

CU Engaged

Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Plan for Voter Registration, Education, and Engagement 2020

Executive Summary

Background

Clarion University is committed to the holistic education of our students. This includes providing an immersive experience in the classroom, as well as a broad range of extracurricular involvement that students can take advantage of to complement their academic work.

As a University, we are consistently working to fulfill our mission to provide transformative, lifelong learning opportunities through innovative, nationally recognized programs delivered in inclusive, student-centered environments. Becoming a participant in the All in Campus Democracy Challenge is a means for the University to expand our learning opportunities for students with a focus on civic engagement.

Coalition

The CU Engaged Coalition, which was founded in 2017, consists of representatives from student affairs, academic affairs, student volunteers, registered student organizations, and community partners. The members of the CU Engaged Coalition have worked together to develop this action plan to continue to advance the success of our 2019 civic engagement efforts. Because of the success we saw in the 2018 midterm, we are committed to expanding voter registration, education, and participation among students. While we work as a coalition, the majority of the plan is executed by the student groups here on campus. They are the ones who help put together Civic Engagement Events and manage the Voter Education and Registration Tabling Series.

2020 Action Plan

Our 2020 Action Plan will be used throughout the year to ensure the coalition is staying on track with their goals. We will also use it to draft our 2021 Action Plan. As we continue to work on growing our coalition, this will need to be a very flexible document. We will be adding new members and working on new ideas.

Leadership

Coalition Members

All of our coalition members, excluding faculty, have involvement in the CU Engaged Coalition listed as a duty of their job. Their position within the university requires that either they or a designee attend coalition meetings and participate in coalition events. This means that regardless of who is in that position, they will work with the CU Engaged Coalition. Because it is position specific and not person specific, the chairs maintain a binder full of the resources they use throughout the year. This way, there will be a handbook of sorts for whoever ends up taking over the coalition. The presidents and advisors of campus partners also keep the information they use within the coalition to pass on to their successors. In addition to the members who serve because of their position within Clarion University, we also allow students and faculty/staff to voluntarily join the coalition if they wish.

- Sarah Zerfoss, Assistant Director of Student Conduct and Community Development (Co-Chair of the Coalition)
- Taylor Boyle, Student Worker of Student Conduct and Community Development (Co-Chair of the Coalition)
- Stephan Brooks, Coordinator of Health Services - Health and Wellness Center
- Barry Sweet, Professor – Political Science
- Tree Zuzzio, Student – Trustee of the University
- Ryan Zavinski, Student - Student Senate Community Relations Committee Chair
- Dante Englemann, Student - Volunteer
- Kaitlyn Krupa, Student – Volunteer
- Corey Negley, Advisor – Allies
- Anita Lahr, Advisor – Clarion University College Republicans
- Maggie Brown, Student President - Clarion University College Republicans
- Kevan Yenerall, Advisor – Clarion University College Democrats
- Kayla Eaton, Student President – Clarion University College Democrats
- Herbert Luthin, Advisor – Clarion University Young Democratic Socialists of America
- Carl Shepard, Student President - Clarion University Young Democratic Socialists of America
- Ryan Skunda, Student – Volunteer
- Greyson Knepp, Student – Orientation Leaders/PALs

Leadership Responsibilities within the Coalition

The co-chairs of the coalition are in charge of organizing and running the monthly meetings. It is also their duty to assist in planning events with campus and community partners. The advisors and presidents of the campus partners are responsible for relaying information discussed at CU Engaged meetings. It is the duty of all of the coalition members to help plan and work various events throughout the semester.

Coalition Meetings

The CU Engaged Coalition meets once each month of both fall and spring semester. In addition to these scheduled meetings, the group will have smaller meetings preceding events. There is also frequent email communication between coalition members.

Campus Partners

- Advisory Board for Leadership & Engagement
- Allies
- Asian Students Integrated Association (ASIA)
- Black Student Union
- Clarion University College Democrats
- Clarion University College Republicans
- Clarion University Student Senate
- Clarion University Young Democratic Socialists of America
- Interhall Council
- Greek Life
- Leadership Institute
- NAACP
- National Society of Leadership and Success
- Peer Adjustment Leaders
- Presidential Commission on Disabilities

- Presidential Commission on LGBTQ+ Concerns
- Presidential Commission on Racial Equity
- Presidential Commission on the Status of Women
- Spanish and Latino Student Association (SALSA)
- Women United

Coalition Partners

In addition to our coalition and campus partners, we also work closely with members of the local community. We co-host events with various groups throughout the semester. Through these efforts, we have built a lasting relationship with the:

- Campus Compact New York and Pennsylvania
- Campus Election Engagement Project
- Campus Vote Project
- Civic Nation
- Clarion Area Young Professionals
- Clarion County Democratic Party
- Clarion County Republican Party
- League of Women Voters
- Local Election Office
- Nation Voter Registration Day Committee
- Rock the Vote
- Southern Poverty Law Center on Campus

Commitment

Clarion University prioritizes student experience and success, national impact and visibility, and community engagement. Some of our core values include community, integrity, social justice, and responsibility. This is demonstrated by our campus being a polling place for students and university-sponsored signage directing students to their polling location. Recently, the University developed our *True North Initiative*. This plan highlighted roughly six priorities of focus for the University moving forward. These priorities have become the basis for an action plan the University will follow over the next 2-3 years. In this plan, the Campus Climate & Diversity committee identified civic education and engagement as a top priority.

The Student Affairs strategic plan mentions a commitment to civic education and engagement. The Office of Student Affairs has been very involved in education and registration events. We ensure that every fall we hold events for students on both National Voter Registration Day and Constitution Day. We also host political speakers, town halls, and deliberative dialogue. We have also incorporated these efforts into the classroom. Some classes offer extra credit if you demonstrate that you are registered to vote. Other classes discuss how to register and vote with first-year students. We eventually hope for this to become the norm in first-year oriented classes.

Landscape

Here at Clarion, we have a plethora of politically motivated clubs. We have student-led chapters of Republicans, Democrats, and Democratic-Socialists. We also have several other minority driven student groups, such as allies, who are involved in our coalition to ensure that we have an open and accessible campaign.

Pennsylvania recently passed Act 77, which dealt with voting reform. Act 77 will help us to have an accessible voter education and registration campaign. Now students will not need to identify a

specific reason they would like to vote through the mail. This has also shown us ways in which our past campaign was not the most accessible. Because of this, we have started working with community and campus partners to create an accessible voting education and registration campaign.

NSLVE

In 2018, Clarion raised our student voting rate from 17.6%, the rate reported in 2014, to 34.7%. This is comparable to the national average of 39.1%. The majority, 86.9%, of our students voted in-person, whether that be on-campus or driving to their polling place back home.

When you dissect these numbers based on undergraduate class year, it becomes apparent that we need to focus on our first-year students, as this group had the lowest percentage of turnout. Also, while both percentage rates were up from 2014, in 2018, almost three times as many undergraduate students voted as graduate students. Graduate students are difficult to reach, as most are not on campus, but we can try mass emails to make sure they are aware of how to register and vote.

We have also analyzed our voting rate not only by graduation year, but also by age group. This helps confirm what we knew, which is that the older the age group, the higher the voting rate. We intend to now target younger students and first-year students, as our upperclassmen and older populations have high civic engagement rate. We of course will still work to maintain engagement in these groups, but we will stress the importance of civic engagement to younger students more so than upperclassmen or older groups.

Goals

Short Term Goals

1. Have at least 50% of our overall student population registered to vote in 2020.
2. Have at least 45% voter turn-out amongst registered student voters for the 2020 election.
3. Celebrate National Voter Registration Day, with the goal of registering at least 75 students at various tables.
4. Register at least 100 students during the spring 2020 semester before the end of the Spring 2020 semester.
5. Organize Civic Engagement Night with tabling on upcoming elections, presenters on importance of civic engagement, and opportunity for voter registration for 2020 primary and general election.

Long Term Goals

In addition to the short-term goals listed above, the coalition has also identified key points that they would like to work on overtime, with no set deadline.

Registration

1. Register 90% of incoming students through interactions during orientations and Welcome Week.
2. Have all of the Student Athletes register prior to an event and advertise it.
3. Receive a Voter Friendly Campus designation.
4. Incorporate Turbovote into our current efforts.

Education

5. Host two Civic Engagement nights each year.
6. Host at least one partnered event with the League of Women Voters each year.

7. Incorporate setting up a voting plan into classroom curriculum.
Engagement
8. Change the location of the on-campus polling location to a more accessible building.
9. Continue to add and maintain both our campus and community partners.
10. Maintain at least 60% student engagement throughout every election.

Strategy

Voter Registration

Clarion University of Pennsylvania has taken a three-pronged approach to registration; we expose students to opportunities to register in the classroom, on campus, and in the community. Various first-year oriented classes, and even upper level courses, offer bonus points to students who are registered to vote. Other classes offer opportunities to get registered in the classroom. In addition to class involvement, we also offer opportunities to register on campus. The Office of Student Conduct and Community Development advertises to students that they can stop in at any time during posted hours and register or apply for an absentee ballot. There are also various tabling series hosted throughout the semester where students can stop by the to get registered or apply for an absentee ballot. We try to keep these tables in central locations, such as the library or dining halls. On top of these methods, members of our coalition also attend various community hosted or co-hosted events to allow both students and community members the opportunity to register to vote or apply for absentee ballots. In the past, we have attended mock caucuses, film nights, and watch parties. Nonpartisan hosted watch parties allow students to gain a perspective of candidates and issues without feeling uncomfortable or ostracized by their peers.

Voter Education

We have a wide variety of methods to distribute information to students about voting, including face-to-face and indirect communication. We engage students face-to-face through tabling series and engagement nights. Both of these events allow students to discuss how to register and vote with their peers. We can also share various information on the history and importance of civic engagement through these events. We also reach out to students indirectly through posting informational flyers, sending mass email, and publishing articles on CU Connect and in the Clarion Call, the school newspaper. CU Connect is a university affiliated webpage where student organization and department offices can post news articles, advertise events, and maintain their various organizations and memberships.

Voter Engagement

To ensure that our students are not only registered, but involved, our coalition works alongside the university and campus partners to remove as many barriers as possible. On campus, we make sure to have flyers and signs up letting students know what they have to take to the polling centers. Clarion University of Pennsylvania is currently a polling place for on campus students. The student center at our off-campus apartments is an additional polling location. This ensures that students who are registered to vote in Clarion have readily accessible polling stations. For those who are voting in their home district, we stress the importance of a voting plan. We also make sure to have signs directing students to where they need to go to vote if they live on campus. If the students live off campus, the coalition and campus partners will provide rides to the off-campus students' polling places.

Available Resources

We work with a plethora of offices on campus, such as the Office of Student Conduct and Community Development, Resident Life Services, and the Office of Student Affairs. In addition to these offices, we have established several campus partners. With these connections, we are able to host various events. We also have CU Connect, a university webpage for students and staff, where we can share news articles and keep students updated on important and upcoming dates. CU Connect allows us to register and advertise our tabling events, track attendance at said events, and even receive reviews of our events from students. Zoom is another tool we use. We typically only use it when we cannot all meet in person. This way, even if we are working remotely, we can still host meetings.

Additional Resources

Currently, the CU Engaged Coalition lacks a budget and an official CU Connect page or email. The lack of email and CU Connect page are not that challenging, as our information is available on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Development page and the student worker for the aforementioned office uses their official email to conduct any coalition communication. The lack of a budget has also been resolved using the budget for the Office of Student Conduct and Community Development for the few things we need to purchase.

Challenges

The biggest challenge the CU Engaged Coalition currently faces is the number of people involved in the coalition. While we have a decent sized group, selecting a meeting time that works for everyone is incredibly difficult. We also have members who do not contribute regularly, but instead select only a handful of events to assist with. We have been working to resolve these issues. To be more accommodating with our meeting times, the co-chairs of the CU Engaged Coalition offer two different meeting dates and times to ensure they have the best chance of speaking to everyone. While this ensures that everyone is kept up to date, it does not always offer the best setting for large discussions, as the group is rarely all together at the same time. We are looking into hosting zoom meetings to increase our attendance. To address the members who do not regularly participate, we have opened up the meetings to anyone who is interested. Because of this, we have had a few more students join.

Tentative Calendar of Events

Spring 2020 Semester

- *January 14, 2020* – Debate Watch hosted by the Clarion University Young Democratic Socialists of America
- *January 15, 2020* – Attend Clarion University Young Democratic Socialists of America meeting to discuss the CU Engaged Coalition (who we are and what we do)
- *January 15, 2020* – Attend Clarion University College Republicans meeting to discuss the CU Engaged Coalition
- *January 16, 2020* – Attend Clarion University College Democrats meeting to discuss the CU Engaged Coalition
- *January 22, 2020* – CU Engaged Coalition Meeting
- *February 03, 2020* – Mock Iowa Caucus co-hosted by the Clarion University College Democrats and the Clarion County Democratic Party
- *February 05, 2020* – Education Tabling Series for promotion of primary elections with campus and community partners
- *February 11, 2020* – Education Tabling Series for promotion of primary elections with campus and community partners

- *February 11, 2020* – CU Engaged Coalition Meeting
- *February 15, 2020* – Western PA Student Voting Summit
- *February 19, 2020* – Education Tabling Series for promotion of primary elections with campus and community partners
- *February 25, 2020* – Education Tabling Series for promotion of primary elections with campus and community partners
- *March 10, 2020* – CU Engaged Coalition Meeting
- *March 11, 2020* – Film Night co-hosted with the League of Women Voters
- *March 25, 2020* – Education Tabling Series for promotion of primary elections with campus and community partners
- *April 13, 2020* – Last day to register to vote in the Primary Election
- *April 21, 2020* – Civic Engagement Night celebrating the centennial anniversary of Women’s suffrage
- *April 28, 2020* – Primary Election
- *April 29, 2020* – First day to register after the Primary Election

Fall 2020 Semester

- *September 17, 2020* – Constitution Day Education and Registration event
- *September 21, 2020* – Meeting with campus and community partners to prepare for National Voter Registration Day
- *September 22, 2020* – National Voter Registration Day Education and Registration event co-hosted with campus and community partners
- *October 19, 2020* – last day to register before the November election
- *October 27, 2020* – Last day to apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot
- *November 03, 2020* – General Election
- *November 04, 2020* – last day to register after the General Election

Undetermined Fall 2020 Dates

- Debate watch parties
- Registration and Education Tabling Series
- CU Engaged Coalition Meetings
- Civic Engagement Nights

Reporting

This plan will be shared with the coalition at the first meeting of every semester, alongside the NSLVE report. Our Action Plan and NSLVE data will also be shared with the campus community through a broad email announcement and posting it on our Office Student of Conduct and Community Development webpage to be referenced at any time by anyone. Where applicable, we will also utilize campus social media and newspapers to share updates and official news.

Evaluation

To see the effect of our civic engagement efforts, an evaluation process is necessary. The use of an evaluation would allow us to continue to improve our students’ engagement as well as tailor and improve upon any events we host. Evaluations will also help us advocate to make civic engagement a university-wide priority. We will use CU Connect to send out evaluations

following events hosted on campus. We will then be able to make the feedback available to the Coalition so that we can continue to improve our events.

The coalition will implement a two-pronged method – we will track the success of our efforts through both the NSLVE Report and our own tracking methods. We track the attendance at our events, we will also provide evaluations at events so that we can continue to use the most effective methods to educate and register students. At the end of the semester, we will compile all of the data and use the next NSLVE to evaluate how successful our efforts have been. Any events that were unsuccessful, or not as successful as the rest, will be adapted to encourage better participation and educational opportunity. We will share all of this information through the methods outlined above under the *Reporting* segment.

COVID-19

In the event that Clarion University of Pennsylvania were transition to remote courses to prevent the spread, in either Spring semester or Fall semester 2020, the CU Engaged Coalition will proceed with the following.

Meetings

The CU Engaged Coalition will not be conducting any face-to-face meetings. Any contact will be done over email or zoom, as needed. Also, we will continue to upload a weekly article to CU Connect.

Tabling

All scheduled tabling events will be cancelled until further notice. The coalition will instead rely upon its social media presence to direct students to online voter registration websites such as TurboVote and vote411.org. We will also be offering zoom “office hours” where students can join to ask any question regarding registration and other voting related topics.

Events

In the event that Clarion University moves to a virtual campus, all events will likely be cancelled. The Coalition will then shift our main events to an online platform.

Constitution Day

In the morning, we will send out an ALL_SERV email with information about Constitution Day, such as why we celebrate it, and a link to a citizenship test. Throughout the day, RUOs and RSOs across campus will share Constitution Facts on their social media accounts. We will send out a list of facts for them to choose from on Monday, September 14, and a reminder email on Wednesday, September 16. The Office of Student Conduct and Community Development will post an article on their CU Connect Page. Rather than the tabling we originally had planned, we will offer a zoom “office hour.” We will conduct our Essay Contest as originally planned. In the evening, from 5-7, we will hold a Speaker Event on zoom. The topic will be “Popular Vote vs. Electoral College.” It will start with a brief presentation and transition into a panel discussion. The evening will conclude with the announcement of the essay contest winners.

National Voter Registration Day

In the morning on September 22, an ALL_SERV email will be sent out with links where students can register to vote and apply for mail-in ballots. RUOs and RSOs across campus will also share the links to register to vote on their social media pages. Rather than the tabling we originally had planned, we will offer a zoom “office hour.”

Last Day to Register

The CU Engaged Coalition will use social media all day to post reminders. RUOs and RSOs across campus will also share the links to register to vote on their social media pages. We will also be offering zoom “office hours” where students can join to ask any question regarding registration and other voting related topics.

Last Day to Apply for Absentee

Similar to our strategy for the last day to register, we will use social media all day to post reminders. RUOs and RSOs across campus will also share the links to apply for a mail-in ballot on their social media pages. We will also be offering zoom “office hours” where students can join to ask any question regarding registration and other voting related topics.

Registration and Education Efforts

While all face-to-face registration efforts will cease, that does not mean the coalition will stop all together. We will utilize our social media to continue to alert students to election dates and how to register to vote. In addition to our social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, we will rely heavily on CU Connect to continue to disperse information to students.