

The University of Texas at Arlington



**All In American Democracy Challenge
Document:
Fall 2024**

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Overview-

The 2024-2025 Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan is developed to support student engagement at the University of Texas at Arlington. Given the students' interest in the current political situation, we expect a bigger turnout than in the previous election cycle.

At the University of Texas at Arlington, we care about our students' engagement and awareness in state, local, and federal elections. We want to provide the resources students need to exercise their right to vote in an informed and responsible manner.

Our areas of focus for our action plan are as follows.

- **Knowledge and Information:** We want to increase students' awareness of what's going on locally and nationally. We also want to spread information regarding the registration process, voting, getting to know the candidates, and policies and legislations that are being implemented or could potentially be.
- **Increasing Resources:** Providing resources to students can make the process much more beginner-friendly, avoid complications, and help students feel motivated to keep up with the news and elections.
- **Student engagement:** By engaging students, we can increase the number of individuals who will participate in elections at all levels. Providing resources and information regarding these matters will help students feel included in the process and, therefore, engaged.

Context and Team-

Student Government (SG) is an organization of approximately 80 Undergraduate and Graduate students whose mission is to accommodate and enact the best interests of the students of UTA. We are committed to ensuring that UTA's Student Body is civically engaged and encourage voting in all local, statewide, and national elections.

We want to ensure that the student community can advocate for themselves and what they believe in. We strongly believe that an active student body is beneficial not only for our university but also for future generations. We hope that our efforts will lead to a beneficial change for the university and its students.

Barriers-

This action plan may face barriers on the way, but these are viewed as obstacles that can be overcome with the right strategy.

Some of the barriers we could face on our campus are the following.

- *Commuter Campus:* According to U.S. News & World Report. "Housing & Residence Halls at The University of Texas- Arlington" 2023 Report, 90% of the student community at UTA live off-campus. This makes us a commuter campus, diversifying our student population and bringing unique challenges to this condition. The nature of our campus leads to students having a more restricted schedule and less

awareness of on-campus events, which leads to getting a sort-of “isolated” stance on everything going on campus, which ends up in missing out on information necessary to be a civil, responsible, and active citizen. Our strategy aims to close gaps between the bridge that connects students and local community engagement, providing students with resources that will allow them to fulfill their civic duty without doubts and complications.

- *Closing of Early-Voting Locations:* We faced a challenge just at the start of this semester when our early voting location at the on-campus Mavericks Activity Center was almost shut down, along with other universities’ early voting locations. Our members in student government were able to go to the Commissioners Court at Tarrant County to show support and advocacy against the removal of these. With the support of everyone in the local and university community, we could keep our early voting location at the MAC. Voter turnout is projected to increase this election cycle compared to the previous one, so keeping our early voting location is crucial in providing students with enough locations not to complicate the voting process.
- *Lack of knowledge and Information:* Another challenge we face is the lack of knowledge and information circulating in our student community. Students balance a lot in their day-to-day lives, school assignments, work, personal situations, and social commitments, among others. This can prevent keeping up with local and national news regarding state and federal elections, voting matters, and new legislation directly affecting their ability to vote.

Vision and Goals-

In the Legislative Relations Committee, we are working towards a campus environment dedicated to civic engagement, pragmatic government relations, and ensuring every student has their voice heard in campus operations. We lay out our goals in the SMART format (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Relevant, Time-Based.) to guarantee realistic standards of practice.

To create a campus culture in line with these values, we must:

S - Normalize and encourage voter education and civil engagement.

M—Focus on the communities we serve. Statistically, university students in Texas are the least likely group to engage with civic engagement and government actions. For this reason, many of our efforts will target the 18-25 age bracket, namely those who find themselves apathetic or nihilistic about civic engagement.

A – Engaging with students about voting and registration through campus platforms, including (but not limited to) PAL classes, Freshmen Leaders on Campus, New Maverick Orientation, and Activity Fairs; Establishing tabling events raising the awareness of voting rules and locations to this demographic; Including informative marketing strategies in the university newspaper, the

Shorthorn; Planning and hosting events geared towards making civic engagement and local governance fun & exciting to students.

R—By equipping students with the information and motivation to interact with the world around them, the LRC will be sowing the seeds for the future of leadership and community building by inspiring students to not only know what to do in the face of adversity but also give them the tools to do something about it.

T—By the end of this academic year, we will have built a community around good works and positive interactions with our democracy's institutions and those who keep the wheels turning.

Strategies-

Social media: There has been an increase in the interest shown by younger people in elections through social media, we can use this to our advantage to increase knowledge, and awareness and spread correct information regarding the voting process, elections, and candidates.

Using social media to engage students and interacting with them in person to give them as many options as possible is a significant element of our vision. In addition to spending a lot of time online for school, students also use it to access news, keep updated, and respond to any queries they may have. One of the leading social media platforms modern college students use, Instagram, is where the Student Government organization is active. Administrators may view page activity on Instagram, including the overall number of views, likes, and engagements.

We will keep looking for the best approach to promote to people using the information bought from social media participation. For Instagram posts, we will post graphics that explain and provide activities going on around campus and updating campus, especially with voting for the general election starting this October. A post on Instagram that describes and offers information about events occurring on campus and campus updates will be used for Instagram postings, particularly with the general election voting beginning in October.

Mass email reminders: Amid student's busy life, a reminder of upcoming events including upcoming elections, voting registration deadlines, and local events related to legislation, would be beneficial to keep students informed and aware of everything going on.

Engagement through events and collaboration with other departments and organizations to spread involvement among students: This is something we've already implemented in our current semester activities' plan through events that connect the student body directly to local representatives and to the matters that are happening at the moment. This is done to give students a place and the resources to keep up with current events and increase engagement and awareness that would make voter turnout higher among students. We've hosted the presidential and vice-presidential debate watch parties, National Voter Registration Day, and Meet-and-Greet with state representative Chris Turner, Pop to the Polls. An event we'll be having in the upcoming weeks is Arlington City Council Day at City Hall, where students will get the chance to know their local government and ask Council member Bowie Hogg questions regarding matters related to the city.

Providing resources in the middle of the student’s busy life: Through our efforts this year we have made strides in ease of access to voter registration resources. Our organization held over 70 hours of tabling not including registration during events that we held. Through the registration tabling, we were able to inform our students of the importance of civic engagement. Additionally, we complete a monthly newsletter in order to keep our student body well informed on any policy changes that affect not only higher education but their daily lives. This newsletter is a great way for students to gain understanding in a more condensed format which makes it easier for them to absorb the information.

Holding Information sessions: Something else that we would like to have more of is information sessions regarding matters related to voting. During our committee meetings, the Legislative Relations Committee was able to come up with multiple different ways of increasing voter engagement such as voter education videos through our Instagram account or holding voter education tabling where we hand out information cards about what will be on the ballot. These are ideas that will be worked on and hopefully implemented as we begin this election season and into the next ones.

Pictures-



Members of Student Government at the Commissioners Court on September 12, 2024.



Students at the Presidential Debate Watch Party on September 10, 2024



Students at the Vice-presidential Debate Watch Party on October 1, 2024.



Members of the Student Government tabling for Voter Registration.



Students on National Voter Registration Day Event hosted by Student Government



Members of Student Government at the Meet-and-greet with Chris Turner on October 3, 2024.



Photo by Christine Vo - The Shorthorn

Acknowledgments-

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