



# Voter Engagement Action Plan

## Fall 2018

### Executive Summary

As excitement builds for the mid-term elections, members of the Shippensburg University faculty, staff and students have begun to plan for registering and engaging students in the civic process. With ten years of experience and feedback from informal civic engagement efforts, we have made the move to formalize our efforts by founding the Shippensburg University's Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Leadership Working Group, also known as ShipVotes. This step will provide stability to civic engagement and leadership activities, along with providing a connection to other social justice work on campus. It is the goal of ShipVotes to engage and empower students through voter registration, rides to the polls, voter suppression protections, information on the democratic process and other events that promote civic engagement. Through optimizing the committee's resources and connections on campus and in the community, we can achieve our mission through an organized grassroots effort. Leading with an inclusive, transparent style that lends itself to collaboration, we will do our part to strengthen the Student Voice in our community, state and nation.

Shippensburg University

Leadership



Shippensburg University campus. In the past year,  
the Social Justice Committee of the Association of

SHIPPENSBURG  
UNIVERSITY

Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF) has begun the process of formally adopting ShipVotes as a subcommittee, which will lend longevity, increased visibility, and formalized structure for civic engagement initiatives. The formal adoption of ShipVotes as a part of the Social Justice committee is anticipated to be complete in the fall of 2018.

Faculty, staff, administration, and students from all departments, offices, and organizations on campus are all welcome to participate in ShipVotes. In recent weeks, representatives from the Residence Hall Association, Office of Student Conduct and the Activities Program Board (APB) have been invited to take a seat on the working group. A leadership team oversees the group's activities, arranges biweekly/monthly meetings, oversees student workers/volunteers and plans for the future of the committee. The ShipVotes leadership team consists of:

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Vacant  
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ShipVotes coordinates with the Residence Hall Association to manage rides to the polls and works with the local election office to navigate traffic flow and efforts to get students to their voting locations. ShipVotes also works with the Campus Vote Project and the Campus Election Engagement Project to streamline efforts and stay up-to-date on the best methods to ensure a voter-friendly campus.

## Commitment

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In 2016, 227 million American citizens were eligible to vote; young people (aged 18-29) made up about 22% of the electorate.<sup>1</sup> However, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), only 50% of young people eligible to vote (24 million) voted in the 2016 presidential election.<sup>2</sup> Only 19.9% of young people (about 13 million) voted in the 2014 midterm election.<sup>3</sup> The trend of national youth turnout being under 50% in presidential election years and dropping to half of that in midterm elections stretches back decades.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Electorate Profiles: Selected Characteristics of the Citizen, 18 and older Population," census.gov, October 27, 2016 [www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/electorate-profiles-2016.html](http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/electorate-profiles-2016.html)

<sup>2</sup> "An Estimated 24 Million Young People Voted in 2016 Election," CIRCLE.org, November 9, 2016, [www.civicyouth.org/an-estimated-24-million-young-people-vote-in-2016-election/](http://www.civicyouth.org/an-estimated-24-million-young-people-vote-in-2016-election/)

<sup>3</sup> "2014 Youth Turnout and Youth Registration Rates Lowest Ever Recorded; Changes Essential in 2016," CIRCLE.org, accessed July 26, 2017, [www.civicyouth.org/2014-youth-turnout-and-youth-registration-rates-lowest-ever-recorded-changes-essential-in-2016/](http://www.civicyouth.org/2014-youth-turnout-and-youth-registration-rates-lowest-ever-recorded-changes-essential-in-2016/)

<sup>4</sup> "Voting Rates by Age," census.gov, May 10, 2017, [www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/electorate-profiles-2016.html](http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/electorate-profiles-2016.html)

In the midst of these troubling trends, it is important to assess Shippensburg University's institutional commitment to "CitizenShip." As with such language of its recent branding campaign (ScholarShip, LeaderShip, ScholaSship etc.), the institution and its leaders demonstrate commitment to improving democratic engagement in several documents, including, the SU Academic Master Plan (AMP), the website of our Student Affairs' office and through the leadership of Administrators, Staff and Faculty members

More specifically, the vision of the Academic Master Plan, states, "Shippensburg University aspires to be a national model for quality public higher education in the liberal arts tradition, both through dynamic faculty-student engagement and through the integration of academic, professional, cultural, and service experiences". It concludes by stating the university's commitment to prepare students "to engage constructively in the global society."

The Student Affairs webpage contains the following description and Mission Statement:

The faculty, staff, students and administration at Shippensburg University pride themselves on having a campus community that fosters student learning, teaches citizenship, and encourages personal development. An integral part of this community is the committed, student-centered people who comprise the Office of the Dean of Students. Staff members within the Office of the Dean of Students plan and deliver comprehensive programs and services, that support the mission of the university and enhance the learning experience for students, they foster the overall development of students where social justice, community, character, and citizenship are the cornerstones.

The Student Affairs webpage articulates one Strategic Goals that address the University's commitment to civic engagement.

- Community: To create shared learning experiences that help students see beyond their own private interests, learn about the world around them, develop a sense of civic and social responsibility, and discover how they, as individuals, can contribute to the larger society.

As for action on the part of senior administrators, in 2016, Roger Serr, Vice President of Student Affairs and Stephanie Erdice, Director of the Women's Center, met with Shippensburg Township supervisors and other community leaders to discuss predictable election day challenges at the polls. This was in line with the 2016 Voter Friendly Campus Report which established that "A key finding from the program was that developing a working relationship with local election officials helped many institutions avoid problems and helped tailor their efforts to meet our specific student population's needs. (VFC Report, 2016, p.8)

Institutional leadership from the faculty and staff has been strong. Indeed, one of the contributing factors for Shippensburg University receiving a Voter Friendly Campus designation in 2016 was the strong grassroots support for non-partisan civic engagement and voter education and registration among Shippensburg University faculty, staff and students.

Recently, some Faculty Seminar courses focus on non-partisan civic engagement. Faculty members from Political Science, Social Work, Education and other disciplines have structured into their individual courses civic engagement volunteer activities for graded projects. Some of the sections of the new University 101 FYE course will also address civic engagement and engage 1st year student in our local and state political system.

Given the strong need for non-partisan civic education among our students, a stronger institutional commitment is essential for our University, given the troubling trends. Civic learning and democratic engagement have always been central to the mission of higher education, and the low voter turnout in this demographic is a reminder of how important it is to integrate democratic engagement programs on higher education campuses. It is important to encourage discussions and create educational programming that will provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to practice engaged citizenship. ShipVotes, is grateful for the fact that Campus Vote Project and NASPA partnered to create the Voter Friendly Campus (VFC) designation to promote institutionalizing civic learning and democratic engagement to prepare students for lives as productive citizens.

## Landscape

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While civic learning and democratic engagement are not a measured learning outcome on the Shippensburg University campus, several departments and faculty have made efforts toward engaging students in these areas both within and outside the classroom. Within the history and political science departments the concepts of civic learning and democratic engagement are part of many classes and the subject of research projects. Co-circularly, faculty in departments such as Social Work, Sociology & Anthropology, History, and Political Science engage their students through Democracy Day efforts and out-of-the-classroom experiences. The library in partnership with the Political Science Department, hosts a Constitution Day celebration annually that includes a speaker on constitutional law and a reading of the Preamble. Along with this annual program the library staff are also planning civic literacy workshops in the fall semester.

As it stands, civic learning and democratic engagement are not overall campus learning outcomes, and they have not been formally assessed on the Shippensburg University campus. Internal barriers, such as limited funding and staff have prevented growth in the formalization of civic learning and democratic engagement on campus, while external barriers such as confusion about polling places and local resistance to students voting have made gaining traction outside the university an uphill battle. Dedicated staff time, or at the very least a formalization of the ShipVotes working group, are the first step toward increasing the visibility and success of civic engagement on campus. In addition, assessments, such as the NSLVE could provide a more accurate picture of campus needs and provide perspective of the campus success as compared to similar and aspirational institutions.

## Goals

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### Short-Term Goals

As the Fall of 2018 and mid-term elections approach, we have been assessing, testing and setting goals for this upcoming semester. Informed by anecdotal data from voter registration and absent tee ballot information tables in the spring semester, we have created a plan to assist students in registering to vote and encouraging them to use their voice on November 6.

1. Host 20+ voter registration drives on campus at various times, location and events
2. Register 500+ Shippensburg University students to vote
3. Host a large-scale voter registration event
4. Participate in 10 voter engagement events in October and Early November
5. Provide rides to our local polling place to at least 250+ students on Election Day

\*Pennsylvania does not have early voting. The Polling location for Shippensburg University Students living on campus is almost 2 miles away from the University

6. Protect students' voting rights
7. Become a National Survey of Learning Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) participant

## Long-Term Goals

In recent months volunteers for civic engagement and voter registration have come together to form the Shippensburg University's Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Leadership Working Group. In the past 10 years, voter registration and engagement at the university was sustained with an ad hoc group of faculty, staff and students that informally came together every two years to host programs, facilitate voter registration activities and arrange a shuttle to the local polling place on Election Day. In the Spring of 2018 members of the former ad hoc groups, as well as new members in various strategic offices around campus have joined together to create a larger more sustainable committee. The formation of this working group has allowed us to create long term goals to support growing our student's involvement in civic action.

1. Institutionalize the ShipVotes Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Leadership Working Group by creating a subcommittee of the Social Justice Committee of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF).
2. Create a more civically engaged student body. Using data from NSLVE to assess student engagement and participation
3. Promote long term civic engagement and participation
4. Advance to more complex areas of Civic Engagement. Using tools and resources available to us, to not only continue our work to register and engage students to vote, but to also create opportunities for students to engage more deeply in the civic process in our local community, state and nation.

# Strategy

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## VOTER REGISTRATION TABLES

Throughout August, September, and early October, ShipVotes will work to reach as many students as possible and engage them in the voter registration process. This will be achieved by hosting Voter Registration tables in the residence hall lobbies multiple times in the Fall semester, as well as hosting voter registration tables at campus programs, in the dining hall and library, and at Home Football games on September 8 and 15. Through these voter registration events, we hope to register 500 students to vote. Some offices we will partner with on campus to host registration tables include Housing & Residence Life, the Ceddia Union Building, and Athletics. More details about programs hosted by ShipVotes are found below.

## WELCOME WEEK

During New Student Welcome, ShipVotes hopes to table in the dining hall and residence halls to remind students, as early as possible into the semester and before classes begin, to register to vote at their new addresses. For some students, college will be the first time they are easily able to register to vote. We hope to utilize this transitional moment in their lives to remind them of the importance of civic engagement and voting.

## MOVIE SCREENING SERIES

Prior to the November elections, ShipVotes would like to hold a series of several film screenings. These films, selected with the help of our ShipVotes fellows, will depict the lived experiences of individuals whose lives are directly impacted by the democratic process, or who have directly impacted the democratic process themselves. We believe that experiencing the stories of others is a high-impact way to engage students in understanding the significance their actions can have on the lives of other people. Some examples of films we believe may be helpful include *Iron Jawed Angels*, *Milk*, *RENT*, or other recommendations that come from our ShipVotes fellows. Through these film screenings, we hope to reach 150 students. At these events, we will also host voter registration tables and hope to register 25 students per film screening.

## LATE NIGHT EVENT

ShipVotes has been provided the opportunity to host a late-night voter registration event on Saturday, September 29 from 9pm — 1 am in the Ceddia Union Building. This event will be a leadership opportunity for our ShipVotes Fellows to come up with a creative program to engage students in voter registration and civic engagement. Through this program, ShipVotes would like to provide the opportunity for students to register to vote, understand the importance of their vote, engage with political issues and learn about candidate platforms. Through this program, ShipVotes would like to reach 300 students.

## RIDES TO THE POLLS

Over the past several years, ShipVotes in collaboration with the Shippensburg University Residence Hall Association has provided rides to the polls for university students via the Raider Ride campus shuttle. For the 2018 primary election, ShipVotes would like to provide rides to the polls for 250 students. In order to increase the number of students utilizing the rides to the polls services from past years, ShipVotes would like to utilize additional advertising, including advertising within the University's new First Year Experience classes, as well as a SnapChat Geofilter for students on the bus.

# Reporting

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The Voter Engagement Plan will be shared with the Social Justice Committee, the Dean of Students and Vice President of Student Affairs. This will provide the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Leadership Working Group with two points of accountability. Regular progress reports and updates will be shared with the leadership of the Social Justice Committee and the Dean of Students. From there, relevant information will be shared with Faculty Union Leadership and the Vice President of Student Affairs. At their discretion, relevant information will be shared with the President and her Executive Management Team.

A major role of the Student Fellows will be to collect data, track the committee's progress and evaluate program activities. When milestones in our action plan are reached, the committee will work to get information to appropriate stakeholders. Several members of the committee have a close relationship with the University's External Affairs and Communications Department. We will be sharing important highlights and progress with members of that team and work together to use the University's media and communication resources to report our work to campus and the community.

# Evaluation

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Data collection will be gathered from many different sources throughout the fall semester. Student fellows will be tracking voter registration and absentee ballot applications. We will also be gathering anecdotal information and comments from students, faculty and staff that engage with our initiatives. When hosting large scale events, we will survey participants and use the feedback to inform our future work. In addition to our own surveying we will work with our collaborators to gain access to their assessment data.

Currently Shippensburg University is not a National Survey of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE), participant. After learning about the survey and working with our Institutional Research Department to better understand the internal steps necessary to start the approval process, we are working to be a part of this group. Data from NSLVE will provide quality information to inform our work in the future and help us evaluate and report progress on our short-term and long-term goals.

# Voter Engagement Event's Calendar

## Fall 2018

### Important Dates

Election Day – Tuesday, November 6 2018

Last Day to send in A.Tee Ballot – Friday, November 2

Last Day for A.Tee Ballot Application – Tuesday, October 30

Last Day for Voter Registration – Saturday, October 6

### Voter registration and Voter Engagement Initiatives

Training for Fellows

Training for RAs/ OLs/FYS peer anchors

Move-in Day – Wednesday, August 22

Success Expo – Friday, August 24

SIS Fair – September, 4

Day of Service – September 8

Voter Registration at Home Football Game – September 8

Voter Registration at Home Football Game – September 15

Iron Jawed Angels Film Screening

Other Movie Screening

Constitution Day/Political Science Speaker – September 17

Late Night Event – Saturday, September 29

Democracy Day – November 5

Meeting with Board of Elections regarding Rides to the Polls.

Election Day – Rides to the Poles – November 6, 2018



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