



## **Background**

The American Democracy Project has been a part of Fort Hays State University since it was brought onto campus in 2004 and the non-partisan initiative is currently housed inside of the Center for Civic Leadership, a nationally recognized institute for civic engagement. The ADP has taken steps to engage the future graduates of tomorrow by creating events that are centered around registering students to vote and encouraging them to vote; promoting positive civic discourse, as well as educating students on current topical issues in ways like talks like Times Talks. Institutionally, the ADP fits within one of the five strategic goals of Fort Hays State University, which is around global, community and civic engagement.

Additionally, the university is a bastion for civic engagement and routinely gives students many opportunities to commit to participating in democracy itself. The Center for Civic Leadership, the larger department that deals with civic engagement as a whole, also is categorized under the fifth strategic goal for the university, which is to promote global engagement. The associated projects, along with the American Democracy Project, help to engage students on global matters, democracy as a whole, as well as service-based learning. Beyond the CCL, the university also has an institutionalized goal to help engage their students in global and civic engagement, with one example being in the curriculum for general education, having to meet certain goals and expectations to gauge a student's overall understanding of those concepts.

Finally, in the deepest levels of the institution, Dr. Tisa Mason, the president of Fort Hays State University, has signed on All-In Challenge's Presidential Commitment to devote to full student voter participation, realizing that higher education has a critical impact and responsibility upon this core tenet - on creating responsible and engaged students that are committed to their communities and to their democracy, with voter participation and exercising the students' right to vote.

## **Current/Past On-Campus Partnerships**

- Center for Civic Leadership
  - Related Entities: Tigers in Service, Global Leadership Project, Women's Leadership Project
- Student Government Association (SGA)
- FHSU Student Engagement / Student Affairs
- Forsyth Library and Learning Commons
- Office of the President at FHSU
- The Docking Institute of Public Affairs
- Departments on Campus
  - Political Science
  - History
  - Teacher Education
  - Psychology
  - Philosophy
  - Sociology

## **Current/Past Off-Campus Partnerships**



- Campus Election Engagement Project
- All-In Challenge
- Students Learn, Students Vote Coalition
- New York Times
- Hays Chamber of Commerce
- Hays Public Library
- Daughters of the American Revolution

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### **Goals for 2020 and Beyond**

Noting that this year is a major election year, Fort Hays State University, as well as the American Democracy Project, is doing whatever it can to help bolster participation rates as well as to better help with the accomplishment of its civic engagement goals. This action plan also serves even beyond this election year, meaning that the work at FHSU to fully commit to full student participation will not stop there. As such, the plan may also be amended throughout the following years to come.

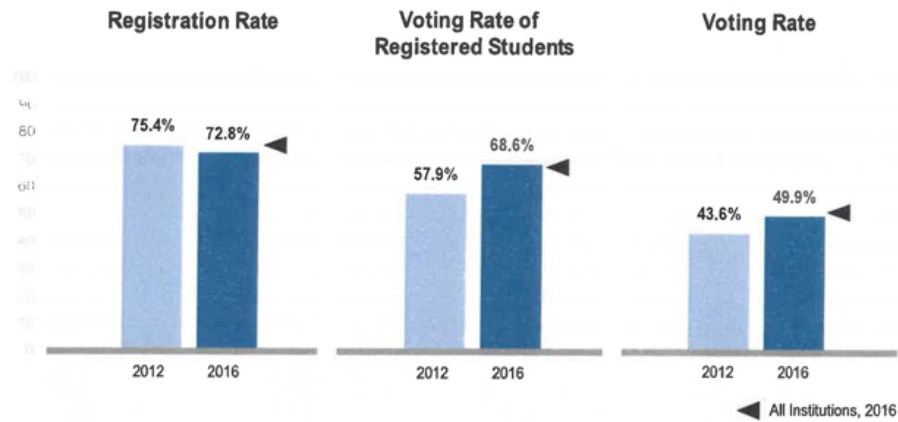
Consequently, these are the main foci that both the ADP and FHSU will continue to work upon and implement as we move forward. Even with COVID-19 having an impact upon our campus, we will cover both on-campus goals should the administration, local health officials, the state of Kansas, and other agencies decide to hold classes during the autumn semester given the situation at the time of decision, as well as online goals to help increase student voting at FHSU. The methodology will remain



the same, although our strategies to help raise voter participation will deviate depending upon the delivery method (face-to-face or on-line). Read the pages following for more details regarding the plans that we have for this upcoming year.

- Increases in the voting rate and efforts

A goal we would like to achieve at Fort Hays State University in terms of voter registration is the voting rate among registered students and the voting rate overall. Our total goal of the number of students that vote in the 2020 election is at around 6,500, set above the actual number of students that voted in 2016 in [our NSLVE report](#), which was 5,445 students. The voting rate goal that we hope to set in 2020 is 55%, which is also 5.1% higher than the actual percentage of 49.9% of students that voted in the 2016 elections. See figure to the data below.



Although COVID-19 may hinder the voting rate we are seeking to attain, our resources will be spent putting time and effort into the education of mail-in ballots and making sure that people are still engaged to vote in 2020. Retention of students on an institutional level is questionable, however, regardless of the decisions made by FHSU itself, we are still ready and prepared to go ahead with the mission of increasing the voting rates.

With in-person interactions, that means at any event, be it the freshman orientation sessions before the beginning of the academic term in August, to Times Talks at the Forsyth Library, tabling in the Memorial Union and beyond, we will make sure that there's always a place for students to register to vote. The onus is on us to make sure that we help students become aware that this campus is civically minded and hold it as a core tenet of the university, and as soon as a student sees that messaging, they will be more apt to see that this university is sending a positive message about getting involved in civic duty and so more students can learn about civic engagement. On-line interactions will be different since there is a larger, more diverse audience to reach out to, however, the message will remain the same. We will make sure to utilize our social media channels more and make sure that online students are still getting registered to vote, no matter



where in the nation they may be. Resources from partners will be used to also help steer those students in the right direction as to where they should go.

- Utilization of Resources/Budget

Our resources are what can help us make the goals we have more attainable for getting students to register to vote on-campus. Therefore the ADP cannot take on that challenge alone, but noting our partnerships, we can utilize the resources from other organizations to better our outreach. That means partnering and networking with organizations that help us spread the message like National Voter Registration Day or Loud Light. We can also tack onto SGA's initiative to bring the League of Women Voters onto campus. As for the one way we will best utilize our resources for 2020 is to obtain devices (iPads in particular) capable of allowing students to register to vote relatively quickly without having to pull out laptops. We will have to ask for the purchasing of those devices from either our budget or have some appropriated money from the Student Government Association.

As of currently, both the ADP and the SGA are working on initiatives to drive voter participation up on-campus and beyond by placing a polling booth on campus so students have a better propensity to vote as well as develop habits to create lifelong civic participation in the greater society they live in, as well as creating community engagement so residents surrounding the campus have the opportunity to come and vote. The ADP and Student Engagement are also planning to have a voter registration block party (be it in-person or online) so students have more chances to get civically involved and take the initiative to vote.

The ADP will also utilize the services of its off-campus partnerships, like All-In and CEEP for resources on how to best strategize how we should be thinking about other things that relate to our goals of bolstering civic engagement and voting rates like social media posts, wording, consultations, attending conferences to attain more skills in this general subject area, so on and so forth. Learning, taking the initiative and adapting are most important as we go along on helping to better how we understand and hone in on what we are lacking.

- Partnerships

Partnerships are crucial in spreading the message of civic engagement on-campus. Without the support of these organizations, we wouldn't have an outlet to speak about the positives of civic engagement to the greater campus community as well as creating a path for greater service at the university. As the ADP is a non-partisan organization, along with the institution's help, we would like to create a path for voter registration that yields in motivated and potential voters like:

- Greek Life
- Faith-based organizations
- Honor societies
- Cultural organizations



By letting the involved students know their rights to vote and the laws behind it, we can reach more students on a personal level as opposed to tabling in the Memorial Union. Not only that but we can recruit volunteers for future voter registration drives. This we feel will bolster civic engagement and the participation in our democracy.

- Events

With the onset of COVID-19, we are unsure as to how the events will look like or even if these will happen in-person. Regardless of no matter how the delivery ends up becoming, we will adapt with how we go forth with those plans. There is a list of ideas that have been brainstormed, keeping in mind with our civic engagement goals for the university. To add, we have to plan an adequate amount of events, otherwise students may see the message we are trying to convey as overwhelming. See the link for potential ideas that will be planned into the summer and will be redacted as the summer progresses. <https://bit.ly/2ZUbJqv>

In addition to these events, noting that this year is an election year, local non-partisan candidate forums will be held at Beach-Schmidt Performing Arts Center that will be partnered with entities at the university as well as partners outside the grounds of the university. That way students and the community are aware of the candidates and meet them, as well as where they stand on issues and ideas for their potential constituents.

- Education

Many students are unaware of the laws that attribute to how they can and cannot vote, thus preventing them from voting. After tabling in the past, the most common issue students run across when registering to vote is whether they should use their permanent address, since many FHSU students are not originally from Hays. Some are unaware that they can register to vote here if they wish, no matter if they are living on-campus in the residential halls. Some may not wish to vote here since they are more in tune with their local politics but yet are not aware of the process of obtaining an absentee ballot. By educating the students in a concise manner, they are more likely to use the knowledge we provide to vote and the facts stick with them for the rest of their civic lives.

Even in the presence of COVID-19 and if classes continue to be delivered on-line, we will share information about mail-in ballots and how to obtain it, as well as deadlines within the state of Kansas so students are aware of when they need to get on the voter registry. That will be done with conferences and webinars, as well as social media posts. It is imperative that the message gets out, not on a small organizational level, but institutionally and beyond.

- Social Media

As of the date of the posting of the initiative, the FHSU ADP social media handles are not being used as much to help spread the message to encourage and fire up potential student voters on-campus. When next year hits, we will utilize those media more, whether it be reminding students on deadlines that are almost due or promoting an event that relates to voting and voting registration. It will elicit the response to the student that the matter has urgency and is important. And to do that, we will have to employ hashtags and engaging graphics that will ultimately help us in achieving our goal of



**FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
AMERICAN DEMOCRACY PROJECT

*Forward thinking. World ready.*

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reaching FHSU students, both on-line or in-person. We will also use videos describing the process and making sure that the pertinent information we would like to put out there is covered without any extra fluff. Even with the onset of COVID-19, we will begin to start getting the message out there so students are aware of how and when to vote, as well as the deadlines for states and their primaries.