



Democratic Engagement Plan

Executive Summary

The Democratic Engagement Plan for Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC), located at 777 Grandview Dr, Kalispell, MT, 59901, highlights a variety of programs and activities for all students to learn, reflect and act, making an impact on their communities. These activities further offer opportunities for students to develop civically; and make informed decisions in the democratic process.

When civic engagement is institutionalized young people create lifelong habits of civic engagement and involvement in our democracy. With the help of administrators, faculty, community organizations, and students at Flathead Valley Community College, we will create a culture of year-round civic engagement on our campus building a more representative democracy in which the voices of our students are valued at every level of government.

The FVCC Democratic Engagement Plan will be reviewed by key stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This plan will be adhered to when all local, statewide, and federal elections take place in order to increase representation of student voices in government. Once approved, this plan will be integrated into FVCC's Civic Action Plan and will support the mission of the college. It will serve as a long-term mapping of transformational and innovative democratic activities developed through collaborative efforts.

Leadership

It is the pleasure of the Office of Student Engagement to collaborate with FVCC colleagues and community partners, to coordinate activities and events which engage our students in the democratic process. However, the plan will be developed, implemented, and promoted by the Office of Student Engagement, with contributions from others who are drawn into collaboration for their interest in this type of work.

Wendy Jeschke, Student Engagement Coordinator

Kelly Murphy, Dean of Students

Brenda Hanson, Dean of Student Financial Services and Compliance

Suzanne DeCamp, Senior Executive to the President

Emmett Jeschke, Student Government President

The role of those involved has been to review past practices and provide input on the FVCC Democratic Engagement Plan. After submission of this plan, the advisory group will

continue to review and explore other initiatives in assisting students to develop the habits of active and informed citizenship.

Commitment

Flathead Valley Community College is committed to inspiring its students to be informed and active citizens. Educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is a hallmark of FVCC's institutional culture. Since the early 1990's, FVCC has supported and dedicated funding to community engagement programming including service learning, volunteerism, and civic engagement.

This programming supports FVCC's mission to promote excellence in lifelong learning, focused on student success and community needs. Although, civic learning and democratic engagement (CLDE) are not explicitly in our mission statement, we will explore embracing CLDE as an institutional priority.

As a result of this action plan, students at FVCC will have access to the resources needed to register to vote, make informed decisions based on non-partisan information provided by civic engagement organizations on candidates and ballot initiatives, and complete their respective ballots. In addition, the students should possess the skills to encourage a healthy environment of civic engagement not only with their fellow students on campus, but all throughout their communities.

Landscape

Within FVCC, civic learning and democratic engagement initiatives have been fully supported by all levels of administration in terms of leadership, funding, and staff and faculty assistance. Through the Student Engagement Office, FVCC currently participates in several activities and events related to civic learning and democratic engagement. Those activities include, but not limited to the following:

- Constitution Day
- Voter Registration Day
- Get Out the Vote Day
- Service Saturday Events
- Service Learning
- Volunteering

From 2014 to 2018, youth voter turnout in Montana increased from 8% to 11%. During the midterms, young people in Montana turned out with the highest rates in the nation. As we learned in 2018, young people have the skills to cast their ballot and make their voice heard. By providing simple and accessible voter registration opportunities, access to educational materials and candidates, and multiple ways to cast ballots, we are building power among young Montanans to increase participation and accountability.

During the 2021 Montana Legislature, legislation was introduced to prohibit political committees from conducting voter registration drives, ballot or signature collection efforts, and voter turnout efforts for federal, state, and local election inside a residence hall, dining facility, or athletic facility operated by a public postsecondary institution. This limits the resources available to assist with democratic engagement on campus. This slight barrier to engage students in voter registration activities will be overcome by the appropriate goals and strategies listed below.

Goals

Goal #1 Increase the voting rates of students for all federal, state, and local elections.

Each student at FVCC will have open access to ample voter registration opportunities, multiple educational opportunities, and several ways to cast their ballots during all elections.

Goal #2 Promote learning on “Engaged Citizenship” among students, faculty and staff to increase their understanding of the democratic process.

FVCC will provide a healthy, open, and welcoming environment for students to discuss and learn about civic engagement and the issues that surround them.

Strategy

Below is a rough chronology of the tasks that make up this plan. Most of these activities will be hosted by the Office of Student Engagement and may be pruned back depending on the capacity to recruit volunteers.

These activities should be inclusive to all students, and engage every demographic on campus. One way to encourage this inclusivity is to intentionally and enthusiastically include student leaders/voices from different backgrounds to plan and participate in these events.

Timeline

Date

Purpose and Activities

All Year

Voter registration forms and information will be available year-round in the Student Lounge (LRC 102). Supplies will be maintained at registration boxes and forms will be mailed in weekly.

Each semester

Host at least one civic engagement event. These can be; guest speakers, panels, fairs, volunteerism activities, or anything encouraging civically-minded discussion and thoughts.

Week before classes

FVCC will email all teaching staff to encourage them to allow a class presentation on voter registration and civic engagement. They will also be informed as to the location of voter registration materials.

Week before classes

FVCC will email all employees encouraging them to include voter registration information into previously existing programming.

Second week of classes

Classrooms presentations will be given on community involvement and democratic engagement activities.

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| Constitution Day Celebration | At this event, the US Constitution will be celebrated with a variety of activities including voter registration materials. |
| Week before VRD | All students will receive information in the weekly student newsletter regarding voter registration opportunities. |
| Voter Registration Day (VRD) | This event will be observed on the third Tuesday in September with a variety of activities including tabling and classroom presentations. |
| One month before each election | Information reminding students of the upcoming election and giving students guidance on preparing for an election (candidate information, how to register, where to vote, etc.) will be sent out in the weekly student newsletter. |
| One week before Election Day | Information and resources will be sent out via weekly newsletters to all students, faculty, and staff. |
| On each Election Day | An election day email reminder will be sent to students/faculty/and staff. If possible, a shuttle will be available to the polls or satellite polling locations. |
| Day after election | Election Day Heroes will be recognized for their dedication to this type of work through a variety of marketing avenues. |
| Last week of semester | Remind students to update voter registration if they are moving especially if classes end before the June elections. |

Reporting & Evaluating

The Democratic Engagement Plan will first be shared among administrators and departments/offices that serve as stakeholders in promoting civic engagement. Upon approval by the senior administration, efforts highlighted in this plan will be shared with FVCC employees; uploaded on the Community Involvement: Civic Engagement and Voter Registration webpage; and shared externally with the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge, Campus Vote Project, and other external organizations.

Regarding the reporting process, Student Engagement staff will utilize a variety of methods to record the outcome of the activities outlined in the plan. It will be reported as follows:



Evaluation plays an enormous role in our efforts to effectively enhance student participation in democratic engagement and civic education. The evaluation process allows stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of our efforts, understand student needs and preferences, and make informed adjustments to the plan's goals and strategies.

Given that our efforts are aimed at reaching all FVCC students, it would be ideal to survey the student body for feedback on our democratic engagement activities. In addition, we will ask students via a survey on Eagle Online and in person at tabling events after the election to evaluate our programming. If possible, data from The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) will be gathered and assessed. All data collected will be analyzed and shared with those involved in the reporting process mentioned above.