campus events.

Oviatt Library will participate in National Voter Registration Day on September 22, 2020 and hosting a virtual voter registration table event.

Associated Students is bringing awareness to the upcoming elections by holding voter registration tabling events at several gathering places and events on campus. Their Lobby Corps teams will frequently table at our Farmer's Market. Since moving to a virtual environment, they have moved to doing voter registration online contests and other events.

Student Affairs is doing a virtual voter registration event at all new student orientations for first-time freshman and first-time transfer students. They talk about civic engagement and the importance of participating in the democratic process as a citizen of the United States. They assist with students registering to vote online or by paper registration forms.

### **VOTER INFORMATION: Ongoing**

Through recommended sites including Skimm, Rock the Vote, and iCitizen, students are encouraged to follow political issues and be informed about the local, state and national issues.

Many faculty are including activities and assignments in their classes that encourage voter registration and participation. These vary widely to including assigning students opposing sides of a proposition issue to debate in class, to giving class time to students to register to vote online. The

students who are ineligible to vote are given alternate assignments which engage them in the discussion of our democratic processes.

In addition, one of our team members, Dr. John Kephart is preparing a Canvas site (our Learning Management System) on the US Census that includes a video, information materials, and possible assignments that faculty can import into their courses.

Associated Students have created email reminders, notices in our Learning Management System (Canvas), and flyers on how to register to vote.

## **FACULTY AND STAFF EVENTS AND RESOURCES**

### **CALIFORNIA VOTER FORUM**

This voter literacy initiative first ran during mid-term elections in 2018, funded with an interdisciplinary grant, for Communication Studies and Journalism, from Community Engagement. For 2020, this will be an inter-department initiative within Communication Studies, with multiple instructors and programs involved including the Debate Team and the Performance Ensemble. Journalism will be simultaneously involved in Media Literacy Week.

The purpose of the Forum is:

- 1) to help students critically think about the candidates and issues on the California ballot and corresponding campaign coverage in political ads, news reports, op-eds, and social media; and*
- 2) to inspire more civic engagement in the election process.*

The 2018 CA Voter Forum had over 500 student participants over the course of the 2-day event in the Oviatt Library's Ferman Presentation Room. For 2020, we hope to partner with League of Women Voters again, to begin early voter registration around campus, and distribute non-partisan voter and ballot information. The week prior to election day students will lead and facilitate a 4-day event in the Student Union focused on Literacy in order to educate and empower their peers to use critical thinking in the upcoming election.

Over the course of 4 days, students will design, facilitate and present on ballot measures, local and national candidates. The goal will not be to sway voters

in a direction, but give as much information as possible to help voters make up their own minds. Students will create teams that focus on one issue. For example, Advanced Public Speaking students will study a designated state proposition and present both sides/perspectives. The Debate Team will study the news coverage across media platforms and present strategies for finding valid and invalid arguments.

For marketing, we will use previous branding/imagery designed by the CSUN Impact Design Hub and work with them again to create new posters on the propositions. We will seek catering bids for refreshments, and collaborate with Community Engagement, Associated Students and various student clubs.

This event is moving to a virtual format for Fall 2020.

### **CAMPUS KICK OFF EVENT**

In February 2020, our campus committee hosted a virtual “kick-off” event to bring campus-wide awareness to the work our committee is doing. The hopes for this event is that it will bring awareness to the upcoming election cycle, inspire the need to get involved, and increase campus and community involvement in our democratic rights and responsibilities.

### **FACULTY WORKSHOPS TO INCREASE STUDENT INFORMATION EFFICACY**

One challenge that we constantly face in trying to get students motivated, interested, and engaged in voting or other forms of civic participation is their belief that they don’t know enough about politics to participate. Students feel as though politics is boring, not relevant to their daily lives, or is too overwhelming for them to become informed enough to participate with confidence. Politicians and the decisions they may feel distant and outside their control. This, despite the fact that there are a number of local and immediate places for civic engagement that have a central impact on their communities (local elections like a city council or school board, volunteering, or direct ballot initiatives as the city, county, and state-level).

This difficulty is compounded by the fact that there is often not a centralized place for them to learn and develop these skills. Critical thinking requirements at the lower division level help meet this challenge, as does coursework in some departments. But, as a broad strategy of civic engagement, such instruction is sporadic and spread across the campus. Instructors often feel unequipped to help resolve this issue, either because they don't see their classes as being about politics (in the sense of political science or elections), or don't feel equipped to teach students how to find, evaluate, and use the information on topics of relevance to their lives

As part of the All In Campus Challenge, In February 2020, we created a short video segment and followed up with workshop for faculty who are interested in integrating information seeking and evaluating skills in their curricula. This was not designed to have conversations about politics in classes. Rather, the point is to give students a way to see how the subject matter they are dealing with in their various classes have not only real-world applications, but influence and are influenced by broader civic conversations. The video and workshop assisted faculty in designing assignments, class discussion, and/or lecture units around helping students develop the skills to see how policies, rules, regulations, or other public actions are taken on topics of concern to them, and how to evaluate information on those topics to form their own informed opinion. The workshops helped faculty who were interested in integrating such connections into their classrooms while still being able to teach the content they need to meet their broader learning outcomes. This program can helped expand the notion of democratic participation beyond merely voting, and to inculcate active civic engagement through making it less distant, less intimidating, and more meaningful to our students. The video and information about the workshops (which were held in March 2020) can be found here: <https://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/community-engagement/we-people>

## **SKILLS FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION – CHILDREN'S ROLE**

The Elementary Education Faculty and their students in teacher education in the Michael D. Eisner College of Education get children involved in civic

awareness through art. Painting with patriotic colors, using handprints, drawing pictures and discussing what “freedom” means, and why people should “make good choices.” This project builds awareness of others, draws audiences in and ideally makes people consider the choices they make will influence the world our children inherit.

## **LAW, ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN COUNSELING**

In the graduate program in Educational Psychology, one faculty member gives a detailed and involved assignment requiring students to research and report on all candidate’s positions and propositions concerning youth, education, health-care, welfare and well-being of communities and neighborhoods. In their future positions as school counseling professionals, they will be a greater asset to their communities if they are fully-informed as citizens and can advocate for the needs of their communities.

## **STUDENT EVENTS AND RESOURCES**

### **DEBATE WATCH PARTIES**

The debate watch parties will be held for the general election in November 2020 will be hosted by Communication Studies Professor, John Kephart III. We have been invited and are registered with the Commission on Presidential Debates and DebateWatch 2020 to host virtual events for the 4 scheduled debates.

Since the 1976 election between President Gerald Ford and Governor Jimmy Carter, presidential debates have served as a fixture of American electoral politics. Each presidential election cycle, candidates spar in a series of primary debates before securing their respective party’s nomination before advancing to a series of argumentative clashes in the general election. In most years, there are three presidential debates and one vice-presidential debates, and these contests have seen decisive shifts in the fortunes of several candidates.

As part of the All-In Democracy Challenge, CSUN will be hosting debate viewing parties for each of the debates that end up being broadcast. As part

of the event, we will begin with a brief lecture to contextualize presidential debates generally and the individual debate specifically, followed by a collective viewing of the debate. After the debate, faculty, researchers, and other experts will debrief the debates with students to unpack what we saw, and discuss potential consequences of the debates.

This is an important piece of our campus plan because research has consistently shown that debates have a tremendous impact on political engagement. The debates reach substantial numbers of voters and are central points of the campaigns (Benoit, McKinney, and Holbert 2001; Carlin 1992; Hollihan 2001; Jamieson and Birdsell 1988; McKinney and Carlin 2004), are a rich resource of information about both candidates and their respective party platforms (Hollihan 2001; Jamieson and Birdsell 1988; Benoit, McKinney, and Holbert 2001; Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003), and provide the candidates an opportunity to expand their positions in direct contrast to their challenger (Benoit, McKinney, and Stephenson 2002). In particular, they are seen as helpful and impactful in early decision making (McKinney and Warner 2013). Perhaps most importantly for our students, debates have been shown to lead to greater discussion about and engagement with elections, increase conversations about and engagement with elections (Patterson 2002), as well as providing great confidence in the ability to understand and use political information while lessening cynicism in the democratic process. increase information efficacy and reduce cynicism (McKinney and Rill 2009; Warner and McKinney 2013).

We will also include live-tweeting and other forms of social media engagement with the debates as research also suggests that social media can increase engagement with and consideration of issues in the campaign (Craig 2016) and perceptions of debate importance (Houston, Hawthorne, Spialeck, Greenwood, and McKinney 2013).

The Commission on Presidential Debates has announced their debate schedule for 2020. This can potentially change given negotiations between the eventual nominees. But, assuming the current dates hold, we would plan to host events on Tuesday September 29, Wednesday October 7, Thursday

October 15, and Thursday October 27 from about 5:30 pm to about 8:00 pm, PST. Debates have tremendous potential to help students make sense of the complex issues in the campaign and motivate greater civic participation, and we look forward to hosting these events in 2020.

### **BIG POLITICS**

Big Politics is an interactive programming event that incorporates art, culture, and community. The theme of the February 2020 event was, "Politics isn't a Bad Word." The goal of the event was to bring politics to the students and meet them where they are at. The fair included events such as proposition, Voter registration booths, voter education, census education, engaging contribution boards around political themes, live music, art exhibits, and more. This was and continues to be an opportunity for students to become informed and get involved in election cycles. Admission is free to students. This activity happens annually on campus.

### **ASSOCIATED STUDENT'S GUEST SPEAKER**

Associated Students hosted the Secretary of State of California, Alex Padilla who spoke about his background, commitment to civic engagement, the census and the upcoming election cycle. This event was held on January 29, 2020.

### **WE THE PEOPLE FAIR**

Associated Students will have a large event with food, guest speakers, campaign parties, tabling, and interactive elements like photo opportunities, and a CSUN "voting poll" competition and will take place in October 2020. This event is being planned as a virtual experience in correlation with the 2020 general election.

### **STUDENT HOUSING ACTIVITIES**

CSUN Student Housing staff have scheduled debate viewing parties, passive programming on resident floors, housing residents "walk to the voting booth," resident student debates, and "person on the street" videos that can be posted on social media, websites, and played on the video screens in the residence



halls. Since we will not be housing many (if any) students on campus, these activities may not be possible or necessary.

### **EOP FREE SPEECH EVENT**

CSUN Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) hosts an annual Free Speech Event which celebrates freedom of speech protected by the First Amendment. EOP Encourages the entire CSUN community to participate and spectate through speech, spoken word, poetry, music, art, or dance. Student from different clubs and organizations are welcome to participate in this free event. This event is being planned as a virtual experience.

### **CAMPUS VOTING CENTER**

CSUN student leaders in coordination with Advancement's Vice President for Government and Community Relations, worked closely with the California Election Commission and made the CSUN campus a polling place for the primary election in March 2020. Our polling site was open for the four days prior to the election and on election day. While we would like to have CSUN participate again for the General Election in November, we are unsure if this will be possible with the campus instruction moving mainly online.

### **SUNDIAL**

The Sundial which is the CSUN student newspaper will participate in by writing several articles on candidates, propositions, and civic engagement with a focus on outcomes that would affect the campus and our students.

### **THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

The Office of International Students will be having events for students who are ineligible to vote in the United States that include debate watches, providing transportation for citizens who would otherwise be unable to come to a polling site, and voter registration drives.