

Civic Engagement Action Plan

University of Central Oklahoma, Volunteer and Service Learning Center

Overview

The responsibility of fostering civic engagement on the University of Central Oklahoma's (UCO) lies primarily with three offices. The Volunteer and Service Learning Center (VLSC) in the Division of Student Affairs, the Center for Civic Engagement: The American Democracy Project in the Division of Academic Affairs, and the Leadership Central Office housed under UCO's Vice President for Public Affairs. These three offices collectively support a majority of all civic engagement programming and promotion on UCO's campus. The varying reporting structure of each office allows for a more well-rounded and comprehensive approach to civic engagement on our campus. This ability to engage stakeholders across campus provides students and staff the opportunity to approach civic engagement from various platforms. This level engagement has shown itself in various forms to include, voter registration drives, candidate forums, voter participation forums, visits to state, local and national politicians, voter education material, and much more.

As mentioned, the VLSC, Leadership Central, and the Office of Civic Engagement are not the sole force behind civic engagement on our campus, but with their mixture of co-curricular and academically focused missions they are able to offer a unique experience to students through programming and education designed to reach all students. This work coupled with the support of UCO's Department of Political Science, UCO Debate, UCO's Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) office, UCO's Office of High Impact Practices, and the UCO Student Association allow for a plethora of civic engagement opportunities for UCO students. The abundance of supporting offices and departments will be shown in the overview and plans that follow.

Current Civic Engagement Landscape

National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement

UCO currently participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). NSLVE is an initiative of the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE) at Tufts University. The most recent NSLVE report provided UCO voter data from the federal elections held in 2012 and 2016. This data is derived from a comparison of registered voters on campus and those who voted in the years mentioned. The student data used for this report is sourced from the National Student Clearinghouse (excluding FERPA blocked records) and publicly available voting files collected by Catalist.

The 2016 UCO report provided the staff and faculty charged with programming for and promoting civic engagement encouraging results that indicate based on a 7.2% increase in voting rates that the programs offered across UCO's campus are making a measurable impact. Although UCO's voting eligible population (VEP) rate remains low at 52.6%, this data is encouraging as participation continues to inch towards the reported 53.2% eligible Oklahomans that voted in 2016 (nonprofitvote.org). However, it must be noted Oklahoma consistently has one of the lowest rates of VEP turnout in the nation placing 46th and 49th in 2016 and 2012, respectively. Another encouraging statistic related to the civic

engagement landscape at UCO is, according to the NSLVE report, the registered voter turnout rate of 71.5% as compared to the statewide average of 67.3%, as reported by the Oklahoma State Election Board.

Voter Registration, Voter Education, & Civic Engagement Programs

As a result of the VEP data reported by the 2016 NSLVE, the VSLC and its partner offices have renewed our focus on voter registration and education for the upcoming 2018 general election cycle. With the goal of increasing registered voters, informed citizens, and civic engagement on campus.

Voter Issues Forum

In January 2017, UCO along with Oklahoma Academy, The League of Women Voters, and the Oklahoma State Election Board hosted a “Voter Issues Forum” focusing on Oklahoma’s political history, voting trends and demographics, student voter engagement, legislative redistricting, and upcoming legislation. The forum included conversations and presentation, by state legislators, historians, state election board officials, and professors from UCO, the University of Oklahoma, and Oklahoma City University, along with local active citizens. This event invited students from across campus to participate and learn more about Oklahoma politics and voting.

Voter Registration Drive September 2017

UCO is an annual participant in Oklahoma Campus Compact’s Voter Registration Drive and competitions. This project is hosted through the American Democracy Projects Center for Civic Engagement. UCO is consistently at the top of the competition based on per capita voter registration or updates.

Constitution Week

Constitution Week is celebrated annually with programming hosted by American Democracy Project. The week of activities has included speakers, voter registration drives, and several U.S. Naturalization Ceremonies. The focus and scope depend on the student leaders charged with programming for the week.

Local Candidate Forums

November 2017 UCO hosted candidate debate for the Libertarian nomination for Oklahoma Governor. This open to the public debate hosted on UCO’s campus was hosted by UCO Debate, Pi Alpha Alpha, and the American Democracy Project.

In April 2018 an Oklahoma Gubernatorial candidate forum was hosted on UCO’s campus by Freedom of Information Oklahoma. This event was open to the public and featured candidates from all major parties.

Legislative Visits and Messaging

Over the past few years, and in particular the spring of 2018 UCO’s Leadership Central office has worked to take students to the Oklahoma state capitol to share their message and UCO’s message with local legislators and other elected officials. This program is a direct result of the political climate and lack of participation of young people in Oklahoma’s political process. This is a growth from the traditional one-

time visit by students on the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's Higher Education Day at the Capitol.

Creation of Democracy Coaches

UCO's partnership with Generation Citizen, a nationwide organization committed to empowering young people to become engaged and effective citizens through civic education, has led to the creation of democracy coach roles for UCO students. This role allows UCO students who commit the time to become trained coaches, in order to, go out into local community schools to help support civics education in the classroom. This civics education, although designed for the common education system, is beneficial to UCO in its efforts to promote understanding and passion for civics at the collegiate level as it trickles down from the coaches.

Civic Responsibility through Co-Curricular Programming

UCO is fortunate to have three offices tasked with providing civically responsible and education programs for its students. These programs include participating in national days of service such as 9/11 Day of Service and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service. Large Scale days of service such as Big Event. Issue specific service and education through our alternative breaks program. Also student leadership seminars and presentations hosted by Leadership Central. One example includes our Lessons in Leadership class that opens up its leadership speakers up for attendance of the campus community.

Digital and Print Media Promotion

This has been one of UCO's biggest areas of growth. Although the most passive of the items listed above and below. Dedicated social media outreach around voter registration and active citizenship have had an impact previous generations of programmers have not had the luxury of seeing. It has not stopped with digital outreach, UCO has stepped up its print media and design efforts to help entice students to register and become informed voter through window posters and handouts.

Office and Staff Changes

A true display of commitment to the civic engagement at UCO can be seen in recent office name changes, staff reclassifications, and job modifications. This includes the American Democracy Project at UCO changing its campus brand to the Center for Civic Engagement: American Democracy Project. This new branding allows the office to align better with one of UCO's transformative learning tenants, Service Learning and Civic Engagement. This new name allows students to better understand how the office can assist them in the time at UCO. The Office of Leadership Central promoted and reclassified the Assistant Director of Leadership Programs to the Director of Public Affairs and Leadership. This reclassification allows for a more direct focus from the holder of this position on the impact students involved in public affairs can have on campus and in the community. The Volunteer and Service Learning Center has written into job duties an emphasis on civic engagement programming along with the more traditional student and community engagement programming being hosted by its staff.

2018-2019 Commitments and Beyond

Enhanced Digital and Print Media

As mentioned, this realm has been an area of growth at UCO, it will continue to be area of growth and focus as the year moves on. UCO is largely a commuter school with students that attend class, parent, work, and drive. This means students do not have a lot of time to spend on campus participating in events or attending meetings for information. UCO will continue to focus on expanding out print media to meet more students where they are at in their classroom building and so on. UCO will also continue efforts to engage the decentralize campus social media hubs to continue to exert an organized influence on topics such as voter registration through centrally designed social media campaigns.

Candidate Forums

The VSLC, American Democracy Project, and Leadership Central will continue their work to bring actively campaigning candidates to campus to help build the civic awareness of UCO students. These forums will lead to increased opportunities to share the importance of voter registration and turnout among UCO students.

Issues Forum

Oklahoma politics has its roots in populism. As a result we have many state questions on our general election ballot. These are a result of legislative assignment or signature petitions. UCO will host opportunities to discuss these state questions once they are finalized in the fall. These forums will be supported through the distribution of non-partisan voting guides and information posters across campus.

Voter Registrations Drives/Stations

UCO will host its traditional voter registration drive as part of the Oklahoma Campus Compact competition in the fall semester along with a daily drive during Constitution Week. These traditional drives will not be the only efforts this year. The VSLC will have a dedicated voter registration information portal outside of their office in the University Center along with paper ballots ready for students. This will allow them a safe space to register or update the voter registration information. This space will include large print posters with voter registration rules and deadlines along with candidate and state question information. Voter Registration and the opportunity to do so will be encouraged in our freshman orientation class, Success Central. This will be led by the Volunteer and Service Learning Center staff.

Target Programming

According to NSLVE Data, UCO saw a six to eight percent growth in voter turnout among 18-40 year old students from 2012 to 2016. The turnout growth for this population, although not negligible, is an area of emphasis for UCO in the upcoming election cycle. Data indicates lower voter rates among 18-29 year olds which are the majority of our students. These areas are all below 48% in voting rate. This means for UCO to sustain growth in voter participation rates the focus will need to be on this population. Programmers will need to focus efforts on meeting these students where they are at in their lives. This will mean a larger focus on issue based program to bolster interest in voting and civic engagement on

UCO's campus. This will mean a dedicated outreach to areas with the biggest focus in Oklahoma will be important. This will be primarily health and education. Along with this issue based programming to grow turnout rates. The campus will need to focus on the larger student organizations such as fraternities and sororities due to their tradition demographic of 18-24 year olds and the traditionally low turnout rates among those students. This outreach will fall primarily to the Volunteer and Service Learning Center and Leadership Central as they have the largest swath of student leaders that also participate in these organizations that can be equipped as influencers.

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