



# Democratic Engagement Action Plan 2020



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## Executive Summary

This Democratic Engagement Action Plan has been created by Tia Lammert Miller, Student Development Coordinator, to establish our first roadmap in beginning to intentionally think about the ways in which we work to help our students become civically engaged and aware in their communities. While prior efforts have been made to encourage voter registration by staff and civic learning through presentations and discussions by faculty this is a particularly important time with the upcoming 2020 general election and the obstacles that COVID-19 has created on college campuses for us work twice as hard to insure that our students are registered, prepared and showing up at the polls. This means we will need to work to offer opportunities for our students to develop an increased understanding of civic literacy.

*Columbia State's 2015 -2025 Strategic Plan reflects the emphasis on the importance of student success with it falling as the first of the college goals. "Student success at Columbia State is defined as the completion of educational, professional, and personal goals resulting from increased knowledge and skills. Success encourages lifelong learning, promotes responsible citizenship, and enhances the quality of life for self and others."*

The implementation of the programs and activities offered through this initiative will be held at all 5 of our campuses located in Columbia, Williamson, Lawrence, Lewisburg, and Clifton.

The work from this plan will begin in the summer of 2020 and continue through December of 2021.

## Leadership

Columbia State's democratic engagement efforts will be led by Tia Lammert Miller, Student Development Coordinator with the support of the Student Engagement Department.

This will include the coordinating of events, drives and activities surrounding voter education and registration held at all 5 of Columbia State Community College's campuses. All efforts will be made to collaborate with community partners, local election commissions, as well as key faculty and staff members to support programming around civic learning and democratic engagement. Community partnering with the County Election Commissions in the 9 counties of our service area will be essential to maximize our reach to students. Involvement as a member of the Tennessee Campus Democracy Network will also be a benefit to the lead.

Student participation is essential for these efforts to be successful and therefore students from the Student Government Association (SGA), Presidents Leadership Society (PLS), and the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature (TISL) will be considered intricate members in supporting the execution of the engagement plan.

During the summer of 2020 the lead will seek out faculty, staff and students interested in serving on the team; ensuring that they represent a wide range of interests. This newly formed group will begin meeting on a monthly basis in fall 2020 to discuss and plan for the distribution of information, resources, and provide education needed to ensure the success of the action plan.

## Commitment

Columbia State Community College vision is to be the “1st Choice” for those seeking post-secondary learning and in order to position themselves to do this have committed to goals and a mission that has student success at its center.

*The mission of Columbia State Community College is to nurture success and positively changes lives through teaching, learning, and service. We are committed to ... the core values of excellence, learning, success, integrity, access, leadership, responsibility, diversity, service, and community. These values guide and direct Columbia State as we pursue our vision.*

### *College Goals*

1. *Student Success*

*Columbia State will increase the number of citizens with diplomas, certificates, and degrees in our nine-county service area.*

2. *Quality*

*Columbia State will provide and maintain high-quality academic programs, faculty, staff, services, and facilities.*

3. *Enrollment*

*Columbia State will increase the number and diversity of students served.*

4. *Resourcefulness*

*Columbia State will work to identify and enhance alternate revenue sources and continue to efficiently use all available resources.*

5. *Community*

*Columbia State will be an active participant in the development and growth of the service area.*

Columbia State is extremely committed to the nine service areas that it serves in Middle Tennessee and ensuring that graduates of Columbia State succeed in the classroom and in their communities. Being active civically engaged members of these communities goes hand in hand with this commitment.

## Goals

In order to help support and encourage students to shift to a higher level of democratic engagement it is essential to ensure that civic and political engagement are spotlighted and encouraged not only during big elections seasons but to be a year-round focus. However, we feel that given the current climate and the timeliness of the upcoming elections cycle that for Columbia State to focus its short term goals on voter registrations and education and long term goals on

### **Short Tem Goals – Voter Registration and Education**

*Focusing on increasing our voter registration and voting rates; while also working to raise the level of confidence our students have when heading to the polls through co-curricular voter education initiatives.*

- Goal of increasing our registration rate for 2020 by 10% from 60.3% in 2016 Presidential Elections.
- Goal of increasing our voting rate in 2020 by 10% from 46.1% in 2016 Presidential Elections.

### **Long Term Goals – Civic Learning**

*To encourage our students to become contributing and engaged members of their communities.*

- To explore developing and including a voter education component into the college's College Success Class for Fall 2021.  
*Spring 2021*
- Host an event with the Secretary of State to speak with students.  
*Fall 2021 given current COVID-19 restrictions around groups*
- Look into policies that surround whether election dates and deadlines could be included on the academic/college calendar.  
*Spring 2021*
- Creation of Democracy Days that will include potential include poster presentations, candidates, review of ballot initiatives and host mock voting opportunities.  
*Fall 2021*

## Strategy

To meet the results of the short term goals above, we have created a plan of action. The Student Development Coordinator will take the lead on planning and coordinating events working with college and community members as appropriate.

### Actions

- Conduct registration drives each semester at all five our campuses. While also working in collaboration with county election commissions to support these efforts. Student volunteers from the President's Leadership Society and Student Government Association will continue to be utilized to assist in recruiting their fellow students. After completing registrations all students will be given a "What Next" Handout to ensure that they receive their Voter Registration Card.

*Fall 2019*

*Columbia campus – (1) drive held by Student Engagement*

*Williamson campus – (2) drives held, 1 by Student Engagement and 1 by the Williamson County Election Commission.*

*Spring 2020*

*Drive dates were planned for both the Columbia and Williamson campus however they had to be cancelled as a result of COVID-19. The Columbia campus drive was going to be held in collaboration with Women's History events sponsored by the Office of Access & Diversity.*

- Voter registration information will be incorporated into online Orientation to begin establishing Columbia State support and efforts towards voter education.

*Summer 2020*

- To ensure that students have all the information needed on election day during the two weeks leading up to the November 3<sup>rd</sup> election we will distribute handouts per campus/county that includes information with polling locations, acceptable IDs, and other essential information. We will also encourage students via social media messaging to download the GoVoteTN app on their phones that provides polling locations, candidate lists, and more.

*Fall 2020*

- To help increase students level of comfortability heading to the polls on Election Day we will hold sessions on "Do you know what's on the ballot?" providing students with sample ballots so that they know what to expect in voting booths. We will also provide them with options to research candidates through recommendations to bi-partisan websites that break down the issues they care about.

*Fall 2020*

- We will make plans to partner with any faculty sponsored lectures that have a civic or democratic lens, such as Constitution Day, to host voter registrations drives at them.

*Fall 2020 and Spring 2021*

- Social Media Takeovers on National Voter Registration Day, September 22<sup>nd</sup> for students to share “why they think voting is important” and on Election Day to take selfies at the poles and with their “I voted” stickers.

*Fall 2020*



## Landscape

Civic learning and democratic engagement initiatives are highly encouraged and supported by administration; becoming a member of the ALL IN community came from a suggestion by our college President. However, there is not a dedicated staff member at Columbia State working on civic engagement activities and there are no active student organizations that have a mission of educating around democratic engagement. This can be a challenge when trying to plan larger-scale projects for the staff member who coordinates the programming. An added layer to this challenge is the physical location of the 5 campuses being spread so far across southern Middle Tennessee; travel to provide programs at more than 2 campuses in a day can be a challenge to hit the busy times at the campuses. The positive to this though is that the Site Coordinators at the Southern campuses and the Student Services Coordinator at the Williamson campus are always willing to lend a hand with programming. However, these staff members all also wear many hats on their campuses so it can be a lot to manage particularly at the start of semesters. In addition to these staff, there are several student members of SGA and PLS that have been willing to help out with previous Voter Registration events. Additionally, a student who participated in the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature (TISL) in Fall 2019 has shown a strong interest in helping to support our initiatives.

When reviewing and comparing the data provided to us through the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) Campus Reports we find that across the board engagement among Columbia State students during the presidential elections in 2016 was much higher in comparison to that of during the midterm elections in 2018, which is in line with the voting rate for all institutions. The NSLVE data for 2018 shows a voter turnout rate of only 58.4 percent of 65.8 percent of students registered; a difference of 7.4. The 2016 data shows a similar trend of a difference of 14.2 between the registration rate and voting rate. This is important information that was considered in setting our goals and strategies; the need to focus on the reason why students are registering to vote, but not showing up at the polls. Is it a fear of not knowing what to expect once they are there or are they having difficulties even getting to the polls on Election Day. The increased programming and support we offer in that critical 2 weeks prior to the general election will hopefully combat this.

Midterm Election Years					
Year	Eligible Columbia State Student Voters	Number of students who registered	Registration Rate	Voting Rate of Registered Students	Overall Voting Rate of Students
2014	4,190	2,534	65.8%	33.2%	20.1%
2018	4,898	3,222	60.5%	58.4%	38.4%
Change	+708	+688	+5.3%	+25.2%	+18.3%

Source - NSLVE Campus Report for Columbia State Community College

In 2018 Columbia State's overall voting rate of students fell to -0.7% below that of the 39.1% rate for all higher education institutions (two-year, private and public) in 2018 was 39.1%.

Presidential Election Years					
Year	Eligible Columbia State Student Voters	Number of students who registered	Registration Rate	Voting Rate of Registered Students	Overall Voting Rate of Students
2012	4,566	3,174	69.5%	70.1%	48.7%
2016	4,510	2,719	60.3%	76.4%	46.1%
Change	-56	+455	-9.2%	+6.3%	-2.70%

Source - NSLVE Campus Report for Columbia State Community College

In 2016 Columbia State's overall voting rate of students fell to -4.5% below that of the 50.6% rate for all higher education institutions (two-year, private and public) in 2018 was 39.1%.

## Reporting

This plan will be shared with all members of the democratic engagement team, members of the Student Engagement Department, any other interested stakeholders, and shared with upper administration. We will also share this plan and our NSLVE Report on our Campus Life page. In addition, it will be shared externally with the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge.

Any accomplishments or highlights will be forward to the Communications Department to be released at their discretion through official college news outlets and college social media accounts.

## Evaluation

This is a living document that will need to be re-evaluated on a yearly bases by the author to assess what is working, what is not, and to makes changes. Being our first year submitting a plan we are hopefully that we will be able to meet or exceed our short-term goals going into an important election year. We know that there will be a need to be a great sense of flexibility in how we deliver many of our programming efforts given the COVID-19 environment so what works this year may need to be altered for the future.

The Student Engagement Department collects data for all sponsored programs so we will be able to use that data to reflect on in terms of student turn out at on campus events and in person voter registrations completed. Our primary evaluation method for voting and registration rates and comparisons to other intuitions will come from the NSLVE 2020 data. The outcomes from the goals of the plan will be included in annual departmental reports.