Voter Friendly Campus Plan | Auraria Higher Education Center
Community College of Denver | Metropolitan State University of Denver | University of Colorado Denver

Executive Summary

Who developed this action plan? What is this action plan for and what does it seek to accomplish? Where will this action plan be implemented? Why was this action plan developed? When does this action plan start and end? How will this action plan be implemented?

WHO: The Auraria Voter Engagement Working Group consists of representatives from each institution on the Auraria Campus with student, faculty, and staff members on the coordinating team.

WHAT: This action plan has two primary goals: to increase voter engagement (registration and voter turnout) in the 2020 Presidential elections; and to develop an ongoing structure for collaboration among the institutions that will strengthen voter engagement in future election cycles.

WHERE: The action plan is designed to be implemented on the Auraria Campus, and by extension in the community of the Denver metropolitan area where our students reside. Given the current context of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the plan is designed to be implemented in a variety of formats, with an emphasis on virtual, online engagement knowing that engagement in person may not be possible throughout the 2020 election cycle.

WHY: All three institutions on the Auraria campus enjoy a relatively high rate of voter registration and turnout among students. This is in part due to the voter-friendly policies of the state of Colorado, however it is also due to a variety intentional efforts that have taken place over the past several years. Notwithstanding, there is space for greater collaboration that leverages the assets of each institution - such as the University of Colorado at Denver's School for Public Affairs and MSU Denver's Golda Meir Center for Political Leadership; and collective size of the student body. With all three institutions combined, this action plan has the potential to impact over 40,000 students living in the metropolitan Denver region, as well as their families and communities.

WHEN: This action plan began in January of 2020 and was revised in May of 2020 to account for the dramatic changes caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Its initial phase will last through the November elections, and the second phase will begin in 2021 after an assessment of its impact, strengths to build on, and remaining challenges to be addressed.

HOW: The action plan will be implemented through coordinated efforts of a working group, with each institution engaging a variety of stakeholders in different sectors of the institution: student leadership, faculty leadership, student affairs, and community partners.

Auraria at a Glance

The Auraria Campus is a dynamic and vibrant higher education community located in the heart of downtown Denver. The 150-acre campus is shared by **three separate and distinct institutions of higher learning**: *Community College of Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and University of Colorado Denver*. The Auraria Higher Education Center is a separate state entity whose role is to provide and manage shared services, facilities, and property to support these prominent institutions in achieving their goals. The collective **student population is approximately 38,000**, with an additional **5,000 faculty and staff**.

Students come from the surrounding community, around the state of Colorado, across the country, and internationally to pursue higher education in the same physical campus. Individually, each campus fulfills their unique academic mission and engage their specific student population and needs of their campus community. Collectively, the Auraria campus has the highest enrollment of students in the state of Colorado and **most campus events and initiatives are open to all students** regardless of campus enrollment.

The Auraria campus is a unique experiment in higher education and one that presents both challenges and opportunities in all that we work towards. Within the context of civic learning and democratic engagement work, **all three institutions are members of the Tufts University National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement** and are working towards active participation in the All In Campus Democracy Challenge; in **2016 MSU Denver was awarded top recognition for 4-year comprehensive universities and for highest voting rate among undergraduates**.

Working Group Leadership

Who is coordinating and overseeing the institution's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement? Who is chairing the working group? What is the role of the working group and what are members' responsibilities? How will working group members be selected? How is the working group inclusive of different campus and community stakeholders?

The Auraria Voter Engagement Working Group is designed to ensure that the students, faculty, and staff at all three campus institutions work together continuously and intentionally to focus on enhancing access to and engagement in registration and voting for all students. The group meets to identify common barriers to voting, share ideas from each institution, and coordinate events and outreach.

- At the Community College of Denver, these initiatives are led by a team of faculty, staff, and students from across the college. The Office of Student Life, Student Government Association, the Division of Enrollment Administration and Student Success, and faculty from the Center of Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences.

- At MSU Denver, Civic and Community Initiatives are led by a broad Steering Committee that represents numerous initiatives across departments and areas. Key among these, for the purpose of civic learning and voter engagement, is the American Democracy Project, co-chaired by Political Science faculty member Hollie Hendrikson and Service Learning Coordinator, Lori McKinney.

- At the University of Colorado, these initiatives are led by a team of faculty, staff, and student leaders from across the campus primarily faculty from the School of Public Affairs, staff from the Division of Student Success/Department of Student Life and Campus Community, and student effort from the Student Government Association.

The Auraria Voter Engagement Working Group is co-chaired by four institutional representatives. Jaime Ingrisano (CU Denver), Gretta Mincer (MSU Denver), Tammi Spicer-Dormuth and Kathryn Mahoney (CCD). Working Group members were selected by identifying offices and organizations within each institution that connect to voter engagement work. This includes student leadership and student-led organizations. The group is always open to new members and seeks to be broadly inclusive of anyone interested in participating. Members and partners represent a broad cross section of individuals across campus passionate about civic and voter engagement and subgroups will harness the unique skills, missions, and approaches of the individuals, departments, and offices. Working group members are responsible for attending meetings as frequently as possible, working with others to plan and organize events, coordinating events and acting as spokespeople for the importance of this work. The Working group strives to include members from all sectors of campus, ranging from students who reflected the diversity of Auraria, to faculty and staff members from all three institutions.

Working Group Partners

What academic departments and which faculty within academic affairs are involved? Which students and student organizations are involved? What community and/or national (private, nonprofit, government) organizations are involved? Is the working group coordinating with the local election office? If so, with whom and how?

ACADEMIC: Several academic departments have been identified as primary potential partners, including CU Denver School of Public Affairs, MSU Denver Philosophy Department, MSU Denver Political Science Department, CCD Political Science Department, and CCD History Department. The tri-institutional Auraria Library and Constitution Day committee are also academic areas with overlapping interest in civic engagement on campus. There is broad support from the institutions to support civic efforts on campus through CU Denver Division of Student Success and MSU Denver Undergraduate Studies.

STUDENTS: Each institution will engage their respective student government leaders to take an active role in civic engagement efforts and partnerships; there are also two students per campus elected to serve on the Student Advisory Board to the Auraria Board (SACAB) that will be engaged throughout the process. Additionally, many specific student organizations have been identified as potential partners such as the Young Democrats, College Republicans, Advocates of TRiO, Phi Sigma Alpha, Black Student Alliance, and fraternity & sorority chapters. MSU Denver will engage one or more CEEP Fellows and CU Denver is pursuing an Andrew Goodman Foundation Fellow.

COMMUNITY: AHEC has an established relationship with Denver Elections and our student union is traditionally one of the early and day of voting sites for Denver County in addition to a permanent ballot drop off location. Community partners that have been identified as past or continuing partners are New Era Colorado, Warm Cookies, Voto Latino, League of Women Voters, Colorado Student Government Coalition, and Inspire. National partners include the American Democracy Project, Students Learn Students Vote, CEEP, Rock the Vote, National Issues Forum, and TurboVote. CCD, MSU Denver, and CU Denver are all participants in the Tuft's NSLVE study.

Campus Landscape

The three institutions on the Auraria Campus share similar barriers and assets in moving our common efforts forward.

Colorado is a state which is highly voter friendly, with state-wide mail-in ballots and user-friendly voter-registration policies. The Secretary of State's office as well as local city and county offices have been easy to engage with campus efforts, and many outside organizations such as New Era have a strong presence.

This working group will build on our assets and resources. Despite such assets, we face a common barrier in the shape or extremely limited budgets and, in the context of the current pandemic, even those budgets are likely to disappear. As state-funded institutions in a state that ranks near the bottom with regards to funding higher education, we will need to rely primarily on creativity, collaboration, and low or no-cost strategies for this work. That said, the passion of faculty and staff involved in this work together with the opportunity to partner with outside organizations will move us forward.

Additional barriers are the challenges of communicating to all students effectively either as institutions individually or as a tri-institutional campus. As a primarily commuter campus with students across the socioeconomic, age, and life spectrums there is no one strategy that effectively reaches a majority of our students. The other barrier is the turnover at upper leadership levels for CCD, MSU Denver, CU Denver, and AHEC.

Surveying the landscape, we would like to see enhanced rates of both registration and voting in the 2020 elections, as well as ongoing trends of higher engagement with the processes of democracy beyond the election cycle. Although the current circumstances of pandemic and racial injustice present challenges to our work, they also provide opportunities to engage students in new ways.

Goals

By participating in this initiative, we hope to:

1. Gain a greater sense of collaboration and shared participation in civic engagement efforts between the three campuses and AHEC
2. Learn best and emerging practices for engaging students on a non-residential campus spread across a large metropolitan area
3. Develop meaningful partnerships and connections with community organizations for students, faculty, and staff to connect on local and larger civic issues
4. Build capacity for community engaged research, teaching, and learning through opportunities engaging students and faculty with experiential learning and research.

Over the next 10 years, the three institutions of the Auraria Campus will become exemplars of voter engagement in an urban, predominantly nonresidential environment where many students are nontraditional and may not have the same privileges and access to college life and engagement activities as more traditional students. We will begin to close the gaps in voter registration and turnout across ethnic groups and across academic disciplines. We will have in place measures to assess our progress and identify new areas in need of attention.

Student Learning Outcomes

What knowledge, skills, and capacities (learning outcomes) does the institution want students to achieve and graduate with in order to be active and informed?

Students at the Auraria Campus will be able to:

- Articulate a sense of responsibility and personal commitment to addressing global and local challenges.

- Demonstrate skills of influence and action, including persuasion, appropriate contacts, and understanding organizational arrangements.

- Demonstrate skills of communication and leadership, including taking responsibility for group outcomes, processes and products; speaking publicly.

- Demonstrate skills of political analysis and judgment, including the ability to weigh pros and cons as well as take trade-offs into consideration.

Strategy

Given the uncertainty of public health, the unique nature of the Auraria campus, and the dynamic makeup of the working group, many strategies have been identified as possible approaches for small and large scale engagement. Below is a sample of possible strategies:

Structural/Institutional Strategies

- Ask high-level leaders who reflect student population to convey messages (Presidents/ Chancellors, Deans, Student Body Presidents)

- Identify departments that have lagged in the past (i.e. engineering) and recruit leaders from those areas to engage.

- Ask the PR lab (course in Journalism and Media Production) to help develop a longer-term PR campaign

- Ask Registrars to ensure that student-facing systems such as class schedules and registration invite students to register to vote, direct them to appropriate websites, and offer a portal to engagement at each institution.

- Create additional messaging and reminders on existing technology (LMS, mobile apps, etc.)

Student Events and Activities

- Develop programming that helps demystify the ballot: how to understand different things on the ballot (i.e. amendments vs referenda; retention of judges, etc.); how to find information and judge its accuracy

- "Party at the Mailbox" concept - crayons and coloring designs to make your own sticker?

- Develop discussion series on upcoming ballot issues

- Host monthly, virtual NIFI Deliberative Dialogue and Hot Topic events

- Ensure that all three institutions have a prompt for student orgs (when they register) reminding them of the importance of voter engagement

Leveraging Other Partnerships

- Ensure that the campus store and other locations have stamps available for those who need to mail their ballots.

- Connect with History Colorado to help with programming about voting, voting rights, expansion of suffrage, why that struggle was important and why it should be valued today, etc

- Sent out "Community Kits" with signs for students to display in their home windows, chalk for their sidewalk, etc to encourage their neighborhood to vote

- Identify ways to engage Dreamers and those ineligible to vote in civic and community engagement.

- Partner with community agencies to target voting messages to populations that have been historically underrepresented or show lower than average voter turnout

Reporting

How will the plan be shared, internally and externally? Please state where the plan will be shared. Will the plan be made public? If so, how? Will the data used to inform the plan be made public? If so, how?

The approach of this working group will be to work within the framework of each of the institutions to report efforts and progress in the realm of civic engagement. Boilerplate messages will be included in all communication that the efforts in this realm are a result of tri-institutional efforts.

Communication strategies include sharing action plan and reports to:

- Institutional media relations (press releases, information on relevant webpages, social media)

- Institutional government relations teams

- Campus civic engagement partners and institutional senior leadership

- Auraria Board of Directors and other key groups that include diverse levels of leadership from all three institutions

The committee is committed to the broad sharing of the action plan and reports to both internal and external audiences.

Evaluation

What is the purpose of the evaluation? What does the institution want to know and be able to do with the information gathered? Who is the audience for the evaluation? Who will carry out the evaluation? When will the evaluation be carried out and completed? What information (data, evidence) must be collected and how will it be collected? What are the performance measures and indicators of success? How will information (data, evidence) be analyzed? How will the results of the evaluation be shared?

Each of the institutions on the Auraria campus have been participants in the NSLVE study and use this data to help drive decision making. Given the challenges of data tracking in the upcoming, highly remote environment and the significant lag time between elections and NSLVE report turnaround, we are planning to make best efforts to track internal engagement. Identified data points my include, as appropriate and available, social media hits, post-event reflections, class surveys, and entities that have agreed to partner such as student organizations, faculty members, community agencies.

Later evaluation will occur with the release of NSLVE data, which provides hard data to evaluate real impact. This information will be shared campus-wide and with community partners and will then inform the ongoing revision of plans for later work.

A stretch goal has been identified to secure funding for a faculty fellow to implement a wide-scale assessment project collecting and analyzing data across all three institutions.

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