

Eckerd College  
Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan

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## **Section I: Executive Summary**

**Basic Facts about Eckerd:** Eckerd College is a small, liberal arts college in St. Petersburg, Florida that is home to approximately 2,000 students who largely come from out of state.

**The People:** The majority of students who attend Eckerd are white, female, and come from out of state, according to [the Eckerd College Common Data Set](#). According to the United States Department of Education, the top five majors at Eckerd College are Environmental Studies, Biology, Marine Science, Psychology, and Business. The students at Eckerd College have an online presence that suggests a culture of activism but there is a disconnect between the intention to do activist work and actually being involved with the activist groups on campus such as; Campus Vote Project, Florida PIRG Students, Afro-American Society, and Artists for Impact.

**Eckerd Leadership:** The College's strategic plan developed under President Damián Fernández's leadership, [Onward: Strategy in Action, Eckerd College 2021-2026](#), has an implementation timeline of 2021-2026 and has four main pillars that aim to increase engagement and inclusion on campus while maintaining the Eckerd image of an out-of-the-box campus with innovative and creative students.

### **Pillar One: Eckerd at the Edges: Innovation in the Liberal Arts for Our Times**

By developing an interdisciplinary approach to a Liberal Arts education, Eckerd College students will have the opportunity to gain a holistic perspective on complex issues within society. Students will also be encouraged to foster an inclusive and intercultural mindset as they become leaders in their fields. Faculty will also be encouraged to expand their research and foster a more diverse and holistic approach to their fieldwork.

### **Pillar Two: The City as Classroom, the Campus as Laboratory**

Increasing engagement between Eckerd College and the local St. Petersburg community to promote sustainability, economic development, environmental justice, social justice, and access to education. A microgrant program for students and funding for updating the necessary facilities on campus will be established in order to enable active participation by students and faculty.

### **Pillar Three: Inclusive Excellence: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)**

Creating a community where DEIB is the accepted norm through the recruitment and retention of a diverse staff and student body, DEIB-focused academic programming and staff training, and looking at the functioning of all institutions through an equitable lens.

### **Pillar Four: A Sustainable Future: Pursuing Resilience**

Pursuing environmental sustainability and financial resilience through strategic planning and implementation.

**Student Leadership:** The main student groups on campus include the student government known as the Eckerd College Organization of Students (ECOS); the longest-running activism group on campus, Afro American Society; Palmetto Productions, which is responsible for hosting a large number of events throughout the school year; and Florida PIRG Students. ECOS currently is working on issues related to

equity for disabled students on campus and environmental issues through the ECOS Environmental Responsibility Council. Afro-American Society focuses its efforts on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for students of color on campus. And Florida PIRG Students work on a variety of public interest campaigns such as the New Voters Project, the 100% Renewable Energy Campaign, the Zero Hunger Campaign, and the Zero Waste Campaign.

**Voter Engagement and Civic Engagement:** Organized civic engagement efforts picked up in 2018 when a group of students began to help their fellow students register to vote and to turn out to vote in the 2018 midterm elections. A major challenge to overcome has been that voter registration efforts have largely been conducted by one organization, Florida PIRG Students, which leads to a high likelihood of burnout among their volunteers and interns during the election cycle. This challenge can be addressed through initiatives to involve additional student groups in voter registration and turn-out efforts and by focusing on Pillar Two of ONWARD, the College's strategic plan, which has a focus on the College's engagement with the Tampa Bay community. The pillars referenced above show that there is a commitment on the part of the College to move beyond what is sometimes described as the "Eckerd bubble," and this includes efforts to encourage students to vote so that communities (including the St. Petersburg community) will be benefitted.

## **Section II: Purpose & Mission**

This action plan is meant to be a blueprint to direct year-round, nonpartisan civic engagement efforts that will increase and encourage voter registration and participation among Eckerd College students. The goals for this action plan are:

- 1) To establish a coalition of students, faculty, and administrators.
- 2) To institutionalize voter registration efforts by adding signatures to student ID cards, making them a valid form of identification at the polls,
- 3) To continue successful voter registration drives during the first-year Autumn Term, Fall, and Spring semesters,
- 4) To improve students' understanding of civic engagement and participation through educational events and constructive dialogue.

## **Section III: Leadership/Coalition**

### **State of the coalition and how different entities can be involved**

A coalition is currently being formed by the Florida PIRG Students' New Voters Project under the guidance of student leader Rebecca Simard. Meetings to confirm participation are still ongoing but Campus Vote Project, and ECOS have agreed to be a part of the coalition. Afro-American Society (AAS) has chosen to not commit to the coalition in order to maintain a sole focus on their work within the areas of DEIB.

- What role does PIRG have/what role can PIRG have?
  - PIRG has the most experience with trained activism on campus and is committed to sharing that knowledge and using their experience to lead the formation of a civic engagement coalition.
- What role does CVP have/what role can CVP have?
  - CVP will continue to work primarily on institutionalization through collaboration with faculty and administrators.
- What role does ECOS have/what role can ECOS have?

- Filling the newly established position of Civic Engagement Coordinator within ECOS and using this position to legitimize civic engagement efforts on campus through the direct involvement of the student government.
- What role do faculty and administrators have?
  - Dean Annarelli is overseeing the Voter Friendly Campus designation process and, along with President Fernández, is wholly supportive of civic engagement efforts on campus. Faculty and administrators can help by collaborating with plans on institutionalization and by encouraging their colleagues and students to vote wherever they are currently registered.

**Current Contacts:**

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**Section IV: Landscape**

- **NSLVE**
  - **Quick Summary**
    - From 2018 to 2020, the registration rate increased by 5.6% from 87% to 92%
    - The largest gap in participation is seen between age groups, 1st year students in 2020 turned out over 10% less than other classes
  - **Key Numerical Takeaways from NSVLE Reports**
    - Registration Rate - % of Eligible Students Registered to Vote
      - 2018 - 87.3%
      - 2020 - 92.9%
    - Voting Rate - % of Eligible Students That Can Vote That Voted
      - 2018 - 49.7%
      - 2020 - 76.8%
    - Other Takeaways
      - 2020 - 1st Year turnout was 64%. This is compared to 75% of 2nd Year and 79% of Upper-Level Students
      - Business/Business Administration majors have the lowest turnout consistently from 2018 to 2020
- **Internal Barriers**
  - There is no formal coalition
  - There is no assigned staff member on campus to oversee civic engagement efforts; it is all student-led

- **External Barriers**
  - In the state of Florida, there have been consistent attacks on voting rights with the passage of SB90 and SB524
    - [This document summarizes how the two bills will impact Florida voters](#)
  - Partisan Redistricting in Florida
    - The Princeton Gerrymandering Project has awarded the [State Senate Map](#) the grade of 'F' and has awarded the [Congressional Map](#) the grade of 'F' as well

## **Section V: Goals, Strategies, & Initiatives**

- **Voter Registration**
  - **First Year Engagement - Autumn Term (AT)**
    - Autumn Term is a requirement for all 1st year students to attend. 1st year students at Eckerd move on to campus 1 month before all other students to take a single course, to complete various cocurricular orientation activities, to get to know faculty and staff on campus, and to start engaging in general Eckerd life.
    - **Identify creative ways to reach 1st year students to help them register to vote (if they choose to) and provide information on how to be engaged on campus, such as:**
      - Working closely with John Sullivan and Fred Sabota to table during Move-In Day. During this time, we could (1) help students change their address to Eckerd (2) hand out materials regarding important voter registration/turnout deadlines (3) hand out materials about big events on campus - like National Voter Registration Day, Vote Early Day, etc.
      - Email Autumn Term faculty to get approval to make 2-3 minute announcements. Since 2018, students from PIRG and ECOS have made presentations in AT classes to help register students to vote and share important election information.
      - During AT, students have to earn a certain number of attendance "swipes." Students get swipes for attending a variety of events. **Students are already able to get a swipe for registering to vote.** We need to identify the most popular AT events (3-5) and get approval to table at them.
  - **Fall & Spring registration drives**
    - Similar to making announcements in AT classes, we will email faculty members across all disciplines to ask for approval to make 2-3 minute class announcements. During this time, we can (1) hand out physical voter registration forms and/or (2) share general information about voting on campus.
    - **Plan and execute all National Voting Holidays** including Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day (NVRD), Vote Early Day, and Voter Education Week.
  - **Utilizing StudentVote.org**
    - In 2020, in collaboration with PIRG, we blasted out StudentVote.org via all-school emails, through class announcements, by embedding on websites, and through peer-to-peer outreach. We also created an Eckerd-specific voting website.

- We want to get (1) a commitment from a senior administrator of the College to send out an all-school email before the voter registration deadline and prior to the early voting deadline (2) update our voting website prior to AT in order to familiarize 1st-year students with the website and the resources it has.
- **Voter Education**
  - **Libguide (Online Library Guide)**
    - Guide created and maintained by Eckerd College Library staff
    - Includes voting resources on why voting is important, how to register to vote, how to research candidates and issues, as well as relevant news about voting
    - We will want to promote this resource to increase civic education among students, faculty, and staff
  - **Vote.eckerd.edu**
    - Our specific voting website for Eckerd
    - As mentioned above, we will want to update this prior to AT (so 1st year students can familiarize themselves with it) and therefore prior to the fall semester (so we can familiarize the rest of campus with it as well)
  - **National Voting Holidays**
    - Our goal is to organize activities for Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day (NVRD), Vote Early Day, and Voter Education Week.
    - Constitution Day Email: Include a blurb about voter engagement/participation
- **Voter Turnout**
  - **Pledge to Vote**
    - [Research shows](#) that pledging to vote increases the likelihood of someone voting. Through class announcements, social media, big events, and coalition building, we will work to get students to pledge to vote.
    - By pledging to vote, students will (1) identify a method (vote by mail, early voting, election day voting) (2) when they will vote (3) how they will vote (the logistics to make their plan happen).
  - **Access to the Polls**
    - **Student IDs as valid voter ID**
      - We will continue to advocate to (1) revamp the Eckerd ID so that it is compliant with the school's current style guide and (2) have that new design include a photo and signature
      - Campus Safety, the department in control of ID cards, has committed to creating an operational strategy on how to get signatures on ID cards in a streamlined manner over the course of the coming years
    - **Transportation**
      - In 2020, Campus Activities paid for a trolley on Election Day to transport students to and from the polling location. We will work with Campus Activities to secure transportation again.
      - We want to see if it is possible to get transportation for Early Voting as well.
  - **Absentee Ballots**
    - The majority of students at Eckerd are from out of state and many choose to stay registered to vote in their home state. We want to organize clinics to help students get the information they need to request absentee ballots in time to vote in their home state.

- Additionally, these clinics will also benefit students who are either FL residents OR decided to change their registration to FL and want to request a vote-by-mail ballot.
- **In-Person Voting: Early Voting and Election Day**
  - Through pledging to vote, coalition building, big events, and providing transportation, we will help students turn out during Early Voting or Election Day, if they choose to do so.
- **Making Election Day A School Holiday**
  - Gather faculty support through petitions to ensure that students who miss class to vote are not penalized..

## **Section VI: Timeline**

- **National Voting Holidays**
  - 9/17/2022 - Constitution Day
  - 9/20/2022 - National Voter Registration Day
  - 10/3-10/7/2022 - National Voter Education Week
  - 10/28/2022 - Vote Early Day
  - 11/7/2022 - Poll Worker Appreciation Day
- **FL Election Deadlines and Dates**
  - **Primaries**
    - 7/25/2022 - Deadline to Register to Vote for August Primary
    - 8/13/2022 - Deadline to send Mail-In-Ballot to SOE for August Primary
    - 8/13-20 - Early Voting Period for August Primary
      - SOEs may offer more days of early voting from one or more of the following days: August 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 21
    - 8/23/2022 - Primary Election
  - **General Election**
    - 10/11/2022 - Deadline to Register to Vote for General Election
    - 10/29/2022 - Deadline to send Mail-In-Ballot to SOE for General Election
    - 10/29-11/5/2022 - Early Voting Period for General Election
      - SOEs may offer more days of early voting from one or more of the following days: October 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and November 6
    - 11/8/2022 - General Election
- **Important Semester Dates**
  - 8/12/2022 - First year students arrive on campus
  - 8/13/2022 - Autumn Term begins
  - 9/2/2022 - Residence halls open
  - 9/5/2022 - Fall Semester begins
  - 10/17-18/2022 - Fall recess
  - 12/16/2022 - Fall Semester ends
  - 1/3/2023 - Winter Term begins
  - 1/27/2023 - Winter Term ends
  - 1/31/2023 - Spring Semester begins
  - 2/17-19/2023 - Family Weekend
  - 3/18-26/2023 - Spring recess
  - 5/12/2023 - Last day of classes

- 5/21/2023 - Commencement

### **Section VII: Reporting**

- NSLVE and action plan will be made available on [vote.eckerd.edu](http://vote.eckerd.edu)
- Other ideas:
  - Engaging Eckerd leadership
    - Meeting with President Fernandez, Dean Annarelli, Campus Activities, and other key stakeholders to review our NSVLE report
    - Attending academic department meetings to share NSVLE results and brainstorm tactics to increase student voter turnout
    - Getting an all-campus email sent out by a senior administrator of the College about NSLVE results
  - Engaging Student Organizations
    - At a minimum, sending out takeaways from NSVLE to student organizations
    - Meeting one-on-one with club leaders
    - Send our NSLVE summary to the all student email alias
  - Materials
    - Producing an NSLVE one-pager that is easily digestible

### **Section VIII: Evaluation**

Our current evaluation of the NSLVE report is internal and limited to a single organization on campus—Florida PIRG Students. The plan is to establish a public mechanism for distributing NSLVE data by encouraging a high profile member of the administration or faculty, such as the Dean of Students or a senior member of the Political Science faculty, to send a school-wide email with the highlights of the report. This school-wide email will be boosted by student groups such as Florida PIRG Students and CVP sharing it. The progress made pertaining to the contents of this report will be shared publicly as well. In the future, there will be a deeper and more detailed evaluation of progress that will be determined early next year.