Shenandoah University Voter Engagement Action Plan 2020-2021

Shenandoah University is looking to broaden its voter and democratic engagement across campus. This initiative is currently housed between the Center for Civic Engagement and the Political Science department. With this new partnership we are looking to implement goals that will reach a broader student base.

Background

Shenandoah University's voter engagement efforts have historically been housed in the Center for Public Service and Scholarship. This office signed the university up as part of NSLVE and did voter registration drives at student orientations. Up until the present, the registration efforts had been working exclusively to register students within Winchester, VA. Since voter engagement was just one small component of the Center's programs, much of the success of registration and actual voting was due to the energy and initiative of student leaders. As with many programs in university settings, this ebbed and flowed depending on that student leadership.

As of 2018, our voter registration rate was 79.8%, a rate that has been generally consistent since 2012. The actual voting rate in 2018 was 38%, only slightly lower than other institutions (39.1%). In the presidential election of 2016, the voting rate was 54.2%, slightly higher than the 50.4% of other institutions.

At the end of 2019, the Director for the Center for Public Service and Scholarship retired. The office was transitioned from Academic Affairs into Student Affairs and was renamed the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). Voter engagement is still only one small part of the efforts in this Center. The partnership between the CCE and the Political Science Department will help to balance the efforts in both the curriculum and the co-curriculum.

Clearly, much of this action plan will need to change depending on what happens with COVID-19. There are many unknowns moving into this upcoming year so this plan is being created with flexibility in mind.

Leadership

There has not been a leadership team in the past dedicated to voter engagement, so this is a new venture. Below is the list of leaders who are currently planning to participate in voter engagement efforts:

- Keith Jones Pomeroy- Director of Civic Engagement, Associate
  - The Center for Civic Engagement will be the primary leader in planning events and coordinating an overall structure for voter engagement on campus.
- Michael Romano- Associate Professor of Political Science
  - Michael Romano will be providing assistance in programming, as well as expertise in the area of political engagement.

- Kara Johnson- First-Year Seminar Head Mentor, student
  - The First-Year Seminar program has agreed to partner in registering first year students. Kara Johnson is the head mentor of this program and will work to train mentors in each class to register students online.
- Maggie McCampbell Lien- Director of the Mosaic Center for Diversity and Inclusion
  - Maggie McCampbell Lien will provide coordination, collaboration, and programming for students in her office, largely students of color and those who identify within the LGBTQ+ spectrum.
- Emmy Maguire- Graduate Admissions Specialist (and former student leader)
  - Emmy Maguire is a graduate of Shenandoah and when she was a student she led successful voter registration programs. She has agreed to continue to support these efforts within admissions and across campus.
- Voter Engagement Coordinator- student work-study (TBD)
  - Within the Center for Civic Engagement, there will be at least one student work-study who will be tasked with planning voter engagement programs.

This leadership team is not comprehensive as of yet. The goal is that there would be at least one more faculty member who would be interested in collaboration and partnership, but given the newness of this initiative, we have been working at intentionally building this coalition.

Goals
While it is anticipated that we could strive to achieve more goals as the program matures, we are considering this a first phase working within the confines of time and resources currently available.

1. Increase voter registration on campus to 85% from 79.8%.
2. Get 100% of all eligible first-year students registered.
3. Increase the voting rate on campus to 60 from 38% in 2018 and 54% in 2016.
4. Organize at least 2 voter education events in fall 2020 to provide information about candidates, political process, and political values.
5. Organize at least 2 civic dialogue events that address understanding the values of political perspectives different than one's own.

Strategy
Below are the strategies to accomplish the goals of Shenandoah University.

Increase voter registration/First year registration:
We are partnering with Rock the Vote to create a webpage on our university site that is dedicated to voter registration. We will be directing students throughout summer orientations to this page, as well as during on campus orientation and move-in in August. Moving to an online registration model will help provide a wider range of options for students, as they can register either in Winchester or in their hometowns.

Partnering with the First Year Seminar program to push student registration through student mentors will also help catch eligible first-time voters. We will also be using Rock the Vote for this initiative.

Using data from NSLVE, the leadership team will also work to develop specific promotion of registration to demographic groups that have lower registration rates.

Increase voting
In the past, voting has been encouraged, but there has not been a systematic process to get students to the polls. The Center for Civic Engagement will provide shuttles on Election day, and publicize this heavily through social media. There will also be a significant push and education around absentee ballots and early voting. We will work with our Marketing and Communications office to push this.

Over the summer, we are creating a video of various students, faculty, and staff who are sharing their first time voting and what it meant to them. This video will be published and widely disseminated in our efforts to encourage registration and voting.

Programs
In the fall, we are planning on doing a 20/20 bus tour where we will bring a group of 20 conservative-leaning students with 20 liberal-leaning students on a bus tour from Winchester to Richmond with two alums, a Democrat and Republican, who are current representatives in Virginia's legislature. The point of this program is to educate students about the political process, and to better understand the underlying values and motivations of those who identify different than themselves politically. We will look at both urban and rural settings and talk about how values influence our political perspectives on issues like poverty and addiction. This event was initially scheduled for April, but due to the pandemic, we are rescheduling. It had garnered a lot of traction and energy behind it.

We will also be working to create events on campus that are student centered around the basics of the political process, political values, and why democracy matters. These events will be advertised within classes as well as different clubs and organizations. We will likely do debate watch parties, followed by student-led talk back sessions. Finally, we are hoping to pursue a variety of civic dialogue conversations around issues of democracy and representation.

The strategies mentioned above will likely need to adapt depending on ever-changing guidelines from the university, state, and federal government. All of these initiatives will be evaluated through surveys, NSLVE data, and programmatic assessment.

Conclusion
This action plan will serve as a guide for greater participation at Shenandoah University in voter registration, voting, and voter education. This is the first initiative of its kind at Shenandoah and it comes at a time where there are significant challenges within higher education as well as

voter engagement nationally due to the pandemic. It is our hope that we will succeed in reaching all of our goals.