

Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi

Democratic Engagement Action Plan

2022-2023 academic year

I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by TAMU- CC Spring 2022 Democracy Fellows, Meagan Pendleton and Jameson Tidwell, as well as Dr. Sanne Rijkhoff, Assistant Professor of Political Science to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2022-2023 academic year, on and around our campus in Corpus Christi, Texas.

This Plan identifies influential individuals, resources, goals, and direction on how to accomplish said goals. Fellowship efforts will be directed towards TAMU-CC campus to promote civic engagement and awareness on campus for both in person and virtual attendees. Promoting civic engagement develops the skills necessary for Islanders to interact with other individuals, organizations, and larger communities. Being a part of a larger community is a primary institutional value here at TAMU-CC. This plan focuses on the electoral and legislative cycles that revolve biannually with the executive term deviations from the Spring of even years through the Spring of odd years. Tabling, events, and flyers (both physical and digital) are being used to promote civic engagement and awareness to reach a wide variety of campus attendees.

Undergraduate students and faculty will be leading this work at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections.

II. Leadership

Dr. Sanne Rijkhoff will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. These efforts, including those of the Democracy Fellows will be supported in this work by:

- Chair Department of Social Sciences
- Dean of College of Liberal Arts
- Faculty teaching in the core curriculum specifically POLS 2305 American Government and Politics, and POLS 2306 State and Local Politics.
- President of the Student Government Association who is a representative of all students on campus.
- The Division of Student Engagement and Success – currently they are mostly focused on student success in study and course goals. We like to establish closer ties to develop support for civic awareness and voter engagement.
- Various student orgs such as Islanders for Social Justice, Young Republicans, Young Democrats, Young Libertarians.

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 into our work

Our group, meaning Dr. Rijkhoff and the Democracy Fellows, plans to meet twice per month at Wednesday afternoon, in Bay Hall 345, which is the office of Dr. Rijkhoff.

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

- American Political Science Association (not official partnership)
- All In Campus Democracy Challenge
- Association of American Colleges & Universities (not official partnership)
- Campus Vote Project
- Fair Elections Center
- League of Women Voters of Texas
- Move Texas
- Vote Riders

III. Commitment

As stated in our mission statement, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is committed to becoming one of the leading centers of higher education in the Gulf of Mexico region while serving the intellectual, cultural, social, environmental, and economic needs of South Texas. As a result, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi will invigorate and strengthen the region and state through its educational programs, research initiatives and outreach efforts. Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is an expanding, doctoral-granting institution committed to preparing graduates for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship in the global community. We are dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, creative activity, and service. Our supportive, multicultural learning community provides undergraduate and graduate students with a challenging educational experience through residential, distance learning and international programs. The university's federal designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) provides a foundation for closing educational gaps, while its strategic location on the Gulf of Mexico and on the cultural border with Latin America provides a basis for gaining national and international prominence.

However, institutional support for civic engagement and learning on campus is primarily sourced from the TAMU-CC political science department. The political science courses are the major source of civic learning and engagement in both the general and co-curriculum.

On campus, we have seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- On campus polling place
- Voter registration tables
- Protests / rallies / walkouts
- Signage promoting Election Day
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On campus, we have experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- Deliberative dialogues

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

IV. Landscape

We do not have access to comprehensive demographic information about our student body at this time. In 2018, the total student enrollment was 11,929 with 3% being international students. Most of our students (53%) are between 18-21 years old (18% for 22-24, 12% for 25-29 and for 30-39, and 4% above

40 years). Regarding race and ethnicity, 48% of our students are Hispanic/Latinx, 37% are white, 5% are Black and 3% are Asian.

TAMU-CC campus assessment data by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). Internal support is limited, and external support is wavering with an infrequent presence of a polling location on campus. Civic engagement has been increasing with over a simple majority of eligible individuals voting. Directed efforts of the Democracy Fellowship and volunteers support growth in TAMU-CC civic learning and engagement via voter registration, civic awareness, and presentation events. Additional assistance may be found in financial support, personnel, and a consistent polling location available to the campus.

V. 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:

- We do not have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We do not have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We do not have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We do not use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is very siloed within one office.
- We do not have sustainable or consistent funding.
- Voter engagement is politicized, resulting in administrative reluctance to engage.

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

- We do not 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:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan mention civic learning and democratic engagement.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.

- We have passionate faculty that like to volunteer and spread the word and might be enthusiastic enough to help with the groundwork.

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

1. Educate students on topics related to civic awareness and democratic engagement specifically by listing National Voter Registration Day September 20, 2022, on the campus calendar, and informing students by email, social media, and through classroom presentations in the core curriculum.
2. Raise our institutional student voting rate from 37.8 % in 2018 to 40% in 2022.
3. Maintain overall student registration rate above 80%.

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

1. Become a Voter Friendly Campus.
2. Evaluate the institution's current efforts and develop a plan with university leadership (e.g., a presidential committee or incorporate it into SEAS student engagement and success) to address growth and improvement efforts for greater institutionalization and cultural change by December 2023.
3. Raise our institutional student voting rate from 56.7% to 60% in 2024 and 65% in 2028 (and 45% in 2026).

VI. 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):

- Promote and host debate watch parties.
- Joined NSLVE.
- Voter registration drives.
- Hold Braver Angels debates each semester to encourage civil discourse <https://www.goacta.org/initiatives/college-debates/>.

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

- Work with student newspaper and office of Marketing and Communication to launch series about youth voting.
- Campus wide email about the importance of voting.
- Promotion of registration and voting on campus social media account.
- Create, print, and post flyers promoting an upcoming election.
- Create direction signs to lead and guide students to the on-campus polling place.
- Distribute nonpartisan voter guide (with help from League of Women Voters).

- Legislative sessions watch parties to promote civic engagement and awareness by observing direct results of 2022 elections.

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

- Involve our mascot during Early Voting and on Election Day.
- Incorporate voter registration into process for student government elections.
- Incorporate voter registration into first year seminars and core curriculum.
- Work with residential life to incorporate voter engagement at the start of each semester.
- Work with the Campus Election Engagement Project.
- Host and promote roundtable discussions for students to share experiences.

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

- Establishing name recognition for the Democracy Fellowship on our campus by bringing this up in (individual) meetings, on social media, on the university website, and through our activities.
- Promote opportunities for students to become Deputy Volunteer Registrar and volunteer election workers.
- Support students to increase familiarity with local policies and procedures to best support campus civic engagement.

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

- Establish a university committee to institutionalize efforts (e.g., the President's committee for Islanders on Civic Awareness and Voter Engagement – with Island themed acronyms). Or include a civic awareness and voter engagement program within SEAS (the division of student engagement and success).
- Establish a product line with I-Vote (Islanders Vote) such as pens, stickers, t-shirts
- Place National Voter Registration Day and general Election Day on the university calendar
- Host non-partisan or bi-partisan debates with political candidates and incumbents about the importance of youth engagement and civic awareness.

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

- Become a Voter Friendly Campus.
- Visit with faculty about encouraging students to vote after each of their classes the week of Early Voting.
- Promote and host information sessions for students who are not eligible to vote but who want to get involved.
- Gain institutional support for civic awareness and democratic engagement initiatives.
- Include civic awareness and democratic engagement successes in the campus wide awards to recognize students, faculty, and staff.

VII. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2020. In 2020 our registration rate was 83.8%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased.

In 2020, our voting rate was 56.7% and our voting rate among registered students was 67.6%. During this year, our voting rate was lower than the national average.

Turnout increased by 18.6 in comparison to 2016. The largest increases were among 18-29 years old students - but these also had the lowest voting rates in 2016. The voting rate is 9.3 percent points below the national average of higher education institutions at 66%. TAMU-CC experienced a decrease in attendance, while voter turnout increased in all demographic categories except for the 17 percent point decrease for in-person voting on Election Day in November 2020, and a 4 percent point decrease in voter turnout from 74% to 70% for voters aged 50+. It is likely that the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic contributes to these decreases.

VIII. Reporting & Evaluation

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

- Email to direct supervisors of Dr. Rijkhoff to establish support and lead it up the administrative chain.
- Email to the President
- Email to the office of Marketing and Communications (MARCOM)

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

- Post on the campus website.
- Release in a public statement.
- Inform local TV stations of students' plans and accomplishments (as was done in 2020).

This Action Plan will be shared between TAMU-CC Democracy Fellows, faculty advisor Dr Sanne Rijkhoff, and community partners such as the Campus Vote Project and Civic Nation's ALL IN challenge.

This Action Plan and NSLVE reports may also be published publicly for civic awareness and transparency. The Action Plan is a guide to help direct efforts of the Democracy Fellowship and community partners to promote civic learning and engagement. The sharing of information is beneficial in developing partnerships and strategizing programs for a common goal.

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect.
- Integrating feedback collection into individual campus efforts.
- In depth discussions with the Democracy Fellows and our partners at Campus Vote Project to aid with best practices

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.
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly.
- Increasing visibility for "Islanders for Civic Awareness and Voter Engagement" on the university website and social media.

The purpose of the evaluation is to analyze the progress and accomplishments of the outlined strategies and goals. An evaluation must be performed by the start of the Spring semester 2023 by Democracy Fellows with assistance from the faculty advisor and possibly other community partners. Relative information may be completed events, and feedback from community members, because of engagement efforts.

With such a small presence on TAMU-CC campus any progress, completed event, coalition support, or feedback through engagement is considered significant success. Evaluation information may be shared similarly, with the Democracy Fellowship and other partners as needed.