

NJCU 2022 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 Communications - Student Affairs/Adviser to Knight Student Media, the Director of the Center for Leadership and Engagement, the Assistant Dean of Social Services, the Department of Political Science and the Student Government Association (SGA).

To become fully engaged citizens, students need to understand the democratic process. As a Hispanic-serving institution (and MSI) educating 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 builds on the university’s commitment to increase voter registration and voting among NJCU students, while also building awareness of the political process.

In general the Garden State has been making strides; as noted by the New Jersey Alliance for Civic Engagement, the state leads the nation in youth voter turnout. According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), there was a 66 percent student voter turnout in 2020. (In 2016 presidential election it was just 48.3 percent of undergraduate students that voted, from 1,023 higher education institutions. At the time, this was 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, consistent benchmarking and full use of all available data has only been recent. 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 our first ALL IN Action Plan in 2020, we spoke with NSLVE and realized we were enrolled in the program and had information on student voting from 2012 - 2018 elections, however the information may not have been fully utilized. NJCU then updated our designated report recipients with NSLVE and evaluated the voting information that is being collected. The insights we’ve gained from being a more active part of NSLVE also help inform us moving forward.

The ALL IN campus team works 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 has a new campus at Fort Monmouth.

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, 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 in the past. 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.

In 2022 we are planning three events. There will be a trip to the Constitution Center in Philadelphia, a screening of a new documentary about civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer – in conjunction with the school's Lee Hagan African Center, Student Media and the campus Women's Center for Equity and Diversity – as well as a debate involving two teams of students discussing Juvenile Justice Rights, a topic of great interest to our students. The teams will be assisted by representatives from the Hudson County Prosecutors Office and Jersey City detectives. Area high school students will be invited and, as with all of this type of programming, access to voter registration will be shared, as well as the importance of voting for both local, state and national elections.

Welcoming Everyone

For the past several 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 also 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. More recently they wrote about January 6. *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

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.

These events are year-round activities. In the 2021 – 2022 school year, for example, we updated the NJCU Votes website, hosted a Jersey City voting rights activist on campus to speak to students about voter registration, and shared voter information in the Community Center newsletter.

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

We will 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 May registration deadline for June primary elections.

Publicize 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.

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 different student clubs, departments and student government to the Constitution Center.

Strengthening our voter registration, education, and turnout efforts.

Be known as a 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.

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.

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 2023 semester.

Data from NSLVE will be analyzed once it becomes available.

This plan is effective from June 1, 2022 through May 31, 2023.