

NJCU 2020 All In Action Plan

Executive Summary

With a motto of “Enter to Learn, Exit to Serve,” NJCU has a long history of promoting civic literacy among students.

The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan was developed by a campus team including: the Director of Student Media, the Director of the Center for Leadership and Engagement, the Assistant Director for the Center for Community Engagement, the Assistant Dean for Social Services, the Department of Political Science, the Student Government Association (SGA) Coordinator and the SGA.

To become fully engaged citizens students need to understand the democratic process. As a Hispanic-serving institution serving many first-generation college students, NJCU has a culture of engagement and a focus on critical thinking and leadership development. We see a direct correlation between providing opportunities for students to effect positive change in their communities and going to the polls. This action plan formalizes the university’s commitment to increase voter registration and voting among NJCU students, while also building awareness of the political process.

According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), 48.3 percent of undergraduate students (at 1,023 higher education institutions) voted in the 2016 presidential election — 11.9 percentage points lower than the national rate among all eligible voters in that election.

A Fresh Approach

While there have been many efforts at NJCU to encourage voter registration and voting, there has not been consistent benchmarking or full use of all available data. Going forward, we will continue to support student leadership in all of our “get out the vote” efforts, but include building new strategies based on greater analysis of data.

In the course of creating this ALL IN Action Plan, we spoke with NSLVE and realized we were enrolled in the program and have information on student voting from 2012 - 2018 elections, however the information may not have been fully utilized in some time. NJCU will be updating our designated report recipients with NSLVE and evaluating the voting information that has been collected. The insights we gain from being a more active part of NSLVE will help inform a fresh approach to support student voting.

The ALL IN campus team will work closely with the SGA to collaborate with student clubs, faculty and staff to create and implement events and activities outlined in this plan, and share data.

Engagement with Student Media will also be a key component of this work, since the ability to make informed decisions is critical to democracy. The student press, through its newspaper and podcasts, helps inform the campus community of key issues.

Commitment and Connection

Our plan calls for student engagement at every level. It includes representation from each college within the university. For example, our ALL IN team is already working with students, staff and professors ranging from the Department of English to the School of Business. We're also working with our faculty from New Jersey Campus Compact, which is housed at NJCU's main campus. (NJCU is part of the Changebuilders Program and also hosts a full-time AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer.)

In addition to all of our colleges, we'll be networked with each of our campuses; NJCU's main campus is located in an urban community on the West Side of Jersey City, the NJCU School of Business is located in the city's Harborside area, a business hub for the region, and NJCU at Brookdale is in Wall Township, Monmouth County.

Landscape

As our team began its work, we did a survey of students to get baseline information on how many undergraduates (excluding seniors) are eligible or registered to vote. Some 93 percent of respondents said they were registered to vote; of those, 70 percent were registered in New Jersey. (54 percent of our respondents were freshman, 23 percent sophomores, 33 percent juniors.)

Each year, NJCU observes Constitution Day which has evolved into a campus-wide effort including the Department of Political Science, the Congressman Frank J. Guarini Library, the M. Jerry Weiss Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature, Student Media, the Center for Community Engagement and the Center for Leadership and Engagement. Additionally, students from various clubs, including The Gothic Times (Student Media) and the LGBTQ Coalition, have been involved. With a range of activities, including information on banned books, snacks, book raffles, and tabling, the day also includes a space just for Voter Registration and Information staffed by students from the Department of Political Science and others. We will continue to pass out booklet-sized Constitutions and voter registration forms during Constitution Day.

The "Great Debate" is another spirited event held during national election years at NJCU. Working with numerous student groups, the Center for Community Engagement has students play the roles of the Democratic and Republican candidates in a live "mock" debate; Student Media covers the event. Election Watch Parties are also organized in our Student Union building.

Welcoming Everyone

For the past three years our Freshman and Transfer Student theme has been #HearMyVoice – which dovetails with NJCU's overall commitment to student empowerment and citizen engagement. Voter registration is always a part of these efforts. We also remain committed to including international students and DACA students in our civic programming efforts.

As an educational community, we understand the importance of engagement with the larger community and the campus is open to a range of bipartisan, nonprofits groups which work to register and inform student voters.

In addition to NSLVE, NJCU will continue to welcome resources and information from other groups, such as: the League of Women Voters, NJ Citizen Action, American Association of University Women and the nonpartisan nonprofit Rock the Vote. NJCU is also a member of the New Jersey Students Vote Coalition (Eagleton Institute of Politics).

Student Media has long been a critical part of voter engagement. Staff have written front-page opinion pieces about voting and national elections. Students at *The Gothic Times* school newspaper also worked together on the night of the 2018 midterms election with other journalism students from around the state on reporting. *The Gothic Times* is a member of the NJ College News Commons, a network of student journalists, publishers, and media organizations that have agreed to communicate and work together in order to improve the quality and sustainability of student journalism in the Garden State.

<https://centerforcooperativemedia.org/njnewscommons/nj-college-news-commons/>

Short-Term Goals

We recognize that the current pandemic means NJCU should be ready to pivot and make some of our programs virtual-only. Given NJCU's recent successful transition, mid-semester, to not only online learning, but also in creating online spaces for student clubs, SGA meetings, year-end celebrations and more, we are confident we can do this.

NJCU will work towards better tracking of voter registration and voter turnout among students; The team will review the NSLVE data as a group and discuss how this information should guide future programming and long-term goals.

Using the resources of campus groups and academic departments, as well as national bipartisan groups, students will have the opportunity to learn about the importance of voting, as well as voter suppression and disenfranchisement. Students can then teach their peers about how voters get purged from the rolls. We will create a civic engagement workshop with students that explains voter disenfranchisement and create nonpartisan awareness about issues.

With articles in the student press, Instagram Live, and in-person events, the larger landscape of voting in America will be put into perspective. This pairs well with the League of Women Voters current redistricting reform efforts in New Jersey. (See FairDistrictsNJ.org)

Make sure civic engagement/voter registration continues to be a part of Freshman and Transfer student orientation.

Continue to publish timely news in NJCU's new Community Center newsletter, such as articles about the census and June registration deadline for July primary elections.

Plan events for Constitution Day.

Create a design contest for our Visual Arts students for posters that contain important voting information geared towards students. These will answer students most frequently asked questions; posters will be displayed at key location on campus, including at our Food Pantry.

Create a similar video contest with Media Arts students.

Host a Netflix Watch party of a documentary related to civics and/or voting history.

Set-up tables at Welcome Back events and Club Day fair with voter registration information. Invite AAUW and League of Women Voters to set-up a table at the events.

Long Term

Plan a field trip with the SGA (or virtual trip) to Trenton to see the NJ Legislature in action.

Strengthening our voter registration, education, and turnout efforts.

Be known resource in Jersey City for nonpartisan voting access.

Strategy

Partner with SGA and a wide range of clubs for student engagement. Announce SGA voter engagement and registration campaign at first and second semester meetings.

Build faculty involvement: At the first full-faculty meeting in the fall, the ALL IN team will share information so professors can encourage their students to register to vote in the first weeks of classes.

The ALL IN campus team will meet monthly.

Make sure our NJCU website has a dedicated page on voter registration information, with resources on becoming an educated voter; track visits to this page.

Announce SGA voter engagement and registration campaign at first and second semester meetings.

Work with the Communications Department to keep our efforts on social media and in the press. Take pictures at events and during activities to post on social media.

Reporting and Evaluation

ALL IN Challenge Democratic Engagement Action Plan will be annually reviewed by the team.

Events and activities that did not receive an outcome that aid in our goal will be subsequently revised in our next action plan.

NSLVE data will be shared with the SGA to encourage students to independently create activities or projects.

In terms of evaluating the success of the ALL IN Challenge Democratic Engagement Action Plan our team will track outcomes through a variety of methods, which includes:

The attendance and participation of students.

The number of students that register to vote at events on campus.

Feedback from individuals working with targeted groups on success of reaching these groups

Evaluations and attendance reports will be collected by SGA, CLE, the Community Center and other stakeholders at all events. Data will be reviewed and evaluated to track engagement and impact.

An evaluation of the year and this action plan will be completed at the end of the Spring 2021 semester.

Data from NSLVE will be analyzed once it becomes available.

This plan is effective from June 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

Important Dates

June 16, 2020 Postmark deadline for voter registration – NJ primary

July 7, 2020 New Jersey primary election

September 17, 2020 Constitution Day Event:
Celebrating Women’s Right to Vote and the 100th anniversary of 19th Amendment

September 22, 2020 National Voter Registration Day Event; “#HearMyVoice @ the Polls”

October 13, 2020 Last day to register to Vote, Presidential Election

November 3, 2020 Election Day event