



# FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY ENGAGED VOTING

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## 2018/2019 Institutional Plan

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# Ferris State University Engaged Voting Plan

## About Ferris State University

In 1884, Woodbridge N. Ferris and Helen Gillespie Ferris established Ferris as a school for anyone—to counter the belief that higher education was only for rich, white men. Woodbridge would later become a two-term governor of Michigan.

*"My plea in Michigan -- and it will be my plea to the last breath I draw, and the last word I speak -- is education for all children, all men, and all women of Michigan, all the people in all our states all the time."*

From the beginning, Ferris State University has recognized its role in not only preparing students for successful careers, but also for *responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning* [from the Ferris State University mission statement].

Today Ferris is the ninth-largest university in the state of Michigan with 14,560 students studying on its main campus. We have 190 degree programs, 19 satellite campuses across the state and offer two-year, four-year and graduate degrees. We pride ourselves on serving a high number of first generation college students and non-traditional students. We also have a high number of commuters. All of these offer unique challenges and opportunities.

## Overview

Ferris State University is one of the first members of the AASCU's American Democracy Project, in part, because of our mission. The Political Engagement Project steering committee is an offshoot of ADP. Our mission states:

We aim to inspire and nurture the political engagement of all students at Ferris State University. The Political Engagement Project's primary charge is to inform and inspire active involvement in the processes that help to create a more just and humane society. We want to foster a sense of political efficacy and identity as well as a set of skills that students will need as they interact as citizens of our democracy.

We also have administrative support:

*"Our commitment to an engaged campus recognizes that much of learning happens outside the classroom. We will work to find ways to connect these learning activities and in doing so create meaningful opportunities for students, staff and faculty to become engaged in our campus, community and region. At the center of these efforts will be an emphasis on citizenship and diversity."* – David L. Eisler, President, Ferris State University.

Thus, there are already several things that we do throughout the academic year to increase student's political engagement.

- Celebrating Founder's Day—as responsible citizenship is one of our founder's visions for Ferris
- Celebrating Constitution Day and Citizenship Day with educational and voter literacy activities
- Providing voter registration opportunities for students, staff and faculty through Turbo Vote

- Hosting forums for candidates for public office and discussions of ballot issues during election cycles
- Hosting several speakers, debates, and other events focused on political literacy, political knowledge, and civic skill building
- Offering faculty curriculum grants to re-design courses so as to better help students apply course relevant knowledge to political engagement

However, we haven't always hit our mark. Research spearheaded by FSU professor and PEP member Penney Nichols-Whitehead collected surveys from our freshmen and seniors in the 2016-2017 academic year. This survey was a modified version of the AASCU's Political Engagement Project's Post survey and it assessed the political background, attitudes, and engagement of FSU students. Self-ratings of political engagement and activity revealed a significant major and class interaction, with seniors in the Social Sciences, Education, Humanities and Business being somewhat more active, and those in STEM and the Health Professions being somewhat less active than their freshmen counterparts are. Seniors were also more likely than freshmen to vote; however, they were not necessarily more likely to be politically active in other ways than freshmen. Finally, both freshmen and seniors had similar reasons for not being politically engaged. In other words, engagement activities on campus were not necessarily changing anyone's mind on why engagement was important nor were they convincing already non-engaged students to become more engaged. While our engagement efforts are increasing voting rates, there is much more that we can do.

## Goals

Our three top goals for democratic engagement during the 2018/2019 academic year are:

1. Make registering to vote and voting easier.
2. Increase political literacy on campus—particularly as it pertains to the Michigan 2018 midterm elections and ballot issues.
3. Expand the network of partners in this voter engagement work.

## Coalition

- Tony Baker, Director of the Center for Community Engagement
- Angela Roman, Center for Leadership Activities and Career Services (CLACS) Director & Coordinator of the Leadership Center
- Mickey Albright, CLACS Coordinator of Career & Volunteer Centers
- Kristi Scholten (Communication)
- Christian Peterson (History)
- Penney Nichols Whitehead (Psychology)
- Jordan Horan (Psychology)

- Antionette Epps (Healthcare Administration)
- Margaret Sue Waters (Respiratory Care)
- David McCall (Developmental Curriculum)
- Fran Rosen (Acquisitions & Collection Development Librarian)
- Sarah B. Rescoe (English)

## Goal One: Making Registering to Vote & Voting Easier for Students

While we are pursuing assessment projects, current FSU student voting registration numbers are unknown. Thus, it is hard to set a benchmark (e.g. increase voter registration by 5%). This year we will get a baseline number to work from for future years.

### **Constitution Day & Citizenship Week September 17, 2018**

Every year for Constitution and Citizenship day we set up an informational table in a high traffic area of the University Center. Not only do we have free pocket constitutions, games that test constitutional knowledge, and prizes, but this year we plan to make voter registration a priority as well. We will have a voter registration booth for students, and we will distribute information about Turbo Vote, hold tutorials for students about how to create a Turbo Vote account, and provide information about the pros and cons of using home vs. campus addresses to register. We will also distribute materials detailing other engagement efforts as well as ACLU “Let me Vote” pamphlets, which relay information about registration, voting early, voting on election day, photo IDs and what to do if students face problems at the polls.

Other constitution week events will include an event on September 20<sup>th</sup> at 7pm covering the topic of free speech. A local lawyer and legal expert on issues pertaining to college students will begin the event by speaking on the topic of free speech on college campuses. The event will then move into a panel discussion on the benefits and costs of freedom of speech with the addition of Dr. Christian Peterson of the History Department and other university representatives (e.g., representatives from Public Safety and from University Counsel). This event is hosted by the registered student organization, Entertainment Unlimited, and it is a 5 star event—this is an important designation at Ferris. In order to achieve this status, an event has to meet several criterion and has to be clearly tied to the FSU mission. Attendance at five star events is often required for certain student organizations, and they are well publicized throughout campus, so they are heavily attended. Because we see voting as a kind of free speech, PEP will set up a voter registration table at this event as well.

## **National Voter Registration Day and #Bulldogsvote September 25, 2018**

PEP and CLACS will host an event on this day entitled, “BulldogsVote.” The FSU mascot is the Bulldog, and this will tie into an element of our social media campaign, #Bulldogsvote. The event will be held on West Campus – the opposite side of campus as the other events and the side of campus where many families live. There will be a cookout, political literacy games, an abundance of voter registration information and help, and dogs to pet while waiting in line. The media campaign will include offering incentives for students to take a picture of themselves with voter registration form in hand (personal information blank), in front of the Secretary of State, with a former “I voted” sticker, and so on, posting to the Instagram or Twitter handles #Bulldogsvote. Students can also send tweets to the hashtag explaining why they think voting is important. We hope to have at least 250 posts with the #Bulldogsvote hashtag as a result of the event/throughout the fall semester. We are also hoping to have a short promotional video where Brutus (our Bulldog mascot) goes through the process of registering to vote and showing his voter card. This clip will be displayed on FSU’s website, FSU’s TV station, and on digital display boards around campus. We are considering this a full service voter registration drive and are even hoping to have a deputized City Clerk to register students on site.

## **Blackboard Learning Management System Alert Messages**

We plan to work with the Blackboard Learning Management System Team to add alert messages upon logging in that will promote voter registration and Election Day information, including a TurboVote link/TurboVote widget integrations. We will ask professors who use this system to post the link to the commercial and to post pre-composed Blackboard “Announcements” with student voter registration and polling/ballot information to their class Blackboard sites. We also plan to utilize our University Wide Notice system to send emails to all students regarding our events and registration efforts and deadline reminders.

## **Communication**

There will be one blast email for all students with voter registration information on September 24<sup>th</sup>—the day before our national voter registration day event. However, we will send University Wide Notices, which are sent to all faculty and staff, before each of our events. This will encourage faculty and staff to provide this information to their students. Furthermore, the IT department will be contacted about adding a link to TurboVote and voter registration information to the university homepage and to serve as the background/desktop of all student computer lab and computer lab classroom computers.

We will also post information about our events via the #Bulldogsvote handle. We will also post voter information on digital signs throughout campus, through hard copy fliers in high traffic areas (and especially in areas or colleges associated with low-turnout majors), and through stuffers in student organization mailboxes and faculty and staff mailboxes. Members of the coalition will also be visiting all FSUS classes (a college skills course that all freshman have to take) and a number of first-year required composition courses to discuss the calendar of events, why it is important to register to vote, and how to register to vote. This will take place during the first two weeks of classes.

## **Ballot Access & Voter Turnout**

We are planning to provide at the above-named events, information on how to find the right polling location for election day. We are also planning to provide information on absentee balloting. Finally, we plan to arrange for transportation to and from the polls on election day. Drivers to and from the polls can include Ferris administrators and faculty who are well known to students. Vehicles will be equipped with games for students, ballot information and voting rights materials, and free food (e.g., pizza and drinks). We will also encourage professors to allow for excused absences or tardiness on Election Day. This goal will best be achieved if the President or Provost sends out a campus-wide letter to students stating the importance of voting and encouraging faculty to allow students to be excused from class.

On October 4<sup>th</sup> CLACS has arranged to have the Secretary of State's mobile voter registration unit on the North Quad from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. PEP members will be on hand to assist CLACS in distributing information about this event, helping students as they attend, and in whatever other way is needed.

In addition to providing polling place information and transportation, our goal is to create a prideful and celebratory atmosphere on campus and at polling locations on election day. Students who vote can continue to post to the Instagram or Twitter handles #Bulldogsvote or using the official FSU/Bulldogs vote Snapchat filter to answer advertised prompts such as "I voted because" or simply to share their voting experiences. Additionally, FerrisVotes and BulldogsVote buttons will be distributed to students who vote at the polling locations.

Furthermore, the residence hall and/or college (e.g., Arts and Sciences, Business, etc.) at the university who has the highest voting rate will receive a small prize/award. On election day, a whiteboard or social media "tally" can display the results in real time, which, in turn, will hopefully improve voter turnout. At major student polling locations, we also plan to host first time voter receptions with food, beverages, music, and games.

Long term goals to improve voter turnout include potentially creating a voting precinct on campus and working more closely to support out-of-state students.

## **Goal Two: Increase Political Literacy on Campus**

### **Bulldog Bonanza September 5, 2018**

During Bulldog Bonanza, a table devoted to voter registration will be set up that will include helping students decipher how to get registered, what address to use, answer questions, and collect completed forms. Additionally, students from the speech and debate team have agreed to create nonpartisan, informational brochures, including one that makes a side-by-side comparison of MI Gubernatorial candidates and another that details the 2018 ballot initiatives. These brochures will then be available at each of our events.



## **Let Your Voice Be Heard! Campus Wide Public Speaking Contest**

In collaboration with the speech and debate team, PEP will co-host a public speaking contest open to any Ferris student. Students will be asked to prepare a 6-8 minute informative or persuasive speech on some aspect of the 2018 Midterm election. Perhaps the student wants to compare candidates; perhaps they want to urge the audience to vote yea or nay on a certain ballot initiative. This will be a chance for students to have their voices heard. The contest offers major prizes to the top 3 speakers (such as an I-pad or smart television)—so there is incentive to enter and to do their best. Everyone at Ferris is required to gain competency in oral communication, and they all have to take at least one oral communication course. Thus, committee members will visit each classroom in the month prior to the contest to promote the event and discuss the importance of political literacy.

## **Gubernatorial Representatives**

We are in the process of securing the primary gubernatorial candidates, or representatives of their campaign, to come speak to students about their platforms.

## **Other Political Literacy & Voter Education Efforts**

PEP had events and speakers throughout the academic year that focus on increasing student engagement, knowledge, and skill building in the political realm. However, we are planning to specifically invite—through a series of events we already host called Apolitical mixers—politically affiliated student organizations (College Republicans, College Democrats, Young American for Liberty, etc.) to host activities that promote education and awareness of the platforms they support—particularly as they pertain to the midterm election and ballot initiatives. We also plan to organize an event that will allow students from the Democratic and Republican student groups to explain the basic views of their preferred candidates. Through a small grant application process, PEP offers monetary support to RSOs to pursue such projects.

During the academic year of 2018-2019, we will help organize a series of talks and/or panels designed to help the Ferris community better understand the US system of government and how liberal democracy should operate in practice. For example, Dr. Peterson will deliver a speech in the fall semester tentatively titled “US Democracy 101” that covers the ideals and inherent tensions of US liberal democracy. He will devote particular attention to issues such as majority opinion versus minority rights and dissent versus the rule of law (the importance of checks and balances as well).

## **Social Media Campaign**

In conjunction with the CLACS and Student Life social media team, Dr. Kristi Scholten’s fall 2018 COMM 383: Mass and Social Media students will monitor and assess the social media campaign and encourage campus wide participation. The PEP committee is also committed to working more closely with the University Advancement and Marketing team to design posters and social media filters with registration information, voting information, and information on key issues on the ballot.

Finally, in addition to the #Bulldogsvote social media campaign, once the voter registration deadline has passed (October 9<sup>th</sup>), the social media campaign will switch to #dearfutureMIgov and will offer incentives to students to tweet what changes they would like to see in Michigan and what they'd like the new Governor's goals to be.

## Goal Three: Expand Partnerships

We would like to expand the network of partners engaged in this and future engagement work. We have already begun discussing collaboration with the Center for Student Leadership, Activities and Career Services. People involved in the center already do a lot to engage students in political literacy. There are many students involved in the center – as staff and as volunteers – we see this as a place to find student participation on the PEP committee. Having students attend our meetings and join this voter engagement coalition will help us generate programming, events, and social media campaigns that will appeal to Ferris students and their unique needs. It is our intent to reach out to the students of CLACS in August, as the fall semester approaches and invite their participation at our meetings. We will also enter all our events into the OrgSync platform, which is an online portal for all FSU registered student organizations and their members. This will help in spreading the word about all of our campus voting efforts. CLACS has also agreed to include these events in the CLACS Volunteer Center listings monthly and help distribute flyers.

We have also begun to host what we call Apolitical mixers. The goal of these is to get the politically oriented student groups together to build bridges and make connections with one another. When much of the national media paints a picture of a politically divisive culture, we want to make sure that provide opportunities to see how cooperation can work. The students that attend these mixers – notably already highly engaged, can help us in our efforts to engage the rest of the student body. Working on the common goal of voter registration, in a diverse group with different political affiliations, will help us attune to the needs of all our students. We are hosting another mixer in September and will ask these students for their input at that time. Any particularly interested students will then be asked to join the coalition.

While this won't help us with the 2018 Midterm elections, PEP is currently putting together a proposal for a political literacy learning community. Learning communities offer monetary incentives in the form of personal development funds for participating in a workshop. The participants usually meet once every other week through one semester. There is an instructor/guide for the group that provides content relevant readings and other resources as well as small projects and goal-setting exercises. The notion is to get a group of interested individuals engaged in focused learning and brainstorming sessions working toward a common goal. In this case, the goals would include identifying our strengths and weaknesses in our civic learning on campus and brainstorming ways to seize opportunities and overcome obstacles on our path to being a better-informed and more engaged campus. This core group of interested faculty and staff would then be resources that we can reach out to for help in future engagement efforts.



Finally, we would like to form partnerships with relevant community groups. We already have a working relationship with the Mecosta County Democrats, and we are seeking ways to make connections with the county Republicans. We would also like to reach out to the League of Women Voters. There is a chapter of LWV in the neighboring area of Mt. Pleasant. We will start by reaching out to them, asking for assistance with both voter registration and political literacy programming.

## Assessment Methods

At every event and program that PEP & CLACS organizes, there is a card swipe machine where students, faculty, and staff can swipe their FSU ID. This will help us keep records of attendance numbers. However, we also pass out attendance cards. These are postcard sized and ask the participant to identify what kind of patron they are (student, staff, faculty, or other). There is also a place to make suggestions as well as instructions on what to do with the card once it is completed. We plan to modify these cards for the fall 2018 semester. We will add a question related to what they learned about political engagement in the process of attending the event, or alternatively, what they found most helpful about the event and what they learned.

We signed up to participate in the 2016 National Study of Learning, Voting & Engagement (NSLVE). However, we are having difficulty tracking down the results. Even if we don't get the results of this study until after our efforts are completed, we are committed to participating in the future. This will give us a report that indicates the registration and voting rates of our students broken down by age, class level, field of study, and voting methods.

We are also participating in the American Democracy Project (ADP) and the Institute of Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE) "Assessing and Improving Political Learning and Engagement on Campus Initiative." We are organized focus groups with faculty, staff, and students to begin in the fall—though specific dates are still being arranged. The focus groups are designed to ask about the political learning and engagement that happens at FSU. It includes questions about how comfortable students or groups on campus feel about sharing their political perspective. It asks questions about the nature of free speech on campus. It asks questions about the ways that attitudes towards politics and/or free speech have changed since the 2016 election cycle—it asks these kinds of questions and many more. We have leeway to ask more directed questions that are specific to events and initiatives we have on campus. This will allow us to get a good sense of how our political literacy and voter engagement efforts are faring and how we can improve them in years to come.

Every year PEP puts together a year-end report that includes an assessment of the impact of all of our activities and events. This report is shared with the Academic Affairs staff, and the members of the University Faculty Senate. This year we will also share our report with CLACS, and the Political Engagement Learning Community Members.

## Timeline

AUGUST			
1-4	Connect with the Secretary of State to secure deputized clerk to register voters on site(s) at events		Contact County Democrats and Republicans to get input/partnerships
5-11	Coalition Meeting to finalize details for Voter Engagement events & delegation of specific duties		Connect with Turbo Vote to secure informational materials
12-18	Work on promotional video & Blackboard alert messages		
19-25	Attend University College Wide Meetings to distribute PEP Calendar and discuss voter engagement efforts		Proof the informational fliers & send to the printers
26-31	Launch the #Bulldogsvote campaign		Classes begin Monday August 27th
SEPTEMBER			
1-8	Stuff Mailboxes with Voter Engagement event fliers & post to digital signs on campus Send directed email to political-oriented student organizations		Wednesday September 5 Bulldog Bonanza event
9-15	Send UWN for Constitution Day		
16-22	Send UWN for Dogs Vote Event		Monday September 17 Constitution day event in the University Center Thursday September 20 Free Speech event
23-30	Send Blast email to students regarding voter registration deadlines and procedures		Wednesday September 25 Dogs Vote Event
OCTOBER			
1-6	Visit communication courses to promote PEP events and speaking contest Launch #dearfutureMIgov campaign		Host an Apolitical Mixer for student input
4 <sup>th</sup>	Mobile Registration Unit		<b>North Quad 10A to 4P</b>
7-13			
14-20			Gubernatorial Race Representative (date TBA)
21-27			
28-31			Let Your Voice Be Heard Contest (date TBA)
NOVEMBER			
1-3			
4-10			<b>November 6<sup>th</sup>, Election Day</b>
11-17			
18-24	Complete Learning Community Proposal		
<b>25-30</b>			

### Reminders:

By July 31: Reserve all rooms, tables, catering and equipment for the September Events

By July 31: Connect with all FSUS instructors to secure a time to visit each classroom for a 5-minute discussion of voter registration efforts and events

By August 31: Reserve all rooms, tables, catering and equipment for the October Events

By September 30: Reserve all rooms, tables catering and equipment for the November Events