

## **La Roche University's Center for Student Development All In Democracy Voter Engagement 2020 Action Plan**

### **I. Executive Summary**

Starting in the Fall of 2020, the Center for Student Development at La Roche University will implement the Voter Engagement Action Plan. The goal is to not only enhance engagement efforts on campus, but also provide a platform for increased learning on issues surrounding voting and why individual votes matter. With the 2020 national election quickly approaching, it is a critical time to implement this plan with related events and activities to ensure students are both registered to vote and informed on key issues.

The Center for Student Development will work in partnership with departments across campus to offer educational programming on voter issues and civic engagement across the globe. In addition, student leaders will play a significant role in the All In campaign. As the main entity supporting the development of student leaders on campus, the Center for Student Development will encourage members of the Student Government Association, student organizations and student leaders to collaborate on tabling opportunities, as well as voter registration and pledge drives.

Through the various events and program opportunities laid out in this proposal, the Center for Student Development seeks to achieve its goal of having a minimum of 25 percent of eligible student voters at La Roche University be registered to vote. Efforts will be made on not only encouraging students to register to vote. Emphasis will also be made on the importance of voting, so as to improve voter turnout among students registered to vote.

According to the *National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement*, the 2018 National Student Voting Rate was 40.1 percent and the National Student Registration Rate was 73.3 percent. Overall voting rates among college students increased 21 percentage points compared with the general population where voting rates increased by 13.6 points. While the national average voting rates might be higher overall, this data shows that more and more university and college students are being civically engaged at a younger age.

In 2019, Pew Research published that Millennials officially outnumbered the Baby Boomer generation, previously considered to be the largest voting block in the United States. Further Generation Z which includes new first-time students to college and university are entering adulthood. According to Pew, this new generation born after 1996 is on track to be the best educated and most diverse generation yet, with nearly half representing racial or ethnic minorities.

The students entering and completing a degree at La Roche University fall largely represent this growing group of young voters. The challenge is educating students on

the importance of voting and providing them with the tools to become civic minded and informed registered voters. La Roche, as a small, private institution is well situated to connect with students and better understand the needs and questions of students through the help of engaged community partners and cross-departmental support.

## **II. Leadership**

Jeffrey Dailey, Assistant Director in the Office of Student Development will manage and coordinate all events, programs and activities surrounding voter engagement held at La Roche University. He will collaborate with community organizations, as well as faculty and staff at La Roche University to create programming surrounding voter issues. He will work closely with the Assistant Dean of Students, David Day, as well as various student leaders to execute these events, activities, and programs.

To help move forward with programming and awareness, the Student Government Association (SGA) will sponsor a registration drive as well as work with the La Roche University's American Association of University Women (AAUW) chapter. These two groups will provide the number of members to help run an information table, provide access to voter registration forms as well as be a part of the planning process for future programs.

The Center for Student Development also plans to collaborate with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Quanton Center for Global Engagement on educational programming efforts. With these collaborative efforts, we hope that our students become informed on the importance of civic engagement on a local, national and global level.

## **III. Commitment**

La Roche University, a Catholic institution of higher learning, is sponsored by its founders the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence. Through its mission, the University fosters global citizenship and creates a community of civically engaged scholars from the region, the nation and around the world.

The role of civic engagement is an important part of the institution's broader mission and goals surrounding peace and justice. The University integrates liberal arts and professional education in creative ways that empower students to achieve success in their chosen careers while promoting justice and peace in a constantly changing global society. The La Roche motto of being "The Best for the World" is a result of the institution's dedication to graduating a diverse group of students who are civically engaged, globally minded, and prepared to thrive in the 21st century workplace.

The Office of Student Development is dedicated to shaping and supporting the student leaders of tomorrow. Not only does the office provide experiences and opportunities for students to engage with one another, but it also oversees the Student Government

Association, supports leadership of Student Organizations, and provides professional development platforms for student leaders, faculty, and staff.

The Office of Student Development has led various efforts focused on civic engagement, such as::

- Hosting tabling events to provide voter registration information.
- Working with student groups to lead Voter Registration drives.
- Providing shuttle services to polling locations near campus.
- Compiling “Before you vote” information sheets and sharing the information across campus.
- Partnering with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to host a Voter Suppression educational session.

#### **IV. Landscape**

La Roche University is a highly diverse campus with many passionate students. Further, the University as a whole supports leadership development for students through programming and opportunities focused on community and civic engagement. This provides a nice landscape to implement an All In Democracy Voter Engagement action plan. In addition to opportunities organized through the Office of Student Development, all La Roche Students are required to take a four-part seminar course that looks at aspects of the La Roche Mission. These courses emphasize aspects of peace and justice on a local and global level, while also challenging students to become more engaged with the community. Aspects of voter engagement are already addressed through these courses and align nicely with the overall mission of the institution.

Both of these efforts provide a nice platform to reach students.

There are still challenges the Office of Student Development (though minor) will need to address in moving forward with this plan.

- La Roche is primarily a commuter school. Many students commute to campus from home and are only on campus when they need to be for class. It is difficult to find times that large groups of students are in different areas of the university and to plan events around those times.
- A large proportion of the student body is international (nearly 20%). This will require the Office of Student Development to identify opportunities that focus on the topic of civic engagement more broadly so as to not exclude any portion of the student body.
- The novel Coronavirus pandemic has added new regulations and guidelines surrounding the sizes of groups allowed for in-person gatherings. This will make it difficult in hosting larger discussion forums and speaker events. New efforts will be made to provide programming opportunities that attract smaller audiences more frequently, while also exploring the use of virtual platforms.

- Finally, the Office of Student Development is a small two-person staff with a handful of student workers. It maintains a large mission of which voter engagement is a small piece. It is difficult to take on large-scale voter engagement projects on top of all the other programs run through the office.

Despite these challenges, the Office of Student Development has identified organizations, campus groups and student leaders, as mentioned in a previous section, to assist in the development and implementation of planned events and voter registration drives.

## V. Goals

### *Long-Term*

- Find strategies for learning what La Roche University students want and need in terms of civic and voter engagement opportunities on campus, with a primary focus on how to engage voter registration and participation in under-served populations.
- Partner with other offices on campus to plan and execute a “Redhawk Vote Day” where students can come to have fun and learn more about voter and civic engagement on a local and global level.
- Increase voter registration on campus to encompass a minimum of 25% of the eligible voter population.

### *Short-Term*

- Voter registration drive during Welcome Week.
- Use existing organizations to help obtain buy in from its members and have organization presidents encourage members to register to vote.
- Provide information on National and Local Officials running for office.

## VI. Strategies

In order to achieve the goals, set forth above, it is important to create a strategy for how the work will be accomplished and by whom. Beginning in the fall 2020 semester, the Student Government Association will be hosting a “Poster Pledge Drive” during Welcome Week to have students make the commitment to Register as well as Vote in the upcoming election. The pledge will be a starting point in our efforts to inform the campus on voting. This pledge will be ongoing in an effort to reach students at a time that is most convenient to them.

The Office of Student Development will be in charge of overseeing each event and ensuring all resources are distributed for each event. As each group (i.e. SGA, AAUW, The Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Quanton Center for Global Engagement) hosts a program or tabling event, we are asking them to create a poster series (20x30)

on information recording their session so that we are able to reach a larger audience throughout campus. These information posters will be left standing so that students can return at an alternative time/day if desired.

The following are planned activities for the upcoming academic year:

- Poster Pledge as mentioned above.
- Virtual Speaker series, covering issues around voter rights, global civic engagement and more.
- “What’s your Party?” Initiative where students complete a political party quiz to help them understand where they fall on a political spectrum on high profile issues.
- Know your Polling Place session to provide information on the process of voting to encourage voter turnout.
- Tabling events and social media campaigns that provide information on applying for a mail in Ballot as well as voting deadlines.

## **VII. Reporting**

This plan along with related resources will be shared on the Office of Student Development landing page on the University website. Event and program information, along with relevant accomplishments will be marketed through press releases on the La Roche University website and the Office of Student Development’s social media channels.

## **VIII. Evaluation**

A pre and post survey will be shared with students at La Roche University. The pre-survey will determine students who are already registered to vote versus not registered to vote as well as gauge their knowledge of various aspects surrounding voting. The will be used to help shape the focus and goal of various educational sessions and forums during the semester.

Towards the end of the fall semester, a post-survey will be distributed with similar questions to determine whether registration numbers have improved along with education and awareness.

In addition to surveying individual students, this action plan will be evaluated every year to ensure that goals are being met. If goals and priorities change, the plan will be altered to meet those changes as needed.