

Miami University 2021-2022 Campus Action Plan

Executive Summary:

Miami University's campus action plan to promote civic engagement was created by the civic engagement fellows in Miami's Wilks Institute for Leadership and Service. Cameron Tiefenthaler, a Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow; Victoria Villanueva, a Civic Influencer; and Grace Kelley and Evan Gates, Andrew Goodman Foundation (AGF) ambassadors created this plan. We are committed to increasing our enthusiasm for the electorate and making positive change, because once we attain this, the voter registration and turnout numbers will fall into place.

This action plan is designed to combine and consolidate our thoughts on civic engagement for our campus. We want to formulate a more direct action plan for increasing our voter registration, turnout, education, engagement, and enthusiasm. By identifying gaps in our current approach and targeting student groups that are not involved, we can make the ease of voting a reality on our campus.

This action plan starts November 1, 2021 and will last until December 30, 2022. The goal is to implement this plan through a multi-faceted approach by engaging our team of Wilks Fellows and reaching the student body where they are; we cannot rely on them to find us and ask for help but rather need to be attending their student organization meetings and department events. We should make ourselves available as resources, not just during election seasons. Our tactics should be targeted and more focused on the demographics of need as highlighted in our 2018 and 2020 NSLVE reports, specifically with our low-performing majors of Mathematics, Business, and Engineering. With these groups of students in mind, we will work diligently to engage them and prioritize their place in the electoral process.

Leadership:

The Wilks Institute for Leadership and Service's civic engagement team at Miami University will assist in coordinating and overseeing this action plan. This team includes our Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow, Civic Influencer, Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors, and other fellows interested in civic engagement. We are leading this initiative to ensure voting on campus is as accessible and convenient as possible and integrated with our other projects to advance voter registration and engagement on campus. These Wilks Fellows were hired to the office with the intention of advancing our civic engagement efforts on campus in whichever ways



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we deem necessary and innovative. We are working together to ensure we take a multi-faceted approach to achieve these goals.

As of now, only our Wilks office is involved in carrying out this action plan, but we will surely need the support of other student organizations on campus. Specifically, we need the support of student organizations with a specific interest in business, math, and engineering majors as these students are underrepresented in our voter registration and turnout percentages. We have collaborated with the League of Women Voters to educate our community and ensure their registration and will continue to collaborate with campus partners in our civic engagement coalition (detailed below).

Landscape:

Our civic engagement approach has overall been successful on campus as reflected in our high voting rate of 70.5% in 2020 compared to the national average of 66%. As of 2020, the major areas in which we can improve include computer science with a voting rate of 64%, Engineering with a voting rate of 66%, Business with a voting rate of 67%, and Math and statistics with a voting rate of 70%. While our voter registration rate has typically been above the national average, we can always do more to ensure our voter turnout remains strong and does not falter.

Currently our civic learning and democratic engagement plan does not have a great presence in courses with the exception of our political science department. We would like to change this by creating a brief unit / curriculum on how to register to vote and ensure that vote is counted. This includes instructions on how to request absentee ballots, update your address, and find more information on candidates and issues. The overall goal is empowering students to take a greater interest and investment in the electoral process. This instruction could occur in the University 101 and similar classes across the divisions to inform the first-years of how to become more involved.

Our internal barriers include inconsistencies in the polling place on campus. While most of our on-campus students vote in the Shriver Center, near the center of campus, some of our on-campus and most (if not all) off-campus students vote at the local schools. These locations are not easily accessible by car and require extra planning in order to vote. Additionally, we do not have a location to vote early on campus. We could remedy this in part by training students to be poll workers and creating a designated early voting location on campus. We can also increase our advocacy work directed at Ohio's Secretary of State office to allow greater flexibility in establishing on-campus early voting places.

An additional internal barrier, especially pertaining to our math and statistics students and their low percentage of registration, is the lack of community some of our departments have. For these majors, their classes are spread out between four different buildings and several departments depending on the focus of the major. Our data analytics departments alone are



housed separately in our business school and our college of arts and sciences. Additionally, our math education department and general math department are on opposite sides of campus. Not having a congruent meeting place or location for these majors hinders their ability to connect with others and build a community which is helpful to increase voter turnout.

We are continuously learning about what barriers our students face internally and externally on our campus. Our external barriers include an inability to use our student id cards to register to vote. As our ids do not have students' addresses nor a signature, they are not acceptable under Ohio's election law. This could be an additional hindrance and complication to ensuring we have student voices heard by the electorate for our students who do not have another id of their own. We will continue investigating how this state-wide problem affects our student body.

We also have overall confusion as to when students should and can register, update their address, and request absentee ballots. This is an external barrier of not understanding the state and federal election law. We will continue to build opportunities to address this on campus.

We have a wealth of resources on campus, especially with physical and financial support from the Wilks Institute. Wilks is always willing and able to sponsor, host, and promote the civic engagement events that the fellows want to initiate. To be more successful, having the administration prioritize civic participation by cancelling classes on general election day or have remote learning would be helpful.

Commitment:

It appears that Miami's dedication to civic engagement emanates from the Wilks office and several student organizations but is not a priority of the university overall. We do have an extension of TurboVote on our student organization portal, and we have had the help of our Dean of Students in enabling the pop-up reminder to register students to vote. However, on the President's strategic plan called Miami Rise, there is no mention of civic learning or democratic engagement. There is no instruction of how to register and maintain registration status to vote within the curriculum, to our knowledge. While we typically have a table of information at first-year orientation about registration, this information is not integrated into the actual orientation. We've also received pushback from various departments about implementing civic education into the Miami transition classes as they claim it does not fit into the goal of transitioning to college and campus life. With these barriers, it has been difficult to reach new audiences of students to overcome our collective lack of knowledge for local and federal election laws and protocols.

To further improve our commitment, we should have a coalition of departments, student organizations, and civic engagement Wilks fellows that meet on a regular basis to solidify our civic goals. A coalition of this type existed at Miami before, but with several departmental



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reorganizations for the civic engagement team and COVID, it fell through the cracks. This previous coalition contained representatives from the Dean of Students, Office of Residence Life, Student Disability Services, Student Activities, Fraternity and Sorority Life, The City of Oxford's Mayor, Orientation and Transition Programs, and more and was organized by the civic engagement fellows. We would like to rekindle this program to ensure that various departments and bodies have a vested interest in our approach to civic engagement on campus.

We internally measure our successes for civic engagement in the Wilks Office by comparing our NSLVE data across elections for registration and turnout rates. We then target which demographics, majors, and divisions have the lowest voter registration and turnout rates and work to improve these statistics with numeric goals for the next midterm and presidential elections.

Goals:

Our first goal is to instill in our students the importance of being a civic leader with an interest in electing changemakers and improving their communities. This primary goal helps our secondary goals of high voter registration and election turnout percentages amongst eligible voters and a desire to learn more about issues and candidates that are on the ballot. We have identified a large gap both in our voter registration and election turnout percentages, especially in midterm years. These goals are shared across the Wilks civic engagement team and heavily influence what programming we craft for our students.

To promote a general enthusiasm for civic engagement, we want our approach to focus on more than just voting on election day. This can include events like a democracy or election history themed game nights, documentary watch parties about the evolving electorate, and other creative ways to mix education and fun.

We also want to increase our accessibility to voter engagement on campus. Although we have a polling place conveniently located on campus, only our on-campus students vote here; our off-campus students have to vote at the surrounding public schools, which are not easily accessible by foot from most off-campus housing. We would like to make transportation to the polling place more convenient by offering shuttles on primary and general election days that loop around common off-campus apartment areas and go to the polling places. We could either fund these shuttles ourselves, through a partnership with our Associated Student Government of Miami's Center for Democracy, or through a partnership with the Butler County Regional Transit Authority (BCRTA), which currently provides transportation around Oxford to students for free.

We want to further boost our connection with and the students' awareness of Freedom Summer. This 1964 Mississippi voter registration drive intended to increase the registration of Black



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citizens. They had their volunteer orientation sessions for over 800 volunteers in Oxford, OH at the Western College for Women, which has since merged with Miami University. Once the drive began, they were met with violence from the KKK. Three men were murdered, including Andrew Goodman, whose parents later created a voting rights foundation in his name. We want to increase awareness of these events and their importance as part of our campus's history and our nation's election history. Incorporating more education about this event into our first-year orientation and Miami transition classes will give students the opportunity to reflect on voting rights and the courage and sacrifice needed to make voting a reality today.

Furthermore, we are aware of the barriers to voting access marginalized communities continue to face. We are committed to collaborating with on-campus offices, especially our Center for Student Diversity & Inclusion and student-led Diversity Affairs Council, to narrow the voting gaps these communities face. We are also aware of the struggles disabled students face in exercising their right to vote. We hope to develop targeted programming and resources for our students who identify with these groups to help them fulfill their civic responsibilities and their role in the electorate.

We want to continue utilizing our student-run civic engagement account through Wilks, called @RedHawksCount. This account shares reminders about election-themed events, voting deadlines, and information about election-related issues like gerrymandering and new laws. On this platform in the spring, we had political science professors record video segments about the history and effects of gerrymandering in Ohio. We'd like to continue this idea to other divisions, namely the statistics department to debrief and discuss our campus voting statistics. We'd also like to use students with clout to share similar messages about why voting is important and meaningful to them. These student leaders can include the presidents of Panhellenic, the National Panhellenic Council, and the International Fraternity Council; captains of our varsity sports teams like football and hockey; the student body president and vice president; and other well-known leaders.

We will further use our NSLVE data from 2018 in preparing for the 2022 midterms. In 2018, our registration rate had increased to 76.8%, our election turnout rate was 48%, and our voting rate of registered voters was 36.9%. In 2020, our percentage of registered voters increased above the national average to 86.3%, our election turnout rate increased to 81.7%, and our voting rate of registered voters increased to 70.5%. As we look ahead to our next midterm election with the knowledge that our turnout in non-presidential election years is lower, we want to have 80% of students registered and 50% of our registered students cast a ballot. As we delve into the data more, we will also create specific metrics and goals for our low-performing majors like math, statistics, business, and computer science.

Over the next ten years, we want the University to have a greater vested interest in our civic engagement efforts. We can create this by implementing a cross-divisional and departmental coalition to discuss civic engagement and the barriers we face in achieving our goals. We also



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want this coalition to bolster our teamwork and collaboration with the Oxford community at large, including the Oxford Chapter of the League of Women Voters and Oxford City Council.

Strategy:

To begin, we want to increase our student outreach to survey and collect information on what barriers they face. Having a better understanding of this information will aid in forming our approach and tactics to overcoming barriers and making voting easier.

We want to continue hosting educational opportunities and panels like with the Oxford City Council Candidates that we hosted on October 26th, 2021 to educate students about each candidate's goals and platform. Having panels, debates, and presentations about various issues and candidates helps to better educate students on the issues they vote on and inspires them to continue their involvement in the electorate.

We also want to combine education about the electorate with fun, interactive activities. For instance, this general election, we hosted a "pizza at the polls" event on election day to inspire students to vote and offer free pizza as an incentive to learn more about voting. We also created a voting 101 flier that discusses Ohio election laws and commonly asked questions about what voting looks like in Ohio for all types of students. If students fill out part of this form asking them where their polling place is and why voting is important to them, they are entered into a giveaway for an airfryer.

We are increasingly dedicated to operate through the intersectional lens of the Wilks office to combine leadership, service, and interfaith work into our projects. We have already begun partnering with local nonprofit organizations (such as our local food pantry and shelter) to raise awareness for local service efforts, reminding students of how far the span of civic engagement reaches. We hope to continue to foster these partnerships as well as partner with our local Coalition for a Healthy Community to further educate students on why they should be civically engaged in their own communities.

To address our lack of voting engagement for math, stats, business, and engineering, we want to immerse ourselves more in their programming. We want to work with the student advisory boards in their departments and collaborate with the subject-specific student orgs. We also want to become involved in their departmental meet-and-greets and programming. For instance, we recently learned that the math department has an ice cream social each semester for their students to meet one another. Utilizing this time to further connect with these students and assist them in registering to vote would serve beneficial.

The Wilks civic engagement fellows for AGF, CEEP, and CVP will continue to plan these activities and events for the student body. Our work is largely collaborative and housed out of the Wilks office in our Armstrong student center.



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Reporting:

Our plan will be shared on the Wilks website under the civic engagement tab to share our goals with the public. Students, faculty, staff, and the public-at-large can then access our information and goals to improve our civic engagement processes. In this space, we can also share our NSLVE data to ensure the statistics and information that informed our action plan are affirmed. With this information shared, students can more easily track Miami's progress within civic engagement and learn how to foster our mission on campus.

We also hope to share this on the Miami president's website and incorporate it into the "Rise Miami" strategic campus plan. We don't want civic engagement to be isolated and siloed in our office but rather want it to be integrated into our University overall.

Evaluation:

The purpose of our evaluation is to have a progress check to identify what areas we've succeeded in and what others still need improvement. By reflecting on this information provided by our NSLVE data, we can craft our next action plan to better fit the needs of our students and overcome their barriers to voting. In reviewing our data and feedback overall, we will assemble our Wilks civic engagement fellows and our coalition of invested civic engagement leaders and organizations to revise our previous plan and craft a new action plan.

