

**Eckerd College Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement and
Voting Rates for the 2018 Midterm election and beyond
May 30th, 2018**

Coalition Members

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The mission of Eckerd College is to provide excellent, innovative undergraduate liberal arts education and lifelong learning programs in the unique Florida environment, within the context of a covenant relationship with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In providing an innovative undergraduate liberal arts education, Eckerd College strives to cultivate an appreciation for civic-engagement and service to our community. The act of voting is foundational and exemplifies Eckerd College commitment to an education which informs students throughout their lives.

Coalition

The Eckerd Votes Coalition was formed with the understanding that it would be representative of the Eckerd Community. Invitation was extended to faculty, staff, student clubs, student government executives, and others. The purpose of the coalition is to create, approve, and implement a voter action plan to increase voter registration, education, and participation.

2016 Efforts

The Eckerd Votes Coalition was not organized for the 2016 elections but the Vice President of Academic Affairs, student Claire Russell, led the charge and implemented programming leading up to the election. Campus Activities partnered with the Eckerd College Organization of Students (ECOS), to provide a variety of programs designed to create awareness and promotion of the 2016 presidential election. Events included watch parties for both the Republican and Democratic Conventions, presidential candidates' debate watch parties, a presentation by the Women's League of Voters on the history of voting, and an election day gathering in Triton's Pub. In addition, Campus Activities provided shuttles to the polls throughout the day of the election. The impact of these efforts can be seen in the 5.8% increase in the registration rate from 76.7% (2012) to 82.6% (2016). Likewise while the voting rate of registered students fell by 2.1%, the overall voting rate increased 1.7% to 46.7% in the 2016 Presidential Elections. Despite these general improvements, Eckerd's voting rate in 2016 was still 3.7% below the average for all institutions and 4.8% below the average for only private institutions. Our 2016 efforts confirm that Eckerd is on the right track, but that there is still much work to be done.

2018 Action Plan

For the 2018 midterm elections, we took into account the data from the last non-presidential election cycle to set our goals:

- Increase registration rate from 65.2% to 75.2%
- Increase voting rate of registered students from 30% to 40%
- Increase voting rate from 19.6% to 29.6%

The action plan will begin implementation during Autumn Term 2018 in preparation for the primaries and then continue through the general election in November.

Long Term Goals

Eckerd College's long-term goal is to deliver an excellent and innovative undergraduate education which would not be complete without supporting students to be civically engaged citizens. In the next ten years we hope to:

- Increase voter turnout/participation to 70% by 2028 (for Presidential Election Years)

Strategy

The strategy proposed will address commitments in three categories: voter registration, voter education, and voter participation for Fall 2018.

Voter Registration

- Voter Registration During Autumn Term
 - Student Volunteers will visit human experience classrooms during Autumn Term to encourage first-year students to register to vote in Florida. Through affiliation with a third-party organization like the League of Women's Voters, Student volunteers can provide forms to be completed then and can submit them for students
 - Host a stamped event where students can register to vote and learn about the upcoming elections
- Residential Advisors Voter Registration Events
 - During Training, Residential Advisors (RAs) will receive education about how to register voters by a third-party organization.
 - Incentives will be provided to host dorm events (passive, dorm, or complex) during which students can register to vote, learn about the upcoming election and the issues involved, and receive non-partisan educational materials.
- National Voter Registration Day
 - On September 25th, coalition members will host an event to register as many students as possible in Florida. We may partner with an organization like Rock The Vote.
- Debate Watch Parties
 - We will provide registration materials and educational materials at any debate watch parties before October 9th, 2018. This is the last day to register to vote for the general election in Florida.
- Faculty Voter Registration Training and Certification

- Offer certification (an hour long training and commitment to having voter registration/education documents in office) such that faculty can be resources for students who have questions about voter registration. By being supplied with voter registration forms (they can give these out for students to mail in themselves) and non-partisan educational materials, they can encourage students to register during mentor meetings and provide materials to do so. Faculty who become certified will be given a sticker made in the EC Makerspace which they can place on their office window.
- Eckerd College Organization of Students (ECOS) Institutionalization
 - The retiring and newly appointed (Fall 2018-Spring 2019) Executive Board of ECOS has been very supportive of Get Out the Vote registration and education efforts. As ECOS has an important role in the engaging the student population, the following item has been proposed:
 - Amendment of the ECOS constitution to assign the responsibility of engaging students during election cycles to the Vice President of Student Engagement and their board. This will assure student engagement in the absence of the Eckerd Votes Coalition or civically-engaged student clubs.

Voter Education

- Debate Watch Parties
 - We will host debate watch parties around campus for both parties during their primaries as well as during the general race. We will work with RAs to facilitate these events in dorm lounges
- Faculty Inclusion of Voting Dates in Syllabi
 - Whether choosing to be certified or not, we will ask faculty to include important voting dates in their syllabi (and on Moodle) . These include October 9th, the last day to be registered, and November 6th, the day of the general election. Most classes have formal syllabi which students often reference.
- Server-List Mass Emails
 - Mass email sent to the student list with links to register to vote, learn more about the candidates and issues, and upcoming events.
- Real Talk & Other Forums
 - Work with Topaz Hooper and the Office of Multicultural Affairs to host a Real Talk forum to discuss candidates and issues
 - Work with Pi Sigma Alpha (Alpha Eta Alpha Chapter) to host a forum for discussing candidate issues and stances (non-partisan) and simulate polling locations and ballots

Voter Participation

- Social Media
 - By organizing social media campaigns that address important communities at Eckerd like those involved in the Marine Science program (How does my vote count? By major?) we hope to engage those whose studies do not obviously overlap with politics and civic-engagement. Updates in the Class Facebook pages about important deadlines and pertinent information, photo-petitions (Selfies with signs like “I’m voting what about you?”), voting memes, and other types of communication will keep voting lively and fun across many different social media platforms.
- Early Voting Events
 - Organize events where groups of students can go to early vote, transportation provided through Campus vans or student carpools, due to the lengthy nature of the Florida 2018 midterm ballot.
- Election Results Watch Party
 - A watch party will be hosted in the Triton Pub where the community can gather to view the televised proceedings of the election.
- Election Day Events
 - The coalition plans on hosting an event like the Parade to the Polls to promote voting as a community event
 - Transportation will be provided by Campus Vans starting at 7 am and going until 7 pm on November 6th.

Evaluation

In the Summer 2019, Eckerd College will receive its NSLVE report which will provide the statistics necessary to evaluating overall progress and impact of the Coalition’s work. Given the long-term nature of this metric, a report will also be prepared after the November 6th elections which will assess the implementation of the action plan and propose how the Coalition can improve and continue its work in the absence of a pressing election.