



**Florida International University  
Voter Engagement Campus Plan 2019**

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## Executive Summary

Florida International University is committed to making a difference. Our students and faculty are involved in a wide-range of civic engagement activities at international, national, state and local levels. This action plan is yet another way to increase civic engagement at our campus. This will be our first year participating in the All in Democracy Challenge, yet we hope to build a strong foundation that will continue to grow and strengthen over the coming years. We will work to increase civic engagement and voter turnout by immersing our students in a multitude of curricular and co-curricular activities. We will carefully monitor the effectiveness of these activities so that we can continue to enhance our efforts and increase our long-term impact.

## Leadership

The FIU Democratic Engagement Committee is a joint initiative between the Office of Analysis and Information Management (AIM) and the Center for Leadership and Service. This collaboration was created to ensure that there was seamless integration between the actions taken and the data that was collected and analyzed. The committee will be co-chaired by Hiselgis Perez, Associate Vice President for the Office Analysis and Information Management, and Patricia Lopez-Guerrero, Director of the Center for Leadership and Service. The goal of the committee is to increase voter awareness, registration, and engagement for students at Florida International University. Because a combination of skills are required to achieve this goal, the initial step was for the co-chairs to identify key stakeholders and invite them to participate in this committee. The members invited to join were selected across diverse areas within the university, so that the efforts would be holistic and well integrated. The initial group members are identified below:

- Hiselgis Perez, Associate Vice President, Analysis and Information Management
- Patricia Lopez-Guerrero, Director, Center for Leadership and Service.
- Bridgette Cram, Assistant Vice President for Academic & Student Affairs
- Kathleen Wilson, Professor and Vice Provost for Faculty Leadership and Success
- Caryn Lavernia, Assistant Vice President, Office of Community Engagement
- Eduardo Merille, Assistant Vice President, Office of External Relations
- Student Representatives from on campus organizations

There are multiple responsibilities that will be handled by this group. First, the group will analyze existing data on voting engagement to identify areas for improvement. The group will also identify any currently ongoing initiatives and attempt to quantify the impact of these initiatives on civic engagement. Once effective initiatives are identified, the group can elaborate on these initiatives by increasing their range or scale. The group will also be responsible for developing new initiatives and discussing the feasibility and logistics of their implementation. Prioritization of the implementation on these multiple initiatives is also an important task for this group. Finally, the group must continually monitor the impact of the different initiatives on civic engagement. To achieve these goals, the committee will meet at least once per term with additional meetings scheduled as needed. A Microsoft Teams site will be created for ongoing collaboration.

## Commitment and Landscape

FIU is committed to civic, social, and political engagement. Our students and faculty are engaged in tackling some of the most difficult issues of our time by developing ideas, solutions, and policy-relevant research that can make a real difference in our world today. The work done at the Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs most clearly demonstrates this commitment. The Green School offers 38 interdisciplinary degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels, as well as 35 undergraduate and graduate certificate programs that teach students core issues related to crime and justice, provide students with an understanding of economic problems, explore the challenges of global scope (such as inequality, migration, and diasporas and nature-society relations). It also offers specific degrees in political science with a multidisciplinary approach to the study of international relations. Additionally, The Green School is home to 16 of the university's most prominent international centers, institutes, and programs, including the Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center, recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as one of only 16 National Resource Centers on Latin America in the country, and the Cuban Research Institute, the nation's premier center for academic research on Cuban and Cuban-American issues.

The goal of the Green School is to equip our students to think about the world in unique ways, generating policy-relevant dialogue and research on the most pressing issues facing the world today, including poverty and inequality; economic development and sustainability; security, foreign policy, and governance, among others. They also seek to prepare the leaders of tomorrow, whether their interest is in politics and public policy or human rights and democratization, through an innovative approach that integrates theory with practice and combines the social sciences with the humanities. The FIU Model UN team – a program housed at the Green School – is the top-ranked team in Florida and the highest ranked of any public university in the country. They were recently named the #1 team in North America by BestDelegate.com!

In addition to the Green School, FIU's Center for Leadership and Service also provides opportunities for students from all majors to be civically engaged. The mission of the center is to provide students with developmental and experiential opportunities that foster leadership, action, and community engagement. Through leadership education, service, and social innovation, students will become active citizens on campus, in their respective communities, and globally. The Center for Leadership and Service's Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) program promotes student development through engaged citizenship and democratic participation. It provides educational programming to aid student affairs staff and FIU students in acquiring the skills and knowledge to become active members in their communities. Some of their services include voter-rights awareness, prepping students to become political leaders, and luncheons that encourage community involvement. The Center for Leadership and Service, Campus Life, and the Student Government Association support students and numerous student organizations at FIU to help them become active citizens and socially responsible leaders in our communities. In 2017-2018, FIU participated as a LEAD Institution for the NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Initiative and received the Voter Friendly Campus designation. FIU is also recognized by Ashoka as a changemaker institution.

We will evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts through the following methods: event attendance, follow-up surveys, and NSLVE Data. This information will be collected and evaluated by the FIU

Democratic Engagement Committee. Additionally, FIU participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Student voter registration and voter turnout will be evaluated by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and these data are shared campus-wide and posted online.

In addition to the co-curricular activities presented above, FIU incorporates civic literacy into the undergraduate curriculum. Baccalaureate degree-seeking students must demonstrate competency in civic literacy through one of the following options prior to graduation:

(a) Successfully passing either POS2041 American Government or AMH2020 American History: Introductory Survey Since 1877. Each of the courses must include the following competencies:

1. Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government.
2. An understanding of the United States Constitution and its application.
3. Knowledge of the founding documents and how they have shaped the nature and functions of our institutions of self-government.
4. An understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation and landmark executive actions and their impact on law and society.

(b) Achieving the standard score on one of the following assessments:

<u>Assessment</u>	<u>Standard Score</u>
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Naturalization Test	60
Advanced Placement Government and Politics: United States	3
Advanced Placement United States History	4
CLEP American Government	3

## Barriers

There are various barriers that must be overcome for FIU to be successful. The first is lack of funding specifically allocated for civic engagement. Until we can secure funding, any initiatives will have to be funded within our existing university budgets. With better funding, we would be able to present more opportunities to students for civic engagement. Another challenge is that there is currently no single office that coordinates these initiatives. While it was good that there were many groups and organizations working on civic engagement on campus, this also implies that our committee is doing these activities in addition to their regular job duties. It would be much easier if there were an office with staff designated to attend to these activities year round. Having a dedicated department and budget to coordinate all aspects of civic and voter engagement would certainly be a needed resource.

Despite the lack of financial resources and dedicated personnel, FIU can leverage its existing resources to make this initiative successful. During previous elections, FIU has been selected to serve as an early voting site. Anyone registered to vote in Miami-Dade County, including FIU students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community, could vote at our main campus. Additionally, our campus has hosted a number of political figures including President Clinton, President Obama, President Trump, and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. There are also several FIU alumni that hold or have held political offices at the state and national level. This has enabled FIU to establish a presence in Washington, DC. Led by the university's Office of Governmental Relations, *FIU in DC* is an integrated advocacy approach to increase the national reputation of, and federal support for, our preeminent research areas, faculty, and student advocates. This program provides a platform for FIU students, alumni, faculty researchers,

and partners to engage with national thought leaders, co-work, and take advantage of academic opportunities.

## Goals

The NSLVE campus reports were carefully analyzed to determine FIU's strengths and identify areas for improvement. Overall, FIU's voting rate has increased for both the presidential and midterm elections. For the presidential election in 2016, FIU had a voting rate of 58.8%, which represented an increase of 3.3% from the 2012 rate. When compared to other intuitions, FIU's rate was 8.2% higher than the average for all institutions and 6.8% higher than public-research institutions. Increased voting rates were apparent across all age groups, educational levels, enrollment statuses, and genders. There was a 27% decrease in in-person voting, although these seem to have shifted to Early Vote (+23.2%) and absentee (+3.9%). There were also decreases in First Year (-1-7%), Black (-6.8%), and 2 or more races (-1%).-

During the 2018 midterm elections, FIU had a voting rate of 48.4%. This represented an increase of 23.5% from the 2014 rates. When compared to other intuitions, FIU's midterm rate was 9.3% higher than the average for all institutions and 7.6% higher than public-research institutions. Increased voting rates were apparent across all age groups, educational levels, class years, enrollment statuses, genders, and ethnicities. There was a decreased in in-person voting (-18.5%) and absentee (-2.3%), accompanied by a 20.9% increase in Early Vote.

Based on the data above, several long-term and short-term goals can be established. Short-term goals would include investigating what accounts for the decreased voting rates in the first year, Black and 2 or more races student populations. Then, specific initiatives could be established to target these populations and implemented along the overall initiatives and strategies. The long-term goals would be to continue to increase voting rates and to eliminate the voting disparities for first year, Black and multiracial students.

## Strategy

Our strategy to increase civic engagement is to schedule frequent events that bring students together and engage them with questions about their communities, their struggles, and issues they personally care about. These events should help build community with the participants and hopefully make them want to return. It is imperative that attendance and contact info be collected at all these events in order to keep track of who attends, how often they attend, and be able to send them invitations for future events. When the next election comes around, we can track who votes and who doesn't, and we can measure how our program has helped to increase or decrease civic involvement. Eventually, repeat participants who demonstrate a passion and fervor for civic issues can eventually take on leadership roles, and we can help give them a platform to further engage other students so that the project takes on a grassroots momentum and we can grow organically. We should eventually identify a way to pass on the torch to student leaders with the capacity and sense of duty to respect the task at hand and use their student experience to better shape outreach efforts to their generation. Sometimes it is difficult to get students from other generations to care, so if we can first identify student leaders in the community, we can then leverage their knowledge to help us better achieve our goal of voter

engagement. The goal is ultimately to inspire and empower students to take on the responsibility of passing on the sense of civic duty to their fellow peers. These events will be targeting our undergraduate and graduate students and will take place at both the Modesto Maidique and Biscayne Bay campuses. Some specific examples of these events include:

- **Tabling.** Collaborate with the Miami-Dade County Elections Office, the Campus Elections Engagement Project, and the Campus Vote Project to promote ongoing voter registration.
- **Center for Leadership & Service Initiatives.** The Center for Leadership & Service Office will co-host events for national voter registration day, support campus CLDE fellows, and provide students with the Civic Score Card challenge. The Center for Leadership & Service will also provide opportunities through Engagement Week, Changemaker Week, and Voter Registration Awareness Campaigns.
- **“Panthers to the Poll” Student Government Civic Engagement Series:** Three events geared toward engaging students on campus to promote voter registration.
- **Greek Life Voter Registration Drives:** The various Greek organizations set up campaigning to increase the voting rates of their members.
- **Guest Lecturers:** Invite politicians, people of influence, artists, and exciting faculty members to present and engage the students at events aimed at fostering an active community. The idea is for the guest speaker to engage the participants on a personal, community level aimed at examining their environment and seeing how and why it takes engagement to make it a better place.
- **Involvement in local politics:** Encourage students to get involved in a local political campaign (regardless of party affiliation) and volunteer for a phonebank or canvassing.

## Reporting

The ALL IN Democracy Challenge Action Plan and the NSLVE data will be shared internally with the Democratic Engagement Committee and with the university communities. Externally, the campus plan will be made available to the general public via links across FIU’s website, specifically on the individual webpages of the following FIU units: Analysis and Information Management, the Center for Leadership & Service, and Student Government.

## Evaluation

We will conduct an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of our efforts. The purpose of evaluation will be to determine if initiatives are being effective. We want to know what civic- and voter-engagement activities our students engage in and how many students are impacted. FIU will use the information to further enhance efforts to increase student engagement. The data will also serve to prioritize the delivery and timing of the different initiatives. M This information will be collected and evaluated by the Office of Analysis and Information Management. The following data will be collected: event attendance, follow-up surveys, and NSLVE data. The information will be shared, discussed, and analyzed by the Democratic Engagement Committee members. The results will be shared with the university community through meetings and presentations. The evaluation results will be publically posted online.

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