



Campus Democratic Engagement Action Plan

All IN Campus Democracy Challenge 2020

Executive Summary

The action plan was developed by core members of the Center for Campus Life team: Andrea Prins, Kassy Clark and Natalie Wagner. Started in January 2020, the plan was formulated to educate, support and give resources to our students to allow them a more readily available avenue and understanding for voting and civic engagement. Although the primary work will be delivered through in-person modules at the main campus of Davenport University where both athletics and housing are present (W.A. Lettinga), marketing and advertisement materials will be sent to other main campus locations including Lansing, Midland, Warren, and Holland.

The Center for Campus Life will lead the initiative and will partner closely with other helpful functional areas of the University to be successful including Athletics, the Mail and Copy Center, Marketing and Communications, DU Bookstore, Advising, and faculty.

Davenport University wanted to participate in the All IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2020 to assist in getting students to vote and allow their voices to be heard for the upcoming presidential election. We learned from the 2016 presidential election how many of our students were not fully aware, present, or able to vote. We also learned that a concerning amount of students didn't see the value in voting or showed little interest in regards to the topic when we reached out. If students *did* participate in voting, many of them were veteran students who already knew what to do or students that had misinformed data or unclear information. It was a wake up call to our office. We found it a part of our duty as Student Affairs professionals to work harder and to reach more students for the 2020 election. We have been working towards that goal with a small interdepartmental team mentioned above, until we found the All IN Challenge and committed to reach further.

Leadership

The core of our leadership team will be from the Student Affairs department. Kassy Clark (Student Access), Andrea Prins (Student Conduct and Care), and Natalie Wagner (Student Life) will be leading the charge for engaging student voters on behalf of the Center for Campus Life. Housing and Residence Life will also be included as a significant partner through their Residence Life Coordinators and student Resident Assistants in each building(s). Student Life will also through their Registered Student Organizations including Student Government.

Academics will be represented through a partnership with the Director of First Year Experience, Dr. Jodi Hicks, our Advising department, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion department team members, and our University Academic Services Director, Kriss Ferluga. As able, Athletics will partner with us to engage student voters through their Student Athletic Activities Board meetings and coaches meetings.

Additional staff will play a role in our marketing, communication, and engagement with students including: Javontae Ford (Student Life – Marketing/Programming), Justine Shelton (Student Life – RSO / Leadership Development), Heather Wieber (University Compliance), Janessa Stam (Mail Center), Jenny Thurber (Advising – Lansing Campus), Greg Foster (Campus Director – Holland), and Peal Beasley (Campus Director – Warren). Kassy Clark and Natalie Wagner will be coordinating the partnerships and direction to said departments.

Students will be recruited by Andrea Prins to act as advocates, volunteers, and liaisons of important information regarding voting education and resources. The majority of these connections will take place upon start of the fall semester as the winter semester was cut short due to COVID-19. The students recruited to help in our mission will be in addition to our 27 Resident Assistants and our 7 Center for Campus Life Student Employees. Two students are currently interested in assisting us.

The Center for Campus Life had been meeting quarterly to designate the plan for engaging with students. During the Winter 2020 semester after learning about the All IN Challenge, meetings went monthly. After COVID-19 caused our campus to close, we continued meeting virtually with hopes that summer will solidify our plans and fall will be back on campus to continue engaging with the students in-person. During the fall, the group will meet as needed.

Commitment

This is an area that needs focus to develop further. There is a lack of written or public commitment from our departments or the institution to create civic engagement at this time. There is a public link on the Consumer Right to Know page within Financial Aid Compliance which outlines Constitution Day, but sadly, that may be the only outward messaging we currently have on the website.

Before the All IN Challenge, commitment to educate students on this topic fell solely to Student Affairs. Civic engagement or voter education has not been a key area of focus for any individual staff member or student group. Occasionally a student who was passionate about an area of politics would begin a student group however, we have not seen any of those groups live past one academic year. Housing and Residence Life in conjunction with Student Life have programs and marketing which promote democratic engagement, voter education, political learning opportunities etc., but nothing is in public viewing form. Posters, social media and communication internally are currently methods used for such programming initiatives.

With the recent partnership to the All In Campus Democracy Challenge, Davenport has identified our new commitment to educating students about voter engagement. Student Affairs is already working to add a voter engagement area on website and utilize this Action Plan as the foundation for the future commitment to civic learning and engagement of our community. This first year will be a learning year with many ah-ha moments for the future. Marketing will identify further areas of spotlight which voter engagement or civic learning opportunities can be posted within the guidelines of our marketing and communication department. Other campus partners, upon joining the team, will assist in communicating the commitment to their specific areas. These steps already are more than we have had in recent history and a slow, but steady start to a better civic engaged student body.

Landscape

We find that one barrier for our traditional age students is lack of interest in civic engagement. Educating students on registering to vote has been met with an absence of enthusiasm. The institution has many students who are within driving distance of their home polling location therefore, many will travel home to vote. Typically when that is the case, students defer to their parents for voting knowledge and education instead of campus resources. If students are not traveling home to vote, many students assume the absentee process will come to them OR not regard their vote as not important enough to pursue further steps.

Every few years, we have a small group of passionate students and a Registered Student Organization might be created, but it typically fizzles. Student Affairs noticed this trend and began educating students during the freshman transitional program, Panther Prowl, about the Social Change model which encompasses 7 principles, 2 with regard to civic learning: Controversy with Civility and Citizenship. We believe during important presidential election years, faculty are having their own classroom conversations about the importance of voting and have found some to give extra credit if students do. However, there is no common goal from faculty to engage with students about civic responsibility and/or voter education.

In order to be successful in maximizing student voters, we need partners across the University to be thinking about civic engagement and voter education. Marketing, media, easy conversation starters, educated staff and faculty and student guides will assist us in gaining momentum for the first year. With hopes to grow the effort in the years to come, time and passionate support from others beyond the Center for Campus Life will need to be made for the topic.

Goals

For comparative data, our goal for the Voter Celebration would be to exceed 150 participations showing proof of voting (picture, I Voted sticker, Absentee mailing location etc.) at the W.A. Lettinga Campus.

For baseline data, Davenport University would like to ensure 50% of its student population is registered to vote by the 2020 Presidential election across all campus locations.

By 2022, Davenport University would like to partnership with one outside local election official to learn, promote, and continue education efforts of the working group and students.

By 2024, Davenport University would like to have civic engagement related topics present in all freshman seminar programs or courses specifically at the W.A. Lettinga campus, but highly encouraged at all other campuses.

Strategy

The first item of business is to educate, inform, and request assistance from our identified internal campus partners of the All IN Challenge, as well as the commitment by the University to ensure civic learning and voter participation are forefront in the minds of our staff and faculty. This will take place through Davenport partnership meetings initiated via Natalie Wagner, Kassy Clark, and Andrea Prins during summer 2020. Marketing efforts on social media regarding voter education, polls about civic engagement or understanding, and question/answer sessions with students will be ongoing throughout the summer.

Upon educating and gaining buy-in with campus partners, we will further dive into implementation of the Action Plan. We are anticipating that key stakeholders will also enhance our current outline to have a comprehensive approach within many departments across the University campus. Currently, some key points of action include:

During Orientation: We will have a voter registration table where students can learn how to register to vote or talk through their plan to vote with their families present.

During Housing and Residence Life Move-In: Voter resource packets will be available at a table where students can learn about registering to vote or talk through voting plans with family.

During freshman transitional programming, Panther Prowl: Students will engage in their small group settings about controversy with civility, citizenship, voter responsibility and education etc.

During the months leading up to the election: A voter resource table will be present in the main academic building twice a month, and be present at Pantherpalooza, to engage students about the voter registration process as well as introduce non-partisan candidate guides. A Voter Resource Packet was created and will be handed out to students at these booths.

The Mobile Secretary of State will be on campus to assist students in the registration process or change or address process if needed on September 11, 2020. Marketing and Communications to do a news clip promoting event.

Blackboard will have a voter resource link routing students to the Student Affairs Civic Engagement page (including the Voter Resource Packet), and post voter registration deadline reminders. These will go to students at all campuses.

Housing and Residence Life will have voter based programming initiatives driven by the Resident Assistants to engage with their residents about the voter process and potential barriers they may face. They will also communicate voter registration deadlines to students through the Weekly Newsletter to residents.

The DU Bookstore will utilize their wall space for advertising and communication of voter registration deadlines. They will also have hardcopies of the Voter Resource Packet available.

The Mail and Copy Center will provide envelopes and stamps for mailed voter registrations. They will also provide hardcopies of the Voter Resource Packet.

The Marketing and Communications team will post social media blurbs and news pieces in regards to civic engagement and voter resources in their weekly newsletter. These will go to all campuses.

The Center for Campus Life will celebrate students who voted by proudly displaying their “I Voted” sticker with cookies on election day. Similar celebrations will occur at the other campuses as able.

Reporting

This plan will be shared with internal campus partners while prepping for the return to campus in Fall 2020. Natalie Wagner, Kassy Clark, and Andrea Prins will have one-on-one meetings with individual partners for plan outline, education, and support or buy in during the summer 2020. Connection with Institutional Research to plan for reporting and gathering data will occur. As we are currently operating in a remote climate, this will all be done via email and virtual meetings.

Once arriving back to campus in August 2020, the large group will meet and ensure understanding of plan and next steps are in place for fall semester. Adjustments will be made as needed.

Upon receiving the NSLVE report for the first time, the group will meet again to re-evaluate our Action Plan to determine areas of focus for future education efforts on campus. Adjustments will be made and perhaps partnerships will be added or removed. Goals and strategies will be created for the next year based on the report.

None of this data or collected information will be made public.

Evaluation

Evaluation will begin by comparative data. Our limited actions in the past in regards to voter engagement have low numbers of student attendance, excluding Pantherpalooza. Student attendance will be a tool to inform us of student communication and education surrounding the topic of voter engagement. These data collection points will be at all our information tabling events, those who opened our voter engagement documentation, who attended a program in regards to democracy topics, picked up a Voter Resource Packet, and/or stopped in the Center for Campus Life for increased knowledge or discussion. Center for Campus Life will maintain and report such numbers and findings at the end of 2020.

Since we are starting fresh, indicators of success will serve as a baseline as we continue to learn and grow in this area of focus. As we gain momentum and refine our action plan for the future, Institutional Research can further assist our evaluation efforts.