

# Texas A&M University at Galveston

## Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022-2023 Academic Year

### I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Ashton Whittington and Cadence Housmans, Texas A&M University at Galveston Action Plan 2022-2023 to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Texas A&M University at Galveston. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2022-2023 Academic Year, on and around our campus in Galveston, Texas.

The following groups will be leading this work at Texas A&M University at Galveston in order to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Undergraduate Students
- Faculty

### II. Leadership

Ashton Whittington | Democracy Fellow,  
Cadence Housmans | Democracy Fellow,  
Malarie Humble | Office of Student Affairs Advisor, will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus.

They will be supported in this work by:

- Shortly after being nominated as Democracy Fellows, we set to work growing a network of faculty and students willing to support civic engagement efforts on campus. Discussion with campus administration and faculty has revealed absolute support behind any efforts to promote civic engagement and voter education on campus. Many of those we have spoken to have expressed unconditional support in increasing activism and voter engagement within our relatively small campus population. Our campus also finds itself situated within a county currently under indictment from the United States Department of Justice. Following a redistricting plan presented regarding the reshaping of Galveston County, which Texas A&M at Galveston is situated in, the Justice Department filed suit regarding the violation of "Section 2 of

the Voting Rights Act by devising a redistricting plan that dismantles the only district in which Black and Hispanic voters had the opportunity to elect a candidate of choice to the county's governing body." With this lawsuit in action, an explanation was finally given regarding a previous rejection for the creation of a polling location on campus. With access to voting being significantly dampened with this decision, many faculty members obviously vie for accessibility for the student body.

- Our coalition, while supported by faculty and campus administration, is largely populated by student leaders on campus. With the support of the Student Government Association, we were able to access the majority of student leaders on campus directly. With many club presidents, representatives of majors on campus, and many other representatives for on-campus, veterans, diversity, etc. This coalition of trusted student leaders has allowed us to meet with campus organizations to further our reach with the student population directly. Many of the students that we were able to meet with for the semester of Spring 2022 were from diversity organizations, with the Justice Department's lawsuit creating much interest in civic engagement on campus.
- We look forward to meeting with more organizations both on and off-campus in the future. We hope to possibly meet with other Texas A&M University System School's Democracy Fellows to discuss student voter initiatives.

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:

- Representation from different parts of campus, including student leadership, Representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise, Trusted leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy, Leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus in to our work, Representation within our Student Government Association. Our group plans to meet Thursday in the Office of Student Affairs at 12:45.

In the event that our leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a succession plan in place. The succession plan for our campus employs the use of our Student Government Organization. It has been tradition for the Democracy Fellows to be selected after an interview process, with applicants being sourced from the student elected senate and executive branch. With our campuses lack of real experience with any large scale voter engagement organizations in recent years, the selection of applicants would most likely be extended only to more experienced student leaders.

We are also partnering with the following organizations from the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition to support our efforts on campus:

- After the Texas Voting Summit in the Spring Semester of 2022 our relatively new Democracy Fellow team was exposed to a large amount of resources and contacts with which to collaborate on future projects. We have applied and are actively seeking further interaction with other student vote initiatives. We were able to apply for and receive a grant from MTV to support our campus. We plan to utilize the resources provided to us to prepare our campus for the upcoming Gubernatorial election in Texas.

### III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrates commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state, "At Texas A&M University we adhere to the RELLIS system to promote the core Aggie values both on and off campus. Respect, Excellence, Leadership, Loyalty, Integrity, and Selfless Service constitute the core Aggie Values and every institution in the Texas A&M University System promotes these ideals amongst students. Civic learning and democratic engagement are consistent with each aspect of Aggie values. Respect to oneself and community, excellence as a citizen amongst a nation that seeks to support you, leadership amongst the student body, loyalty to one's nation through civic engagement and activism, integrity as a voter, and selfless service to support legislation and action that supports both yourself and society as a whole. Any number of reasoning finds some way for the Aggie core values to promote student engagement in democracy."

On campus, we've seen:

- Voter education resources
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Voter registration tables
- Signage promoting Election Day

On campus, we've experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Registering to vote

The emphasis on civic learning and democratic engagement could be increased.

### IV. Goals

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration.

We know our campus faces following challenges internally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- The voter engagement work on our campus is very siloed within one office.
- We have trouble getting students to come up to tabling events and interact with Democracy Fellows

We also know our campus faces the following challenges externally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- We don't have a working relationship with our local election office.
- Our state laws make it challenging to support student voter registration efforts.

With that said, we know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- We have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- We use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have sustainable or consistent funding.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We can engage student leaders for the leadership of our initiative.
- We have working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement.

With this in mind, we have set the three goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

Over the next academic year we would like to accomplish the following goals,

1. Meet with student organizations to educate the student body about upcoming local and national elections.
2. Inform the Student Body about the Justice Department Lawsuit and collect responses from students with their thoughts, to provide them to local election office in the hopes of receiving a polling location on campus.
3. Establish relationships with organizations and resources off-campus to better promote voting at upcoming events.

We have also set three goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

Over the next five years we would like to accomplish the following goals,

1. Establish a solid framework for future Democracy Fellows on our campus.
2. Build a new attitude on our campus towards voting and civic engagement.
3. Introduce voter education to the student body in a nonpartisan format.

## V. Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** in the **short term** (within the next year):

- We have met with numerous organizations on campus and have established contact with leadership from most of the leading student orgs on campus. We have spoken with the organizations regarding meeting in the coming semester and have been meeting with them gradually over time. We have also created infographics and posted them online while also establishing a social media presence aimed at both students on and off campus. We have also found success with registration events on campus in high traffic areas. During events like our Spring Fest and Earth Day we were able to bring in voter registrars from the local area to help students with registration in Galveston County.

These are tactics that we **plan to do** in the **short term**:

- We plan to continue meeting with organizations on campus and grow our social media presence. We also would like to really get the organizations on campus to promote voting without us being present. The lawsuit against Galveston County was big news within not only the state, but nationally within the ongoing conflict surrounding redistricting. The fact that weeks after its announcement, we were the ones to break the news to students being directly affected by the county, was a bit of a shock. Of course the students aren't at fault in this situation. Our campus is on an island off of an island, and voting rights isn't a pressing matter within the context of the degrees offered on campus. So getting the organizations on campus to promote civic engagement and education on their own volition would allow for both the normalization of student voter education, and the growth of the student body as engaged citizens.

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **short term**:

- We hope to grow our campuses relationship between students and civic activism, but we would also like to expand upon our relationship with local and national organizations seeking to support voting on campus. By collaborating for events and voter drives, as well as holding informational sessions and town halls, we believe that we can establish a relationship that could go on to benefit the campus after our time as Democracy Fellows is done.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** for the **long term** (beyond the next year):

- We have just begun to realize the potential of our role as Democracy Fellows on our campus. With the program having existed on our campus during the pandemic, nothing was really possible with the restrictions in place. But with the restrictions that previously halted any real civic innovation on our campus now lifted, we have the unique opportunity to connect students to a county that plays a pivotal role in state government. We have developed a framework of contacts and activities for future Democracy Fellows to utilize, following the plans and schedules created during our short time in the program. We have met with other campus representatives and other resources off campus in regards to helping our campus to get the resources it needs to successfully promote voting and civic engagement amongst the student body. We believe that we have laid a solid foundation for both our, and future Democracy Fellow's success.

These are tactics that we **want to do** in the **long term**:

- We plan to host tabling events and voter registration tables at all major events planned for the upcoming semester. We also plan to establish further contact with organizations on campus in regards to successfully implementing civic duty into their goals for members. This looks like voting events and informational sessions about candidates created by orgs in conjunction with Democracy Fellows. We also plan to invite speakers down to campus, candidates, election officials, and registrars willing to answer questions to students on campus. It is also important to note that we have already come into contact with willing speakers, and hope to further our relationship with them in the future.

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **long term**:

- We hope to implement all of the previously listed plans into our upcoming semesters either as Democracy Fellows or as students on campus. We also plan to create a club aimed at promoting student voting education and engagement in the long term. There are complications for us

regarding Democracy Fellows acting alone. We have found that funding and event support maybe easier found if we were to exist as an organization on campus.

## **VI. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)**

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data. Our most recent report is from December 2021, and provides data from the 2020 election. It also compares this data to that from the 2016 and 2018 election. The registration for 2020 is 83.3%. This is an improvement from 2016 and 2018's 77.5% and 79.1%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased.

Our most recent report is from December 2021, and provides data from the 2020 election. It also compares this data to that from 2016, and 2018. The voting rate on our campus in 2020 was 59.7%, surpassing 2016 and 2018's 37.8% and 31.3%. The voting rate of registered students on our campus is 71.6%. This is a huge contrast from previous percentages of 48.8% in 2016, and 39.6% in 2018. During this year, our voting rate was about the same as the national average.

Our NSLVE report gave us excellent data in regards to our relatively small Democracy Fellows presence on campus. The data regarding Voting by Field of Study was particularly interesting, and the trends presented well reflect the participation in on campus events by specific majors.

## **VII. Reporting & Evaluation**

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Email to members of our campus coalition
- Email to campus administration
- Email to Campus Vote Project

We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Release in a public statement
- Publish on Social Media for Student Viewing

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- Seeking out feedback throughout the action planning process from people outside of our action planning team