

# **Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan 2024**

## **Chapman University**

## **Executive Summary**

This campus voter engagement action plan was developed by the Department of Student Engagement at Chapman University to improve our current voter registration and turnout efforts and enhance the current voter engagement coalition. The plan will be implemented at our Orange Campus and Rinker Campus during the 2024-2025 academic year, led by professional staff affiliated with the Department of Student Engagement and involving administrative, academic, and student collaborators with existing financial and human resources.

## **Leadership**

### **Lead Administrators**

Justin Koppelman, Ph.D. - Director of Student Engagement

Karla Monterrey, MA - Student Union Program Coordinator

Sidney Ecoiffier, MBA - Manger of The Campus Center at Rinker

\*No succession plan is needed for leadership since responsibility for this effort exists within the job descriptions of existing professional administrative positions.

### **Lead Student Employees**

Kennedy Ceman - Lead Civic Engagement Assistant

### **Collaborators**

The Department of Student Engagement works with a coalition of student organizations, academic departments, and external civic engagement organizations to promote civic learning and democratic engagement work. Student organizations include Chapman Democrats, Chapman Republicans, the University Programming Board, and Student Government Association along with a variety of diversity/cultural and religious/spiritual student organizations. Academic units include the Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Attallah College of Educational Studies, the School of Communication, and the Office of the Provost. Administrative collaborators include the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Office of Residence Life and First Year Experience; Center for Global Education; Fish Interfaith Center, Alumni Engagement, and Strategic Marketing and Communications. The Department of Student Engagement also works with the Orange County Registrar of Voters (OCROV) and utilizes resources and support provided by the ALL in Campus Democracy Challenge, Campus Vote Project, CIRCLE, Democracy Works, Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, and Students Learn Students Vote.

## **Commitment & Landscape**

Chapman University has signed on to the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation, a commitment that we will remind our campuses of through newsletters to faculty, staff, and students.

The Department of Student Engagement is Chapman University's main resource to support students with voter education, registration, and turnout. The Department of Student Engagement actively collaborates with campus partners, academic departments, student organizations and external non-partisan and non-profit civic organizations. Voter registration is incorporated into new student orientation, welcome week programs, classroom presentations, campus-wide emails,

standalone events such as our celebration of National Voter Registration Day, and ongoing voter registration campaigns.

The Department of Student Engagement is committed to improving democratic engagement. For example, in 2020, Chapman's voting rate increased from 60% in 2016 to 80% because of the voter engagement efforts led by the Department of Student Engagement in partnership with other campus groups. Likewise, Chapman University's midterm election voting rates also increased above the national average. Chapman University has been designated a Voter Friendly Campus in each of the previous recognition cycles and received the ALL IN Platinum Seal designation for the 2020 elections and a Most Engaged Campus seal for the 2022 elections. Recognitions such as these are promoted directly to students and through institutional communication venues such as websites, social media platforms, and faculty/staff newsletters.

Senior leadership at Chapman University also treats civic learning and democratic engagement efforts as a priority. In March, 2020, President Struppa signed the Presidents' Commitment To Full Student Voter Participation as part of our involvement in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, and also signed on as a supporter of the Engage 2020 effort led by Wesleyan University. These commitments are communicated to administrators in both student affairs and academic affairs. The Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students also emphasizes voter engagement regularly in weekly email announcements to all students.

The university's academic program is centered around global citizenship, which leads our academic experience to naturally emphasize civic learning and democratic engagement. For example, two of the four focus areas of our general education program require enrollment in courses built with a civic orientation and framing. Within the liberal arts and sciences focus area, students are required to complete courses focused on inquiry into the natural sciences, social sciences, and ethics. The global focus area engages students in deeper learning about the diversity inherent in our social and natural environments, meaningful dialogue and action around the topics of citizenship and service, and a requirement to attain a basic intermediate fluency in a language other than English.

With full-time professional and part-time student staff dedicated to voter engagement efforts, and an institutional budget to support that work, primary barriers have to do with understandable limits to institutional resources, the balance of multiple important priorities, and a continuing challenge of increasing voting literacy. While civic learning and democratic engagement efforts are widespread throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum, there is always more that could be done and more resources that could be allocated to enhance how that work is done. The decentralized nature of university environments also requires relationships and buy-in in order to make voter engagement a pervasive element of our broader civic learning priorities. Developing and sustaining

relationships that secure such buy-in often come at the expense of time and energy that would otherwise be dedicated to other valuable academic endeavors that might not operate with a salient civic or voter engagement framing. As a microcosm of the larger society and an institution inevitably influenced by it, institutions of higher education, including Chapman University, are faced with capturing students' attention and intention amidst a socio-political landscape that can make civic, rather than partisan, engagement difficult, at times seemingly fruitless, and make voter literacy and engagement confusing. We do our best and take on the challenge earnestly, while also recognizing a continuous cycle of new students brings a continuous cycle of striving to hold students' attention and foster their commitment to civic engagement in light of ever-evolving national socio-political climates.

As indicated in the 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) reports, Chapman University's voting rates have continuously increased from year to year. Political affiliation of incoming students reflects a spectrum of politics and orientations that point to a strong degree of political diversity on campus (apx 30% identify as right of center, 30% identify as middle of the road, and 40% identify as left of center), though that diversity at times manifests as partisanship rather than collaboration and perspective-taking.

Women's voting rate continues to be higher than men's, which corresponds to a general trend in more women students participating in civic engagement-related campus events, while Asian and Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander students have the lowest turnout among racial/ethnic groups. Our voting data also guides us in identifying academic departments that should be areas of focus for partnership. Since the data shows more voter engagement in fields of study such as education, legal professions and studies, and communication, we will dedicate additional effort to reach students in the sciences, where voting rates trend around 70-75%.

## Goals

### Long Term Goals:

- Increase students' disposition to be active in public issues
- Increase the number of students voting in presidential elections
- Increase students' capacity for perspective-taking and depolarization

### Short Term Goals:

- Reconnect with faculty, staff, and students involved in the coalition before the Fall semester to secure their commitment to tangible goals that will be informed by *Students Learn Students Vote* strategies.
- Increase student voting rate by 5% from 2020 to 2024 to match the 5% increase we experienced in registrations from the 2016 to 2020 elections.
- Revamp our voter registration and turnout module within our Canvas Learning Management System to emphasize resources that can be used by others in the coalition to promote campus-wide voter literacy.

## **Strategy**

### **Voter Registration**

Throughout each semester, the Department of Student Engagement coordinates various voter engagement opportunities for the Chapman community. Other than regular voter registration informational tabling during peak hours in the Argyros Forum Student Union and Attallah Piazza, tabling is also provided in conjunction with new student orientation/check-in, Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day, and our inaugural Voter Registration Bash event. We also work with the local Registrar of Voters to co-host informational tabling. Other efforts include providing voter registration information, including an emphasis on TurboVote, which is integrated into the home page of our new online student involvement platform (CampusGroups), and our on-campus Vote Center, through campus digital signage, institutional social media platforms, our CU at the Booths webpage, our online student portal and mobile app, campus-wide departmental communication, and regular classroom visits/presentations. In this outreach, we'll dedicate specific attention to the academic/professional fields (e.g. sciences) and racial/ethnic groups (e.g. Asian, Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander) with the lowest voting rates.

### **Voter Education**

*Debate Screenings* - We will continue to screen presidential debates through the November election, involving coalition partners to engage as broad of an audience as possible.

*Voter Education Week* - We will distribute resources about the National Voter Education Week website to inform students about registering to vote, checking their registration status, making a plan to vote, and encouraging them to get their friends and family ready for the election.

*Life of the Parties* - At the beginning of Fall semester, the Department of Student Engagement, Chapman Democrats, and Chapman Republicans collaborate on this non-partisan event intended to provide students with an opportunity to learn about each political party's stance on current issues.

*Global Citizens Wall* - The Global Citizen Wall will continue to be updated weekly with a new question about an economic, environmental, social, or political current event to foster dialogue and civic learning.

*Presentations in Classrooms and Student Organization Meetings* - The Department of Student Engagement will offer short lightning talks on voter registration and voting related information to increase students' voter registration rate and to encourage students to vote.

### **Voter Turnout**

*Vote Early Day* - In the week approaching Vote Early Day, we will launch a marketing campaign to promote early voting as an option.

*Orange County Registrar of Voters Vote Center* – We will continue to work with our local Registrar of Voters to host an on-campus Vote Center at both of our campuses to increase accessibility for the Chapman family and surrounding communities. The Vote Center will be open three days prior to and on election day. In our outreach promoting this resource, we'll dedicate specific attention to

the academic/professional fields (e.g. sciences) and racial/ethnic groups (e.g. Asian, Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander) with the lowest voting rates.

*Election Day Watch Party* - As the Vote Center is operating on Election Day, we will be hosting an Election Day watch party in the Student Union for voters to watch the results live.

### **Reporting**

This report will be shared with and will evolve in partnership with all collaborators listed above. This plan will be available publicly on the CU at the Booths website in addition to the websites of national partners, such as the ALL IN Challenge and the Campus Vote Project.

The plan and data pertaining to voter registration and turnout will also be shared with all departments in Student Affairs, other academic and administrative collaborators, and senior institutional leadership. Select data including our fully NSLVE report will also be shared publicly for all faculty, staff, and students to review.

### **Evaluation**

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess our success in communicating a clear commitment to students' participation in democracy and contributing to an increase among students in their participation in elections specifically. The audience for the evaluation is primarily the leadership and collaborators listed above but is also the campus at large, given that data acquired through evaluation will be included in our reporting. Evaluation of our efforts is conducted by the leadership mentioned above with support as needed from the collaborators mentioned above. Evaluation will occur throughout the year – specific efforts (e.g. classroom presentations, National Voter Registration Day, Vote Early Day) will be evaluated shortly after they're implemented or completed while other efforts will be evaluated over the course of a longer period of time (e.g. voter turnout efforts will be evaluated in part by immediate feedback and in part by the results of our NSLVE data). Success is related to the goals mentioned above – Will we see a 5% increase in voter turnout? Will our coalition remain strong and evolve responsively to the climate? Will our Canvas LMS module and kit be utilized broadly across disciplines and colleges? Data will be collected and evaluated as early as new student orientation and will guide us in ensuring our efforts adapt to new insights and opportunities.