



George Mason University
Campuses: Arlington, Fairfax, Prince William, VA
June 2022 – January 2028

What would it take to ask every student, faculty and staff to participate in civic and/or democratic engagement?

I. Executive Summary

George Mason University is an institution that is deeply committed to civic learning and democratic engagement. That commitment is shared across the institution with engagement from senior administration, University Life, academic units, and the Office of the Provost. Our institutional mission includes a commitment to creating a more just, free, and prosperous world and our goal for a “Mason Graduate” is an engaged citizen, and well-rounded scholar, who is prepared to act.

George Mason University’s action plan to increase civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation among college students was developed by Kristen Wright, Director Community Engagement and Civic Learning (CECL) in Undergraduate Education, Office of the Provost, and Alissa Karton, Assistant to the Vice President for University Life (UL - Student Affairs division)/Director of Special Projects, in conjunction with MasonVotes, the coalition of staff, faculty, and students across Mason who take leadership in supporting non-partisan voter engagement, provide opportunities for voter education and registration, and also do large scale outreach to increase election related education and voter turnout.

Kristen and Alissa, as members of the Provost and University Life teams, will facilitate implementation, evaluation and regular review and updates every 6 months.

Since it’s establishment in 2007, MasonVotes has focused on education and awareness surrounding all things election and voting related, and encouraging civic engagement among students, staff and faculty. Because Mason has such a diverse population, with many in our community prohibited from voting because they are not U.S. citizens, it’s always been important to MasonVotes that we focus on educating ALL on our democratic system and ALL the ways one could be civically engaged no matter where they live now or in the future, and not solely

focused on registering voters. Most first-year students arrive to Mason having registered to vote their senior year of high school.

In addition to the commitment from the Mason Votes coalition to democratic engagement at Mason, Mason recently selected “Transformative Education through Anti-Racist Community Engagement” as the topic for its next *Quality Enhancement Plan*. Through this plan, Mason seeks to embed community engagement and civic learning into academic and student co-curricular experiences at Mason. By doing this, we will provide nearly all Mason students with the opportunity to take a civic learning course that is connected to their academic interests. This plan represents a significant commitment and investment from Mason in deepening the opportunities for students to participate in civic learning and doing so in ways that are institutionalized in academic experiences as well as university traditions for our students.

The primary goal of this action plan is to engage every member of the Mason community in civic and/or democratic engagement.

II. Leadership

Our institutional commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is shared among many Mason stakeholder and partners, including but not limited to the Vice President for University Life, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Vice President for Community and Government Relations.

A. Leads

Given the breadth of responsibilities involved, we feel strongly that having both the academic side and student affairs working hand in hand leading the way is crucial for our success.

- Undergraduate Education (Provost Office): Community Engagement and Civic Learning (CECL)
 - Academic partners
 - Related community partners
 - Assessment and evaluation
- University Life (Student Affairs): Vice President’s office
 - Logistics (monthly meetings, procurement of swag, etc.)
 - Related community and student organization partners (high turnover, additional outreach and communication required)
 - Assessment and evaluation

B. Academic Partners

- Community Engagement and Civic Learning (CECL)
- Department of African and African American Studies
- Office of Community Engagement and Civic Learning
 - Wages funding for student positions
- Schar School of Policy and Government

- Social Action and Integrative Learning
- Women and Gender Studies

C. Campus Unit Partners:

- Center for Culture Equity and Empowerment
- Center for the Advancement of Well-Being
- Counseling and Psychological Services
- Federal Government Relations
- Government and Community Relations
- Housing and Residence Life
- Leadership Education and Development (LEAD)
- New Student and Family Programs
- Student Government
- Student Involvement
- Student Media
 - Wages funding for student positions
- Student Support and Advocacy
- University Life
 - Wages funding for student positions
 - Assessment and evaluation

D. Off Campus Partners

- All In Campus Democracy Challenge
- Campus Engagement Election Project (CEEP)
 - Potential funding for student fellow positions
- Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)
- Clinton Global Initiative University (CGI U annual funding provided by Mason)
- Fairfax League of Women Voters
- Local Government Counties
 - Arlington
 - Fairfax (MasonVotes has a long standing relationship with the Fairfax County Registrar)
 - Prince William
- Virginia Campus Compact/National Campus Compact (annual membership paid by Mason)
- Virginia21(annual membership paid by Mason)

E. Student Organizations

- Alexander Hamilton Society
- Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.
- Arts Advocacy
- Black Justice Association
- College Democrats
- College Republicans
- Graduate and Professional Student Association

- Mason Cable Network
- NAACP
- Patriot PIRG
- Roosevelt Society
- Student Government
- Student Media
 - Wages funding for masonvotes.gmu.edu content and management
 - Potential grant funding for student positions
- WGMU campus radio station

III. Commitment

Our current President has been in place for two years (with a primary focus of getting us all through COVID) and their strategic focus and plan is forthcoming. However, Mason faculty and staff have always had a strong commitment to engaging students in civic education and the democratic process. A current faculty member used to hold a class where they took students to New Hampshire for the primary leading up to each Presidential election. Ten years ago, students fought hard for a polling location on the Fairfax campus and with the support of faculty and administration working collaboratively with the Fairfax Registrar that became a reality, after a two-year evaluation period, we changed campus locations to one that was more student friendly for walking and also offered closer parking options.

The Office of Community Engagement and Civic and University Life missions, core values and vision align and support all that MasonVotes works to accomplish.

A. Office of Community Engagement and Civic Learning (CECL)

Mission

To connect Mason students and faculty with community to support student learning and the development of civically engaged citizens and well -rounded scholars committed to positive social change through partnership with community.

Vision

By embedding community and civic engagement into academic and co-curricular experiences, we will equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- *Understand themselves as agents of change.*
- *Identify and disrupt racist practices.*
- *Work collaboratively towards positive social change.*

Mason Impact + (RS/CECL/ENTR) Learning Outcomes
(General education curriculum)

- Understand knowledge creation: Students will understand how knowledge is generated and communicated, and how it can be used to address questions or problems in disciplines and in society.
- Engage multiple perspectives: Students will be able to identify and negotiate multiple perspectives, work collaboratively within and across multiple social and environmental contexts, and engage ethically with their subject and with others.
- Investigate a meaningful question: Students will use inquiry skills to articulate a question; engage in an inquiry process; and situate the concepts, practices, or results within a broader context.
- Complete a project: Students will design and carry out an individual or collaborative project that explores an original question, seeks a creative solution to a problem, applies knowledge to a professional challenge, or offers a unique perspective. Students engage deeply in this original work.
- Communicate and share outcomes: Students will communicate knowledge from their project through presentation, publication, or performance to an audience beyond the classroom.

B. University Life

Mission

University Life cares for the whole student by promoting inclusive well-being and fostering lifelong learning to prepare ethical leaders for the world.

TOGETHER, we achieve our mission through an unwavering commitment to our values:

Inclusion and Equity

We are committed to cultivating an environment of engagement, connection, and belonging that is respectful and fair for everyone.

Leadership for Positive Change

We are committed to cultivating leaders who critically examine and understand the potential impact of their decisions and act ethically.

Well-Being

We are committed to cultivating an environment of understanding and fulfillment of both individual and community well-being that promotes purpose, vitality, engagement, and resilience.

Collaborative Community

We are committed to cultivating a supportive network of colleagues that shares ideas, learns and creates together, and develops authentic connections.

Strategic Transformation

We are committed to dynamic action in creating meaningful solutions to anticipate and meet the needs of an ever-changing community

The UL strategic plan is structured to realize our vision by declaring our mission, values, and then defining our major strategies to meet the desired outcomes. In the spirit of Mason Strategic Goal #1, all division programs, initiatives, and action steps are developed and delivered with student learning in mind. With a focus on comprehensive student development, we promote and assess student learning through six learning domains:

- Global and Multicultural Inclusion
- Identity Development
- Interpersonal Competency
- Practical Competence
- Social Responsibility
- Well-Being

Examples of institutional support:

- National Voter Registration Day email sent to all students each year from President's Office.
- Every January during the Commonwealth of Virginia's legislative session, a delegation of students (depending on the year between 30-60 students) known as "Mason Lobbies" travels to Richmond to meet with legislators on issues of importance to current college students and new graduates. This occurred in a hybrid version during the pandemic.
- Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence Task Force established summer 2020- The task force is taking steps to build systems of equity and remove bias from the culture at George Mason University. MasonVotes will coordinate with task force members on how we can specifically consider and address diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice tenets?

IV. Landscape

The Patriot Experience (co-curricular learning)

Global Citizenship Track

The *Change The World* category guides you to be an engaged and active member in your community. Mason students who *engage with the world, honor freedom of thought and expression, will thrive* together. This category will help you to learn how to:

- Identify core personal values and base actions on those values

- Apply ethical knowledge and learning with democratic ideals and principles to make positive changes locally and beyond
- Demonstrate knowledge, awareness, and understanding of important world issues
- Apply academic and disciplinary knowledge and personal experience to promoting social change
- Build a just society and be better equipped to make meaningful social change

Assessment Data

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE)

2020 71.8% Voting Rate (5.6% increase from 2016) vs 66% All Institutions

2020 31% Increase in Early Voting

2020 20% increase in not-in-person

2020 Increase in voting across all race and ethnicities from 2018 voting

2020 Increase in voting across all ages from 2018 voting

Enrolled student population at George Mason University, both undergraduate and graduate is

- 40.4% White
- 18.4% Asian
- 13.9% Hispanic or Latino
- 11% Black or African American
- 4.09% Two or More Races
- 0.153% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 0.145% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders.

V. Goals

Long-term

- By 2028, George Mason University will engage every member of the Mason community in civic and/or democratic engagement
- By 2028, the institution will increase student voting rates by 20 percentage points over 2016 turnout levels, with Black and Hispanic students voting at the same rates as white students.
- By 2024, include electoral engagement in University 100 class syllabi as a learning objective to the course.

Short-term

- By the start of classes in fall 2024, we will ensure that 90% of freshmen and new students (who are eligible to vote) are registered to vote and are encouraged to pledge to vote in the November 2024 election and verify their registration details.
- By the fall of 2023, we will establish a relationship with the local election officials in Arlington and Prince William counties and invite them to join MasonVotes working group.

VI. Strategy

In support of both our long and short-term goals we will offer:

New Initiatives

- *Civic Student Advocate* program that we will launch this summer/fall to hire students from different majors/areas of campus to help with voter outreach
- Based on our NSLVE data we will target outreach to faculty in majors with lower student voter turnout sharing educational materials and deadlines via MASONVOTES.GMU.EDU, emails and offering to present to their students. In the classroom
- NEW faculty outreach, education and awareness on MasonVotes initiatives and support
- Utilize New Student Convocation and lunch (freshmen and transfer students) to register/verify eligible voters
- Meet with leadership and faculty/staff advisors of politically related and civic minded registered student organizations to connect them and discover their mission and goals and how we can all partner

Improving Existing Initiatives

- Continue to improve and expand election and voter related content and resources available on MASONVOTES.GMU.EDU
- Increase Student Media Public Service Announcements on campus cable network and student run radio station
- President Washington *National Voter Registration Day* email to all students. We know that not all students regularly check and read their email. Expand this action to ad in campus newspaper, banners and signage throughout campuses and at the George Mason statue
- Continue programmatic efforts during **Civic Related Calendar** events

- Constitution Day 9/17/22 – Student Media hosts array of interactive activities for university community; expand to Arlington and Fairfax campuses
- National Voter Registration Day 9/20/22
- National Voter Education Week 10/3-10/7/2022

VII. NSLVE

George Mason University is very grateful to NSLVE and the critical data on Mason's and national student voting that they collect, analyze, and share.

VIII. Reporting

Mason's action plan will be posted on MASONVOTES.GMU.EDU, University Life and CECL websites and shared with all partners and stakeholders.

NSLVE data is always shared with our Office of Communications, Government and Community Relations, Provost and President's offices, Student Involvement, Student Media, University Life, Board of Visitors, Fairfax County Registrar and others. We pride ourselves on being transparent in our efforts, successes and areas for improvement.

IX. Evaluation

We are committed to evaluating our progress toward stated goals every six months through 2028 to ensure we are engaging every member of the Mason community in civic and/or democratic engagement by:

- Working with the Office of Undergraduate Education with University 100 faculty and Peer Advisor training to include voter education materials, offering to present to classes, and tracking how many classes register students/provide information on elections and voter registration. We will also review syllabi to see how many faculty have added *electoral engagement* as a learning objective for the course.
- Collaborating with the University Life Assessment office, Eunkyong Park, Director of Co-Curricular Assessment, Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, as a resource to help determine best ways to track and collect data on:
 - Student, faculty and staff civic and/or democratic engagement. By using Mason 360 and our new course designation process we will be able to measure the engagement.
 - Freshmen and new students registered/registering/pledging to vote
- Utilize data collected by **The Patriot Experience** to determine how many students are participating in the *Global Citizen Track*

- Utilizing the latest NSLVE data to monitor changes in Black and Hispanic student voting
- Create a roster of our local election officials in Arlington and Prince William counties, and who we've included in correspondence, held individual meetings with, and/or attended MasonVotes meetings

End Note: Thank you for this opportunity to delve deeper and offer thoughtful consideration to our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts and goals.

June 9, 2022