

Project Description

To effectively foster and enhance a significant level of civic engagement and political participation at the university of Arkansas – Fort Smith, the UAFS chapter of the American Democracy Project (ADP) ambitions to create a series of program that systematically exposes the students not only to the experiences of political, policy, and civic leaders, but that also empowers the students to become better engaged citizens.

Measuring the impact of the American Democracy Project on the UAFS campus shall be done via the quantitative tracking of the number of registered voters among the student population, the quantitative tracking of the number of actual voters among the student population, the quantitative tracking of students' attendance at ADP-sponsored events, and the quantitative tracking of students' engagement on ADP's social media platforms.

Background and Rationale

No university in Arkansas offers a systematic and frequent program that fosters an interaction between political and civil leaders on the one hand and the students on the other hand. Very few universities in Arkansas offer a consistent public sphere where policy makers, policy administrators, and thought leaders can frequently exchange with students on the issues of the day. There seems to be a need to consistently take students to the halls of the various levels of government so as to have students grasp the practical side of politics. And there seems to be a necessity for the establishment of a consistent partnership with relevant community groups to consistently provide volunteer opportunities to our students.

Given the above-mentioned observations, it becomes imperative that UAFS grasp the mantle of leadership and address these evident needs. Hence, the proposal to revamp the American Democracy Project at UAFS.

Plan of Action

The UAFS American Democracy Project shall progressively implement the following plan of action. It will likely take four academic years to fully implement all of the items in the following plan of action.

- A- **Political Participation Programs**: Besides voter registration drives, a series of town halls will be held between public officials/political candidates and UAFS students.
- B- **Civic Engagement Programs**: a series of town halls between civic leaders and UAFS students.
- C- **Mentorship program (Pilot)**: Pairing up a handful of selected students with local political/policy leaders for mentorship purposes.
- D- **It's Up to Us Project**: Shepherding our students through the national competition to raise awareness about the national debt.
- E- **Awards Ceremony**: Recognizing the contributions of an individual, a group, or an organization not only to the strengthening of democracy, but also to the betterment of the community.

Possible Pitfalls

The implementation of the project may face the following pitfalls:

- A. The lack of adequate funding: inadequate funding will likely jeopardize the implementation of this plan of action.
- B. The lack of a student worker: without a student worker to handle key administrative and logistical functions, the implementation of this plan of action may suffer a setback.
- C. The potential decrease in students' enthusiasm in political affairs during off-years
- D. An inconsistent attraction of top public officials to the campus, especially when the state legislature is in session.
- E. The challenge of finding enough relevant topics and enough relevant guest speakers for students to remain engaged in public affairs.