



OFFICE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

TOWSON.EDU/TUVOTES

Voter Engagement 2018 Action Plan



Civic Engagement and
Social Responsibility

Executive Summary

TU Votes is an all-encompassing voter registration and engagement initiative, bringing together all of the university's events and initiatives related to this topic under one umbrella. Most importantly, it is a call to action that makes it clear that Towson University is a community that votes. The TU Votes 2018 Action Plan will not only place voter registration at the forefront (primarily through the use of TurboVote as key registration platform), but it will also focus on ensuring that students take their voter registration to the next level and into the polls, making informed decisions when casting their ballot.

According to a report by CIRCLE, the youth registration and turnout rates during the 2014 midterm elections were “the lowest ever recorded,” with 46.7% of young people ages 18 to 29 who registered to vote that year, and only 19.9 % who actually voted.¹ As we get ready for the 2018-2019 academic year, this plan focuses on voter engagement in preparation for the 2018 midterm elections, and the beginning stages of planning for the presidential elections in 2020. We intend to continue the work that took place around the 2016 election season when it comes to voter registration, education, turnout, and ballot access, and expand it further through intentional connections with student organizations, academic units, and community organizations.

Through the creation of a TU Votes Coalition, and a set of strategies and plans to engage voters, we intend to accomplish a set of short- and long-term goals that include:

- A voter registration rate of at least **50%**, and a turnout rate of at least **35%** among the TU student body during the 2018 midterm election, narrowing the gap between voter registration and turnout to under **15%**.
- Engagement with at least **10** student organizations on campus to host voter registration drives in 2018.
- At least **60%** of students who demonstrated further knowledge, awareness and involvement in civic learning and democratic engagement, as measured through pre- and post-year surveys among student leaders, including the Political Engagement Learning Community.
- A **95%** registration rate and **85%** turnout rate during the 2020 presidential election.



¹ THE CENTER FOR INFORMATION & RESEARCH ON CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT (CIRCLE): “2014 Youth Turnout and Youth Registration Rates Lowest Ever Recorded; Changes Essential in 2016.”
<https://civicyouth.org/2014-youth-turnout-and-youth-registration-rates-lowest-ever-recorded-changes-essential-in-2016/>

Leadership: The TU Votes Coalition

Towson University's TU Votes Coalition will be made up of a combination of student leaders, faculty, staff, and community partners. Each, in various ways, would help us engage the various pockets of the TU community in this work.

The following is a list partnering offices, units and organizations, pending final confirmation of the coalition during the summer of 2018:

Student Affairs:

- **Luis Sierra, Office of Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility** – Chair of TU Votes Coalition, responsible for overseeing voter engagement efforts at TU, as well as relevant designations such as the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and the Voter Friendly Campus designation
- **Center for Student Diversity** – Support in engagement with multicultural student organizations at TU
- **Student Success Programs** – Connections with college-bound students in the Baltimore region, especially those who have been admitted to Towson University
- **Military and Veterans Center** – Engagement of veteran students on campus
- **Housing and Residence Life** – Engagement with the Political Engagement Learning Community, as well as on-campus resident population as a whole
- **Student Activities** – Support in engagement with student organizations at TU, and utilization of Involved at TU (Campus Labs Engage) system
- **Fraternity and Sorority Life** – Support in engagement of fraternities and sororities at TU
- **Counseling Center** – Health and well-being of students as they engage in civic engagement opportunities, such as voter engagement

Academic Affairs:

- **Dr. Sarah Oliver, Department of Political Science** – Faculty member connected to the Political Engagement Learning Community during the 2018-2019 academic year.
- **Dr. Christian J. Koot, College of Liberal Arts** – Faculty member with Interdisciplinary Studies, oversees the “Making Sense of America” Lecture Series at TU
- **Jeremy Sanders, International Student and Scholar Office** – Engagement of international students

Administration:

- **Government and Community Relations** – Point-of-contact regarding political community partners and legislative affairs in Annapolis
- **Partnerships & Outreach** – Connections with the community through BTU – Partnerships at Work for Greater Baltimore
- **Office of Technology Services** – Making the most of technological resources to engage voters at TU

Student Leaders:

- Director for Civic Engagement, Student Government Association
- Director for Civic Engagement, University Residence Government
- Liaisons, Political Engagement Learning Community
- Vote Everywhere Ambassadors, Andrew Goodman Foundation

Community Partners:

- TurboVote
- Andrew Goodman Foundation
- Baltimore Collegetown Network
- #BaltimoreVotes
- Maryland State Board of Elections

Tentative Partnerships:

- Black Girls Vote
- VotoLatino
- National LGBTQ Task Force
- Baltimore City Board of Elections
- Towson Chamber of Commerce

The coalition will convene in August 2018, October 2018 (as we prepare for the midterm elections), and January 2019 (to reflect on the midterm election and start planning for the 2020 presidential election).

Commitment

Towson University (TU) is dedicated to a vibrant form of education that transcends the classroom. TU seeks to empower students with the tools needed to become active members of society. As part of TU's mission, we aim to foster intellectual inquiry and critical thinking, preparing students who will serve as effective, ethical leaders and engaged citizens. TU graduates leave with the vision, creativity, and adaptability to craft solutions that enrich the culture, society, economy, and environment of their communities.

We are seeking to implement ways to continue to stimulate involvement among our students, empowering and equipping them to truly become civically engaged. We want each of our students to be invested in matters concerning their government, as demonstrated by their involvement in local, state, and federal elections.

In addition, we understand that before students can become engaged citizens, they must be educated on key issues related to local, national, and international events. Students need to know why they should register to vote, and feel a personal commitment towards voting, with an understanding that their voice does make a difference. Without intrinsic motivation and a sense of responsibility towards taking an active role in their community, they will remain uninvolved. Once students' interest are piqued, and they know the worth of their own participation, they need help with the logistics. For first-time voters, the process can be quite intimidating without staff members on campus to provide explanation and support as needed. As an institution committed to the civic engagement of our students, we must ensure they are equipped with the tools, knowledge and resources to get involved, and provide the much needed support.

Landscape

Climate

Towson University's data from the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) showed a 2016 registration rate of 87.1, 6.3% higher than in 2012; and a voting rate of 60.7%, which was 4.9% higher than 2012. However, the same data shows that although 87.1% of eligible students were registered to vote, only 60.7% voted. This is higher than the national voting rate for all participating institutions (50.4%), but we are still reflecting and strategizing on ways to further close the wide gap that exists between voter registration and actual voter turnout.



Student Engagement

- Over the past academic year, we have seen an increased participation and engagement in programs geared towards political engagement and discourse, such as the debates hosted by the College Democrats, College Libertarians and College Republicans, as well as opportunities where students have been able to invite midterm election candidates at various levels to come to campus and talk about their platforms.
- In addition, we continue to see large participation in Tiger Pride Day, an annual event organized by the Student Government Association that mobilizes students for a day of legislative advocacy at the Maryland State House in Annapolis.
- There is a continued interest in conversations about pressing issues at the local, regional, and national level, through not only student organizations on campus and groups such as the Political Engagement Learning Community, but also through other opportunities inside and outside of the classroom.

Challenges

- Classes still take place on Election Day, as it is not designated as a campus holiday. This has led to frustration among many of the students that have not been able to be engaged in the voting process in the past, since they could not go home due to classes and assignments at school to complete. In the past, TU's AGF Vote Everywhere Ambassadors have advocated to make Election Day a campus holiday, which would ideally allow students to leave campus to vote if they are unable to vote early.
- We are continuing to seek ways to more efficiently measure voter registration and turnout, in order to close the gap between those numbers. Towson University has been and will continue to utilize TurboVote as our main method to assist students to register to vote. TurboVote has offered several features that have made the process efficient and simple, from

the user-friendly and easily-accessible interface for those who use it, to the ability to send absentee ballot request forms via e-mail to those who need them, and the timely text and e-mail reminders that the system sends to its registrants. One of the main challenges, however, is that TurboVote is not an assurance that the student will actually vote via that absentee ballot, so the number of TurboVote sign-ups may not be the best metric to determine how many students were engaged in the political process, and it is not ideal to have to rely on students filling out feedback surveys to determine what difference TurboVote actually made. There are several other voter engagement initiatives at TU which serve a great utility in terms of voter engagement and attempting to fill any gaps: voter registration, opportunities to declare domicile at the university itself to allow voting on campus, etc. The intricacies of voting via absentee ballots have made explaining TurboVote more complicated, and it is not practical to explain the entire absentee voting process plus the TurboVote service to a student during the brief interactions that we are able to have with them. This is not necessarily the fault of TurboVote, as it fills a very specific niche that is helpful to certain students, specifically those that are already at least somewhat knowledgeable about the voting process. However, this is a minor challenge we will continue to work towards overcoming, especially as we prepare for the election process in 2018. TurboVote continues to be one of our core partners in the efforts to register students, and help them navigate through all areas of voter engagement.

Opportunities

- Towson University has the benefit of being a polling location, both for early voting and Election Day. Ballot access efforts on campus will continue encouraging Maryland students to utilize the polling place in the Administration building during Early Voting Week. TurboVote helped with ballot access as well, providing TU students with the opportunity to get their absentee ballot request form sent to them at school and begin the absentee voting process.
- We continue to see an increase in meaningful connections on and off campus, not only among various academic and non-academic units, but also among community organizations and fellow higher education institutions. For example, the [Baltimore Collegetown Network](#) organizes meetings and workshops all surrounding campus voting, which have been helpful not only for capacity-building and resources, but also for opportunities to partner with colleagues throughout the entire area and even the DMV as a whole.



Goals

Short-term

- A voter registration rate of at least **50%**, and a turnout rate of at least **35%** among the TU student body during the 2018 election, narrowing the gap between voter registration and turnout to under **15%**.
- Engagement with at least **10 student organizations** on campus to host voter registration drives in 2018.
- At least **60%** of students who demonstrated further knowledge, awareness and involvement in civic learning and democratic engagement, as measured through pre- and post-year surveys among student leaders, including the Political Engagement Learning Community.

Long-term

- A **95%** registration rate and **85%** **turnout rate** during the 2020 presidential election.
- A **50%** rate of students, faculty and staff who are taking advantage of early voting.
- The establishment of Election Day as a campus holiday.



Strategy

As TU looks ahead to the 2018-2019 academic year, we seek to continue expanding on the work that took place before, during, and following the 2016 presidential election. We plan to expand the impact of these initiatives, to not only have a strong voter registration and turnout rate in the 2018 midterm elections, but also a high rate of informed and empowered voters.

Encourage Active Citizenship

- Continuing to **educate the student body on the voting process**, through our online portal (Towson.edu/TUVotes), and ongoing opportunities to present to students inside and outside of the classroom.
- The creation of an **Issues to Action series**, designed to taking the issues students are passionate about, and turning them into meaningful action. This can take shape in several ways, from creating workshops on campus for anyone who would like to learn more about how to contact their representatives, to hosting local, regional and national guest speakers on campus about a particular issue, as well as sponsor trips to community events that exemplify active citizenship in action.
- **New York Times Talks / Campus Conversations centered on voter engagement in anticipation of the midterm elections.** For example, one of the NY Times Talks that took place in 2018 was facilitated by one of our Vote Everywhere Ambassadors, and posed the question “Should the voting age be lowered to 16?”

Facilitate Democratic Engagement

- Coalition-led **voter registration drives** during the academic year
- **Sponsorship/support of student-organization-led voter registration drives**, all to fall under the TU Votes umbrella
 - o Unique links will be created for every student organization seeking to host a TU Votes Registration Drive, which will be helpful in recognizing each organization's efforts to get their peers registered to vote.
- Voter engagement at an off-campus level through the Community Ambassadors, which would encourage students to **help their neighbors become registered to vote**.
- Efforts to **embed voter registration and information as part of existing campus traditions and programs**, such as Orientation, Welcome Week, Homecoming, and athletic events
- Availability of **ongoing and up-to-date information** about early and Election Day opportunities, especially about the ability to vote on campus

Remove Barriers to Voting

- Towson University has the benefit of being a polling place, both for early voting and Election Day. Ballot access efforts on campus will continue to focus **on encouraging Maryland students to utilize the polling place in the Administration building during Early Voting Week**. TurboVote helped with ballot access as well, providing TU students with the opportunity to get their absentee ballot request form sent to them at school and begin the absentee voting process.
- Through student leaders such as the [Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassadors](#), **work to advocate to make Election Day a campus holiday**. This would ideally allow students to leave campus to vote if they are unable to vote early.
- Continue to **support a system for easy registration** such as TurboVote. Towson University has been and will continue to utilize TurboVote as our main method to assist students to register to vote. TurboVote has offered several features that have made the process efficient and simple, from the user-friendly and easily-accessible interface for those who use it, to the ability to send absentee ballot request forms via e-mail to those who need them, and the timely text and e-mail reminders that the system sends to its registrants.

2018-2019 Timeline

June-July 2018

- June 5: Last day to register to vote in MD to be able to vote in the primaries
- June 14-21: Early Voting Primary Election
- Confirm TU Votes Coalition
- TurboVote Marketing during Orientation

August 2018

- Welcome to TU (W2TU) Week – Voter Registration on Freedom Square and other locations on campus
- Initial wave of Student Organization Outreach

September-October 2018

- Star-Spangled September
 - o Constitution Day
 - o National Voter Registration Day
 - o Federal Depository Library Birthday Bash
 - o Campus Conversation with Ira Shapiro, author of “Broken: Can the Senate Save Itself and the Country?”
- Voter Registration Drives by campus units and student organizations
- TU Votes-Centered New York Times Talks and Campus Conversations – “Why Vote?” “Who is on the Ballot?”

November 2018

- Midterm Election Watch Party
- Campus Conversation: “What comes next?”

Spring 2019

- Voter Registration Drives
- Ongoing meetings with TU Votes Coalition
- NY Times Talks/Campus Conversations – “Looking ahead at 2020”
- Support of related student organization programming
- TU Voter Summit – a continuation of the student-led conference and conversation “Where Have All the Voters Gone?” that took place during the Spring 2018 semester.
- Recognition of student organizations who registered the most students to vote in the midterm elections

Reporting

This action plan will be shared as part of the requirements set by both the All-In Challenge and the Voter Friendly Campus designation. They will also be shared with partner institutions as part of the NASPA Lead Initiative, and will be available on our website for access by students, faculty and staff, along with summaries of NSLVE data.

Evaluation

Quantitative

- TurboVote Engagement Data
- Report from the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement

Qualitative

- Feedback from TU Votes coalition, student leaders, and student organizations, through verbal interviews, as well as written assessment tools (i.e. an end-of-year survey to all who used the TurboVote system to ensure they were registered to vote).



The TU Votes Action Plan was compiled by the Office of Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility at Towson University, located on the second floor of the Administration Building. Should you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please contact us at 410-704-4803, or civicengagement@towson.edu.