



The 2019-2020 Tarleton

State University Action

## Plan

### Increase Civic Learning, Democratic Engagement, and Voter Participation among Students

**Executive Summary:** The goal of the 2019-2020 Tarleton State University action plan is to increase civic learning, civic and democratic engagement and participation, as well as voter participation among students at Tarleton State University in addition to support initiatives that began as early as 2014. We will accomplish this through programs within the curriculum, student life, faculty development, and community-building initiatives to encourage the appreciation of diversity, applied-learning environments, social responsibility, and to improve our campus climate for political learning. Texas voter participation is notoriously low, with the 18-29 year old cohort having the lowest participation rate. This low participation rate is our motivation to move forward with plans for the 2020 election year including the primary elections. Our efforts will include voter registration drives, non-partisan election information, and candidate and issues information sessions.

We will implement this plan at the Stephenville and Fort Worth campuses of the University with the goal to spread to our other campuses in the future and to collaborate with other universities in Texas. This plan is part of our participation in the All in Challenge and our continuing efforts to increase civic engagement, advocacy, student success, and retention. We are implementing this plan through our working group that represents a wide range of diverse departments of the university. Included in the group are Academic Affairs, Student Life, The Dick Smith University Library, The Center for Transformative Learning, The College of Liberal and Fine Arts, The Department of Government, Legal Studies, and Philosophy, The Department of History, Sociology, Geography, and GIS, The Department of Communication Studies, and student government and other organizations as determined by the working group. We intend to utilize the resources available through Students Learn Students Vote, NASPA, NSLVE, Engaged Scholarship Consortium, Campus Compact, and our county and state election offices.

**Leadership:** The following working group will be assembled in the Fall 2019 semester. This group will refine and facilitate the implementation of the action plan and ensure the collaboration of the groups listed. The members, listed below, have roles in administration, student affairs, academic departments, and related instructional models. The group will plan events for the Spring 2020 semester as well as review possible events, activities, and initiatives for subsequent academic years. The group will meet twice per semester to plan and evaluate the implementation of the action plan.

- **Academic Affairs:**

- Dr. Diane Taylor, Associate Vice President for Curriculum, Assessment, and Faculty Affairs.
- Dr. Laurie Sharp, Associate Professor and Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Studies.
- Dr. Denae Dorris, Director of The Center for Transformative Learning.

- **Faculty and Staff:**

- Dr. Lora Helvie-Mason, Associate Dean of the College of Liberal and Fine Arts.
- Dr. Nathaniel Cogley, Department Head of Department of Government, Legal Studies, and Philosophy.
- Dr. Opeyemi Zubair, Department Head of Department of History, Sociology, Geography, and GIS.
- Dr. Christopher Gearhart, Department Head of Communication Studies.



- Mr. Casey D. Thompson, Government and Legal Studies, Town Hall Coordinator, and American Democracy Project Coordinator.
- Dr. Dominic Dottavio, Former President of the University and American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Democracy Project, Stewardship of Public Lands Program at Tarleton State University.
- Dr. Marcie Reynolds, Government, Twigg Model, and Town Hall Model.
- Mr. Winston Dawson, Communication Studies and Texan Debate Coordinator.
- Ms. Callie Price, Department of Biological Sciences and Sense of Place Coordinator.
- Dr. Christy Tabors, Manager of Research & Learning.

**Commitment:** Tarleton State University is committed to increasing civic learning and democratic engagement through significant and long-term plans and investments. The leadership of Tarleton State University has a very visible commitment to improving civic learning, the campus climate, and democratic engagement of our students. Over the past four years, there has been a strong focus on public sphere pedagogy and creating reciprocal relationships with the state and local communities. The University established the Center for Transformative Learning to foster this approach and these connections. Administrators and faculty traveled to other universities, learned about related pedagogical models, and began implementation of those models at Tarleton. For three years, departments and faculty have been adapting and implementing public sphere pedagogy models in Federal Government and Communication Studies core curriculum classes. We created a dedicated coordinator position to facilitate communications with the public as well as campus wide communications and efforts.

#### **Commitment through education - Course Design, On-Campus Events, and Learning Outcomes:**

- **The Center for Transformative Learning:** The Center is a University wide initiative to provide faculty training and workshops, fellowships, and research-incentive seed grants, on multiple topics including civic engagement and community involvement.
- **Town Hall/Twigg Hybrid Model:** Every fall and spring term, The Tarleton Town Hall engages students in government courses for federal government and Texas government. Students conduct eight weeks of guided research on different policy issues. Once their research is complete, students participate in an evening event to discuss their respective policy issues in small groups with policy consultants, experts, and professionals from the Stephenville community and surrounding region. Students formulate an action plan related to the role of government and how this role changes. Approximately 1,200 students participate in Town Hall each academic year.
- **Texan Debate:** Every fall and spring term, The Texan Debate engages students who are enrolled in communication courses in research on current policy issues. Students participate in a full day debate event that concludes with an evening debate on the issue. Preparation for the debate and the research on the debate issue focus on civic learning and democratic engagement. Approximately 800-1,000 students participate in Texan Debate each academic year.
- **Living/Learning Communities:** Legacy Hall is a living and learning community for students enrolled in Texas government courses with a civic learning and democratic engagement focus. Legacy Hall has a capacity for 300 students and has served 140 students during the last two fall terms.
- **Election Year Events:** We are developing an action plan to build upon our efforts in the upcoming



election year with our focus on voter registration drives, voter education, and election watch parties. We want to work through Student Life, Social Organizations, and Living/Learning Communities, to coordinate efforts to register voters. Create a campus wide communication for National Voter Registration Day 2019 and begin planning for a large-scale event for National Voter Registration Day 2020. The University also utilizes our campus communications systems to send reminder emails and text messages on voting days.

- **Constitution Day Symposium:** The University's Constitution Day Committee and our Honors College are sponsoring a symposium in which two of our faculty, Dr. Nathaniel Cogley and Dr. Charles Howard, will be covering the Electoral College, its founding, and its modern day necessity. This symposium will be open to all students, the public, and faculty. All faculty are encouraged to integrate this event into their curriculum as an assignment to encourage participation.
- **Service Day Events:** Each year all departments develop co-curriculum 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.
- **Learning Outcomes:** The University has Core Curriculum Student Learning Outcomes and Service Learning that include:
  - Personal Responsibility - to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making, and demonstrate an understanding of ethical standards as applied to decision-making
  - Social Responsibility - to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities and express ideas in written, visual or oral forms to a range of diverse audiences in multiple settings.
  - Applied Learning Experiences in Service Learning - The University also supports and encourages students to engage in service learning. In which projects may be sought independently or as part of a course, by an individual or as part of a group, and minimum of 20 hours of non-compensated service. In participating in a service learning experience, students will be able to demonstrate growth in acquisition, integration, construction, and application of knowledge, improve cognitive complexities, enhance interpersonal development, develop interpersonal competence, and develop an appreciation of humanitarianism and civic engagement.

**Commitment through resources:** The Provost and Dean of the College of Liberal and Fine Arts dedicate substantial resources for instructional support and these above referenced events. With the growth of these models and events, the University engages approximately 3,000 students in public sphere pedagogy models in the 2019-20 academic year across all majors. By dedicating the necessary resources to create these models in the core classes, the impact across the campus is pervasive and installed as part of our culture.

**Commitment through long-term goals:** One of our next goals is to create a sustained effort across all programs, departments, and the university to interconnect civic learning initiatives to multiple courses and disciplines throughout a student's course of study. The University is committed to achieving the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification by following an evidence-based documentation of institutional practices for self-assessment and quality improvement. Additionally, these high-impact teaching models and other democratic engagement and civic service initiatives affirm Tarleton State University's commitment to progress. These commitments are becoming an enduring part of our institutional culture



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**Commitment through University statements and documents:** Our Mission Statement, Core Values, Strategic Plan, Academic Affairs, and Texas A&M System policies also reflect our commitment.

- **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.
- **Core Values:** Tarleton State has seven core values that guide the implementation of the mission which include Integrity, Leadership, Tradition, Civility, Excellence, and Service.
- **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.
- **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.

**Commitment through Learning Outcomes:** Tarleton State University also has courses with learning outcomes built in to course that reflect our commitment to civic learning and engagement such as:

- Global and Multicultural World: Prepares students for a global and multicultural world, and prepare students to value service, leadership, civility, integrity, and academic excellence.
- Outreach, Service, Partnerships & Community Engagement: Increases academic affairs' commitment to outreach, service, partnerships, and community engagement.
- Core Curriculum Student Learning Outcomes:
- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving– the application of both qualitative and quantitative skills analytically and creatively to subject matter in order to evaluate arguments and to construct alternative strategies.
- Communication–to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication
- Empirical and Quantitative Skills- to include the manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions
- Teamwork - to include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal
- Personal Responsibility - to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.
- Social Responsibility: to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities
- Texas A&M University System Learning Outcomes: Tarleton State University is part of the Texas A&M University System and there are system wide student requirements that reflect the commitment to civic engagement such as:
  - Practice personal and social responsibility.
  - Practice ethical leadership.



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

**Commitment through measurement of outcomes:** In supporting Tarleton State University's commitment to creating a campus climate for political learning, the university has tied our learning outcomes for core curriculum classes to civic learning and democratic engagement. Texas requires six hours in government covering Federal Government and State and Local Government and we conduct assessments 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 Texas Core Curriculum, so there are areas of connection to civic learning and democratic engagement diversity and social responsibility outcomes.

**Landscape:** As seen in the learning outcomes above, civic learning and democratic engagement are pervasive in the overall learning outcomes at the program, college, university, and university system levels. In the coming year, the working group plans to make recommendations to strengthen this language in the outcomes. We are reviewing data from the last two reports from NSSE, NSLV, and 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. One of the goals of the working group is to give more attention to these reports to increase our voting rate. The NSLV report shows 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 have identified some internal and external barriers to success. Internally, 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 Communication Studies. For example, almost all students begin college in need of GOVT 2306 – Texas Government, as it is not available in dual credit courses. These requirements provide an opportunity to focus this effort on these courses. More willingness from faculty to incorporate these elements into the courses would increase the impact. 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, the lack of true online registration, and proximity of polling places for college.

We have addressed some barriers through the adoption of public sphere pedagogy models. We have also had leadership, support, and resources from Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to assemble the teaching teams and event management staff to make these programs successful. We are at a point where our challenge is 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 challenge 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 civic learning takes place on a college campus due to student activism, this is an area of opportunity for the working group to assist.





**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 through on campus registration drives with the ultimate goal to maintain a higher voting participation rate than the state average.
- Increase knowledge of and engagement with the electoral process through events such as Constitution Day.
- Increase engagement with current policy and political issues through integrated course work in core classes such as the Town Hall and the Texan Debate.
- Increase community service through Service Day events.
- 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.
- Increase student engagement by creating a complementary working group made of student organizations.
- Create cross discipline collaborations on assignments connected to civic engagement.
- Create a process for training Texas Volunteer Deputy Registrars as per the Texas Secretary of State's Guidelines.
- A polling location on campus.

**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. This work will be coordinated between the areas represented by the working group. The College of Liberal and Fine Arts directs the models and many of the events such as our Constitution Day activities. The working group will plan more events in the Fall for the upcoming elections. Once this group meets, a revised list of activities with focal group, purpose, and goals will be included in the action plan.

- Engage student organizations in the effort to promote democratic participation.
- Voter registration drives.
- Information sessions on elections and issues.
- Distribute information on upcoming elections.
- Election and debate watch parties.
- Constitution Day program.
- Special emphasis programs such as staging issue debates and inviting local and state elected officials to participate.
- Use of social media for civic learning and democratic engagement.

**Reporting:** We will share this action plan 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. The working group will determine the level of communication with the public regarding the plan. Since our plan involves a number of activities on different levels, the coordinator will collect information from each of the individual efforts and create an annual report for the working group. Our goal is to begin tracking data to report to NSLVE to track our progress.



**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. To assist in data collection, the University created the Civic Engagement & Service Learning (CESL) Fellows facilitate the development of effective learning experiences, rooted in high impact practices and sustainable campus-community partnerships to support teaching, research, and community development. Each Fellow joins an interdisciplinary cohort of colleagues working to advance conversations about important aspects of effective transformative learning experiences. These are rooted in high impact practices, community engagement, and campus-community collaboration(s) in tangible ways by supporting faculty innovation and enriched student learning through high impact, transformative pedagogy, providing leadership for university-wide transformative learning experiences, and establishing faculty learning pathways designed to increase interaction with peers. These will include follow up surveys through the campus email system as well as attendance tracking at the events. Those who are responsible for coordinating an event, program, model, will evaluate the effectiveness and report to the coordinator. Evaluations are due one month following completion of the event. The working group will identify the necessary data collected be specific to the type of event. We will share the results 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.