



**All In Challenge  
2018-2020 Action Plan  
to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement,  
and Voting Rates Among Students**

**I. Executive Summary**

The Tarleton State University action plan to increase civic learning, political engagement and voting rates among students at our institution is being developed by members of our working group with representatives from Academic Affairs, the College of Liberal and Fine Arts, Student Life, Student Organizations, the Center for Transformative and the Departments of Social Sciences and Communications. The goal of this action plan is to encourage higher levels of civic learning and democratic engagement among our student body through political engagement, voter registration and education, and through university programs within the curriculum that facilitate engagement with current policy/political issues and guide students in the means of political participation. The action plan will be implemented on the Stephenville campus of the University. The plan was developed to continue our efforts to increase civic learning and engagement among college students and as part of our participation in the All in Challenge. We are also focused on the impact of this type of plan on student success and retention. The action plan is designed for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years. The plan will be implemented through the collaboration of departments, programs, and organizations on campus.

**II. Leadership**

The following working group is planned to implement the action plan. We are still securing members for this effort, and we will update the plan at the start of the Fall 2018 semester.

Academic Affairs:

Dr. Diane Taylor

Associate Vice President for Curriculum, Assessment and Faculty Affairs



College of Liberal and Fine Arts:  
Dr. Lora Helvie-Mason  
Associate Dean

Center for Transformative Learning:  
Dr. Denae Dorris  
Director of Academic Outreach and Engagement

Student Affairs:  
TBD

Student Organizations:  
TBD

Department of Social Sciences – College of Liberal and Fine Arts:  
Dr. Eric Morrow – Chair

Department of Communications – College of Liberal and Fine Arts:  
Dr. Christopher Gearhart - Chair

Constitution Day Committee:  
Dr. Nathaniel Cogley - Chair

Faculty:  
Dr. Marcie Reynolds – Government  
Mr. Casey Thompson – Government  
TBD – Communications  
TBD – Communications

The working group will facilitate the implementation of the action plan and ensure the collaboration of the groups listed. The members of the working group are being selected based on their roles in administration, student affairs, departments, and related instructional models. The group will meet at the beginning of the Fall 2018 semester to plan and implement Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 events as well as review possible events, activities, and initiatives over the following academic year. The group will meet twice per semester to plan and evaluate the implementation of the action plan.



### III. Commitment

The leadership of Tarleton State University has had a very visible commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. Over the past 4 years there has been a strong focus on Public Sphere Pedagogy. Administrators and faculty traveled to other universities, learned about related models and began implementation of the models at Tarleton. For 3 years departments and faculty have been adapting and implementing public sphere pedagogy models in Government and Communications core curriculum classes. The Provost and Dean of the College of Liberal and Fine Arts have dedicated resources for instructional support and events. With the growth of these models and events, the University will engage approximately 3000 students in public sphere pedagogy in the 2018-19 academic year. The University is also committed to achieving the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, and these models as well as other activities for democratic and political engagement and civic service affirm Tarleton State's commitment to show progress in this area.

This commitment is becoming more of a pervasive part of our institutional culture through the participation and support of university leadership. The instructional models have been offered for 3 years with plans to add an additional model that will create a living learning community in one dorm focused on civic learning. With the focus in the core, the current activities include students from all majors. More efforts are needed to create a sustained effort across all programs, departments and the entire university, so this action plan is a commitment to build on our efforts. Our focus will be on continuing activities including voter registration drives, election watch parties, election information sessions, etc.

Our commitment is also reflected in the following:

#### **Mission Statement:**

Tarleton strives to develop moral and ethical thinkers, scholars, and leaders who demonstrate civility and integrity, while contributing meaningfully and responsibly to a global society.

See full statement online at:

<https://www.tarleton.edu/strategicplan/2016-2020/mission-vision.html>



### **Core Values:**

Tarleton State has seven core values that guide the implementation of the mission which include leadership, civility, and service.

### **Strategic Plan:**

Goal: Student Transformation

Tarleton promotes academic achievement, meaningful engagement and personal development, guided by the university's core values. Texans will become responsible and ethical citizens, using their abilities as scholars, leaders, and servants to transform communities and generations.

Goal: Distinctive Engagement

Tarleton collaborates to promote an improved quality of life and enhanced access to learning. The university will be a leader in contributing to the improvement of our community and society.

See full list of strategic goals at:

<https://www.tarleton.edu/ORG/strategicplan/documents/StrategicPlan-2017RevisionFinal.pdf>

In supporting Tarleton State's commitment, the university has learning outcomes at multiple levels. First are the learning outcomes related to civic learning and democratic engagement aligned with core curriculum classes. The state core curriculum requires 6 hours in government (Federal and State). Assessment is conducted in each of these areas on an annual rotating basis to ensure the majority of students are achieving these outcomes. These outcomes also apply across the core, so there are areas of connection to civic learning and political engagement in personal and social responsibility outcomes.

See the full list of core curriculum learning outcomes at:

<https://www.tarleton.edu/generaleducation/generaleducation/learningoutcomes.html>



## **Academic Affairs – Related Learning Outcomes**

### Global and Multicultural World

AA10 Prepare students for a global and multicultural world, and prepare students to value service, leadership, civility, integrity, and academic excellence.

### Outreach, Service, Partnerships & Community Engagement

AA17 Increase academic affairs' commitment to outreach, service, partnerships and community engagement.

## **Texas A & M University System Learning Outcomes**

Practice personal and social responsibility, including the ability to:

- Practice ethical leadership;
- Recognize an ethical dilemma and apply rational decision-making in order to address it;
- Choose ethical courses of action in research and practice;
- Acknowledge and address the consequences of one's own actions; and
- Engage in local and global civic activities.

Educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is currently included in the general education curriculum at Tarleton State through the use of public sphere pedagogy models. For the 2018-19 academic year this will include the Texan Debate model, the Town Hall model, and the Legacy model. The Texan Debate model will be held in the Fall and Spring terms and will engage students in core curriculum Communications courses in research on a current policy issues. Students will participate in full day debate event that will conclude with an evening debate on the issue. The preparation for the debate and the research on the debate issue are focused on civic learning and democratic engagement.

The Town Hall model engages students in Government courses for Federal Government and Texas Government. Students conduct 8 weeks of guided research on a specific policy issue. The research leads to an evening event in which student discuss their issues in small groups with policy consultants, experts and professionals from the community and region. Students formulate an action plan related to the role of



government and how this role can be sustained or changed. Students are required to present their research and action plan in a paper by the end of the semester.

The Legacy model is a new initiative for the 2018-19 academic year. The model is focused on a low retention dorm on campus. Students will be enrolled in Texas Government courses with a civic learning/democratic engagement focus. Students will be challenged to consider the “legacy” that has influenced them in terms of political socialization, to analyze current issues, and to consider their legacies in relation to democratic engagement.

Educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is also included in the co-curriculum through Tarleton State’s emphasis on community engagement through service. All departments are asked each year to develop projects for the university-wide service day. Additional service activities happen throughout the year, but the University Service Day is a time to engage as many students as possible in community service.

Additional areas in the co-curriculum are related to community partnerships. More information will be submitted as a revision to this action plan when available.

#### **IV. Landscape**

As can be seen in the learning outcomes above, civic learning and democratic engagement are incorporated into overall campus learning outcomes. However, it is recognized that more specific language in the outcomes could be included. The working group will review this and make recommendations to strengthen this language in the outcomes.

Over the summer we are reviewing data from the last two reports from NSSE, NSLV, CIRP. An initial review of the data shows that we are slightly behind peer institutions in civic learning and democratic engagement. For example, the 2016 NSLV report shows among Carnegie Classification institutions, we were 6.9% below the voting rate average. More attention will be given to the data in all of these reports in order to provide the working group with an update and set goals. The NSLV report showed a slight increase in the voting rate from our 2012 report, but it is clear that more coordinated efforts are needed to raise engagement in this and other areas.



We do have internal and external barriers to success. Internally, the challenges are related to impact across departments and programs. Our primary focus has been on core classes, and while we have significant participation in the models, more faculty could adopt elements of these models to enhance the civic learning and democratic engagement component of their core courses in Government and Communications. Almost all students need GOVT 2306 – Texas Government when they begin attending college, as this course is not offered for dual credit. This provides an opportunity to focus this effort on these courses. More willingness from faculty is needed to incorporate these elements into the courses. External barriers include a strong negative view of government in our state political culture, demographic transition among groups that are statistically low in political participation, and proximity of polling places for college students who are not registered locally.

We have addressed some barriers through the adoption of public sphere pedagogy models. We have also had leadership, support and resources from Academic Affairs to assemble the teaching teams and event management staff to make these programs successful. We are at a point where we are challenged by space for classrooms and events. We will have to continue to think creatively to use the space we have in relation to future development of some of our current programs. This does not prevent us, however, from developing more targeted programs for smaller groupings of students, and the mobilization of student groups to assist with civic learning. While some of this takes place on a college campus due to student activism, this is an area that needs further discussion and direction to assist with this effort.

## **V. Goals**

The following are goals related to the impact of enhancing our focus on civic learning and democratic engagement. They are also goals related to our learning outcomes and goals for the next decade.

- Increase voter registration and voting
- Increase knowledge of and engagement with the electoral process
- Increase engagement with current policy and political issues
- Increase community service
- Increase student success, retention and graduation rates through public sphere pedagogy
- Increase awareness of current challenges in the function of government on the local, state, and federal levels





-Increase the commitment of the University community to civic learning and democratic engagement

## **VI. Strategy**

Our strategy includes our ongoing evaluation of our use of public sphere pedagogy as well as additional activities focused on civic learning and democratic engagement.

- Voter registration drives
- Distribute information on upcoming elections
- Election and debate watch parties
- Information sessions on elections (e.g. Constitutional amendment elections in Texas)
- Engagement of student organizations in effort
- Constitution Day program
- Special emphasis programs (e.g. In 2014 we had a campus wide Celebration of Civil Rights with a wide range of programs)
- Use of social media for civic learning and democratic engagement

This work will be coordinated between the areas represented by the working group. The models are currently directed by the Department of Social Sciences and the Department of Communications. Planning for our Constitution Day activities is already underway, and more will be planned in relation to November state and national elections once the working groups meets for the Fall term.

Once this group meets, a revised list of activities with focal group, purpose, and goals will be included in the action plan.

## **VII. Reporting**

The action plan will be shared internally with the working group and the leadership in each area represented. A summary of the plan will be prepared and shared with Deans and Department Heads. It is TBD whether or not the plan will be shared with the general public. Since our plan involves a number of activities on different levels, efforts will be more targeted to engage specific groups in the activities.





## **VIII. Evaluation**

Evaluation will be a part of each program, event, and initiative so that the working group can determine effectiveness related to specific goals as well as to the overall goals of civic learning and democratic engagement. Evaluation will be done by those who are responsible for coordinating an event, program, or model, and evaluations will be requested within a month following completion. The data collected will be specific to the type of event, and this will be identified once the final schedule of events and programs is determined for the academic year. Results will be shared as it relates to the academic and administrative assessment, pursuit of recognitions and classifications, reporting required by the system and for accreditation, and planning by the working group for our ongoing effort in civic learning and democratic engagement.