

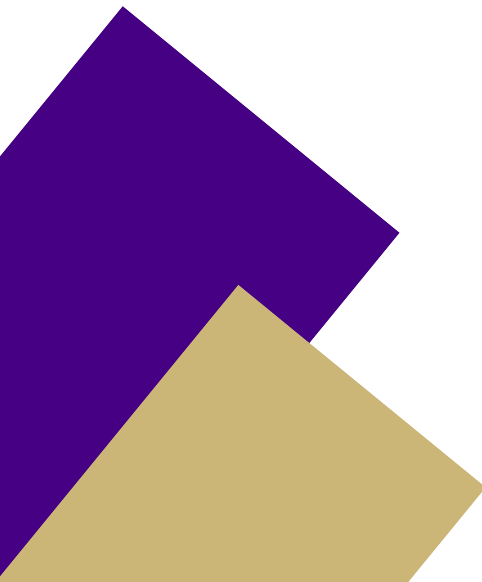


MADISON CENTER FOR CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT

ACTION PLAN



2022-2024



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Our People

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Executive Summary

The Madison Center for Civic Engagement, situated in the College of Arts and Letters, is a high administrative priority at James Madison University. In addition to many other strategic partners on campus, our center works directly with our president Jonathan Alger on a wide variety of initiatives here in Harrisonburg, and across the Commonwealth, nation, and world.

This year, our efforts will focus on a new initiative called For the Common Good, where we aim to bridge partisan divides and build trust in our democracy. In this work, we are recommitting to student voter registration, having secured a new polling location on campus that is more accessible for all students. This year, we have also hired a Woodson Martin Fellow and two Woodson Martin undergraduate Democracy Fellows, who focus specifically on working on alleviating barriers for immigrant, refugee, and historically-marginalized voters. Their work in voter registration will focus on deeper engagement across our campus and community. Our broader Democracy Fellows spend the majority of their time on voter registration, as well.

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Executive Summary

Hardly a week goes by on campus that our center is not carrying out or involved in a program or event on campus. Our work is integrated across our university curriculum, and within every college and program on campus. We also have a robust assessment effort planned, partnering with our Center for Assessment and Research Studies to ensure our work has maximum impact on campus.



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Leadership

Our center is led by three full-time staff members (an executive director, associate director, and program coordinator) as well as key part-time staff including a Woodson Martin Democracy Fellow who focuses on marginalized and underrepresented groups, a Graduate Assistant and numerous undergraduate Democracy Fellows. The priority of this work is also reflected in the selection of our new executive director, who is a tenured professor and leading scholar in multiple fields. Cutting edge research undergirds all of our work, and publications from our staff are used across the nation and world. We seek to position our center as leading our campus in voting initiatives, while shaping national and global conversations in academic civic engagement spaces. This reflects the high priority of our university on this work. All of our staff are committed to this work as their central and full-time focus. We also liaise with our assessment office, Dean's Office, Provost's Office, and President's Office on a weekly basis.

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Commitment

The three pillars of engagement at James Madison University (JMU) include community engagement, engaged learning, and civic engagement. Prior to the establishment of the James Madison Center for Civic Engagement, the university defined civic engagement as preparing individuals to be active and responsible participants in a representative democracy dedicated to the common good. Efforts to institutionalize civic engagement were made concrete in 2017 with the establishment of the Madison Center for Civic Engagement, which ties civic learning and democratic engagement to the core educational mission of the university. The Madison Center's mission is to strengthen our democracy for the common good. We are a nonpartisan entity that works in partnership with students, faculty, staff, and with community, state and national partners, to support civic learning and democratic engagement. In addition, the Madison Center is responsible for the coordination, implementation, and facilitation of programming to embed political learning throughout the campus experience and to institutionalize voter engagement.

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Commitment

Civic Engagement has also become embedded in JMU's curriculum. Two of JMU's General Education Clusters, The American Experience and The Global Experience require students to think critically about their own society and its relationship to a larger global community, and to develop responsible and enlightened global citizenship by examining a wide variety of the processes that shape the human experience.

Every student on campus at JMU must take a General Education course that is dedicated to civic engagement, reflecting a significant educational experience for our students and the depth and level of integration of this work.



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Landscape

The Madison Center for Civic Engagement partners with the Center for Assessment and Research Studies to collect information to better understand our campus culture and students and to develop and improve civic engagement programming at JMU. Civic engagement is also explicitly in our president's strategic plan, and this high administrative priority is reflected in the support this work is given.

Civic learning and democratic engagement is visible throughout campus, in classrooms, within student organizations, and at various events. These include:

- Dukes Vote, a Madison Center initiative that especially focuses on student voter registration, and provides opportunities and programming to build capacity, knowledge, skills, and values that prepare students to be informed participants in democracy. We have recommitted to Dukes Vote this year in partnership with our Office of Student Affairs. This will mean a wider pool of volunteers and student workers for things like student voter registration, Constitution Day, and our Common Good Conversations.

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Landscape

- Student Government Association (SGA), is dedicated to collaborating with all members of our local communities to advocate for students while fostering a proactive, inclusive environment. The Legislative Affairs Committee operates on a wide range of disciplines pertaining to civic engagement, including voter information, activism, and lobbying on the organization's behalf.
- D.E.E.P. (Diversity Education Empowerment Program), is designed to influence meaningful change throughout the James Madison University campus community through the development of programs and services that heighten awareness, increase knowledge, and celebrate the value of diversity in all forms. Student Diversity Educators create and implement programming that focuses on promoting inclusion, advocacy, and respect in order to equip students with the cultural capacity to change and shape the world.
- Democracy in Peril Series, sponsored by the Department of History and other departments, focuses on the state of democracy in both the U.S. and abroad.
- Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue seeks to create a world that engages in dialogue and deliberation across differences as a cultural norm and as an effective tool for addressing the challenges and opportunities of civic life.

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Landscape

- Madison Vision Series, lecture series that brings scholars, thinkers, and leaders of all kinds to campus for exploration on issues facing our society.
- Two of JMU's General Education Clusters, the American Experience and The Global Experience require students to think critically about their own society and its relationship to a larger global citizenship by examining a wide variety of the processes that shape the human experience.

Our campus voting rates are significantly higher than our peer institutions, according to our most recent NSLVE Report. Additionally, Assessment data on JMU's campus climate was collected in April 2022. It showed that across multiple marginalized identities, the majority of those students felt less comfortable with the climate of campus than the majority of students, which shows we still have significant work to do in this regard. Data was presented in the report that indicated the campus climate findings at JMU are consistent with those of similar higher education institutions across the country.

This year we are working on our most significant addition of civic engagement to our curriculum in JMU's history. We are developing a certificate program that will integrate civic engagement across our entire university, including the College of Business, Health Sciences, School of Education, and the College of Arts and Letters. Our executive director is working directly with the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, Provost, and President to ensure this work is integrated across the university. Currently, our most significant footprint on campus are our two general education courses, which every student on campus must take.

Reducing Barriers on Campus

On-campus precinct in new, strategic location: Those who live on-campus in dormitories, as well as a select number of community members, may vote in-person on election day at the on-campus precinct. As part of an effort by JMU Civic, JMU, and the Harrisonburg Registrar's office to increase accessibility, the on-campus precinct has moved to a more central location on campus. This will allow for more students to have access to the precinct on election day.

Reducing Barriers on Campus Continued

Community Outreach: Continuous and open communication with the local community is necessary to maintain positive relationships between campus and the community. The Madison Center has a positive and proactive relationship with the Harrisonburg Registrars' office and the Electoral Board. Harrisonburg is also an incredibly diverse city, including a large immigrant and refugee population, with some 25 percent of the population speaking a language other than English. Our Woodson Martin Democracy Fellowship Initiative expands our capacity to engage with this diverse population in Harrisonburg and community-based organizations.

Communication Channels

The Madison Center will utilize its social media platforms, podcast, newsletter, and blog to educate and share important civic learning and democratic engagement opportunities and work to address public problems. Our partnership with University Communications will allow us to share university-wide messages about voting and elections.

Presentations: Our workshops and presentations to classes and student organizations allow us to meet students directly where they are and share important information about voting and elections.

Long-term Goals

Students who graduate from James Madison University will be equipped with the tools, knowledge, and skills needed to be informed and active participants in our democracy. Through the Madison Center's educational programming efforts, curricular and co-curricular activities, and partnerships across campus, students will develop skills related to critical and analytical thinking, advocacy, and a sense of civic efficacy. Through these ongoing efforts, the institution will continue to transform into the national model of the engaged university.

Short-term Goals

We acknowledge that we have work to do to create better avenues for engagement and access for historically-marginalized students. Since 2012, White students at JMU have had either the highest or second highest voter turnout rate in federal elections. This higher rate is consistent despite White students being the largest ethnic group on campus by over several thousand students. We think this shows that the voting information we provide is more accessible to some students than others, and that we need to improve our ability to meet students where they are.

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Goals

Short-term Goals Continued

In 2020, 76% of White JMU students voted on or before election day, the highest voting rate of all ethnicities. In contrast, 63% of Asian students voted. In addition to this, 68% of Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander students voted. The Madison Center would like to see all ethnic groups on campus have a voter turnout rate that falls within 5% of the ethnicity with the highest rate.

To do this, we will be reaching out to work in collaboration with various on-campus student organizations to help us reach these communities with voting information. In addition to this, we are going to have voter registration tabling take place on new areas of campus, to help target majors that the NSLVE report indicates have a lower voter turnout rate.

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Goals

Short-term Goals Continued

According to the JMU 2020 NSLVE Report, the majors with the lowest voter turnout rates are in the College of Science and Mathematics, and the College of Business. We would like to see the voter turnout rate of students in these colleges fall within 5% of the college with the highest rate overall. In addition to the strategies listed below, we will also conduct more classroom visits and voter registration tabling in and around the buildings of these colleges. As mentioned above, we will be reaching out to on-campus organizations to help reach the affinity groups of student voters with the lowest voter turnout rate.

With new leadership in our center, we are reinvigorated with a sense of mission and purpose regarding this civic engagement work.

This year, we are framing our work around a brand new initiative called For The Common Good. Our voter registration work will continue to gain top priority and infusing civic values into our students will also focus on Common Good Conversations, lunchtime conversations around a pressing topic like Misinformation, Free Speech, or Diversity, at which we will provide free pizza and drinks. We will also have sponsored lectures and social media/digital educational materials that aim toward this initiative.

Other initiatives include:

- *New Student Orientation* - The Madison Center has an ongoing partnership with Orientation, JMU Service-Learning as well as Residence Life. Democracy Fellows will train Resident Advisors on our programming, voter education, and registration and will provide resources for first-year students.

Other initiatives continued:

- *Student Organizations* - Our center will reach out to each of the 400+ organizations on campus with information about programming, as well as voter education and registration information. Dukes Vote democracy fellows, as well as volunteers, will attend student organization meetings and offer to register voters and provide information about elections.
- *Civic Holidays* - The Madison Center is an active participant in the civic holidays, as well as a National Voter Registration Day partner. On NVRD, JMU Civic will provide a day of programming on highly trafficked areas on campus. During National Voter Education Week, JMU Civic will conduct programming targeting around providing voters the education needed to cast their ballot on or before election day. This will include programming around candidates running for office, polling locations, absentee voting, and making a plan to vote. On Vote Early Day, JMU Civic will plan programming around helping student voters decide how they want to cast their ballot for the election. On Election Hero Day, JMU Civic will create messaging thanking our election heroes, including election administration teams and poll workers.

Other Initiatives Continued:

- *Class visits and syllabus statements* - Through a campus-wide email and smaller-scale e-mails, the Madison Center and Dukes Vote will offer class visits by trained volunteers to all JMU faculty. Class visits incorporate discussion of why voting matters, education about voting processes and laws, providing time to answer questions, and registering voters in each class. The Madison Center will provide important information regarding registration and elections to be included on course syllabi. Instructional faculty may include the statement as they wish.
- *Nonpartisan candidate voter guide* - The Madison Center will research and write a nonpartisan voter guide that will include platforms and information about candidates running for office. This guide will be posted on our website and social media platforms.
- *Traveling Town Hall* - In partnership with the Office of Residence Life, candidates or representatives of the candidates will be invited to participate in a traveling town hall to dormitories around campus. This will provide an opportunity for students to directly access candidates running for office.

Other Initiatives Continued:

- *Madison Center for Civic Engagement website* - This year, our executive director has completed a full evaluation of our digital media and working with our digital media staff, has begun a full revamp of our social media and website. We are beginning a significant pivot from long-form website information to short video and social media-centered content. We will maintain the former while improving the latter. Our website and social media will be used as a hub for all of our resources. This will include frequently asked questions about voting, links to events, online voter registration, educational resources and other information regarding voting laws, polling locations, and Voter ID requirements.
- *Student Volunteers* - Through our renewed partnership with Student Affairs, the Madison Center will create a strong volunteer base to increase the agency and participation of students across campus. With this new volunteer base, we hope to reach further across campus, including those students from traditionally marginalized groups and low turn-out fields of study.

Other Initiatives Continued:

- *Electoral board and Harrisonburg registrar partnership* - JMU Civic will continue its valued partnership with the local voter registrar and electoral board to ensure the voter registration efforts align with the registrar's needs. The local registrar and electoral board provide valuable guidance on registration processes and presentations to our students.
- *Panhellenic council* - As many students are involved in Greek Life at JMU, the Madison Center will attend the Panhellenic Council meetings to provide voter registration information. We will also connect with the Inter-Cultural Greek Council focused on ensuring access for traditionally underserved and marginalized communities. According to NSLVE, male students had a 13% lower voter turnout rate than women. Ensuring that male-fraternities vote through the panhellenic council will help alleviate this difference.

Other Initiatives Continued:

- *Academic primers* - Our executive director completed a full evaluation of our website and digital materials. Because of this data, we are leaning into social media and video-focused material to gain more engagement from our student body. Our Democracy Fellows will have the opportunity to research and produce an academic primer on a topic that interests them and produce this digital material each semester.
- *Woodson Martin Democracy Fellow Initiative* - As mentioned above, the Woodson Martin Democracy Fellow Initiative focuses on immigration and refugee-related issues, as well as outreach and programming for those from traditionally marginalized and underrepresented communities. The Woodson Martin Democracy fellows focus on creating resources that address barriers that keep members of marginalized communities from having an equal voice, participation, and share in the voting process.

Strategy

Our entire staff is committed to implementing our action plan and the direct, day-to-day supervision comes from our incoming associate director. Our graduate assistant, Angelina Clapp, and our Democracy Fellows, also implement a significant amount of this work. Angelina commits much of her time to organizing and implementing voter registration work.



This action plan will be shared widely with our internal and external partners. We plan on making it publicly available on our website, as well as sending it to our internal and external advisory board members. Additionally, it will be sent to relevant stakeholders on campus and within the community, including our national partners. The plan will be made public and will be posted on our website. The data used to inform the plan is collected from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) conducted by the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education at Tufts University. This data is shared publicly and can be viewed on our website.



The purpose of our evaluative efforts is to ensure our methods are data-driven and evidence-based, as well as to create mechanisms to track and assess various outcomes. These include participation in events, registration numbers, attitudinal changes among participants, and the use of our resources. The purpose of this evaluation will allow the institution to examine the impact various resources from the Center have on campus. The institution also conducts an assessment of students during their first and third years at JMU. In this assessment, civic attitudes, engagement, and values are measured. This year we have also submitted a full and comprehensive report to SHEV regarding our civic engagement activities. The audience of this evaluation includes all relevant stakeholders, such as students, faculty, staff, donors, administration, community members, advisory boards, and our national partners and it will be carried out by both the Madison Center and James Madison University.

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Evaluation

The evaluation will be carried out at various times in the year. The Institutional Assessment is carried out during the fall semester. Data from this assessment is traditionally made available by the following Spring semester. The assessment by the Madison Center of our programs will be conducted throughout the year. This data will be used to inform strategies and engagement efforts for the next year and action plan.

The data collected from our events will include the number of people who attended, the number of people who streamed it online if applicable, the number of students who interacted with us while tabling, and the number of registrations received while engaging with students. Additionally, at our larger events we will plan to hand out flyers to every attendee that links to a survey about their experience at our events. Attitudinal changes over time, as well as measures of civic efficacy among students, will be tracked using JMU assessment data.

With new leadership has come a renewed commitment to data-informed processes here in the center. We are looking at each piece with fresh eyes on successes and where new resources should be invested. We are excited to accomplish our mission with fresh efforts and research-driven initiatives.