



THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
TASKFORCE ON VOTER ENGAGEMENT –
2018 ACTION PLAN

DRAFT May 31, 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The George Washington University (GW) has long been ranked among the top ten higher education institutions with the most politically active students by the Princeton Review. GW has extremely active College Democrats and College Republicans, as well as student organizations that draw both progressives and conservatives to political engagement. In addition, GW students understand that voting is one of many ways to demonstrate their civic responsibility; GW students are deeply civically engaged through community service, community-engaged scholarship, and social innovation and entrepreneurship.

This voter engagement plan has been developed by a team of campus staff, faculty, and students. Everyone has insights and opportunity to provide high-touch and intentional dialogue regarding the importance of voting and being civically and democratically active. This group does significant work with student leaders on campus, who have an even greater reach with the rest of the student body. While this is a taskforce, it has become a coalition of campus partners with shared passions and guiding principles. Starting in May and ending at the end of the Fall Semester of 2018, this plan is comprehensive in design, promoting voter registration and participation using the two primary channels available – direct and in-person engagement and passive-engagement through the media, residence halls bulletin boards, and social media and campus websites.

GW is grateful to take this opportunity to be an active participant in providing students with the knowledge, skills, and resources to be more civically and democratically engaged. By being more intentional in graduating students who are democratically aware we believe we will be supporting our society in solving some of the nation's and the world's most insistent concerns.

LEADERSHIP

The GW Taskforce on Voter Engagement is chaired by Amy Cohen, Executive Director of GW's Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service within the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement. The role of this taskforce is to provide our campus community with an all-inclusive and wide-ranging reach of opportunity to learn about the importance of civic and community engagement and provides pathways and reminders to lead students to democratic engagement. GW fosters opportunities for students to fulfill their civic duty and exercise their responsibility in our democracy.

We are committed to providing all our students with the resources needed to be civically and democratically aware.

Taskforce members include faculty and staff across multiple schools, including Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, and the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, as well as the Office of Enrollment Management and the Student Experience; and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement; and Office of External Relations.

Students and student organizations were also well represented. Student members represented GW College Democrats, GW College Republicans, the Student Association, the Interfraternity Council, Residence Hall Association, as well as a number of graduate students from the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, and the Graduate School of Education and Human Development.

COMMITMENT and LANDSCAPE

The George Washington University (GW) has long been ranked among the top ten higher education institution with the most politically active students by the Princeton Review. GW has extremely active College Democrats and College Republicans, as well as student organizations that draw both progressives and conservatives to political engagement. In addition, GW students understand that voting is one of many ways to demonstrate their civic responsibility; GW students are deeply civically engaged through internships, community service, community-engaged scholarship, and social innovation and entrepreneurship.

In 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama challenged GW to complete 100,000 hours of community service. If we did so, she agreed to give our Commencement address. (GW is the only university whose Commencement takes place on the National Mall). GW completed more the 169,000 hours of service that year, and has continued to increase annually. This year, the GW community completed more than 700,000 hours of service; more than 600 students earned President's Volunteer Service Awards, indicating that they had performed more than 100 hours of service during the year.

More than 70 GW courses in all schools, undergraduate, graduate and professional, engage students in real world engagement and problem-solving. Students use their academic skills to address community-identified needs – and in the process, students strengthen their analytical skills and develop civic and cultural competence.

GW's Nashman Center provides more than \$50,000 annually to students for social innovation projects conducted in partnership with community residents, schools, and organizations. Offices and schools across the university also seed social innovation, helping students to understand and practice their role as civically-engaged leaders in community.

Students at GW also participate extensively in internship experiences on Capitol Hill, in federal agencies, in international organizations such as the World Bank, and at the White House, which is half a mile from campus.

Many departments and schools teach politics and policy, these include our excellent Department of Political Science, Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, Graduate School of Political Management, and Elliott School of International Affairs. However, because of GW's orientation toward our hometown industry, many of our courses, programs, and schools – including in business, nursing, engineering, public health, mathematics, and law – are geared toward understanding, analysis and action in politics and policy.

Civic engagement in a democratic republic should be coupled with the exercise of the franchise. This is both a responsibility and a right.

As a participant in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) for the last several years, GW has tracked our student voting rate. In 2016, on average nationally, 50.4% of students voted. That year, **57.9% of GW students voted** – up 3.3 points from 2012's 54.6% of students. In the 2014 midterm election, **21.6% of GW students voted** whereas the average across all institutions in 2014 was 18.8% of students voting.

Voter participation among GW students is solidly above average. We vote at a higher rate than our peer institutions (private research institutions) and a higher rate than all institutions aggregated. But as an institution with so many students who learn and serve in the nation's political offices, federal agencies, community organizations, schools, and other public institutions, GW aspires to excellence in civic engagement.

GOALS

The goals of this initiative are to see a rise in student voter participation from 21.6% in the 2014 midterm elections to 30% in 2018. We would like to see a similar rise during presidential election year of 2020, from 57.9% to 65% of all GW students participating in voting. We believe that this is both an ambitious and realistic goal. GW's voter participation is already above the national average with minimal coordinated campus effort. By providing resources and reminders, we can drive greater voter participation.

The taskforce is using the following Learning Outcomes to guide our programming within this initiative. GW wants students to not only understand the logistical processes of voting and democracy and how to find out this information in the future, but also the importance of voting and democracy on both individual and societal levels.

1. GW students will learn how to register to vote.
2. GW students will learn how to find out when and where to vote.
3. GW students will have an opportunity to explore the importance of voting in their own lives.
4. GW students will learn about the resources available to them to inform their voting decisions.
5. GW students will have an opportunity to explore the importance of being civically and democratically engaged.

STRATEGY

Our aim is to create a cohesive platform across campus to encourage voter registration and participation. We will be using the two primary avenues to communicate our campus commitment to democratic engagement and to create ample opportunity for students to gain a deeper and more critical understanding of the registration, voting, and knowledge-gathering processes. We will be using direct and in-person programming and passive-engagement through campus media, social media and institutional websites.

We will also attach opportunities for voter registration to **large scale campus programs** like Colonial Inauguration (new student orientation) in June, Welcome Week in August, and Freshman Day of Service and Convocation in September.

Because of GW's unique location in the nation's capital, we will also host a wide variety of public or large scale **events**, such as political debates, lectures and town hall meetings that include candidates or address important political issues. In addition, GW's student newspaper, the GW Hatchet, and many of the academic and student offices on campus provide students with a comprehensive list of local programs. When the opportunity arises, we will partner with local organizations to develop or promote these programs.

The utilization of **TurboVote** on our campus will allow us to create seamless opportunities for students to register to vote when using various campus web-portals. Faculty may also provide voter engagement programming information.

GW has a legacy of commitment to courses that include a public service component, including democratic engagement. Faculty will be encouraged to ensure that students are aware of the relationship among service, voting, and policy.

Senior level administrators will also endorse participation in voting and civic engagement. These messages are to be institutionalized, direct, non-partisan, an encouragement of voting, and serve as a reminder of the importance of our students' values and their voices.

Campus Programs:

As noted above, we will ensure that opportunities to register to vote and reminders to participate in voting are incorporated in the programming that welcomes students to campus or welcomes them back, including Colonial Inauguration (new student orientation) in June, Welcome Week in August, and Freshman Day of Service and Convocation in September.

- Party at the Polls – Allows our campus to customize and build excitement around voter registration, voter participation, and democracy. These will take place in high traffic areas that will include tabling and absentee ballot boxes to be sent off by taskforce members.
- Voter Documentary Film Series – Facilitated by GW faculty to include discussions regarding the importance of voting and will take place three times between September and October. The films to be shown are still being planned.
- Why Vote – A dialogue series for students from marginalized communities to discuss the role of democracy in their communities and the important role of voter turnout throughout history and its impact on social change. This will be a monthly discussion series from August to October to take place in various locations on campus but will be primarily hosted at the Multicultural Student Services Center.

Social Media:

We will use the TurboVote portal and its tools to spread the word on campus and encourage students to use TurboVote to learn about how and when to register and vote in their state.

We will ensure that throughout the campus – at student service desks and on websites that serve students – we will make TurboVote available and invite students to use it.

From August through early November, the Nashman Center for Civic Engagement promotes voter registration each week through its newsletter, which reaches more than 4,000, and through social media. This information will be featured on the GWServes database homepages. Special messages from the Nashman Center and the official GW twitter accounts are scheduled to encourage students to register and vote beginning in September and repeating across multiple media platforms on a weekly basis through mid –October.

In addition to the Nashman Center, the Office of Enrollment and the Student Experience will incorporate messages in their communications and in their database, the Multicultural Student Services Center will incorporate this information, and other offices and departments will as well.

National Voter Registration Day – September 25th, 2018– “I vote because...” social media picture campaign. We will send a campus-wide infomail to students to remind them to register on this day.

Many student organizations have signed on to support the campaign to increase student voting including the GW Student Association, GW College Republicans, GW College Democrats, the Organization of Latino American Students, and the Joint Election Commission for GW.

Throughout the campaign we will use the hashtags:

#VoteTogether
#GWVotes

Creating Campus Ambassadors:

We also plan on providing students with small items such as water bottles, bags, pins, etc. to promote the #GWVotes campaign. These will be given to students who participate in our various programs, making them campus ambassadors for this initiative.

REPORTING

GW participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), housed at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University. By participating in NSLVE we are placing ourselves in a position to gather a deeper understanding about our student registration and voting rates and how we can encourage democratic involvement.

On the Honey W. Nashman Center's website an analysis of our own evaluations at the beginning of the Spring 2019 semester and all NSLVE reports will be made widely available.

EVALUATION

The GW Taskforce on Voter Engagement recognizes that this endeavor asks that we are committed to an ongoing process. With this in mind we have created learning outcomes that will act as our guiding principles in planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The Learning Outcomes listed within the Goals section will lead our evaluations. Students will answer a Likert scale survey that asks them how confident, or if they experienced the following:

1. I know how or have learned how to find out how to register to vote.

GW Taskforce on Voter Engagement
Action Plan - 2018

2. I have an understanding of the resources available to inform my voting decisions.
3. I know how to find out when and where to vote.
4. I understand the importance of voting.
5. I understand the importance of being civically and democratically engaged.

Students will receive surveys based on these learning outcomes at our various events on campus and will be encouraged by facilitators to turn them in at the end of our programs. We will also make these available online