



TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY
CENTRAL TEXAS™

ALL IN Democracy Challenge 2024 Plan Executive Summary

This plan is developed by students, faculty, staff, and community partners to communicate our strategy for increasing civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus over the course of the 2023-2024 academic year and into the 2024 presidential election. The plan will be coordinated by the Office of Student & Civic Engagement and the CTVotes organization. Though not intentionally detailed in this plan, our vision is to create a campus “ethos” of civic learning and democratic engagement by establishing civic engagement as a normal practice and tradition of the university.

Leadership

Prior to 2019, Texas A&M University-Central Texas’ (A&M-Central Texas) civic learning and democratic engagement efforts were largely distributed between various offices at the university without a central location or unified understanding of the institution’s goals and priorities related to civic learning and democratic engagement. In the fall of 2019, A&M-Central Texas formed a working group consisting of university faculty, staff, students, and community members to gain a greater centralized perspective of the civic learning and democratic engagement efforts currently underway and those to be planned. The working group is centralized within the Division of Student Affairs and includes:

- Mr. Paul York, Associate Dean of Student Affairs (chairperson)
- Ms. Ali Mathe, Assistant Director for Student & Civic Engagement
- Dr. Morgan Lewing, Associate Professor – College of Education and Human Development
 - Chair, American Democracy Project @ Texas A&M University-Central Texas
- Mr. Pat Venkatachala Sonti, Graduate Student – Liberal Studies
- Ms. Kirstin Martinez, Senior – Liberal Studies
- Mr. Douglas Sauer, Student Government President, Senior - Chemistry

Community Partners. As part of our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts we partner with the following external partners:

- Bell County Board of Elections
- Texas League of Women Voters – Killeen

Commitment

In 2012, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) released the National Task Force on Civic Learning & Engagement report, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future*. In this influential report, AAC&U challenges colleges and universities to renew their commitment to civic learning and engagement, foster a civic ethos across all components of the institution and its culture, make civic literacy a core expectation for all students, engage in civic inquiry across the curriculum, and advance civic action as a lifelong practice.

The SLSV coalition asserts “a public institutional commitment is critical for improvement across campus; it signals to all stake holders that these efforts are significant and long-term.”¹

[A&M-Central Texas Mission](#)

A&M-Central Texas “is committed to high quality, rigorous, and innovative educational programs delivered in a variety of instructional modes to a diverse student population through exceptional teaching, service, and applied scholarship. With an emphasis on community engagement, the university employs emerging technology to enhance student learning and to nurture its partnerships with regional community colleges, the military presence in its region, and the community at large.”²

[A&M-Central Texas Strategic Plan](#)

A&M-Central Texas’ 2018-2022 strategic plan, developed by the university’s University Council serving as the steering committee with feedback from Faculty Senate, Staff Council, the Student Government Association, the A&M-Central Texas Alumni Association, the President’s Regional Advisory Council, the University Foundation Board, the Killeen Economic Development Council, and the Off-Campus Development Committee, identifies a pathway toward excellence with five imperatives: academic excellence, student success, community engagement, access & pathway to higher education, and diversity & inclusion. The university recently welcomed a new interim president and will be engaging in a campus-wide strategic planning discussion.

The plan’s third imperative, Community Engagement, is central to the work in this plan and identifies two primary strategic goals:

1. (3.1) Prepare educated and engaged citizens that contribute to their community and enhance the vitality of the region.
2. (3.2) Serve as a central hub for building regional partnerships and supporting community-based research to advance defined social and economic initiatives.

¹ Strengthening American Democracy: A Guide for Developing an Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates Among College Students (Washington, DC: Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, 2019).

² Strategic Plan: 2018-2022. (Killeen, TX: Texas A&M University-Central Texas, 2018).

In order to meet these strategic goals, A&M-Central Texas identifies several strategies to guide the work of the institution:

Goal 3.1

Provide resources to support faculty in community engagement and to develop service-learning courses.

Develop a recognition program for faculty, staff, and students participating in community and civic engagement initiatives.

Engage with the community to develop programs that complement students' curricular and co-curricular activities.

Expand and strengthen the relationship between the Office of Career & Professional Development with business and industry in the outlying areas of our Central Texas region.

Prepare to apply for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification
Establish an Office of Civic and Community Engagement to coordinate and support community engagement activities on campus and in the community.

Goal 3.2

Develop active community advisory boards for each college and professional program.

Develop a regional, national, and global advisory board for online programs.

Establish a strong infrastructure for the University Center for Applied Research and Engagement (UCARE).

Increase the number of faculty and staff serving on local, state, and national boards or professional organizations by 20% by 2022.

[Division of Student Affairs Mission](#)

The Division of Student Affairs provides foundational support for the civic and democratic work of the institution. Student Affairs' mission reaffirms the university's mission to community engagement by enriching "the quality of campus life through innovative student-centered programs that foster service, diversity and integrity" and by providing opportunities to "engage socially, professionally, and academically to enhance lifelong learning."

[Division of Student Affairs Strategic Plan](#)

The strategic plan for the Division of Student Affairs “employed the University Five-Year Strategic Plan as a foundation, and to ensure stakeholder buy-in the strategic plan was further enhanced through student recommendations and a Student Affairs Leadership Team” consisting of representatives from each office within the division. The plan establishes three imperatives: enhance student success and career connectedness, strengthen a sense of community, and provide leadership for civic and community engagement.

Two of the division’s strategic imperatives—strengthen a sense of community and provide leadership for civic and community engagement—are central to our work:

Imperative Two: Strengthen a Sense of Community

Students have consistently assigned a high ranking to the need for an enhanced sense of community at A&M-Central Texas. Two themes have consistently emerged in the feedback provided to the division and the strategic plan development group are the need for greater student voice in institutional decision-making and the desire for increased partnerships with the regional community to achieve common goals.

Goal 2d. Emphasize a students’ sense of community

- Create opportunities for regular dialogue between students and the senior leadership of the university
- Ensure partnerships are created that propel civic and community engagement initiatives across the division

Imperative Three: Provide Leadership in Civic and Community Engagement

Law professor Thomas Ehrlich states, “civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes.”³ Institutions of higher education are called to engage students in civic responsibility to create future leaders in communities. The division is committed to creating opportunities for students to engage their communities fully as partners in the learning process.

Goal 3a. Prepare for the 2024 application for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

- Develop institutional capacity for monitoring and measuring community engagement activities and perceptions of community engagement
- Ensure community engagement initiatives within student research are implemented and present in the continuous improvement process
- Ensure community engagement initiatives within study abroad programs are implemented and present in the continuous improvement process

³ Thomas Ehrlich, *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Oryx Press, 2000), iv.

- Ensure community engagement initiatives within student organizations and volunteer efforts are implemented and present in the continuous improvement process
- Embed the Civic Engagement AAC&U VALUE rubric and associated learning outcomes across the division to assess and demonstrate civic learning

Goal 3b. Continue to develop students as ethical leaders and positive change agents who feel empowered to positively contribute to their local and global community

- Implement a university “day of service” led by students
- Leverage student involvement software to provide co-curricular transcripts documenting leadership, service, internships, and engagement of students
- Develop leadership development training and certificate opportunities
- Create a student-led service proposal initiative in which students accomplish large-scale community service projects
- Provide opportunities within study abroad programs in which students can better understand their strengths to promote greater positive cognitive and interpersonal growth

Goal 3c. Leverage external partnerships to enhance Student Affairs’ initiatives

- Include community partners in the biennial alcohol and other drug review and implementation of future programming
- Establish a community engagement advisory board that provides input to the institution’s efforts and areas of focus in regard to service-learning and civic engagement
- Have each functional area within Student Affairs develop key strategies in enhancing partnerships within the community in the continuous improvement process

Though A&M-Central Texas does have a significant commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement, we do experience challenges to our commitment. As an upper-division institution, many of our students are older than the typical 18-to-24-year-old university population and experience barriers that prevent them from being fully engaged related to family, finances, and employment. Additionally, the unique context of public universities in the State of Texas does cause the institution some trepidation surrounding voter education and engagement.

Landscape

A&M-Central Texas joined the Texas A&M University System in 2009. Until 2016, democratic engagement efforts have been somewhat periodic and decentralized. Additionally, many of the activities and initiatives currently understood to be part of our civic learning and democratic engagement plan were not originally perceived as supporting the community and democratic engagement portion of our mission. For instance, since 2015, the Division of Student Affairs has supported the BECOME Poverty Simulation – providing students with an experiential learning

opportunity wherein they experience homelessness in downtown Austin, Texas for a night while engaging the homeless community and learning about resources and ways they can make a difference locally. Now, thanks to the collaborative efforts of groups and faculty and staff identified in this report, A&M-Central Texas will have a more focused and accurate picture of its civic learning and democratic engagement landscape.

Students. We are an upper-division institution with a growing contingent of Early College High School students. We recently were designated a Hispanic Serving Institution and have the below breakdowns in our student population. Understanding these breakdowns and the demographics of our NSLVE data are vital to ensuring we are reaching our students and helping to remove barriers as possible. An example of how we utilize our student demographics and our NSLVE data is the decision to make Spanish language resources available for every English language resource we make available.

Our Fall 2023 HC: 2253

Race/Ethnicity

Hispanic or LatinX	640
White	832
African American or Black	540
Asian	103
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	20
American Indian or Alaskan Native	11
International	12
More than 2 races	52
Not reported	43

Age

18 – 24	718
25 – 35	812
36 – 50	594
51+	127

Military Affiliation

Active Duty	88
Veteran	442
Spouse	201
Child	338
No Affiliation	1184

Campus Learning Outcomes. The Texas A&M University System has established the following learning outcomes as a common set of learning outcomes within the University System: ethical & social responsibility, globalization & diversity, specific knowledge, integration, communication, and problem solving & critical thinking. As a campus, we have identified the learning outcomes below supporting our civic learning and democratic engagement work:

Ethical & Social Responsibility: Students will articulate multiple cultural perspectives in local, national, and global communities. Students will identify and analyze social and ethical challenges, including resolutions.

Globalization & Diversity: Students will utilize multidisciplinary perspectives to evaluate initiatives that have been employed to address global issues. Students will describe the nature of global interdependence and its impacts. Students will articulate an understanding of cultural differences from diverse perspectives in specific disciplines.

Problem Solving & Critical Thinking: Students will construct well-supported, clearly articulated, and sustained arguments. Students will demonstrate an ability to justify conclusions based on evidence. Students will demonstrate the ability to identify, analyze and formulate solutions to complex problems.

Service-Learning. Through our service-learning opportunities, which are course-based, credit-bearing, educational experiences in which students learn to relate theory to practice, students participate in service or other engagement activity at diverse organizations throughout the community. These service-learning courses span the curriculum and include the following course titles: Business Ethics, Marriage & Family Therapy Ethics, Community Health Nursing, Environmental Sociology, Introduction to Social Work, Child Welfare, Methods & Practices in Counseling, and Stress & Social Work.

Internal Barriers

Funding. One of the most significant barriers we face, simultaneously internal and external, is the availability of funding for civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. As a young institution, we do not have the alumni and philanthropic base enjoyed by other more established institutions. Further, like many state institutions, we have experienced significant changes in state appropriations which resulted in colleges within the university reducing the number of course offerings. Subsequently, the total headcount supported by the institution has been impacted, resulting in a reduction in the total number of students paying mandatory fees to support civic and democratic programs and engagement. COVID-19 also significantly impacted our enrollment and efforts to reach our students.

Student Involvement. Another significant internal barrier to A&M-Central Texas' success in civic learning and democratic engagement is the lack of involvement by students. A&M-Central Texas is an upper-division institution and many of our students are considered "nontraditional" in part because they are older than the typical 18-24-year-old range, have spouses and dependents, and/or full-time work. These factors, along with the lack of residence life on campus, create significant barriers for student involvement. We do not currently have any student organizations aligned with political parties or ideological concepts.

External Barriers

2021 S.B. 1. In 2021, the Texas Legislature passed, and Governor Greg Abbott signed, S.B. 1 into law resulting in significant changes in how Texas votes.

Enhanced poll watcher protections and mandatory training. S.B. 1 gave partisan poll watchers greater autonomy in the polling area, with the exception of at an individual polling station while a voter is casting their ballot. The confusion around this clause in the law will increase the trepidation minoritized communities feel when approaching a polling location.

Updated ID requirements when voting by mail. During COVID-19 and the 2020 state and federal election, voting by mail was a popular method of voting for many in Texas, and the United States. S.B. 1 requires a voter's full driver license number or last four digits of the voter's Social Security number and the information must match what is already on file for the voter.

A ban on in-person drive-thru voting. While Harris County was the primary county engaging in drive-thru voting, the Texas Legislature placed a complete ban on conducting drive-thru voting.

Current Campus Efforts

Voter Registration. The Office of Student & Civic Engagement has facilitated voter registration and "Get to the Polls" activities since 2013 with more intentional efforts beginning in 2017 preparing for the 2018 midterms and the 2020 presidential election. We have found success in emphasizing local and state elections to encourage students to get to the polls. CTVotes is our branded, institution-wide voter registration and voter education initiative and student group. With coordination from the Office of Student & Civic Engagement, CTVotes organizes voter registration tables and sidewalk talks. Additionally, Student & Civic Engagement staff serve as volunteer voter registrars for Bell County.

Voter Education. We work with the Texas League of Women Voters – Bell County to provide students with nonpartisan information related to ballot measures, candidates, etc. We strive to

ensure we have resources available to primarily English-speaking students and primarily Spanish-speaking students.

National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) Data

Voting Rate of Registered Students		
2016 (Presidential)	67.2%	-
2018 (Midterm)	57.8%	-
2020 (Presidential)	73.2%	6%
2022 (Midterm)	GOAL: 60% (We are still waiting on our 2022 NSLVE data)	
2024 (Presidential)	GOAL: 76%	

Registration Rate of A&M-Central Texas Students		
2016 (Presidential)	76.6%	-
2018 (Midterm)	77.8%	-
2020 (Presidential)	81.2%	4.6%
2022 (Midterm)	GOAL: 83% (We are still waiting on our 2022 NSLVE data)	
2024 (Presidential)	GOAL: 85%	

Voting Rate		
2016 (Presidential)	51.5%	-
2018 (Midterm)	45.0%	-
2020 (Presidential)	59.4%	7.9%
2022 (Midterm)	GOAL: 51% (We are still waiting on our 2022 NSLVE data)	
2024 (Presidential)	GOAL: 64%	

Goals

Long-Term

A&M-Central Texas supports an active student citizenry and is committed to encouraging students' engagement as active citizens beyond their graduation. We seek to make civic learning and democratic engagement a habit for all students. To move us forward to achieving our goal between 2022 and 2032, we will work to:

- Leverage growth in younger student populations to encourage more student-led engagement and initiatives.

- Institutionalize our civic engagement initiatives by developing civic and democratic engagement traditions and events and linking those to the learning outcomes established by the university and the Texas A&M University System.
- Strive for and achieve gold status in the ALL-IN Democracy Challenge and consistently increase registration and voting rates year over year.

Short-Term

The return to campus after our response to COVID-19 provided us with great momentum to reinvigorate our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. Our short-term goals will focus our efforts on the 2022 midterm election and the 2024 presidential election.

Presidential Election

- Increase our 2024 presidential voting rate of registered students to 76% (a 2.8% increase from the 2020 presidential election).
- Increase our 2024 presidential registration rate to 85% (a 3.8% increase from the 2020 presidential).
- Increase our 2024 presidential voting rate to 64% (a 4.6% increase from the 2020 presidential election).

Strategy

Voter Registration

- TurboVote
 - We recently re-signed a multi-year agreement with Democracy Works, the entity behind TurboVote. We have integrated TurboVote into our Engage platform by Anthology, into our Canvas learning management platform, and into our online orientation platform. We additionally will use TurboVote for targeted social media and campus-wide email marketing.
- Orientation
 - The Office of Student & Civic Engagement oversees orientation efforts on our campus. This office is additionally responsible for coordinating our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. The opportunity to register to vote has been added to the orientation experience.
- Constitution Day
 - Voter registration tables will be available in Founder's Hall, Heritage Hall, and Warrior Hall. Additionally, the University Library will display texts about voting and responsible citizenry.
- National Voter Registration Day
 - Student & Civic Engagement is partnering with the University Writing Center and the Killeen Chapter of the NAACP on hosting a voter registration drive.

- Social Norming
 - A social norming campaign will be developed to highlight student voting and encourage a sense of competition amongst the student body.

Voter Education

- University Mass Email
 - A mass email will be sent to all students regarding voter information and registration the 2nd class day each semester and will include links to our TurboVote page and to SCE's website.
- Voter Information Flyers
 - Non-partisan voter information flyers, in both Spanish and English, will be regularly distributed around campus with non-partisan details on issues, registration information, and promoting early voting.
- Voter Education Week – October 3 – 7th
 - We will host a voter registration drive on October 3, send students information on requesting a mail-in ballot on October 4, send a mass email to students about making a voting plan on October 5, share an example ballot and “what’s on the ballot” with students on October 6, and send students information on being more active in voting and elections on October 7.

Voter Participation

- TurboVote
 - We will continue to leverage our relationship with TurboVote by Democracy Works to communicate with students regarding upcoming primaries and election dates.
- Democracy Wall/Rolling Grease Boards
 - Each semester we utilize white grease boards around campus to ask students to respond to one question or topic related to civic learning and democratic engagement or social issue. Two weeks prior to each election or primary, we will post an example ballot, Bell County polling locations, and non-partisan information related to what is on the ballot.
- Early Voting
 - We will send messages to all students encouraging them to vote early and to make a plan to vote early. This is supported by our Voter Education Week strategy.
- Debate Watch Parties
 - Student & Civic Engagement will host debate watch parties for state and federal elections with debates.
- Election Results Watch Party
 - We will host a watch party to reveal the election results on campus.

Reporting

Our full plan, along with our NSLVE data and NASPA LEAD information is shared on the Student & Civic Engagement's institutional public-facing webpage. We will work with institutional actors to ensure greater availability of this data and our collected data. This plan will inevitably change as we progress through each semester and encounter new and different challenges than those we currently predict. As we encounter challenges and determine the plan needs to be updated, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs will be primarily responsible for making, documenting, and communicating those updates to the appropriate stakeholders.

In addition to being posted on the website, this plan will be electronically sent to all faculty, staff, and students.

The same procedure will apply to the results of this plan and all evaluation done to indicate efforts on goals.

Evaluation

- We will debrief after every event and at the end of each semester to establish what went well and what are our opportunities to improve?
- We will track voter registration numbers and assess which activities were most effective at encouraging student registration.
- At the end of each semester, a random selection of 50 students will be sent a three-question survey asking:
 1. The university provided me with information on how to register to vote
 2. The university encourages me to be an active citizen in our democracy
 3. I want to be in the running for a \$50.00 gift card
- We will continue our participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) to track student voting rates.
- We will get photographic documentation of students engaging in the Democracy Wall strategy.