



SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE

Action Plan for Southwestern Michigan College (SMC)

To Increase Civic and Political Engagement and Voting Rates for the 2024 general election.

The Definition of Civic Engagement

“Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”

A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate.”

Excerpts from *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000. ([Definition](#))

Obviously, an important topic and concern. What are we teaching our students? Math, Psychology, English, Welding, Accounting; yes, indeed, all of these but what do you do with it? Each one of the definitions presented discusses involvement in our communities. We are a community college so by definition we should be involved in Civic Engagement. Southwestern Michigan College should be involved in the process. I would like to “get to know” The Democracy Commitment” better before we consider a commitment to this organization.

At SMC we are small but mighty.... I believe this initiative should be cross campus involving all parts of our community. I can already think of the Honors Program (and PTK) students having programs in their areas of interest. Accounting students working with the laws that affect their professions. STEM students being involved with the agencies that affect the

environment, “get out the vote” programs, bringing (more) local and state legislators on campus, Social Work students working in their policy areas, re-enforcing and acknowledging some of the already great things our students, faculty and staff are already doing, just to name a few off the top of my head.

Michigan changed its voting registration laws by Proposal in 2018 which changed; how to register, online registration is now available and registration up to and including election day. Also “no fault” absentee voting. ([Michigan](#)).

In November 2022, Michigan voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment that gives voters the right to vote early and in person at early voting sites before statewide and federal elections. Communities may also choose to provide early voting for local elections.

“Michigan voters have the right to cast a ballot early and in person at an early voting site before Election Day.”

Early voting will be available beginning with the presidential primary in 2024 and every statewide and federal election thereafter.

Early voting allows a voter to cast a ballot before Election Day, in an experience similar to voting on Election Day.

During the early voting period, voters are issued a ballot and can then insert their ballot directly into a tabulator at their early voting site.

Details are still being worked out.”

Executive Summary

This plan was created by Mary D Young-Marcks(faculty) and Branden Pompey (Student Life) with the support of the Office the President who has signed and submitted the Presidents’ Commitment.

We, at SMC, hope to foster a community of civic engagement in all areas of the college community, including community awareness and involvement, voting registration and engagement.

This plan is written for the calendar year 2024. The plan has the support of all levels of the college; financial resources will come from Student Life, the Office of the Provost and the Office

of the President. We hope to continue and foster a campus where being Civically Engaged is part of our culture.

SMC is a locally governed community college with a commitment to providing knowledge for all through access to high quality higher education and postsecondary training that dates to our founding more than 55 years ago. Our campuses in Dowagiac and Niles, which is Cass County, MI. We are a rural college with enrollment of 1397(Fall 2020) 41% full time. 84% is traditional age students. This is a dramatic decrease from Fall 2018- 1569 a variety of factors figure into that- the number of traditional aged students and of course COVID

SMC is unique among two-year colleges. We offer full residential life experience on our Dowagiac campus and student leadership development opportunities for students living on campus or commuting.

This plan is meant to include all members of the SMC community; staff, all faculty and students who attend either one of campuses (Dowagiac and Niles) and those students attending remotely.

Leadership

Staff and Faculty Coordinators

Mr. Branden Pompey;

Assistant Director of Campus Life-Clubs (SAC) and this will be part of the job description of the person holding this position.

Dr Mary D Young-Marcks; Professor Social Sciences

At this point in our development, we consider it a great success that we were able to include this work as part of the job description for the Assistant Director of Campus Life- Clubs. I am planning on retiring at the end of academic year 2024 and hope to be able to include it in the job description for the incoming faculty member.

We do work with the County Clerk and League of the Women Voters but these are informal relationships.

Coalition:

Dr Joe Odenwald; President

Dr David Fleming; Provost

Brent Brewer- Chief of Staff

Jeff Hooks-Director of Student Life

Katie Hannah- Dean of Students

John Eby Coordinator of Media Relations

Michael O'Brien Vice President for Institutional Advancement
Dr. Angela Evans Office of Institutional Research
Ms Jennifer Zimmer Coordinator of Library Service
Faculty Members from various departments and schools (hopefully)
Representative(s) from The Council of Clubs; which is to provide organization, opportunities for collaboration, leadership development, continuity and governance to officially recognized SMC student clubs and organizations.

Commitment

SMC being small, does not have a dedicated office or staff for this project. As mentioned earlier it is part of the job description under our student life area. Faculty involvement is voluntary – SMC only has one faculty member teaching any Political Science courses and one adjunct who teaches in other areas as well. We have the support of administration and financial support but to date other human resources have been limited.

We rewrote our EDUC 120 (our introduction to college course) course objectives to include civic engagement

- *Increase understanding of Civic Engagement by defining what it and being aware of the opportunities on campus and community to be involved.*

Part of the commitment does require clubs in order to be approved and seek funding to be civically engaged as well.

We are working to include this topic as part of student orientation.

We intend to work this project in to all aspects of SMC life- it will be part of building our "Roadrunner Nation" which is participation on activities in areas of the college; it includes as states earlier participation on community events for club funding, participation with on campus events. Students earn points for their participation which can earn them various rewards. We also have developed a Leadership program (see attachment for more information) for students which among other things includes a trip to the state capitol and meeting with our representatives.

Another example is our Grady Scholars. "The mission of the Grady Scholarship program is to support and enhance the educational experience of underrepresented students during their second academic year at SMC. This is achieved through retention initiatives such as, student leadership experiences, community service participation, and student development mentoring. In addition, the program seeks to identify and develop a student's curricular and extracurricular goals and prepare them for their careers or transfer. (See attachment for more information)

Our president – Dr Joe Oldenwald has signed to ALL IN’s [Presidents’ Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation](#). We do publicize our involvement in local media and social media

It is our goal to have this be an area of commitment throughout all of campus – in the classroom, extracurricular activities with the hopes the everyone on campus makes parts of their daily and personal lives

Landscape

NSLVE Report and Input

We went down slightly (-0.1 %) from 2012 to 2016 for voting rates. We just started out planned involvement campus wide in 2017. We saw an increase in participation from 2014 to 2018 but midterm and general elections are not comparable. We saw an increase from 2018 to 2020 but again midterm and general elections are not comparable. However, we did a rather large increase from 2016(31%) to 2020(52%).

We have not recieved our 2022 NSLVE report yet; our numbers for 2020 are included

We would like to bring all those numbers up. We believe Michigan’s change in law will help with registration numbers. We are hoping more educational opportunities and visibility will increase voting turn out as well.

The report show that traditional age student follows the pattern of low voter turnout; by involving our Student Activity Center, we hope to change that National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Since 2017, SMC has received campus-specific voter registration and turnout data through the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement.

Using the “The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)” for SMC. This a case where it appears great progress was made but the true story is the political climate of the times. I would like to think our increased involved in this area helped and will continue to encourage more involvement as we go forward.

Year	Number of Students	Registration Rate	Voting Rate of Registered Students	Overall Voting Rate of Student Body
2014		52.6	22.5	11.9
2016	1929	64	62	40
2018	1569	59.4	54.4	32.3
2020	1397	80	65	52

(Student)

One of the critical areas of concern is the demographics by age. While voter turnout over all in 2014 was the lowest since World War II our demographics show

Nationwide voter turnout was 36.4%, down from 40.9% in the 2010 midterms and the lowest since the 1942 elections, when just 33.9% of voters turned out, though that election came during the middle of World War II , Michigan voter out was 17.4%(Primary). 2018 was very different. Michigan’s turnout was 28.2%. (Primary) Overall, turnout was higher as well. SMC increased as well. We did become involved actively in 2017- so hopefully our efforts were part of the change

“The November 2018 election is widely recognized for its high voter turnout. Census Bureau data released today show who is behind the historic 11 percentage point increase from the last midterm election in 2014.

Voter turnout went up among all voting age and major racial and ethnic groups. Fifty-three percent of the citizen voting-age population voted in 2018, the highest midterm turnout in four decades, while the 2014 election had the lowest.” (Misra)

Goal to increase registration participation for 2022 across all demographics

By	2014	2016	2018	2020
18-21	8.8	38	27.9	54
22-24	12.7	42	39.3	51
25-29	10.6	37	40.5	46
30-39	18.5	52	40.9	41
40-49	29.2	51	47.8	65
50 +	56.3	71	60.7	-

(Student)

Race/Ethnicity	Percent	Voting 2016	2018	2020		
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1%	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Asian	1%	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Black or African American	15%	N/A	24%	49%		
Hispanic/Latino	5.5%	N/A	18%	41%		
Multiracial	4.7%	N/A	33%	43%		
Native	.01%		N/A	N/A		

Hawaiian/Pacific Islander						
Unknown	8 %	N/A	30%	47%		
White	64.6%	N/A	34%	57%		

(Students)

Specific Goals

1.) Obtain background information and baseline information to start process.

Plan: Attend Michigan Voting Summit. [Attend the Conference, Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement Meeting in June 2024.](#)

This will be our fifth year of participation; we hope to have our faculty member and Student Life representative attending from our campus.

2.) We have been using the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) report and will use 2016 2018 and 2020 data to help us formulate our goals here. We have not yet received our report for 2022

3.) Increase information and access to all on campus about voter registration.

Plan: Embedding voter registration information in the SMC's homepage, Moodle (our course management systems), and/or Wired (our online portal operated by SMC).

4.) Increase Voter Registration

Plan: Voter registration available during freshman orientation, in residential areas, during Campus Bash, Beak Week and other related events

[Participation in National Voter Registration Day](#)- September 17th, 2024. Increase by 5%

We plan to coordinate with faculty members to encourage their students to register to vote in the first weeks of classes during both our Spring (January-May) and Fall (September- December) semester. There will be work being done during the summer, but the number of students is small.

5.) Voter Education ~ **#SMCVotes All specifics dates - TBD**

Michigan elects Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General in Midterm election years-we have an open US Senator race this year as our senior Senator Debbie Stabenow announced her retirement, the primary is in August- so we will be focusing on education and involvement during the Spring Semester(January-April).

Michigan in 2018 also changed the way redistricting was done-

We believe that at SMC while the General election is important Midterms are very important as well – but not just statewide offices and proposals- but the local races- the millages, city council, the Board of Trustees for SMC and we will be highlighting those races- with current office holders some of which are former SMC students

Plan

Planned Activities

Spring Semester 2024

January 15, 2024 Event connected to MLK Day; Civil Rights, Service and Voting

January , 2024: SMC Votes Kick-off Party: Presentation of SMC's voting history, voter participation goal setting for the 2024 General Election. Leads into pizza a movie night in the SAC Theater

February, 2024: Michigan Primary Info Night: Do an afternoon/evening of going through the primary ballot, maybe invite local candidates to campus.

“According to Michigan state law, the Secretary of State must release a list of individuals who are "generally advocated by the national news media to be potential presidential candidates" for the presidential primary election”.(Powers) Michigan 's Presidential primary is scheduled for February 27, 2024

February, 2024: Working with Black History Month as well. Hopefully having former students who are currently holding office in Berrien County come to speak -Running for Office: asking questions about why they decided to run, the ins and outs of running a political campaign

Similar activities during fall semester leading up to General Election

Event to explain and identify the changes in Michigan's Congressional and State districts

April 2024: Meet, Greet and Listen to local elected official- that can affect SMC and student directly

Summer 2024 No plans at this time due to limits in numbers of students on campus.

Fall 2024- All Dates to TBD and may be virtual or live depending on the situation

Civic Engagement (#SMCVotes)

General Plan- created with hopes of face-to-face involvement but being able to transition to wholly online if necessary

August 2024

- Michigan Voter Registration Info Video- create video to show what activities are available, how to register and how to be involved.

Michigan's primary is August 6, 2024

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September 2024

- – Outdoor Engagement Pop-Up: “What’s Important to You?”
- – Townhall Presentation/National Voter Registration Day/Absentee Ballot Information/” Why We Vote”

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October 2024

- – Townhall Presentation: “Art of Politics 2.0”
- – Outdoor Engagement Pop-Up: “Importance of Local Politics”
- – Townhall Presentation:
- – Townhall Presentation: “Michigan Voter Info Night”
- – Outdoor Engagement Pop-Up: “Exit Polling”

November 2024

- Election Day, November 6th Watch Along
- 13th – Handout Detailing Election Results

Plan: We include Civic Engagement component in our EDUC 120 which is an introduction to college course required by most incoming students.

We plan to work on including a Civic Engagement component in our orientation for incoming students.

Plan: Host Constitution Day September 17, 2024

Use of Social Media to organize social media campaigns to get students active and voting on campus. This would involve sending regular updates through various social media platforms

(Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to remind students of important deadlines and other pertinent information regarding the elections, deadlines, and the candidates.

Use of Wired to have reminders posted once students and faculty members sign in to remind them Primary and Election Day voting.

6.) Increased Voter Turnout

Plan: Information provided in classes, social media use to “remember to vote”, information in Wired.

Participation in National Voter registration day, September 17, 2024

7.) Increase participation across campus.

Plan: Engage faculty and staff in process.

Identify and engage student groups in process

Participate in collegiate athletic conference voting challenges.

SMC in September of 2021- bought back athletics to our campus- we currently have cross country and starting in Fall of 2022- basketball, bass fishing, dance, volleyball, and wrestling were added. This addition brings diversity to campus that we did not have before. Our athletes are required to live on campus, so we have the opportunity to involve them in these activities

Reporting

This Action Plan will be shared with the Office of the President and the others mentioned under leadership. It will be made available to all those whose work will contribute to putting these initiatives into action so they can see how their efforts fit into the bigger picture of the goals for this endeavor.

Additionally, the plan and activities covered by will be shared with the Marketing office and us with the hope that it will be available on the college’s website. It will also be sent to community partners who are coming alongside the college to support civic goals for its students. The college has already made its NSLVE data available publicly, through the website and press releases sent to local media.

This is an area which we need to work on- we report as things occur and try to push out” the news as it is planned.

Evaluation

The work described in this plan will be evaluated annually and as we go. Since we are relatively new to the process- we need to adjust as we try new things. For example, turning this plan in early asking for help and now dealing with revisions. Evaluations and changes will need to be made based on the current environment for campus. We have not reviewed the NSLVE data for 2022, and but will use it as a guide in formulating goals and plans when we receive it.

Conclusion

As we started The Definition of Civic Engagement

“Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

Point of Contact for Designation Process

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Student Voting Rates for Southwestern Michigan College, 2020 NSLVE Campus Report

Student Engagement Information and Initiatives

Student Leadership Initiatives

In Spring of 2021, we were able to once again curate a cohort of students for both our Leadership SMC (8) and Welcome Week Leader (7) programs. After a year off in 2020, Leadership SMC came back with lectures, guest speakers, team-building exercises, and professional assessments for both Orientation and future Welcome Week Leaders. The 2021 Welcome Week Leader program provided us with a contingent of student leaders who helped facilitate without a doubt the most well-attended and successful slate of events this college has seen since the program's inception in 2018. Attendance for Welcome Week 2019 was 800 students while Welcome Week 2021 had over 1,324 students attend. Overall student engagement numbers in Fall 2019 were 1,755 while Fall 2021 saw student engagement numbers hit 2,734. (Numbers will be updated)

We are currently finalizing marketing materials and applications to secure a resolute cohort of students for 2024. We are also examining the timing of Leadership SMC. In its current format, Leadership SMC is offered during the summer semester and Orientation Leaders and Welcome Week Leaders that are taking summer classes are funneled into the program. We would like to offer the program in the spring instead as we believe this would then funnel students from the program into positions such as Orientation Leaders, Welcome Week Leaders, and RAs. We also believe that offering the program in the spring will increase the overall enrollment in the program as more students are on campus in the spring than in the summer.



As our focus now shifts to strengthening our clubs and student organizations, we look to introduce a new version of the Council of Clubs this Fall. Each active organization on campus will be responsible for sending a representative to a monthly meeting where funding requests will be assessed, opportunities for collaboration will be discussed, and resources can be shared.

Roadrunner Nation Restructuring

Roadrunner Nation Mission Statement

SMC believes that student engagement is integral to one's total college experience. Roadrunner Nation fosters a holistic collegiate experience by providing innovative and intentional co-curricular engagement opportunities that transform students and support their connection to the college. Roadrunner Nation provides opportunities for students to become involved through activities, programs, student-led initiatives, and student organizations. As a result, SMC students who participate in Roadrunner Nation will graduate with a well-rounded experience and lasting memories of their time at SMC.

Roadrunner Nation Logistics

- Students who initially sign up for Roadrunner Nation will receive a custom "Roadrunner Nation" enamel pin.
- Members will have the following advantages when it comes to programming
 - Early sign-ups for trips, pop-up tournaments, and other limited events
 - "Fast Pass" entrance into events with check in lines (Stage Shows, President's Ball, Casino Night, Movie Nights, etc.)
- Access to RRN Only Events (Five Pines Sledding Trip, Concert, Cookouts, Axe Throwing Tournament, etc)
- Community service hours to be completed during SMC's Day of Service and selected by the club members
- Members will help inform and market activities and engagement opportunities for students throughout the year.
 - Help develop Welcome Week/Welcome Back Weekend programming.
 - Attendance requirements at SAC activities and intramurals throughout the year.
 - Assist with communication distribution across demographics (Res Life, Commuter, Dual-Enrollment, Non-Trad, etc.)
- Students who actively participate in the RRN club for an entire semester will receive their official Roadrunner Nation t-shirt



Grady Scholarship Program

2023-2024

Overview

Mission

The mission of the Grady Scholarship program is to support and enhance the educational experience of underrepresented students during their second academic year at SMC. This is achieved through retention initiatives such as, student leadership experiences, community service participation, and student development mentoring. In addition, the program seeks to identify and develop a student's curricular and extracurricular goals and prepare them for their careers or transfer.

Program Plan

- Student Leadership workshops
- Career Development workshops
- Community Service opportunities on and off campus
- Leadership Project
- Assistance with applying for student worker positions
- Help with Recruiting Initiatives
- Dinner with Grady Family

Recruitment

Application Requirements

- Member of an underrepresented student population
- SMC cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher
- Preference given to students living in or near Cass County

Completed Grady Scholarship Application Form

Nomination from Faculty or Staff

Interview with Student Development mentor

Application Timing

Grady Scholar application available March 11

Applications due April 1

Faculty and Staff Nomination

Students may be nominated by faculty and staff for participation in the Grady Scholarship program

Scholarship

Through the application process, we will identify 20 Grady Scholars and designate institutional scholarships for those students at \$1,000 each, \$500 for the fall semester and \$500 for the spring semester.

