VOTER REGISTRATION & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN
2022

Executive Summary

Founded in 1964, Montgomery County Community College (Montco) is a public, 501(c)(3) higher education institution that offers associate degrees, professional certificates, and job-training programs. The College is accredited by the Middles States Commission on Higher Education and has three physical locations in Pennsylvania –Blue Bell, Pottstown, The Culinary Arts Institute in Lansdale - and a Virtual Campus. In 2019, Montco's enrollment was 16,541 (15,343 credit and 1,198 non-credit). Approximately 70 percent of the student body is enrolled on a part-time basis and over 80 percent of students work while they attend classes.

Montco has received recognition as being one of the most technologically advanced community colleges in the nation as well as for excellence in faculty and staff. An Achieving the Dream Leader College of Distinction, Montco has been included on the list of Best for Vets Colleges in *Military Times*, and has been recognized as one of the Most Promising Places to work by *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* for the past five years.

For the 2020 General Election, Montco was recognized as having the highest student voter registration and voter turnout of 2-year schools in Pennsylvania.

Montco is committed to engaging students civically and providing opportunities for all students to become involved in the democratic process. As a 501(c)(3) institution, all efforts are non-partisan in nature the College does not advocate for or oppose any individual candidate or political party.

Who developed this action plan?
As with our 2020 Action Plan, this plan was developed primarily by the Civic Engagement Working Group (Departments of Government & External Relations, Office of Integrated Learning, Office of Student Life, and Academic Affairs) with individual input from students and faculty members. Montco leadership provided overall guidance and support throughout the process of developing the plan. Montco continually seeks to incorporate more student-focused voter registration initiatives that involve the Student Government Association, fellowships from external civic organizations, and various student clubs.

What is this action plan for and what does it seek to accomplish?
This action plan was developed to continue and institution-wide awareness and education campaign about the importance of voter registration and voting to develop and foster a greater sense of civic duty among Montco's students, faculty, and administrators. As a primarily taxpayer-funded institution of higher learning, it is important that Montco students and stakeholders understand the impact of their engagement and have the proper tools available to engage civically. Many Montco students are also members of underserved communities, and it is

important for these students to have access to resources and opportunities that might otherwise not be available to them.

Where will this action plan be implemented?
This plan will be implemented through all possible avenues to reach students, faculty and administrators. This includes in the classrooms at Montco's three physical locations, its Virtual Campus, and through digital and mobile mediums like email, text messaging, Blackboard and *Montco Connect*, the College's student portal.

What is the duration of time that the plan is in effect?
This plan is developed for the 2022 election year. However, in continuation with our 2020 plan, many of these initiatives will be implemented throughout the College's operations every year thereafter. Many events will be repeated each year to maintain a continual, consistent student engagement program after being evaluated for effectiveness by Montco staff.

Leadership

Providing overall guidance and institutional support for civic engagement initiatives at Montco, individuals include:

Dr. Victoria L. Bastecki-Perez
President

Phil Needles
Vice President of Student Services

Dr. Celeste Schwartz
Vice President of Information Technology & Chief Digital Officer

Jodi Empol-Schwartz
Assistant Professor of Political Science

Patricia Drewicz
Facilities Use Manager

Michael Harcum
Director of Admissions & Recruitment

Christopher Jaramillo
Coordinator of Admissions & Recruitment

Marketing & Communications
- Molly Hafner, *Director of Marketing*
- Diane VanDyke, *Director of Strategic Communications*
- Erin Jellesma, *Senior Marketing Project Manager*
- Amelia Fox, *Digital Marketing Manager*
- Eric Devlin, *Public Relations and Communications Coordinator*

For the development of this plan and implementation of registration and engagement opportunities the Civic Engagement Working Group was formed:

Michael Bettinger
Director of Government & External Relations

Sean Hutchinson
Coordinator of Integrated Learning

Tyler Steffy
Director of Student Life

Sarah Schenk
Coordinator of Student Life

Statement of Commitment

Montco is committed to providing initiatives and resources to encourage civic engagement and democratic participation among students for each election year. As an institution, Montco understands that every election is important and affects the lives of our students, staff, and faculty – whether the election be for the President of the United States or a County Commissioner.

President Dr. Victoria L. Bastecki-Perez has signed on to *ALL-IN's Higher Education Presidents Commitment to Full Voter Participation*. This action further codifies Montco's leadership's commitment and full support to institutionalize civic-engagement throughout the Montco community and strive toward 100% voter participation among its students.

Landscape

Our most recent National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) reports show that Montco voter registration rates (77.3%) are slightly below average among all institutions participating in the study. However, those who are registering are voting in high numbers (86.5%), above the national average. Personnel and institutional support are in place to provide increased focus to voter registration and participation, and the development of this plan represents a deliberate effort to institutionalize the importance of civic participation among the students and staffs. A more in-depth look at the NSLVE data is examined in this section as well.

A challenge to engage Montco students exists because students are commuters. Many students typically come to campus for classes and then leave to go to work, pick up children, etc. Approximately 75% of Montco students are part-time and over 80% are working while they attend. This situation reduces the amount of time when students are on campus and have down time or non-class hours that they can use to attend events or become engaged in activities.

Yet, many students do remain on campus each day and in-person registration and engagement opportunities will continue to be implemented so they have opportunities to participate. To enhance these efforts and reach greater numbers of students, Montco will continue to provide opportunities through virtual means such as messages sent directly to students through email, text messaging, and push notifications through a newly developed student portal. Additionally, when possible, efforts will be made to greater incorporate voter

registration and civic engagement into the curriculum and classroom experience expanding on some of the civic-focused coursework already in place.

Voter Registration

Montco's voter registration rates - the percentage of all Montco students registered to vote – has continued on a consistent upward trend over the past four years. In 2020, the percentage of registered Montco students surpassed the state-wide registration rate for the first time since track began in 2012.

Election Year	Pennsylvania (Statewide)*	MCCC Student Voter Registration Rate**
2020	76.3%	77.3%
2018	68.3%	67.3%
2016	72%	67.4%
2014	64.4%	55.5%
2012	71.9%	63.9%

*US Census Bureau, Reported Voting & Registration of the Citizen Voting Age Population for States
** National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Voter Participation Rate

In addition to the registration rate, Montco's continued to show an above average level of voter participation among Montco students when compared to all institutions participating in the NSLVE study. However, unlike the registration rate the figures seen in registration, the overall voting participation rate falls below the Pennsylvania state-wide averages. The significant decrease in participation state-wide in 2014 can also be seen among MCCC students and all NSLVE institutions.

Election Year	Pennsylvania	MCCC Student Voting Rate	All NSLVE Institutions
2020	76.5%	66.9%	66%
2018	54.6%	44.9%	39.1
2016	62.6%	59.5%	50.6
2014	40%	20.8%	19.7%
2012	61.6%	50.9%	57.6%

Further analysis of the NSLVE data does show encouraging trends. When comparing each mid-term election and each presidential year Montco student voter participation rates also grew dramatically over the past four cycles, particularly in mid-term elections. The reasons for this increase could be institutional efforts combined with a greater civic participation among students given the increasingly politicized national conversation.

2016	2020	MCCC Participation Rate Change
60.6%	66.9%	+6.3%
2014	2018	
20.8%	44.9%	+24.2%

When looking only at voting rates of Montco students who are registered to vote, as opposed to all Montco students generally, an increasing number of them are turning out to the polls. Similar to the overall data, the greatest participation can be seen during presidential elections with a significant increase in the 2018 midterms compared to 2014.

Election Year	Voting Rate of Registered Students (MCCC)
2020	86.5%
2018	66.7%
2016	83.5%
2014	37.4%
2012	79.7%

Method of Voting
For the 2020 election, 66% voted in-person and 32% voted by mail-in or absentee ballot. Breaking down student participation by race/ethnicity, every category showed an increase from 2016, and voting rates for those identifying as black, white, two or more races and Asian were all above the national average.

Additionally, all age groups showed an increase in the voting rate except for the 50+ group. Students aged 18-21 showed the largest voting rate growth over 2016 with a 9% increase. 50+ with -2% decrease. This can be seen as an example of the younger electorate becoming more engaged, at least within the Montco community.

As with previous years, the highest levels of participation were seen in the Social Sciences and Communications & Journalism areas (73%). These students would potentially have a greater interest in the civic conversation, and the data does show discipline areas where outreach could be increased, such as Biomedical Sciences (58%) or Computer & Information Sciences (58%). Every area, however, did show an increase from 2016.

In terms of gender, more female students are voting than males; however, the reason for this is higher enrollment for females. Percentages were even with 66% of females and 66% of male students voting.

Goals

1) Achieve an <u>over 65%</u> voter participation rate among students for the 2022 general election.

2) Increase the voter registration rate among Montco students to <u>over 70%</u> for the 2022 midterm election.

3) Work with community groups to ensure students in typically under-served communities have full access to resources; and provide a consistent program of registration and engagement opportunities throughout the academic year in order to institutionalize the efforts and emphasize to students the importance of being registered and engaging civically.

Strategy

As with previous election cycles, Montco intends to implement this plan through a variety of methods, including digital platforms and in-person experiences to provide a wide-range of engagement.

<u>Voter Registration</u>

TurboVote
The College has extended our partnership with TurboVote, an online platform which allows users to register to vote, request absentee ballots, and sign-up to receive important election information such as deadlines, polling locations, etc. This platform allows students to use a unique URL – mc3.turbovote.org - to access the platform.

From there, students enter basic identifying information and answer a few short questions in order to register in as little as 10 minutes.

Due its efficacy, Montco continues to utilize this platform through a number of mediums:

- Embed the link onto the Montco Connects student portal

- Send college-wide emails to students, faculty & staff

- Embed the TurboVote link on Blackboard

- Include TurboVote link on the syllabus template for faculty

- Provide voter registration forms with information and the link to Enrollment Services

TurboVote is and will continue to be the College's primary tool for voter registration efforts. A primary objective in utilizing the platform is to present the link to every student throughout the semester through multiple mediums. The versatility of TurboVote also allows voter registration opportunities to reach all students regardless of enrollment status (part-time, full-time, online, etc.) or campus location.

Spring Fling
As part of our work Spring Fling programming to celebrate the completion of the semester, voter registration was incorporated to allow students to engage with civic engagement organizations and register to vote in-person. Spring Fling events we organized on each Montco campus providing registration options prior to the deadline to vote in the Primary Election in May.

> April 27 – Blue Bell Campus
> April 28 – Pottstown Campus

Montco Connect Student Portal
Currently – the TurboVote link is incorporated in the online student portal as a drop-down box for new students. Those students accessing the portal for the first time are greeted with a dialogue box asking them if they are registered to vote or if they would like to sign up for absentee ballots or election alerts and includes a link to the TurboVote site. It is the first information a new student encounters when accessing the portal.

In fall 2020, a new student portal will be brought online, and work is currently in progress to integrate TurboVote. This new platform will have an entirely new user experience than the one currently in place. There is potential for greater engagement among student body by embedding links and information directly to the portal site on a continual bases, posting engagement information in real time and allowing sign-up for events, and direct "push" messaging to a student's cell phone.

The portal has a social media-type interface and messages can be posted to students' "news-feed" and incorporated into various pages depending on interest such as the Student Government Association and student clubs.

Montco Votes
The College is currently in the process of developing a landing page on its website dedicated specifically to voter registration, voter education, and civic engagement. The page will include:

- Information on voter registration requirements
- The TurboVote link to register or request absentee or mail-in ballots
- Links to find a user's legislator and polling place
- Information on upcoming civic engagement opportunities
- Photos and information on previous civic events

The page will be continually updated to reflect up-to-date information, changes to election law, and event schedules.

In-Person Voter Registration
Although the TurboVote platform creates an entirely digitally based process, tabling events and in-person voter registration drives will continue. Past efforts have shown that students respond more positively to initiatives that are conducted by other students or familiar faculty. In-person registration drives also produce a sense of community, fellowship, and shared purpose among the student body.

For the Spring 2022 semester, tabling events were held on:

4/18/2022	11:30 AM	1:30 PM	In conjunction with Lawn Games
4/18/2022	11:30 AM	1:30 PM	
4/21/2022	11:30 AM	1:30 PM	
4/21/2022	11:30 AM	1:30 PM	
4/25/2022	11:30 AM	1:30 PM	In conjunction with Lawn Games
4/25/2022	11:30 AM	1:30 PM	
4/28/2022	11:30 AM	1:30 PM	
4/28/2022	11:30 AM	1:30 PM	In conjunction with Spring Fling

Tabling events have been, and will continue to be, scheduled throughout the year placing an emphasis before registration deadlines and elections.

Faculty engagement is also a priority without disrupting class schedules. A simple spreadsheet is developed listing the dates and times of the tabling in one-hour shifts. This spreadsheet is then circulated by the Office of Integrated Learning so faculty members can sign-up to participate according to their availability.

External Non-Profit Organizations
The College also works with volunteers from a diverse group of external non-profit organizations that focus on voter registration and civic engagement initiatives. These partnerships will continue throughout each year and will become particularly more active as the 2020 General Election approaches.   These organizations include:

- League of Women Voters
- New PA Project
- Montgomery County Voter Services
- Accion Comunal Latinoamericana de Montgomery County (ACLAMO)
  - Latin American Community Action of Montgomery County

Civic Engagement

Issues-Focused programing

Throughout the year, Montco staff works with student clubs to facilitate & promote events relative to their interest. The College will continue to produce programing focused around significant civic issues facing college students today. Examples of this programming include:

Webinars, Virtual Events:

"What is the History of Medical Racism in the 20th Century, and How Did Medical Racism Impact African American Communities?" February 23, Dr. Maranda C. Ward, MPH, EdD

A Conversation on Critical Race Theory

Navigating Mathematical Spaces Wile Black

Community Lecture: Come Join Us to Learn about Dr. Frank Erdman Boston

Celebrate Women's History Month with Sojourner Truth Reenactment

Launching Women Leaders 2022

Legislator in Residence

Montco invites approximately 8-9 legislators throughout each semester for guest lectures on a number of individual topics involving government and political science. Many of these legislators are state representatives and senators; however, the county commissioners also have been involved. The program is incorporated into the course syllabus, and the students do research on each legislator before the visit and have prepared questions for Q & A.

Spring 2022 Legislator in Residence Series

Constitution Day
Each year, the College joins colleges and universities across the country in celebrating Constitution Day on September 17. The day includes a voter registration drive and free pocket-sized constitutions give-away for students.

PACCC Community College Week
Each spring, Montco participates in the annual Community College Day in Harrisburg hosted by the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges (PACCC). For this event, students visit the State Capitol and participate in face-to-face meetings with state legislators and their staff. Also involved in these visits are the President, Trustees, and relevant leadership depending on availability. Student participation includes Political Science students, Montco Student Ambassadors, and members of the Student Government Association.

The students take the lead in facilitating the discussions with the legislators. They speak about Montgomery County Community College and their experiences, as well as some of the challenges they might face and how the College has helped them accomplish their goals. The day provides students the experience of "lobbying" their legislators on a particular issue. While the general focus is support for Montgomery County Community College, other areas ultimately are addressed, including mental health resources and student debt.

Between legislative visits, the students participate in a press conference emphasizing the importance of community colleges. In addition to visiting the State Capitol Building – an opportunity many students would not have had otherwise - the daylong event allows students to learn more about the legislative process and provide a chance to interact directly with elected officials.

Marketing & Communications
The College has a centralized marketing a communications (MarCom) operation. This team has been utilized to increase awareness among both the internal college community as well as the external population about important deadlines and information regarding voter registration, polling places, Election Day reminders, etc. The MarCom team has played an integral role in the development of graphics for display throughout campus; creating content to distribute to students, staff, and faculty; and general promotion of civic engagement events throughout the year.

Community Polling Places
Each year, Montgomery County Community College serves as a polling place for the surrounding precincts. Both Blue Bell and Pottstown campuses are utilized, and this provides a well-known, centralized location for local residents - many of them Montco students - to cast their votes in person. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the spring, vote by mail was highly encouraged, and our Pottstown Campus serves as a 24/7 drop-off location for mail-in ballots.

Reporting

For the 2020 election, Montco received ALL-IN's Silver Seal and was recognized as having the highest voter registration and voter turnout among 2-year schools in Pennsylvania. An info graphic was prepared utilizing various NSLVE data points and was distributed to the College's, students, faculty, staff, elected officials and community partners.
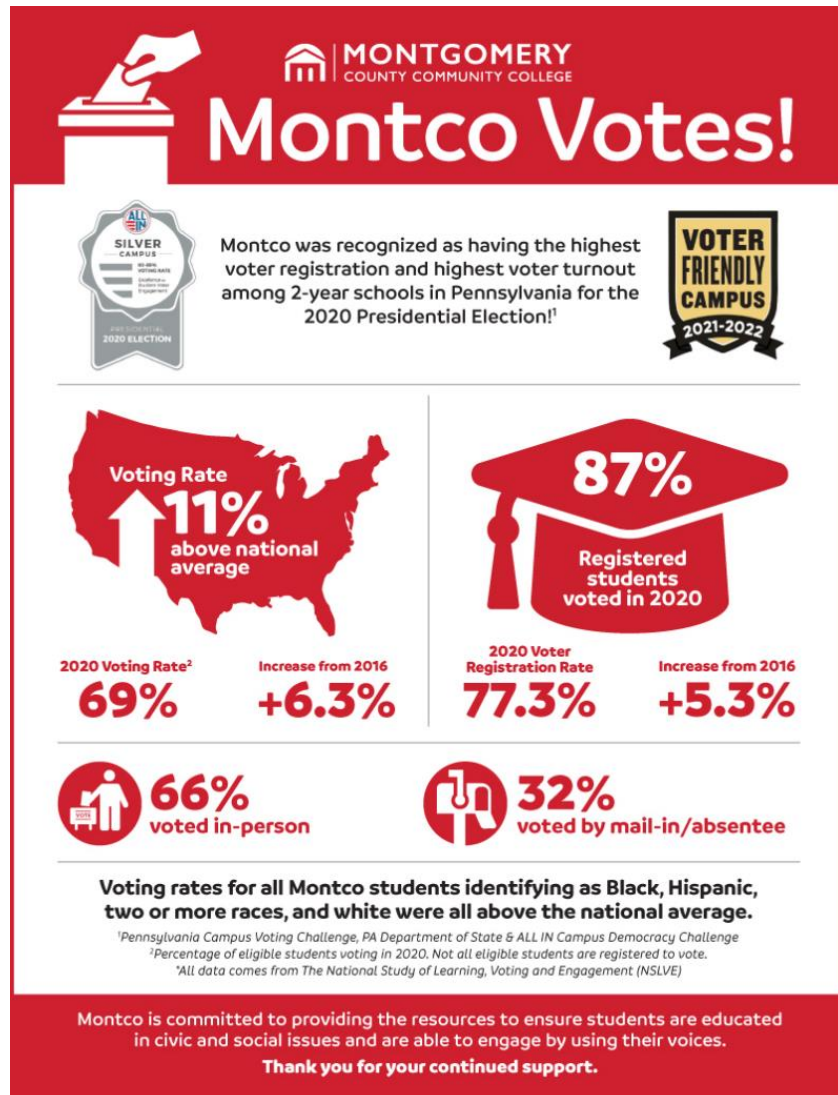
A press release was also shared on social media, and it was distributed to a number of news organizations. The President recognized the accomplishment and the development team at the Board of Trustees meeting, and the press release also was included in the President's Report, which is created monthly for the Board of Trustees and shared with the internal college community and with external stakeholders, including alumni and legislators. The press coverage was included in Montco's monthly News Brief, a compilation of college news that is circulated among the community. Depending on the publication, the articles have a potential viewership of several million readers.

Montgomery County Community College has given permission and encourages groups such as ALL-IN to share action plans and NSLVE reports whenever possible. Past and future NSLVE reports will also be shared on the Montco Votes page and on social media as they become available.

Evaluation

Individual NSLVE reports are used as the primary resources for analyzing our voter registration and voter engagement efforts. Simple data points such as voter registration and participation rates will be used as

benchmarks to set goals and measure progress. However, more specific NSLVE information will be utilized as well. For example, recent NSLVE reports show that very few Montco students utilize absentee ballots, choosing instead to vote in person. Using this information, messaging may be focused more on ensuring that students know where their polling place locations as opposed to requesting absentee ballots, although this information will be included, too.

The TurboVote platform allows administrators to see back-end data on the number of students who are using it to register and request ballots. It also shows who is signing up for alerts and what platform they would prefer. For example, should the data show that students prefer to sign up for email alerts (rather than texts); it will show that this medium is perhaps a more effective method for future messaging.

Additionally, an individualized code can be used for each embedded TurboVote link. This allows administrators to see how students are accessing the platform. For example, should a text message be sent to all students and a student accesses the site through the link, this will be shown on the back-end data. If there is a surge in TurboVote usage with this text link, it will show that this is an effective medium to reach students.

#MontcoMomentum
       Facebook: Montgomery County Community College
       Instagram: mcccpa
       Twitter: @mccc