

FAU Civic Action Plan



**FAU**  
**WEPPNER CENTER FOR LEAD  
AND SERVICE-LEARNING**  
Division of Student Affairs  
Florida Atlantic University

## Executive Summary

As Florida Atlantic University strives to maintain the prestigious Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement, the ultimate goal of this civic engagement plan is to create civically-minded and socially responsible students and alumni by bringing together curricular and co-curricular programs and experiences. The Roadmap to Civic Engagement for Florida Atlantic University incorporates elements of curricular and co-curricular service-learning and civic engagement, as well as resources directed specifically to continuing to build a culture of voter engagement at FAU.

This plan incorporates the definition of civic engagement from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) as defined in Ehrlich, 2000:

“Civic engagement is working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. In addition, civic engagement encompasses actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community.”

To accomplish this, the Civic Action Plan centers around five themes, detailed throughout this plan.

- Community Partnerships
- Voter Engagement and Literacy
- Experiential Programs
- Faculty and Staff Engagement
- Equity and Social Justice

This plan was assembled in alignment with FAU’s *A Strategic Plan for the Race to Excellence 2015-2025* and live out the Mission of the institution, which states:

Florida Atlantic University is a multi-campus public research university that pursues excellence in its missions of research, scholarship, creative activity, teaching, and active engagement with its communities.

Additionally, this plan serves to support the *Pillars* and *Platforms* of the university’s Strategic Plan which strive to “create knowledge that benefit society”.

## **Institutional Background**

Since FAU was founded in 1961, the institution has been committed to community. FAU developed as a “new kind of university”, one that would open the door to higher education more than ever before. The *Race to Excellence* offers a blueprint for where FAU envisions itself as it moves further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One of the core components of the Race to Excellence that this plan seeks to build on is to “achieve the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s classification as a community engaged institution by 2020.”

FAU is an institution with a footprint that spans over 100 miles of coastline in southeast Florida, across a 4-county service area with students attending campuses in Dania Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Davie, Jupiter, and Fort Pierce, and the main campus in Boca Raton.

### Weppner Center for LEAD and Service-Learning

In November 1995, Dr. Daniel Weppner, an Associate Professor in the Educational Leadership Department, requested support from the University President to establish a place on campus that would motivate students to get involved in volunteer services. In February of 1996, the Campus Volunteer Center (CVC) was opened.

Since 1996, the center has evolved into a place where thousands of students come to get involved in their community. Originally established with just Dr. Weppner at the helm, it expanded its services to include more staff, more community partnerships, additional programming and an interactive website. In the year 2000, Students Advocating Volunteer Involvement, or SAVI, was established by the Student Government Association to serve as a partner in community service programming. In the following years, SAVI and the Volunteer Center services expanded to the Broward and Jupiter Campuses, expanding the FAU community service programs to additional Florida communities and students.

In the Fall of 2006, representatives from the FAU campuses began discussing further opportunities for partnership. Included in these discussions were plans to have university-wide programs like Alternative Spring Break, which first took place in Spring of 2007. Following the Alternative Spring Break trip, the campus representatives for the CVC came together and revisited the policy, procedure and mission of community service programs at FAU. With the support of Dr. Charles Brown, then Vice President for Student Affairs, the center was renamed to the Center for Civic Engagement and Service. During the Summer of 2007, the Center was officially named the Dr. Daniel Weppner Center for Civic Engagement and Service with operating offices on the Broward and Jupiter campuses. In 2014, the name was changed to the Weppner Center for Service-Learning and Civic Responsibility.

In July of 2014, LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) branched out from Student Involvement & Leadership. In July of 2015, after one year of existence as a standalone office, LEAD merged with the Weppner Center for Service-Learning and Civic Responsibility to become the Weppner Center for LEAD & Service Learning. Also in 2015, a Community Engagement Task Force was formed that ultimately led to the formation of the Office of Community Engagement, with whom the Weppner Center works as a close partner. In November 2019 the Weppner Center for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning was reprised. The Center that started as a table in the Breezeway now offers programs and resources that benefit all of South Florida and ultimately, our world.

## Community and Regional Background

As the home of Florida Atlantic University's Main Campus, the City of Boca Raton with a population of almost 100,000 is part of the larger Miami metropolitan area, with a population of over 6 million people. Greater Miami is the eighth largest metropolitan area in the US. South Florida is known around the world for its diverse cultures, history, and is also known as the "Gateway to the Americas".

While metropolitan South Florida is known around the world for its beaches and being an economic powerhouse, challenges and disenfranchisement exist across the three-county region. Cost of living remains one of South Florida's biggest challenges, affecting residents' ability to access nutritious food, secure safe and affordable housing, as well as access to quality education. Additionally, workforce training and access to affordable health care also remain challenges for many of the residents of Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties.

FAU works with a variety of nonprofit agencies across its service area, as well as other regions in Florida, and around the country. Through a plethora of programs offered through the Weppner Center for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning, students, faculty, and staff engaged with a variety of community partners across a range of social issues including: poverty, disaster relief, environmental awareness, animal health and rights, and much more.



Miami

Fort Lauderdale

West Palm Beach

## Community Partnerships

The largest amount of engagement with community partners takes place in the areas around FAU's campuses. Additionally, programs such as Owl Breaks connect with community partners regionally and across the country. The first step in understanding the work of the community partners was getting a baseline of who our partners were and what their needs were and how to align the programs that the university offers in an effort to meet the needs of the community.

Beginning in the 2017-2018 academic year, community partners had the ability to request opportunities to be posted on the Lead and Serve website, as well as have an interactive listing of community partners separated by social issue and geographic region to better serve students across FAU's broad service area. Beginning with the 2018-2019 academic year, in accordance with the university's desire to attain the Carnegie Classification of Community Engagement, a community partner survey is being developed to gauge the efficacy and impact of the current programs and services provided to community partners. The data garnered from the community partner survey will also be used to develop intentional ways to integrate the student experience.

In Spring 2020 the relationship building efforts with community partners shifted to virtual platforms to continue to engage students with the community partners while also maintaining safe social distancing. For example, the Connect to Community Series which has students engage with various community partners through WebEx meetings where they learn how the non-profit is navigating the pandemic and what they can do to help. Another program that promotes virtual civic engagement is the Your Voice Counts: Census 2020 event where students connect with a representative from the US Census Bureau and learn more how participating in the Census impacts their community.

Through 2021 efforts have been made to expand outreach to community partners utilizing the platform Noblehour. Several trainings and workshops have been hosted to teach community partners and students how to utilize Noblehour as a one stop shop to find volunteer opportunities and log their service hours. Also, through a collaboration with the FAU Career Center to use their Handshake platform to reach out to employers to see if in addition to looking for students to hire they would also be looking for students to volunteer and get connected with civic engagement projects.

Community Partnerships: Seek out new community partnerships and further strengthen existing partnerships between the university and the community.		
Goal	Method	Measure of Success
Increase the presence and engagement of community partners in programming.	Encourage community partner participation in programmatic efforts as well as in active conversation.	Evaluate the level of engagement of community partners representing a cross-section of social issues.
Create opportunities for community partners to give feedback on programs and services being offered.	Development of assessment instrument(s) to gauge community partner feedback.	Community partner voices are heard consistently in programmatic development.

Increase access to departmental and university resources for community partners.	Identify resources currently available and what resources could be made available.	Evaluation of resources and gauge whether resources meet the current/expected need.
Create virtual opportunities for students to connect with community partners	Communicate with community partners to see how their programs and service have been adapted and connect students to digital resources.	Evaluation of resources and gauge whether resources meet the current/expected need.
Expand outreach to community partners utilizing the platform Noblehour.	Increase collaboration with the FAU Career Center to grow partnerships with employers who are also looking for student volunteers.	Evaluation of resources and gauge whether resources meet the current/expected need.

### **Voter Engagement and Literacy**

Students come to FAU from across the state of Florida, and around the country. As of the 2016-2017 Board of Governors IPEDS report for Fall enrollment, 88% of students were classified as a Florida resident, with 12% classified as non-Florida resident. Additionally, at the end of 2016, FAU gained the designation as a “Voter-Friendly Campus” which “was developed to coordinate administrators, faculty, and student organizations in civic and electoral engagement. This program was developed in partnership between the Campus Vote Project and NASPA, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. In order to increase the amount of resources available to students throughout the school year, the Weppner Center for LEAD and Service-Learning also created a new website to highlight the Voter Friendly Campus designation as well as offer localized links to the Florida Department of State website and County Boards of Elections: <http://www.fau.edu/leadandserve/programs/voterresources.php>.

In an effort to facilitate institutional growth in the areas of democratic and civic engagement, the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education at Tufts University in Boston, MA facilitates the NSLVE (National Study of Learning and Voter Engagement) report that is offered to institutions to get a closer look at their student voting habits to better encourage students to vote either locally at their collegiate location or at home. Most recently FAU was provided data for the 2012 and 2016 election cycles.

From the 2018 mid-term election cycle as evidenced in our NSLVE report, FAU reported a 49.3% voting rate (which reflects an increase of 22.2% from the 2014 mid-term election cycle). This is also 10 percentage points higher than the all institution national average for 2018.

Beginning in October 2017, the State of Florida began online voter registration with [www.registertovoteflorida.gov](http://www.registertovoteflorida.gov). This portal offered through the Florida Department of State and the Florida Division of Elections allows residents to register for the first time or update their registration to encourage more to take part in the democratic process. In 2018, FAU increased

the number of registered student voters by 3.1%. With in the public research institutions, FAU is approximately 10 % higher. First year students also saw an increase of 23.5% from 2014.

From the 2018 mid-term election cycle as evidenced in our NSLVE report, FAU reported a 49.3% voting rate (which reflects an increase of 22.2% from the 2014 mid-term election cycle). This is also 10 percentage points higher than the all institution national average for 2018.

From the 2020 election cycle as evidenced in our NSLVE report, FAU reported a 71.1% voting rate (which reflects an increase of 11% from the 2016 election cycle). This is also 5.1 percentage points higher than the all institution national average for 2020.

Voter Engagement and Literacy		
Goal	Method	Measure of Success
Increase ratio of student registration to voting	Development of programs that translate voter registration to voter turnout.	Host programs at least once a month that not only register students to vote but also educate on resources related to casting a vote.
Build connection with Education, English Languages/Literature, and History to capitalize on significant increases in voter turnout rates.	Development of a focus group to learn if/how faculty are integrating civic/voter engagement into their curriculum.	Ability to translate successes from these departments to help students/faculty that have seen decreases in voter engagement.
Increase awareness about topics that may be on the ballot	Create events that allow students to share different points of view and perspective on hot topics. Work with faculty to present hot topic discussions to their classes such as the Leadership and Social Change class.	Increase engagement in programs designed to express thoughts and explore vantage points of social issues.
Increase promotion of early voting resources	Host events and create marketing campaigns to promote early voting	Increase early voter turn-out by 5%

### **Civic/Community Engagement Centered Experiential Programs**

The Weppner Center for LEAD and Service-Learning offers a variety of experiential programs centered around community engagement and becoming more aware of the various social issues affecting South Florida communities:

Academic Service-Learning designated courses

FAU met its goal for the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement of 200 designated courses with an actual number of 213 designated courses as of the Spring 2020 semester.

Additionally, there was a substantial increase in courses that reported AS-L involvement, netting a 15% increase in overall hours reported for the 2019-2020 academic year.

With the challenges brought about by the shift to virtual events and learning in 2020, FAU focused on implementing voter education into as many events and aspects of campus life as possible. To do this, coalition leaders partnered with faculty who taught Academic Service-Learning courses, which included more than 200 courses across the institution, to put on events and programming to help educate students about voting. Each of these courses includes a “Purposeful Civic Engagement” learning portion, which requires students to engage in semester-long civic engagement projects. Through FAU’s work to expand civic engagement and voter education opportunities, participation in and completion of Academic Service-Learning courses increased by nearly 10% in Fall 2020.

Days of Service/SAVI Partnership Programs

The Student Government program, SAVI (Students Advocating Volunteer Involvement) is also advised by the Weppner Center for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning. SAVI hosts and sponsors three days of service throughout the year, centered around a variety of social issues. The academic year begins with the WOW (Weeks of Welcome) Day of Service, followed by two events during Homecoming Week: the FAU Day of Service during Homecoming and ExtravaCANza. The ExtravaCANza program is designed to seek out canned food donations, students are then able to build a sculpture out of the cans, and finally the cans are then donated to both the Beyond Food program (located on-campus) and Boca Helping Hands. In the Spring semester, we also host a Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service. In addition to the larger days of service, SAVI hosts SAVI Saturdays which occur around once a month where students serve various organizations in the community. Some examples of projects include: cleaning and sorting donated shoes at In Jacobs Shoes, handing out water and supplies at the American Heart Association Heart Walk, beach clean-ups and more!

Owl Breaks

The Owl Breaks program is an immersive experience that take place during university breaks and offers students the chance to “dive deeper” into a social justice issue around the state of Florida, and regionally. Past social issues that Owl Break trips centered around included: disaster relief, children’s health awareness, food insecurity, and much more. The Owl Breaks program also serves as a catalyst for students to become more civically aware, and also inspiring students to take action. For example, as a result of attending one of the Owl Breaks trips during the 2017-2018 academic year, a student became inspired to become more environmentally minded and wanted to work toward more action around environmental issues.

<b>Civic/Community Engagement Centered Experiential Programs</b>		
Goal	Method	Measure of Success



<p><u>AS-L Courses</u>: Increased outreach to faculty to center on social issue engagement with projects. Additionally, engagement with faculty from fields that have had lower rates of voter turnout as evidenced in latest NSLVE report.</p>	<p>Beginning with focus group of faculties, learning about how social issues/community partners are selected and gauging how students are reflecting on “what’s next” after they’ve completed their projects.</p>	<p>Evaluation of faculty/student rosters each semester to gauge community partnerships, and collective social impact of all students participating.</p>
<p><u>Days of Service/SAVI</u>: Intentional aligning of “what’s next” after completing a day of service, and how students can use their “vote as their voice” particularly after the WOW Day of Service as it is before Election Day.</p>	<p>Engaging SAVI director in conversations on how we can have conversations with students on being an active citizen after completing a day of service.</p>	<p>Students will begin to develop action steps as a part of their post-service day experience to include registering to vote (if not already).</p>
<p><u>Owl Breaks</u>: Similar to the Days of Service, utilizing the Site Leaders to also encourage students to think about “what’s next” and how to do they create action as a result of their experience.</p>	<p>Retooling Site Leader training to have increased focus on social issue, and beginning the trip experience with how they will carry this experience forward once we come back?</p>	<p>Students will begin to develop action steps as a part of their post-service day experience to include encouragement to register to vote (if not already).</p>

**Faculty and Staff Engagement**

Faculty and staff play a critical role in increasing student voter registration and turnout rates, FAU saw increases in several STEM fields, including: Biological and Biomedical Sciences, Computer and Information Sciences, Engineering and Engineering Technologies, Mathematics and Statistics, and Physical Sciences.

Through building partnerships with faculty and staff the link to voter registration and resources were able to be on the front page of Canvas which is the online platform used for all academic programs.

On the FAU Community Engagement classification application, there is a question on the application that specifically asks: “Does the institution encourage and measure student voter registration and voting”? There is also a sub-question that asks, “describe the methods for encouraging and measuring student voter registration and voting”. FAU does encourage and measure student voter registration and voting, through the Weppner Center for LEAD and Service-Learning, with the official measurement tool being the nationally recognized NSLVE report. In terms of promotion, this takes the form of encouragement of students to vote by staff; however, there is also an opportunity for faculty to continue promoting in their classes, as evidenced by the disciplines that have increased rates of student voter registration and turnout

and an opportunity for more promotion/resource sharing for disciplines that have seen lower rates or overall decreases.

<b>Faculty and Staff Engagement</b>		
Goal	Method	Measure of Success
Gain an understanding of the decreases in voter engagement in: Architecture, Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies, Natural Resources and Conservation, Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies, Philosophy and Religious Studies, and Public Administration.	Review of courses that are housed in these disciplines that are designated as Academic Service-Learning to gauge how civic engagement is infused into the curriculum to then look for future opportunities to increase these rates going into the 2018 and 2020 election cycles.	The measure of success will come from the 2018 and 2020 NSLVE reports, and any associated increases with the aforementioned disciplines.

### **Basis in Social Justice**

The main focus of this civic engagement plan is to inspire students to become change agents through active participation in the democratic process. Through utilization of the data provided by the NSLVE report, we are able to further define connections between programs that are already being offered and inspiring students to take action and become active citizens.

As evidenced in the *Race to Excellence*, FAU is committed to be an integrated partner in the communities it serves to reach toward a common goal of improving the lives of those around us. As an institution of higher education, FAU strives to educate students to develop critical thinking skills to make better sense of the social issues around us and how they can become agents of positive change.

This civic engagement plan exists to bring together a variety of programs and services that are offered in an effort to engage the students, faculty/staff, and community in bringing about higher levels of democratic engagement and improving the lives of those around us.

