

MCVOTES

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A Campaign for Civic Engagement

Maryville College

ALL IN CAMPUS DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE Fall 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MC VOTES: A Campaign for Civic Engagement is an action plan for the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. This plan will be implemented at Maryville College for students who are disengaged from the voting process. MC VOTES begins in Fall 2020 and will end in Spring 2021. The plan was developed as an extension to previous attempts to better engage the student body and to fulfill institutional priorities and objectives as set forth by the College's strategic plan. This iteration of MC VOTES was adapted and will be implemented by Ryan Indelicato, Bonner Program Coordinator, Center for Campus Ministry.

LEADERSHIP

The leadership of the MC VOTES planning team will be comprised of students who possess a dedicated interest in civic engagement promotion and staff whose positions facilitate innovations in civic learning and engagement. Due to the challenges posed by COVID-19 in the spring, MC VOTES was unable to successfully recruit leadership in spring 2020. During the months of July and August 2020, MC VOTES will work to recruit students, staff, and faculty stakeholders from significant demographic groups based on 2018 NSLVE data, priorities outlined in the College's forthcoming strategic plan, and the capacity of individual departments and offices.

Ryan Indelicato, Bonner Program Coordinator (Campus Lead)

Rev. Dr. Anne McKee, Chaplain and Director of Church and College Services

Student Position(s) TBD

Faculty Position(s) TBD

COMMITMENT

The college's mission statement opens reading: "Maryville college prepares students for lives of citizenship and leadership..." This mission coupled with the ethos "do good on the largest possible scale" established by our founder, Rev. Isaac Anderson lays a solid foundation upon which the college has constructed its commitment to civic learning and engagement. Additionally, Maryville has recently applied for and received the Carnegie Classification on Community Engagement, which has provided space for all areas of the college to closely examine and self-reflect on the work produced in support of the college's strategic plan. Moreover, the education goals of the college are designed to support and enhance "students' readiness to act as informed and responsible citizens...in an interconnected and diverse world." These commitments are consistently communicated to all members of the college community, including prospective students and families, students, staff, faculty, and alumni via the college website, admissions materials, public presentations, and town halls.

LANDSCAPE

Maryville College benefits from a robust array of co-curricular and scholarship programs that have a distinct focus on civic learning and engagement. Through the Center for Community Engagement, Maryville is one of only 37 schools in the nation, and the only one in East Tennessee to offer a Certified Nonprofit Professional credential. The credential is indicative of exceptional preparation for entry-level positions at a number of nonprofit agencies. In addition to the CNP credential, the College offers students the ability to study or intern in the nation's capital via the "Washington Experience," engages students in literacy education and policy analysis via the "Student Literacy Corps," and, since 2015, has been an active competitor in the Hult Prize competition, which challenges student across the world to combine their rigorous academic preparation and creativity to solve social issues of global importance. In addition to these experiences, students also benefit from the Bonner Scholars Program.

The Bonner Scholars program at Maryville College is funded via an endowment that was established by the Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation. The program offers first-generation and low-EFC students with the opportunity to attend the College in exchange for a commitment to perform 10 hours of community service each week that they are enrolled at the institution. In return, the scholarship provides a student with a significant scholarship and a monthly stipend. A "common commitment" of the Bonner Scholars Program is Civic Engagement, which is illustrated through the various clubs and organizations that are led by Bonner Scholars, including: SGA, Peace & World Concerns, Black Student Association, and MC Votes.

The above co-curricular programs and scholarship programs serve as catalysts for civic engagement at Maryville College. In addition to these institutional programs, there are numerous student clubs and organizations that reflect the College's commitment to civic engagement. Among others, these clubs include: Circle K, a campus affiliate of the Kiwanis Club, the Environmental Action Team, Campus Democrats and Republicans, Global Citizen Organization, Peace & World Concerns, and, an active student newspaper, the Highland Echo.

While these programs and organizations provide a strong foundation on which to build voter engagement and education programs, there is still a fairly challenging road ahead due to internal and external barriers to the voting process. These barriers include staff capacity, communication, and the unique realities of Tennessee state law pertaining to voter registration and participation. A significant barrier to continued work on this civic engagement initiative lies with the capacity of our staff. The amount of man hours necessary to commit to this plan simply do not exist among current staff. This is due to the reality that much of this work needs to be planned and executed during what is arguably the busiest portion of the academic year, new students are entering and returning students are inevitably overextending themselves in pursuit of new ideas for a club or their academics. In addition to our capacity barriers, Tennessee's voter laws will have a significant adverse effect on the results of this plan.

Although MC VOTES has placed a priority on engaging First-year students, the group is aware that many of those students may be unable to actually vote due to a Tennessee state law that requires first-time voters to vote in-person. This law establishes a high barrier for Tennessee residents who attend

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Maryville College, but registered to vote at their home address. Moreover, while our campus is one of a small handful in the state with an on-campus polling location, the location is not an early voting site. As a result, even the students who reside within Blount County are unable to vote at the on-campus location, unless their registered address is within the site's precinct. We are grateful for our relationship with the Blount County Election Commission, which has been an invaluable resource through this process of better understanding the various ways in which Tennessee's voter laws affect Maryville College students.

GOALS

The overarching goal of MC Votes is to increase voter education, engagement, and participation in campus, local, state, and federal elections. This overall goal is broken down into short term and long term objectives.

Short Term Goals:

- We plan to recruit and train a team of student volunteers who will help with voter registration, education, and participation under the mantle of MC Votes as a campus organization. Additionally, we plan to recruit and train one work-study student who can help to manage our voting initiatives and act as a Campus Voting Coordinator.
- We will be developing a short video that includes an explanation of why voting matters, particularly among students, how you can register to vote, where you should register to vote, key dates and info, and campus resources including MC Votes contact info.
- We will be implementing a program where campus clubs, organizations, classes, etc. can request to have a member of MC Votes come and register their participants. We hope to turn this into a competition to see what campus organization can register the highest percentage of their members.
- Reach a campus registration rate of 80% (15% higher than our 2016 rate) and a campus voting rate of 70% (30% higher than our 2016 rate).
- Design and premier the MC Votes page on the College's website. This website will provide accurate information about voting dates and locations for Maryville as well as other parts of the country. The website will also provide easy use links to register to vote.
- Create MC Votes social media accounts, which will provide voter education, dates and deadlines, and FAQs.
- Sign up for National Voter Registration Day Campus Takeover.

Long Term Goals:

- Integrate voter registration into Freshmen Orientation.
- Partner with existing campus organization like MC Democrats and MC Republicans to host local political debates, educational presentations, movie nights, etc.

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- Reach a campus registration rate of 80% (15% higher than our 2016 rate) and a campus voting rate of 70% (30% higher than our 2016 rate)
- Maintain consistency and organization after the 2020 election cycle.

STRATEGY

The Center for Campus Ministry staff will oversee efforts to involve the College in the National Study for Learning, Voting, and Engagement, the Campus Vote Project, and the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge. Additionally, CCM staff will serve as the advisor for the student organization formed in 2018, MC Votes. Our initial strategy involves wide scale voter registration. While this year seems unlikely to yield successful efforts to institutionalize voter registration into freshmen orientation, we will have the opportunity to create a 5-10 minute video about registration, engagement, and resources that will be viewed by all incoming students. In addition to this video, our team will offer registration sessions to any campus club, sport, or organization interested. We will also host multiple outdoor tableing events to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Next, we want to focus on education. We plan to do a combination of MC Votes sponsored events along with partnered events with campus political organizations to better educate the student voting base. Once early voting has begun, we plan to help get students to voting locations. We want to do this through a combination of shuttling, and proper accurate access to absentee voting. Lastly, we want to maintain a sense of civic engagement even after the election is over in November. We want our students to be asking the questions, well what next? To do this, we will continue holding events that look to future elections and other ways to remain active in the political system during off years.

REPORTING

Initially, the results of this plan will be shared with the leadership team of MC VOTES and faculty/staff stakeholders. Ideally, we will see significant increases in both voter registration and voter turnout, which can then be shared as a college media release, however, this decision is ultimately reliant on discussions with the President and his cabinet.

EVALUATION

Following the conclusion of the 2020 election cycle and the receipt of the NSLVE report, the MC Votes leadership team will conduct an evaluation of this plan with the goal of increasing future effectiveness and addressing issues that arose during the operational period of the plan. The leadership team will use a combination of formal and informal assessments to measure the awareness of this campaign across campus and its ultimate impact in whether an individual decided to register and/or participate in the voting process. The results of the evaluation will be shared according to the opinion of the president's cabinet.