

December 12, 2019

## **Executive Summary**

The democratic engagement plan has been developed specifically for Minnesota State University Moorhead located in Moorhead, Minnesota. MSUM is part of the Minnesota State University System which is comprised of 30 colleges and 7 universities spread over 54 campuses in Minnesota.

This plan is developed in order to identify MSUM's voter education, registration, and turn-out goals for the 2020 election and other democratic engagement initiatives for future election cycles, along with steps to achieve the goals.

The plan was developed through information gathered from members of Student Senate and Students United; in addition, three faculty members and one student affairs staff member provided input.

This plan will be evaluated after the 2020 election to identify if the short-term goals were met and what strategies used were most effective. An updated plan will be completed prior to the 2022 election cycle.

## **Leadership**

Leadership for this democratic engagement plan at Minnesota State University Moorhead will come from a work group of committed faculty members, student affairs professionals, and students.

Faculty who are engaged in local voting efforts as private citizens will be asked to share their expertise as part of the team. In addition, members from the political science department will provide insight into best practices and faculty members in the Center for Engaged Learning will assist in coordinated efforts.

Student affairs professionals who work with student organizations and student leaders will serve on the work group in order to ensure we have open channels of communication with co-curricular aspects of the university and will bring knowledge of Minnesota State University system policy as it relates to voting.

Students who have a personal or academic interest in voter engagement will be part of the workgroup. Specifically, the work group will have representatives from Student Senate and Students United who can share perspectives on initiatives across Minnesota.

The work group will also seek to engage with local organizations, including the City of Moorhead and Clay County.

### Commitment

As an institution, democratic engagement can be seen as a key component of deliver on our promise to our students. Minnesota State University Moorhead's strategic anchors are:

**Strategy 1: Our Students.**

Focusing relentlessly on student achievement and students' return on their investment.

**Strategy 2: Our University.**

Creating a campus community that is diverse, inclusive, globally aware, and just.

**Strategy 3: Our World.**

Being indispensable to the social, cultural, and economic advancement of Moorhead and the surrounding communities.

In addition, there is a Minnesota State Statute (201.1611 POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION AND SCHOOL DISTRICT VOTER REGISTRATION) that requires institutions to provide information about voter registration to students. It reads:

Subdivision 1. **Forms.**

All postsecondary institutions that enroll students accepting state or federal financial aid shall provide voter registration forms to each student as early as possible in the fall quarter. All school districts shall make available voter registration applications each May and September to all students registered as students of the school district who will be eligible to vote at the next election after those months. A school district has no obligation to provide voter registration applications to students who participate in a postsecondary education option program or who otherwise reside in the district but do not attend a school operated by the district. A school district fulfills its obligation to a student under this section if it provides a voter registration application to the student one time. The forms must contain spaces for the information required in section [201.071, subdivision 1](#), and applicable rules of the secretary of state. The institutions and school districts may request these forms from the secretary of state. Institutions shall consult with their campus student government in determining the most effective means of distributing the forms and in seeking to facilitate election day registration of students under

section [201.061, subdivision 3](#). School districts must advise students that completion of the voter registration application is not a school district requirement.

### Subdivision 2. **Student voter registration.**

A copy of each completed voter registration form must be sent to the county auditor of the county in which the voter maintains residence or to the secretary of state as soon as possible. All completed voter registration forms must be forwarded no later than 21 days before the general election.

Following MSUM's completion of a Strategic Priority setting process in February 2020, the work group will examine the priorities that are set forth and ensure alignment of this plan with institutional priorities.

### **Landscape**

Minnesota State University Moorhead has University Wide Student Learning Outcomes. The project to develop university-wide student learning outcomes was part of the University's ten-year re-accreditation process in 2016-17. The university's accrediting agency, the Higher Learning Commission, promotes continuous improvement projects that will lead to overall effectiveness in the curricular and co-curricular areas. The learning outcome that relates to democratic engagement is "Demonstrate civic awareness and responsibility, both locally and globally."

We need to further examine data from MSUM's Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the National Survey of Student Engagement from 2019 and 2018 data from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership. In addition, we will use data related to student voting, including NSLVE and others, to better understand the landscape as we further develop the plan.

Academic Affairs at MSUM is in the process of a strategic realignment. Following the final structure being announced and put into place, additional conversations with the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the deans of each college will create opportunities for incorporating information about democratic engagement into entry level courses within a variety of majors.

Further exploration is needed to fully understand the Minnesota State Statutes and policies that govern how institutions can incorporate voter information into official communications or university-sponsored events.

### **Goals**

### *Short term goals*

1. In 2020, MSUM students will know where to find information about the voting process.
2. In 2020, MSUM will have 100% of on-campus residents registered to vote.
3. In 2020, MSUM will have a student voter turn-out of 50% or more (an increase of approximately 4%).
4. In 2020, MSUM will have 30% of voters participate in early or absentee voting by providing accurate information about these options to students.
5. In 2020, all MSUM students will understand where to find voting information for the state in which they intend to vote.

### *Long-term Goals*

1. By 2024, the institution will incorporate democratic engagement into the First Year Experience courses as part of the intended learning outcomes.
2. By 2028, the institution will achieve parity in the rates at which students of color and white students are voting.
3. By 2024, students at the institution will have on-going relationships with local voting advocates through Student Senate and Students United in order to understand and implement best practices for student voter engagement.

## **Strategy**

### Short-term Goals Strategies

1. Working with Student Senate and Students United, each student living on-campus will receive information about voting in Moorhead, MN and where to find information about voting in surrounding states. In addition, voting information will be provided over the official student listserv.

2. By working with Housing and Residence Life staff, we will provide information to students as they sign up for housing and to provide the county auditor with a list of on-campus residents to allow students to register to vote on the Election Day.
3. MSUM had a voter turn-out of 46.2% in 2018 according to NSLVE data. For 2020, we have secured having a polling place located on campus which will lower the barrier for students to vote.
4. MSUM had an early and absentee voter rate of 24.3% in 2018 according to NSLVE data. We will provide specific information to students during Orientation and an event called DragonFest that happen early in the academic year.
5. Student Senate and Students United will create and execute an informational campaign.

#### Long-term Goals Strategies

1. The First Year Experience course curriculum is evaluated annually. The workgroup will engage in the process of curriculum improvement suggestions and work with the FYE committee to incorporate democratic engagement information into the course curriculum.
2. MSUM is generating new efforts to engage students of color in a variety of ways; we will work with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to incorporate democratic engagement as a key point in the updated Diversity Strategic Plan that will be authored in 2020.
3. Student Senate and Students United have both been engaged in efforts to encourage student voting, and with a new emphasis on voter registration and voter engagement they are working to build relationships with community organizations. Through a staff advisor monitoring record keeping, we will ensure that even as student leaders transition in or out of these two organizations, they are able to maintain connections with these external organizations.

#### Reporting

The voter engagement reports will be shared with the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs for further distribution to the President's Council, the Center for Engaged Learning, Student Affairs Directors, and others. We will explore a posting on MSUM's public-facing website or internal site that can be accessed by the campus community. Further conversations with the Center for Engaged Learning after a permanent director is named will also inform the eventual distribution of the plans and reports.

Student Senate will be the connection with students to inform them of the democratic engagement plan.

## Evaluation

The NSLVE report will be shared on campus through official channels, such as a posting in DragonDigest. In addition, information will be provided to Student Senate and Students United directly.

NSLVE data will be provided to the Student Life Programming Work Group in order to examine the effectiveness of co-curricular efforts.

After incorporating democratic engagement information into First Year Experience courses, course data will be evaluated and provided to the Center for Engaged Learning, the FYE Curriculum committee, and the Office of First Year Programs.

This plan will be evaluated after the 2020 election to identify if the short-term goals were met and what strategies used were most effective.