

SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

2020-21 #SUVotes Plan



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: On November 3, 2020 the state of Texas will hold elections for President, Congress, and some state and local positions. The results of these elections will impact the state in many ways. Democratic engagement, through higher voter turnout rates, is important for this and all elections. Southwestern University contributes to higher education's role in promoting civic learning and democratic engagement through coursework, cross-campus collaborations, community engagement, student leadership development, and diversity education.

Southwestern's action plan was drafted by the co-chairs: Dr. Sarah Brackmann and Dr. Emily Sydnor. Our plan focuses on increasing voter registration, promoting voter education, and encouraging voter participation.

Initial programming will begin during new Student Orientation and continue through voting day on November 3rd.

LEADERSHIP: The Office of Community-Engaged Learning and the Department of Political Science collaborate to promote curricular and co-curricular civic learning and democratic engagement. Our committee includes staff, faculty, and student representatives, and includes a variety of campus perspectives.

Co-Chairs: Dr. Sarah Brackmann, Sr. Director of Integrative & Community-Engaged Learning and Dr. Emily Sydnor, Assistant Professor of Political Science.

Partnering Campus Departments:

- Community-Engaged Learning (CEL),
- Office of Student Activities (OSA)
- Office of Diversity Education (ODE)
- Mosaic
- Residence Life

Working Group Members will be recruited over the summer and will meet in early September to discuss a work plan. Potential members include the following individuals:

- Terri Johnson, Assistant Dean for Multicultural Education
- Oliver Agger-Shelton, Assistant Director of Student Activities
- Lisa Dela Cruz, Director of Mosaic and the Residential Experience
- Antonio Esparza, SU Junior, Democracy Fellow with the Campus Vote Project
- Emily Gilby, SU Senior & President of SU Democrats, Democracy Fellow with the Campus Vote Project
- Maureen Rendon, Southwestern University Newman Civic Fellow & Civil Discourse Fellow
- Alesha Lewis, SU Senior
- CDSJ Representative
- Student Government Association Representative
- Alex Bell, Southwestern University Civil Discourse Fellow
- Shay Salunkhe, Southwestern University Civil Discourse Fellow
- Zarine Parakh, Southwestern University Civil Discourse Fellow
- Josh Tenorio, SU Sophomore



COMMITMENT: Southwestern University’s mission statement, “fostering a liberal arts community whose values and actions contribute to the well-being of humanity,” prompts a community of scholarship and learning that facilitates social activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good. In addition, the University’s core values of “fostering diverse perspectives, being true to oneself and others, respecting the worth and dignity of persons, and encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good” promote democratic engagement, both on campus and beyond.

Through community-engaged learning classes and a variety of co-curricular programs, the **Office of Community-Engaged Learning** fosters the following

civic learning outcomes:

- Diversity of communities and cultures
- Analysis of knowledge
- Civic identity and commitment
- Civic action and reflection
- Awareness of civic contexts/structures

Since 2012, students enrolled in CEL responded in agreement that these courses have benefitted civic learning outcomes such as helping them better understand people of different ages, abilities, cultures, or economic backgrounds (85%) and encouraging them to seek additional opportunities to learn about people of different ages, abilities, cultures, or economic backgrounds (70%).

Across subfields and courses, **the Department of Political Science** highlights the importance of citizen participation to democratic society. Students enrolled in Dr. Emily Sydnor’s American Politics class engage in six different political or civic activities over the course of a semester, such as attending city-wide meetings, volunteering for local political parties, or helping register fellow students to vote. In doing so, they increase their own sense of political efficacy, understanding of the campus’ political context, and knowledge about local and national political issues.



Southwestern University supports learning wherever it takes place- residence halls, student organizations, internships, or the dining hall. **Mosaic** is Southwestern Student Life’s intentionally designed approach to these co-curricular experiences. Five key areas of development include the following:

- Make Meaning of the Academic Experience
- Develop 21st Century Skills
- Shape Identity
- Construct a Well-Managed Life
- Contribute as a Global Citizen

Other Departments/Initiatives Supporting Democratic Engagement:

- **The Office of Diversity Education (ODE)** promotes diversity and social justice events on campus. In the past, they have hosted national leaders such as Dolores Huerta and Angela Davis, difficult dialogue circles, brave space training, and social economics workshops that promote deeper civic learning on issues of power and privilege. The ODE also advises the Coalition for Diversity and Social Justice which includes ten cultural, identity, and social justice based groups within the coalition: Pirates for Pride, E.B.O.N.Y., Kappa Delta Chi, Hispanics and Latinx Organization, SU NATIVE, Asian Student Association, Reproductive Justice Alliance. Students for Environmental Activism and Knowledge, and Muslims and Allies. Students in these groups engage in activism in the campus community, and within our local and regional communities.
- **The Office of Student Activities (OSA)** advocates, educates, and mentors students by promoting leadership opportunities, advising student organizations, and facilitating student engagement. Specifically, OSA supports student leadership in organizations such as the College Republicans, College Democrats, and Young Americans for Liberty in ways that foster political discussion across campus. They also help coordinate voter registration drives and polling locations on campus.
- **Assistant Professor of Art Ron Geibel’s “Art and Activism” First Year Seminar** investigates the role art plays in social and political change. Students in this course will examine the ways in which artistic and creative forms of activism—from protest signs to

graffiti—draw attention to injustice and offer alternative approaches to making change on a local, national, and global scale.

- **The SU Project for Civil Discourse** is a student-led initiative that promotes free and open conversation and the development of empathic listening skills. Each year, four fellows are selected to design and executive programming that encourages students to engage in the exchange of ideas. In the past, the initiative has hosted “Taco Talks” with local business leaders and artists, deliberative discussions about tax policy and the role of the media in politics, and a day-long Civil Discourse Festival that included a keynote speech by Nadine Strossen, former president of the ACLU.

LANDSCAPE: Our Paideia liberal arts curriculum encourages students to draw connections between their academic coursework to other campus life experiences and broader social issues and problems. In addition, all students take at least one course that provides them an opportunity to understand how difference is used in the maintenance of structures of power and inequality, as well as activism in which people engage to promote social justice. Institutional surveys confirm that the connection between our academic curriculum and co-curricular opportunities are promoting meaningful experiences for students.

Community-Engaged Learning is offered in a variety of courses with 75% of the class of 2018 taking at least one course before graduating.

According to the 2019 NSSE Snapshot, 64% of SU seniors reported “very much” or “quite a bit” that their experience at SU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in the area of being an informed and active citizen.



TURNOUT & VOTER ENGAGEMENT: We have seen voter registration and turnout among Southwestern University students increase over the past 6 years. According to Southwestern’s NSLVE reports,

- Voter registration rates increased 10.5 percentage points from 78% in 2014 to 88.5% in 2018.

- In 2018, 58.4% of registered students voted in the 2018 election (for an overall voting rate of 51.8 percent). Not only is this turnout an increase from the university's previous overall voting rate in 2016 (51%) but it is also higher than the national average.
- In 2018, about 20 percent of students voted on election day, while the majority (64 percent) voted early; these numbers are similar to proportions who chose each method in previous years.

However, since 2018 the Texas legislature has passed a law preventing the use of "mobile voting" locations during early voting—a practice that allowed us to host a polling place on campus for a single day of early voting. We have arranged for Southwestern to host a polling location on Election Day for each election in 2020, and so we expect to see an increase in election day turnout relative to previous years.

Having the polling place on campus is definitely a strength for our campus engagement in 2020. However, its presence for the primaries in March highlighted some of the challenges we still face. First, many students didn't understand that they had to be registered at their campus address in order to vote at the on-campus polling location. Second, the on-campus polling place needed to be marketed better and earlier to students—some didn't realize it was there or know where the building was once they had heard about it.

GOALS:

Southwestern's Core Values promote the following actions:

- Cultivating academic excellence
- Promoting lifelong learning and a passion for intellectual and personal growth
- Fostering diverse perspectives
- Being true to oneself and others
- Respecting the worth and dignity of persons
- Encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good.

In line with these core values, we have several long-term goals:

- Promote civil and public discourse
- Increase voter registration
- Increase turnout of underrepresented groups
- Increase voter engagement in local and state elections
- Increase students' self-efficacy in the context of politics and government

SU's short-term goals for the 2020 election include the following:

- An overall voting rate of 55% (2016: 51%, 2018: 51.8%)
- Increased collaboration with student groups on campus through "SU Votes"
- A voter registration rate of 95%, with encouragement to register using campus addresses.

STRATEGIES

We've used past voting data and SU campus goals to draft the following strategies:

Voter Registration

In the past, we have had success in registering students to vote by “tabling” outside the dining hall on campus, especially on National Voter Registration Day, which falls on September 22 this year. This year, we would like to build on our tabling initiatives in the following ways:

1. We will do a better job tracking how many students are registered at any given tabling event. Right now we have no means to assess our success at on-campus registration.
2. We would like to host a competition between residence halls, sports teams, student organizations, or Greek organizations to see who can register the most students.
3. We would like to reduce the costs to students of becoming volunteer deputy registrars. In Texas, you must be a VDR to register someone to vote and while the training is free, it is off campus and requires registration. If more student organizations have VDRs within their membership, it will be easier for them to register other group members.

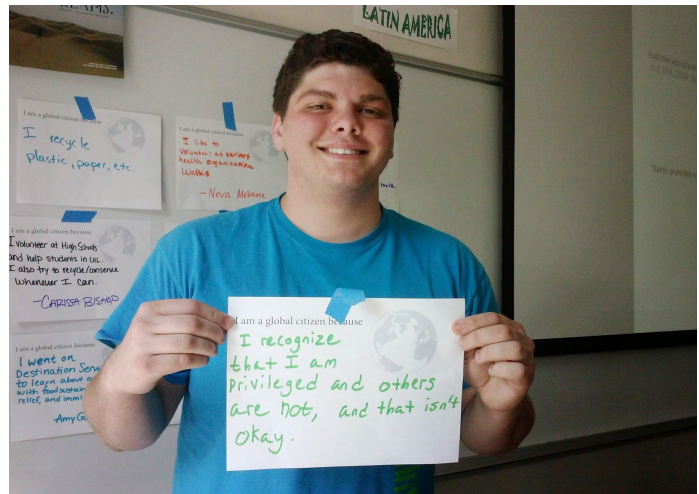
Timeline: August 17th-October 12th

Location: Bishop's Lounge, Robertson Center

Leading Group: TBD

Voter Education

In 2018 we hosted debate watch parties and members of the American Politics class created a non-partisan voter guide that we posted online and distributed around campus. In advance of the 2020 primaries, our Civil Discourse Fellows organized a series of “Taco Talks” that helped students connect current political issues to topics of interest to majors that, according to the NSLVE, were less likely to turn out to vote. They also hosted a Q&A session about the primaries and the issues on the ballots. Both the voter guide and similar programming from the Civil Discourse Fellows will be developed for Fall 2020. We also hope to host opportunities for students to get to know candidates for local elections, as our city mayoral election and other local elections will now take place as part of the November general election. .



Timeline: August 17th-November 3th

Location: Various locations throughout campus

Leading Group: Civil Discourse Fellows & American Politics Class

Get Out the Vote

In 2018 and for the March 2020 primaries, we hosted an election day festival to raise student awareness and enthusiasm around election day. This fall, we hope to expand our get out the vote efforts in a variety of ways. First, we will work with the Communications and Marketing department to have “student takeovers” of social media in the weeks leading up to (and on) election day by students who are excited about voter turnout and can help us drum up enthusiasm. Students will also post on the campus app and their personal social media using the hashtag #SUVOTES2020. We also hope to have our new university president send an email to students encouraging them to vote in the November elections.

For students who wish to vote in their home district, we will host an absentee voting party in which we provide stamps and envelopes for students who have requested and received their ballots to fill them out and mail them in. We will also provide information to students about how to vote early, whether on campus or at home.

On Election Day, Southwestern will host an on-campus polling location. We will promote on-campus voting in the weeks leading up to election day, and have a “Pirate Bike to the Polls” event where students can use university-provided bicycles to ride together to the on-campus polling location. We will increase signage around campus, decorate the dining halls, and generally work to increase awareness of students’ on-campus voting options.

Timeline: October 20-November 3th

Location: Bishop’s Lounge, Voting Precincts throughout Georgetown

Leading Group: SU Votes Planning Committee

Adapting to COVID-19 and Digital Organizing

As of this writing, we do not know what the academic calendar will look like at Southwestern in the fall. Much of our plan detailed above requires students to be on campus, but here are some of the ways we hope to adapt if the COVID-19 pandemic forces us to go digital for the fall semester.

Registration

Instead of tabling, we will find ways to promote registration digitally. This is complicated in Texas because the state does not allow online registration, but sites like TurboVote will send registration forms with pre-paid postage to students at their home addresses if they request them. We will promote this type of registration through the campus app and other campus-wide communication streams. While we’d have to adapt it slightly, the Greek life registration competition could still go on. We would likely hold off on VDR training, as it is done on a county-by-county basis and VDRs have to be recertified at the end of every major election year, so anyone who gets trained in Fall 2020 will have to get recertified come January 2021.

Education

Most of our educational efforts can still go on, but they would simply be conducted on a digital platform rather than in person.

Get out the vote efforts

While we expect far fewer students to vote on-campus if we are not a residential community in the fall, we can still use social media to encourage students to request absentee ballots, vote in their home counties if registered there, and to, in general, show their commitment to voting and

civic engagement. This spring we've had many student takeovers of SU social media to show how students are handling the stay-at-home orders and distance learning, and getting them to do the same but to talk about voting or registration should still be feasible.

REPORTING

The Co-Chairs will share this action plan with Southwestern's Marketing and Communication Office. In addition, the OCEL will post it on their [campus website](#). Collaborating offices and departments will also share via social media.

EVALUATION

Our short-term goals can be assessed easily through review of the NSLVE report that will be released in 2021, which will contain our overall voting rate and voter registration rate. To evaluate our success in increasing collaboration with a diverse range of student groups, we will track which groups (and how many) regularly send a representative to meetings of the SU Votes coalition throughout the fall semester.

We will also continue to track how many students are registered by on-campus efforts and how many people from both Southwestern and the surrounding community use our on-campus polling location. This information is not only useful for the university, but can help us persuade the county that having the on-campus location is worth the resources expended. Finally, we plan to conduct an exit poll for students voting on campus. The exit poll will be developed, administered and analyzed by students in Dr. Sydnor's "Candidates, Campaigns and Citizens" course.