



# Campus Vote Project Voter Engagement Plan 2024

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## Executive Summary

Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) is a selective admission Hispanic Serving Institution located on the border between Mexico and the United States, with an enrollment of over 8,000 students. We are, in fact, the four-year institution with the highest percentage Hispanic enrollment (92.5%) in the United States. The 2023-2024 student body includes 54.2% first-generation students, 61% female, and 65% of our students are Pell-Grant Recipients. While our TAMIU four-year graduation is 25% and our 6-year graduation rate is 47%, our first-year persistence rate is 79%: the highest of the regional institutions in the Texas A&M System. The University delivers over 80 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs.

Developed by our ALL-IN Taskforce members, this Campus Plan outlines our university's voter education, registration and turnout efforts throughout the Fall 2024, Spring 2025, and Fall 2025 academic semesters. It is also meant to serve as a guide that provides structure for our campus partners and helps track our progress as an institution. With TAMIU's fourth and fifth year in participation of democratic engagement opportunities, campus plans such as this one offer an opportunity to track yearly progress and add revisions to established strategies. It covers all of the democratic engagement opportunities that will be hosted on campus for students and members of the community.

TAMIU's Mission aligns extremely well with the Campus Votes Project, as our institution aims to "prepare students for leadership roles in an increasingly complex, culturally diverse state, national, and global society," as we strive to improve "the quality of lives for citizens of the border region, the State of Texas, and national and international communities." A collaboration between universities and organizations like the Campus Vote Project is vital for the removal of barriers that deter our young adults to participate in our democracy. Clearly, a hosting and promotion of democratic engagement opportunities through this plan is essential for the sustainment of an informed citizenry who engages in political action, specifically for young Hispanics, who have been historically underrepresented at the national level.

## Leadership

**Lead:** Dr. Nicholas Hudson, Director of the Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement, [nicholashudson@tamiu.edu](mailto:nicholashudson@tamiu.edu).

**Engage:** Initial ALL IN Task Force co-chairs and members have been meeting throughout the Fall Semester. Our 2023-2025 TAMIU All-In Democracy Task Force will consist of students, faculty and staff, and administration.

1. Dr. Nicholas Hudson, Co-Chair, Student Engagement
2. Carolina Gonzalez, Student Engagement
3. Voter Engagement Student Employee
4. Scheiby Gonzalez Fisher, Enrollment Management
5. Luis Stagg, Housing & Residence Life
6. Priscilla Cadena, Student Engagement
7. Christine Rojas, PRMIS
8. Sean Saputo, Athletics
9. Dr. Haley Kazen, UC
10. Dr. Irma Cantú, COAS
11. Dr. Alfonso Vergaray, COAS
12. Dr. Nilda Garcia, COAS
13. Dr. Andrew Hazelton, COAS
14. Dr. Arthur Soto-Vasquez, COAS
15. ARSSB Rep
16. COED Rep
17. Olinda Dominguez, CNHS
18. Jesus C. Galaviz, SGA President
19. Nico Weigdant, SGA Vice-President
20. Preston Salazar, SGA PAC
21. Ana Toscano, SGA PAC
22. Elena Cano, Campus Activities Board
23. Rafael Contreras, Greek Council
24. Margot Wheeler, Greek Council
25. GA Rep
26. PASA Rep
27. Krystel Castillo, MOVE Texas
28. Ilse Mendez, Next Gen America
29. PSA Rep
30. Democracy Fellow – TBD
31. Democracy Fellow – TBD

## **Purpose and Scope**

There is a growing interest in the promotion of civic learning and democratic engagement among our students, faculty, and staff. TAMIU administration has been committed to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. As such, the administration authorized the creation of the TAMIU All-In Democracy Task Force, charged with constant communication of voter engagement opportunities and initiatives has been displayed among our faculty and staff. This communication also extends to outside our campus as outside organizations have been notified about our initiatives in the past.

The TAMIU All-In Democracy Task Force meets monthly during the Spring and Summer 2024 semesters and weekly during the Fall 2024 semester to discuss voter registration plans and voter mobilization/turnout in a nonpartisan way to increase the democratic engagement of TAMIU students, faculty, and staff. The meetings feature students, faculty, and staff as we discuss our plans for the Fall 2024 election. We also assist in other democratic engagement activities, such as participation in Voter Education and Civil Discourse. With multiple representatives from individual university departments and student organizations, this Taskforce is resilient to changes in student organization/university department/taskforce leadership. Since all members are active in the decision-making processes of the Taskforce, transitions in any position (if required) should be smooth.

## **Commitment**

Our university's administration has always been committed to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. Constant communication of voter engagement opportunities and initiatives has been displayed among our faculty and staff. This communication also extends to outside our campus as outside organizations have been notified about our initiatives in the past. There is a growing interest in

the promotion of civic learning and democratic engagement among our students, faculty, and staff. There is, however, room for improvement and growth.

The Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement will be hosting numerous voter education forums, debates, and events of political nature throughout the academic year. One of the team's work study participants will be specifically dedicated to Civic Learning & Voter Education (CLVE). The student employee will take charge in class wraps, voter registration, voter education, and voter turnout efforts. The member will organize a group of strategic approaches to involve students in election/voting-related events. Through the efforts of the participant, TAMIU will demonstrate the institution's commitment to engaging students with proper resources and participation support. TAMIU will be seeking two additional Democracy Fellows through partnerships.

Our taskforce's efforts throughout the academic year should cement democratic engagement into our university's culture. Changes are already being seen and felt. As a response to the changing nature of the student population, our voter engagement has shifted to a hybrid approach virtual engagement in some of our university's most used platforms. For instance, voter engagement has made its way to our new student and transfer student orientations. Our office website also promotes this taskforce's mission, goals, and efforts and provides interested individuals with informational resources. All student organization members and graduating students use a platform called TAMIU Presence, where students are asked to sign up for reminders about upcoming elections and registration deadlines in the State of Texas. Presence has also proved an effective tool to share "news" about our Taskforce's efforts and events. Additionally, TAMIU has announcements and links available on the TAMIU Blackboard Ultra platforms. These platforms will be constantly used by all our Dustdevils.

#### **Strategic Plan:**

One of the ways this taskforce believes this growth will happen is through the implementation of this plan. This plan's events create enough attention that attracts students, professors, and community members and motivates them to be politically engaged. This can be seen in our university's social media pages and internet page, with different articles congratulating the successes of the democratic engagement efforts on our campus. The campus has also agreed to participate in the NSLVE's collection of data for a couple of years now. This is useful in tracking the progress and the success of different initiatives. Through the collaboration with professors, students are motivated to vote and remain informed of the voting process in the State of Texas. As a matter of fact, one of the components of this plan is to ask professors to dismiss classes early to give students enough time to vote.

TAMIU will lead a voter registration component through our "First Year Celebration" for all incoming students. The celebration will be composed of the significance of students' civic participation and how their voting life will impact today's community and establish their future community voting values. In doing so, the student body will be introduced early on to voter education and registered before elections. Hosting a "First Year Celebration" will fundamentally inspire students to be democratically active and will help increase the voter turnout efforts.

# Landscape

## Students:

Our university has surpassed the 8,000 students enrolled mark within the last three years, with our Spring 2024 enrollment the largest it has ever been. Texas A&M International University is the nation's largest Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with over 93% of the student population identifying as Hispanic/LatinX. A substantial amount of TAMIU's student population is first-generation and a percentage of our students are Pell-eligible. A very small percentage of our student population lives on campus (7.8%) which poses different problems for our voter engagement efforts.

Using our NSLVE data from 2016 and 2018 sheds some light on the majors and individuals our taskforce must focus on. First and foremost, the vast majority of our students vote during the early voting period. This is because our institution is fortunate enough to have its own early voting polling site on campus. In 2016, 67.3% of our registered students voted early. In 2018, 76% of our registered students voted early. In 2020, 77% of students voted early, an increase by 10% points. By far, our taskforce efforts should focus on promoting early voting on campus, as it's already the most popular form of voting. Interestingly enough, our NSLVE data shows nothing for our voting by mail numbers. The three majors that voted the least in 2020 were our Engineering and Engineering Technologies (43%), Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Humanities (43%), and Parks, Recreation, Leisure and Fitness Studies (40%). In 2018, these majors were Foreign Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, and Engineering and Engineering Technologies and Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies. A focus on these students is a surefire way to increase democratic participation in our campus. Moreover, percentage-wise our older students vote more than our younger students. Quantity-wise, however, younger students tend to vote more than older students. This is expected because of our university's demographics, but sheds light on where our taskforce should focus on this upcoming academic year.

Given recent legislative changes, one potential challenge we will encounter is the removal of the early voting site that TAMIU had had for years, working in conjunction with our County Elections Administrator. Given this recent legislative change, the Webb County Elections Administrator has shifted their focus from having an on-campus early voting site (for any eligible voter) to one off campus. Additionally, while the TAMIU campus falls under Webb County Precinct 255 for Election Day voting, the on-campus voting location has also been removed. The Webb County Elections Administrator has sought and achieved a waiver to all any eligible voter to be able to vote at any precinct on Election Day, which may reduce some burdens; however, the systemic barrier of not having an on-campus election site may prove to be a large burden. We have been fortunate that MOVE Texas has provided shuttles to election sites for students and may promote that service, as long as it falls under the System protocols. The TAMIU Student Government Association may also look towards providing their own services as well.

## Current Campus Efforts

**Voter registration:** Our institution's voter registration efforts have been significantly successful and popular among our students. It must be noted, however, that voter registration efforts have only been recently incorporated into our university's events in Fall 2018, after an invitation to our students to participate in the Texas Voting Summit. The attendance to this Summit encouraged our students, faculty, and staff to come together and create a task force (which has been in existence ever since) in

charge of promoting voter registration on campus. This taskforce hosts voter registration drives around diverse locations on campus during National Voter Registration Day, different days throughout the Fall semester, and on the last day for voter registration in the State of Texas. Moreover, the Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement has incorporated voter registration into TAMIU's New Student Orientation, effectively exposing the incoming freshmen class to our democratic engagement efforts. TAMIU has developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MOVE Texas which includes providing MOVE Texas with Federal Work Study student employees to help register voters. This is part of our university-wide efforts to institutionalize voter registration efforts.

Our university's SOLE staff will volunteer as Deputy Registrars to ensure the accuracy and integrity of voter registration information. Overall, volunteer Deputy Registrars serve as important facilitators of democracy by helping eligible individuals exercise their right to vote and promoting active civic participation.

**Voter education:** The Political Action Committee of the Student Government Association hosts a variety of forums and debates during the election cycle so that our students are informed and educated on diverse local, state, and national candidates' platforms. The PAC also hosts a Constitution Day celebration open to all students. Some of our campus partners also host informational tables during the semester that our students can visit to remain informed of different political issues. A Volunteer Deputy Registrar training session is also hosted by this task force on campus. The majority of our trainees are students, but these training sessions are also open to members of the community. Given that this year is a primary season, the Student Government Association PAC will be hosting candidate forums and debates with various candidates for political office. The Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement will be hosting numerous voter education forums, debates, and events of political nature throughout the academic year.

**Campus climate:** The student body at TAMIU is becoming more interested in the bipartisan nature of politics. While our campus currently does not house organizations like Young Republicans, it does house organizations such as the Political Science Association, SGA's Political Action Committee, and MOVE TX. These organizations have been responsible for hosting educational tables, hosting debates, and other events of political nature. Activism events, such as protests, are extremely rare. However, there has been a growth in political discourse and debate among students. The Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement has also been instrumental in TAMIU's voter engagement efforts – hosting classes and programs revolving around voter engagement and political participation in our campus and community.

**Campus Engagement:**

TAMIU will provide students with promotional materials such as resource tables in fairs, pamphlets in orientation bags/kits, and voter friendly presentations through programming like our Dusty Camp, Dustdevil Transition, Welcome Week(s), and Involvement Week. With the help of these events, our institution will collect feedback from the student body and evaluate how to further engage voter education and registration throughout the academic year and for future purposes.

TAMIU's Political Action Committee (PAC) is a group conducted by the Student Government Association (SGA) devoted to raising awareness to democratic participation and political advocacy. PAC is responsible for the focus of the university's community democratic interest. During the fall, debates will

be held by the SGA PAC for City Council races. The debates will serve the organization with first-hand perspective and will ultimately engage students and community members to participate in civic activities to increase voter awareness. Not only will attending the debate(s) be highly beneficial for civic education purposes, but it will also stimulate critical thinking towards democratic decisions, raise awareness to local issues, learn to strategically network with city officials and community members, and become inspired to act towards civic leadership now or in the future.

As an approach to student engagement on campus, The Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement held a May the 4th event co-sponsored by the SGA Political Action Committee (PAC) featuring a Stars Wars theme on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. The event often reaches a large group of fan-enthusiast students through Star Wars activities, movie-screenings, and theme-related food. Through the event, TAMIU aimed to increase voter awareness of the May runoff elections, and students were encouraged to engage in both voter education and voter registration efforts.

The university has organized “Party of the Polls” as an event meant to stimulate voter participation during elections. Ideally, this event should serve as an accessibility feature to students and community members to engage in voting either on campus or by offering shuttles to drive groups of people to voting sites. The “Party at the Polls” supports TAMIU’s efforts to increase the voter registration numbers and overall voter turnout. The event is composed of voter friendly information suggesting voter registration, free food, and activities enticing voter awareness. In fact, “Party at the Polls” offers students with volunteer opportunities to help with either voter registration, assisting event activities, directing attendees, or information distribution. Overall, “Party at the Polls” is an organized event planned to emphasize the importance of voting in our community through fun and engaging activities and experiences. Party at the Polls events are hosted by the Task Force, the TAMIU Student Government Association Political Action Committee and MOVE Texas.

## Goals

### Long-term goals

TAMIU’s overall long-term goal is to provide students with the tools necessary in becoming lifelong active citizens and community leaders. While it would be unwise to put a timetable for long term goals, to move toward our goal of providing our students with said tools, TAMIU hopes to:

- Conduct voter registration for 100% of eligible students
- Institutionalize our voter engagement initiatives, engraining them in our university’s traditions and culture.
  - Incorporating voter engagement in faculty syllabi through the Student Government Association and Faculty Senate
- Institutionalize our task force.
- Consistently strive towards obtaining designations from diverse organizations that establish our campus as a democratic campus.
- Ensure TAMIU’s voter engagement efforts are student-led and incorporate our student organizations (in the past, representatives from MOVE Texas TAMIU Branch, the League of Empowered Women, and the Political Science Association have led some of our voter engagement efforts)
- Developing lost-lasting connections with outside organizations to increase voter engagement

outside of campus and in the community. Best known as “town and gown” relations, our institution strives to register non-college students (members of the community) and make TAMIU a symbol of democratic engagement in our community through ongoing MOU/partnership with MOVE Texas

## Short term goals

TAMIU’s short term goals are to take advantage of the established momentum our civic engagement efforts have garnered and to build on what we have learned. TAMIU’s hopes to:

- Continue to increase voter registration rates.
- Increase amount of voter registration events throughout the academic year by collaborating with student organizations.
- Study data from 2020 NSLVE Data to determine path forward and determine appropriate voter registration and turnout goals depending on majors.
- Host voter registration drives at all signature events.
- Create a Scholarship & fundraiser for Scholarship that is targeted towards students that are democratically engaged. (Be The Voice)
- Continue to build up our four pillars of work pertaining to voter engagement.
- Reflect on CLDE report and find solutions to low engagement both within and outside the taskforce.
- Connect and collaborate with more student organizations on campus to further expand our team.

## Our Strategy for 2024

### A. Voter education:

1. Continue to provide a presentation highlighting TAMIU’s multiple voter engagement efforts to all new Freshmen Students during our New Student Orientation sessions throughout summer.
2. First-Year Seminar (UNIV 1201) – introduces students to key concepts and foundational knowledge regarding democratic engagement, such as voter registration and turnout.
3. First-Year Seminar Signature Course (UNIV 1302) – partnership with faculty to create signature courses that build on the key concepts introduced in UNIV 1201.
4. Student Government Association – provides a direct line of communication with students that promotes democratic engagement through peer-to-peer encouragement and provides accurate information on diverse issues.
5. Greek Council – in alignment with the organizational founding missions of its individual members, the Greek Council hosts events related to democratic engagement and educates and encourages its members to be democratically engaged. Greek Council will also host various events related to democratic engagement during Hazing Prevention Week.
6. Encourage connections between civic-based campus events and voting, including promotion of civic opportunities with Campus Vote Project, Ask Every Student, Texas Voters Summit, MOVE Texas, etc.

7. Coordinate and host debates/forums for local and primary elections.
8. Incorporate democratic engagement and education to TAMIU's Signature Programs of Welcome Week, Involvement Week, First Gen Week, Welcome Back Week, and Spirit Week.
9. Provide unique opportunities to learn about voter engagement – seminars, informational sessions, programs, speaker series, and other engagement opportunities.
10. Coordinate and host a Volunteer Deputy Registrar Class at TAMIU for students that will be registering others to vote. Set up of this class/session must be arranged with the Webb County Elections Office by the first week of school to give enough time to make any accommodations necessary.
11. Creation of a Voter's Guide detailing various races
12. Hosting of local city-council and Mayoral debates
13. Hiring a work study student specifically for Civic Learning and Voter Engagement

**B. Voter registration:**

- Provide a presentation highlighting TAMIU's multiple voter engagement efforts to all new Freshmen Students during our New Student Orientation Sessions throughout summer. This presentation will also serve as means of registering all our incoming freshmen class.
- Celebrate National Voter Registration Days (Sept. 17, 2024):
  - This fall, TAMIU will attract engagement towards voter registration through the National Voter Registration Day celebration on September 17, 2024, which will take place the same day as the commemoration of the U.S.' Constitution Day. National Voter Registration Day is a nonpartisan civic holiday celebrated in the U.S. to further expand the efforts of voter registration and democratic opportunities. The pursuits of the event are intended to set forth an increase in voter turnout efforts.
- Register 100+ students during TAMIU's NVRD campus takeover.
- Host (in partnership with MOVE and other TAMIU student organizations) multiple voter registration events during TAMIU's Signature Programs
- Increased Spring 2024 voter registration efforts in anticipation of the Spring 2024 primaries
- Increased Fall 2024 voter registration efforts to include 4 large scale voter registration efforts in coordination with the Student Government Association, Greek Association and MOVE Texas
- Social Media Efforts – our campus, student organization partners, and students utilize social media to inform students and community members of democratic engagement opportunities through creation of videos, flyers, and screen savers.
- Register 250+ students throughout each year in joint efforts with MOVE Texas

## Reporting

TAMIU's taskforce will use several options for reporting our results and for attracting participants to our democratic engagement efforts:

- Utilizing our Modern Campus/Presence platform program page to promote voter engagement opportunities.



- Maintenance of a “Civic Engagement” tab on TAMIU SOLE’s website that will cover voting resources, opportunities to get involved, our institution’s campus plans and resources, links to register to vote.
- Promote voter engagement opportunities reminders via our university’s newspaper (The Bridge)
- Use of digital signage on campus’ desktops, computers, television screens, etc.
- Updates via University’s and taskforce members social media pages (Facebook is by far the most popular among our students)
- Publishing of informational articles regarding our results on our university’s internet page
- Use of mass email that can reach all students and all professors.
- Use of mass text messaging system that reaches all students.
- Attendance at events

## **Evaluation**

The evaluation of our efforts is vital for progress and the implementation of new concepts. TAMIU’s taskforce will use several methods to evaluate our progress:

- TAMIU will continue to use NSLVE data to develop voting goals and evaluate voter participation progress. NSLVE’s comprehensiveness is incredibly useful in the identification of areas needing improvement. A student-led taskforce, in our opinion, helps in the addressing of these areas.
- Data collection for voter registration numbers are to be collected each time there is a tabling event or drive.
- Participation rates and program evaluations will be collected at each individual event.
- All this data will be discussed and addressed during our taskforce weekly meetings.