

The University of Oklahoma - Norman

Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Campus Action Plan

2024-2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Oklahoma's Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Campus Action Plan outlined here has been meticulously developed by the dedicated members and director of the OU Civic Engagement Fellowship at the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center. Crafted by the 2024-25 Civic Engagement Fellows, Michael Stoyak and Jhanvi Patel, in collaboration with Civic Engagement Director Faith Martin, this plan serves as a comprehensive blueprint for fostering increased civic engagement across the OU community while amplifying existing initiatives on campus.

Informed by valuable feedback from past election cycles and insights derived from NSLVE, this plan is rooted in our shared experiences and driven by the ambition to affect substantial change. Our primary objective is to achieve a notable increase in overall voter participation by 15 percent.

To implement this action plan, we will provide education on civic engagement and voter registration procedures to various on-campus organizations. This will ensure widespread participation and alignment with our goals. We will closely monitor the Oklahoma Votes program and both on- and off-campus registration and mobilization efforts. This ongoing evaluation, informed by real-time data and feedback, will allow us to continually improve our strategies.

At the core of the OU Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Campus Action Plan lie our fundamental principles of registration, education, and mobilization. To achieve success in these areas, the plan outlines strategies for implementing an on-campus early voting location, absentee voting education initiatives, candidate education through speaker series and social media campaigns, multiple registration drives facilitated by various organizations, and the integration of updated campus modules to seamlessly incorporate civic education into classroom curricula. These efforts are complemented by the orchestration of large-scale events dedicated to fostering civic engagement and education, reinforcing our commitment to empowering our university community to become active participants in our democratic process.

LEADERSHIP

The Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center

- Director: Dr. Michael H. Crespin
- *Mission*: Strengthen representative democracy through scholarship, learning, and service.
- *Established* 1979 by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and the Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma.
- *Tribute*: Honoring Carl Albert, a native Oklahoman, University of Oklahoma alumnus, Rhodes Scholar, and 46th Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.
- *Opportunities*: Offers leadership opportunities such as the Carl Albert Civic Engagement Fellowship, the Carl Albert Graduate Fellowship, Capitol Scholars (classroom plus semester internship at state capitol), and Community Scholars (classroom plus semester community-centered internship.)

Center Leadership

- Dr. Michael Crespin: Director and Curator
- Faith Martin: Director, Civic Engagement

Partnerships

- Liaison with Close Up Foundation, Students Learn Student Vote Coalition, and the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge.

Civic Engagement Fellows (2023-2024)

- Michael Stoyak: Student, Civic Engagement Fellow
- Savannah Slayton: Student, Programming Chair
- Jordan Brown: Student, Membership Chair
- Jhanvi Patel: Student, Coalition Outreach Chair
- Annie Mullins: Student, Public Relations Chair

Civic Engagement Fellows (2024-2025)

- Michael Stoyak: Student, Civic Engagement Fellow
- Jhanvi Patel: Student, Civic Engagement Fellow
- Ally Khrais, Student, Programming Chair
- Hope Wear: Student, Membership Chair
- Randi Wright: Student, Coalition Outreach Chair
- Mercer Martin: Student, Public Relations Chair

Civic Engagement Fellows

- Selection: Two undergraduate students per academic year.
- Role: Co-chair Oklahoma Votes, leading a six-member student executive team to promote civic engagement on campus.

Oklahoma Votes (OK Votes)

- *Mission:* "Registration. Education. Mobilization."
- *Leadership:* Under the Carl Albert Civic Engagement Fellows.
- *Overview:* Oklahoma Votes is a campus-wide initiative to encourage students to register to vote and to participate in local, state, and national elections. The mission of Oklahoma Votes is "Registration. Education. Mobilization." Under the leadership of the Carl Albert Civic Engagement Fellows, Oklahoma Votes coordinates voter registration drives and other civic engagement efforts on OU's campus.
- *Activities:* Voter registration drives and other civic engagement efforts.

OK Votes Leadership Succession Plan

- Process: Application and interview for incoming chairs, managed by Faith Martin and current Civic Engagement Fellows.
- Selection Criteria: Diversity in majors, interests, and demographics.
- Transition: Outgoing team conducts meetings with the incoming team and a one day retreat the week before Fall semester begins.

OK Votes Partnerships

Student Groups include Latinos Unidos, Oklahoma Intercollegiate Legislature, Student Government Association, College Democrats of OU, College Republicans of OU, Ignite, Rock the Native Vote, Henderson Scholars, Student Leftist Organization, Political Science Club.

Faculty and Departments

Anne and Henry Zarrow College of Social Work, Dodge Family College of Arts & Sciences Leadership Scholars, African and African American Studies Department, Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, Headington College, OU Political Science Department, and University College Gateway to College Learning.

Student Affairs and Student Life Partners

Athletics, Housing & Food Services, Independent Greek Council, Interfraternity Council, Multicultural Greek Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, President's Leadership Class, Sooner Orientation Weekend, Student Government and Student Organization Services, What To Do at OU, Howdy Week

Community Partners

Rotary Club of Norman, Oklahoma Elected Officials (State Representatives Annie Menz, Cyndi Munson, State Senator Mary Boren and US Representative Tom Cole.)

Tabling Locations

Bizzell Memorial Library, Dunham College, Headington College, Headington Hall, Oklahoma Memorial Union, Walker-Adams Mall, Athletic practices, the Pride of Oklahoma marching band orientation.

Goals of OK Votes Leadership

Promote Diverse Representation: Amplify voices from various marginalized groups to enhance civic engagement and empower student communities.

Form a Collaborative Working Group: Create an interdisciplinary working group involving staff and faculty from Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and other relevant departments to foster civic engagement as part of the 2024-25 campus plan. Members will include the Directors and Fellows listed above as well as Dr. David Surratt, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students; George Ahmandi, Director of Student Government and Organizations; Suni Cicekli, Associate Athletic Director - People, Culture & Belonging; and, Becky Barker, Director, Leadership Development and Volunteerism.

COMMITMENT

At the University of Oklahoma, community engagement and civic learning are fundamental priorities. Our mission is “to provide the best possible educational experience for our students through excellence in teaching, research and creative activity, and service to the state and society.” Across campus, numerous departments and individuals actively support and engage in programs, coursework, research, and initiatives that advance civic engagement.

To institutionalize civic engagement, we have developed voter informational modules in Canvas for our administration, faculty, and students. Our campus is designated as a Voter Friendly Campus through partnerships with NASPA and Campus Vote Project. Additionally, our President and Provost have committed to the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge for the last two years.

The Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center (Center) serves as the hub for coordinating civic education, political participation, and community engagement. Its mission is to strengthen representative democracy through engaged and informed citizens. The Center promotes extensive student participation in community and civic engagement through voter registration, education, and mobilization efforts.

While civic learning and democratic engagement are not yet formalized as general learning outcomes, students have ample opportunities to engage in civic education, community involvement, and political participation.

The Center is essential in institutionalizing voter engagement on campus. Students rely on the Center for support in their civic and community activities, including voter registration, absentee ballot requests, and access to nonpartisan voting and candidate information.

Beyond the Center, civic learning and democratic engagement are robustly supported by the Political Science department, panhellenic programs, and the Student Government Association. These entities emphasize integrating civic education throughout the campus via classroom curriculum, extracurricular

activities, and events featuring civically engaged individuals such as elected officials.

Civic learning and democratic engagement are rapidly expanding at OU, yet there remains significant potential for growth. The Carl Albert Center leads ongoing efforts to embed these practices into the campus culture.

LANDSCAPE

The landscape of civic engagement among young people in Oklahoma presents significant challenges. Recent data from the State Election Board reveals a troubling trend: less than a quarter of registered voters aged 30 and under participated in the last November election. Even more concerning, fewer than 10% exercised their voting rights in March 2023 to decide on State Question 820, a pivotal initiative concerning marijuana legalization and related convictions. This trend extends beyond Oklahoma, with neighboring Texas reporting only a 25% turnout among voters aged 18-29 in the 2022 midterm election.

The decline in young voter participation over recent years is particularly alarming. While about 31% of voters aged 30 and younger participated in the 2018 midterm election, subsequent years have seen a decline in interest. This underscores the urgent need to address barriers to youth participation in the electoral process.

Peter de Guzman, a researcher with the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University, highlights several inherent challenges young people face in becoming civically engaged. These include frequent moves, limited political experience, and transportation issues. Young people also tend to be a less reliable population for political organizations to reach, with nearly half of respondents to a CIRCLE survey stating they were not contacted by either the Trump or Biden campaigns during the 2020 election.

“When you’re a young person who’s never registered and not on a voter roll, you’re going to be harder to locate and more expensive to contact,” de Guzman explains. This often results in a neglect of outreach to young people, further exacerbating their low participation rates.

The consequences of low youth voter turnout are profound, especially considering the significant representation gap in legislative bodies. With only seven out of 149 state representatives and senators in Oklahoma aged 30 or younger, and the

average age of legislative members nearing 53, there is a palpable lack of representation for young voices in policymaking.

Moreover, voter registration rates among young Oklahomans are subpar, with over a third of individuals aged 18 to 30 not registered to vote. This highlights the need for streamlined and easily accessible registration processes to ensure that potential voters do not encounter unnecessary barriers.

While online voter registration was introduced in Oklahoma in the summer of 2023, it has faced numerous issues, including at one point requiring users to fill out forms online, print them, and mail them in, rendering it unreliable at best. It is imperative to focus on alternative strategies to engage young voters and emphasize the collective power of their voices in shaping the future of our democracy.

The competitiveness of races on the ballot can also influence turnout. In Oklahoma, nearly 70% of state House and Senate races in the last election were decided during the candidate filing period or single-party primaries, limiting voter engagement opportunities. Many young Oklahomans feel disillusioned with the political process, believing their votes do not matter. This sentiment can lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of disengagement and underrepresentation, especially in a state with significant legislative barriers to voting.

Our NSLVE 2022 report shows that we had increases in voting among our white and black student populations, but our Native American and Hispanic populations did not increase at the same rate. Additionally, participation rates in the OU Colleges of Business, Computer and Information Systems, and Architecture remain in the teens, indicating a need for improvement in these areas.

Despite these challenges, there is hope. Through our concerted efforts on the OU campus, we have effectively countered this trend. Since 2018, our outreach endeavors have significantly raised voting participation rates from 30% to an impressive 60%.

The goal of this action plan is to build on the momentum of increasing student voting rates. By addressing barriers, expanding targeted outreach, and fostering a more inclusive campus climate for civic engagement, OU aims to ensure every eligible student has the opportunity to vote and participate meaningfully in the democratic process.

GOALS

Goal 1: Address Accessibility Barriers

- Establish an On-Campus Early Voting Location: We are in discussions with the local election board and have secured a support resolution from Student Congress, a letter of support from OU President Joe Harroz, and backing from State Senator Mary Boren and U.S. Representative Tom Cole.
- Disseminate Registration and Election Information: Share registration dates, election dates, and absentee ballot information through the OU Voting website, Canvas modules, social media outreach, and tabling events.
- Centralize Transportation to Polling Stations: Implement initiatives like "Stroll to the Polls" and involve athletic teams that build on their registration drive themes, such as "Row to the Polls" and "Flip to the Polls."

Goal 2: Cultivate Informed Students – Enhance Online and On-Campus Education

- Revamp the Canvas Module: Update the module with comprehensive voter information and prominently display banners for increased visibility.
- Increase On-Campus Visibility: Use strategic signage and engagement initiatives to raise awareness. Have a monthly column in the college newspaper.
- Institutionalize Resources in Classroom Settings: Embed civic engagement resources into classroom settings for widespread impact.

Goal 3: Implement the Ask Every Student Initiative

- Forge Partnerships with Housing and First-Year Programs: Encourage early voter registration during students' initial campus experiences.
- Collaborate with Tribal Communities: Work to encourage student engagement and voter registration.
- Target Academic Colleges with Low Voter Registration Rates: Focus outreach on colleges identified in the NSLVE report as having the lowest voter registration rates. Collaborate with designated faculty to develop tailored civic engagement plans.

Goal 4: Expand Coalition Reach

- Partner with Student Affairs: Acquire updated lists of student organizations and their leaders.
- Engage Student Organizations: Present engagement opportunities at Registered Student Organization (RSO) fairs and other events.
- Connect with Community Partners: Establish relationships with relevant community partners to strengthen coalition efforts.

Goal 5: Foster Institutional Buy-In

- Integrate Civic Engagement into Course Syllabi: Embed civic responsibility within the academic curriculum.
- Utilize Athletics as a Platform: Leverage the broad reach and influence of athletics to disseminate civic engagement messages.
- Utilize OU's Volunteerism department: Promote civic engagement with the department's local opportunities, be it poll working, knocking doors/working in elections, tutoring in local schools and shelters, community projects, etc. The more students feel connected to the community, the more they will want to vote to protect and/or invest in that community,

STRATEGY

Our comprehensive voter education strategy is designed to instill a robust sense of civic duty among our student body and ensure their active participation in the democratic process. With a focus on accessibility, engagement, and empowerment, we have developed a multifaceted approach that encompasses various initiatives and partnerships.

Voter Registration:

Participation in the Ask Every Student initiative serves as the foundation of our voter registration efforts. Tabling locations across campus will provide not only Oklahoma and National voter registration forms but also access to computers and tablets for online registration and absentee ballot requests. Our dedicated team of Civic Engagement Fellows, along with the Oklahoma Votes Team and volunteers and a notary public, will be stationed at strategic points across campus to engage students, answer questions, and facilitate the registration process. We will also extend our reach to residential colleges, the Bizzell Memorial Library, and the Oklahoma Memorial Union, ensuring that no corner of campus is left untouched.

National Voter Registration Day:

This event will be a cornerstone of our voter registration and mobilization efforts. We have reserved four tabling spaces on campus and will provide registration materials for Oklahoma and the top six states where our out-of-state students originate, as well as Spanish-speaking volunteers at each table.

In partnership with our broader coalition, we will distribute branded "I am a voter" stickers and pens, along with laminated social media signs for participants to hold and post with. These efforts are designed to enhance visibility and engagement, making NVRD a highly impactful event for our university community.

Absentee Voter Drive:

In recognition of the diverse residency of our student population, we are implementing an ambitious absentee voter drive targeting the top six states where our students reside. Each designated table will be staffed with a notary and a Spanish-speaking student, ensuring that language barriers and notarial requirements do not hinder participation.

Early Polling Place on Campus and Poll Worker Training:

To address common barriers such as transportation and scheduling conflicts, we are working to secure an on-campus early voting location. We have support from Student Congress, Dean of Students, Dr. David Surratt, other campus administrators and local elected officials. Additionally, we aim to train students as poll workers. By deploying them at the polling station, we hope to facilitate the voting process and empower students to actively contribute to the electoral infrastructure.

Athletic Team Drives and Voting Promotion:

Harnessing the spirit of camaraderie and teamwork, we are collaborating with various athletic teams to organize specialized voter registration drives. From "Row to the Polls" with our rowing team to "Flip to the Polls" with gymnastics, and "March to the Polls" with the Pride of Oklahoma marching band, these initiatives aim to infuse the voter registration process with excitement and energy. As it is our first year in the larger Southeastern Conference (SEC,) we also want to leverage athletics' expanded reach and influence using coaches and popular players in "I am a voter" social media posts and videos.

Student Orientation Weekend Involvement Fair / Howdy Week:

The excitement of Student Orientation Weekend and Howdy Week provide an ideal backdrop for our voter registration efforts. At the Involvement Fair, where new students gather to explore campus resources, our Civic Engagement Fellows will set up a booth dedicated to registering students to vote. This event has consistently proven to be a catalyst for increased registration numbers and fosters a sense of civic responsibility among our newest arrivals.

In 2024, we will be participating in Howdy Week for the first time, where all freshmen are introduced to OU. By incorporating our voter registration education and availability during this week, we aim to create a normative voting culture and increase participation among new students.

Communication with Political Science Professors and Targeted Professors in Traditionally Lower Voter Turnout Colleges:

Recognizing the pivotal role of academic engagement, our Civic Engagement Fellows are proactively reaching out to Political Science professors and the Colleges of Business, Architecture, and Computer Sciences. By scheduling classroom visits, we aim to register students to vote and educate them on the significance of their participation. These visits will include engaging presentations on OK Votes and the broader importance of civic engagement, fostering a culture of informed and active participation among students.

Voter Education Initiatives:

Throughout the academic year, the Civic Engagement Fellows in collaboration with our broader coalition, will curate a series of on-campus speaker events, including the popular Politics and Pizza series. These events will feature a diverse array of speakers ranging from professors and political candidates to legislative directors and campus staff. By providing comprehensive voter education, we aim to equip students with the knowledge and understanding necessary for meaningful participation in elections.

Social Media Campaign:

Harnessing the power of social media, we are launching a dynamic campaign aimed at encouraging students to educate themselves on different candidates, polling locations, and voting procedures. Through regular posts, we will provide information on polling locations, election dates, and voting reminders.

Institutional Support:

Our commitment to institutionalizing civic engagement is unwavering. We are actively engaging with university leadership to ensure that our efforts are supported at the highest level. Through advocacy and collaboration, we aim to integrate the production of civic-minded students into the university's strategic plan, cementing our commitment to nurturing engaged and informed citizens for years to come.

REPORTING

Our strategy for disseminating the campus plan and NSLVE data involves a multi-faceted approach to ensure broad visibility and engagement:

- 1. Digital Platforms:** The campus plan and NSLVE data will be published on the Oklahoma Votes website (ou.edu/voting) and shared through our social media channels. We will also leverage the social media platforms of partner organizations to broaden our reach.
- 2. On-Campus Engagement:** During the Spring semester, students participated in a poll and identified their top three political concerns. We will use this information to educate the student body on these issues and show them how they can get involved to make a difference through voting. Additionally, everyone will have access to the campus plan, data, and reports through the Oklahoma Votes website and social media pages. Oklahoma Votes events will also feature short presentations updating attendees on our civic engagement progress and goals. These events offer a chance for direct interaction and feedback from students.
- 3. University Communications:** We aim to collaborate with the University's communication department to disseminate information about our civic engagement efforts to alumni, faculty, and staff. This collaboration will include announcements on the university website, and features in university publications.
- 4. Institutional Collaboration:** We will work with institutional partners and our working group to enhance the availability of this data. This includes ensuring that data collected through our efforts is accessible and utilized for continuous improvement.
- 5. Student Government Association Involvement:** We will continue to work with the OU Student Government Association to amplify our plan and outreach through their networks.

6.Dynamic Updates: Recognizing that our plan will evolve, we will regularly update stakeholders on progress and changes. These updates will be shared through our website, social media, and events, ensuring transparency and responsiveness to new challenges and opportunities.

EVALUATION

We will assess the effectiveness of our voter engagement efforts through various metrics. Our goals are to measure the impact of each event on student engagement, gauge the helpfulness of these events to participants, and track these metrics against voter registration and turnout data from our NSLVE (National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement) reports.

Each event's success will be measured by:

- ***Voter Registrations***: Collecting and counting voter registration forms at each event, with data stored in the Oklahoma Votes Google drive to analyze trends.
- ***General Attendance***: Counting attendees or having them sign in at Pizza & Politics, candidate forums, and/or Election Watch parties, with attendance records also stored on Google drive for trend analysis.

These metrics will help us determine which events are most effective in registering voters and recruiting volunteers. For example, if "Pizza & Politics" events have lower attendance and registration compared to "Election Watch Parties," resources and efforts will be adjusted accordingly.

Evaluation of Institutionalization

Working with the university administration and faculty to institutionalize civic engagement is expected to increase attendance and voter registration. Continuous evaluation during and after implementation of this plan (measuring “clicks” of Canvas module) will enable Oklahoma Votes to adapt strategies to better meet student needs.

NSLVE Data

The University of Oklahoma has participated in NSLVE since its inception in 2012. This data provides insights into student voter registration and turnout, helping us evaluate our performance both locally and nationally across different election cycles. This historical data will guide future planning for voter registration and mobilization efforts.

Election Watch Parties

2024 is a presidential election year and we plan to leverage that to increase student interest and motivation. We will host election watch parties, including debate watch parties and a large election night event in collaboration with the Student Government Association, College Democrats of OU, and College Republicans of OU. These events will be evaluated based on turnout and student feedback.

Online Voter Registration

As of July 2023, Oklahomans can register to vote online and while the system is still being fine-tuned, it represents a significant advancement in making voter registration more accessible. This development will be closely monitored to ensure it contributes positively to our voter registration goals.

By continuously evaluating our initiatives and making data-driven adjustments, we aim to enhance the impact of our voter engagement efforts, ultimately increasing student participation in the democratic process.

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