



University of Charleston 2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Developed by: Kara Fisher

Executive Summary:

The University of Charleston (UC) has long committed to sustained and energetic civic engagement through such efforts as get out the vote campaigns, voter registration drives, and community involvement. Executing this commitment in the pandemic has presented new challenges and UC is proud to report that we have been able to activate a robust response, actualizing a variety of events in this unique election season.

Labor Day at UC presented another opportunity for civic engagement as it is dedicated to service activities across our community and endeavors to involve every full-time, undergraduate student. This year with an emphasis on presidential politics, we staffed a four-day registration and absentee ballot initiative on our campus. Students and faculty alike safely registered voters and helped students acquire absentee ballots across many US states. This effort is ongoing and our political science faculty are especially excited to help students figure out where they are registered and how they can vote remotely this November from our campus.

Additionally, we work closely with the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office to be sure we have the latest information to empower our students with all the tools they need to register in a timely manner and vote even when they are away from their West Virginian home polling place.

Collegiate athletics is a significant part of the Golden Eagle campus culture. Our athletic director has developed an initiative this election cycle to get every student-athlete registered to vote by November 3rd, titled Empowering Eagles. To date, this initiative has registered 57 new voters among our student-athlete population. The Empowering Eagles program is stressing that when we don't vote, we give up our voice.

Student groups are coordinating locally with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to ensure that their peers are well apprised of their voting rights. Students will be engaging in virtual town halls on this subject between now and election day. Special consideration is given to marginalized voting groups including transgender communities, immigrant populations, formerly incarcerated citizens, among others.

As an educational institution, UC recognizes that the promotion of voting as a civic responsibility is congruent with its Mission. We are reflective, in this the 100-year anniversary of women's suffrage, that these rights are hard fought and precious. We hope that our university community, supported by our work and their dedication, will live active, engaged lives both by voting themselves and by democratizing access for civic engagement for others.

Leadership:

Our leadership team includes the following:

Kara Fisher, Honors College Director, Assistant Professor of Political Science
Hallie Chillag, Honors College Director, Assistant Professor of Social Science
Bren Stevens, Vice President for Athletics, Athletic Director
Ryan McFarland, Student Body President

Commitment:

Our campus has not yet signed the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation.

Our campus has used the following methods to communicate with students about the election:

By email, By posting on institutional social media channels

Landscape:

Our campus demographic and voting data:

Our engagement has increased at UC from 2014 to the 2018 midterm elections. We are excited to note that our engagement has increased during this time and we have received a bronze seal recognition in response to our institutional efforts. Total enrollment: 2,620 (1,882 undergrads and 738 grad students (Spring 2019). UC students represent over 40 states and all 55 WV counties. International students represent 44 countries.

Goals:

Our campus democratic engagement goals are:

It is our goal that our university community, supported by our work and their dedication, will live active, engaged lives both by voting themselves and by democratizing access for civic engagement for others.

We hope to expand our community partnerships with three additional organizations.

We hope to specifically engage our athlete populations.

Strategy:

Our campus has used the following strategies and organized the following events:

In-person voter registration drives, In-person voter education events (e.g. film screenings, debates, lecture series, etc.), Classroom voter registration presentations (in-person or virtual), Pledge to Vote drive, Targeted engagement of our student Athletes

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Students will be engaging in virtual town halls on this subject between now and election day. Special consideration is given to marginalized voting groups including transgender communities, immigrant populations, formerly incarcerated citizens, among others.

The Honors College hosted a four-day registration and absentee ballot initiative on our campus. Students and faculty alike safely registered voters and helped students acquire absentee ballots across many US states. This effort is ongoing and our political science faculty are especially excited to help students figure out where they are registered and how they can vote remotely this November from our campus.

Students in the Honors College and Social Science department encouraged the ALL IN Pledge to Vote through targeted classroom activities.

Our athletic director has developed an initiative this election cycle to get every student-athlete registered to vote by November 3rd, titled Empowering Eagles. To date, this initiative has registered 57 new voters among our student-athlete population. The Empowering Eagles program is stressing that when we don't vote, we give up our voice.

Students, Faculty, and Staff are encouraged to wear white on election day in honor of the 100th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage.

NSLVE:

University of Charleston has authorized NSLVE.

Evaluation:

We will evaluate our action plan in the following ways:

UC has been involved with the ALL IN Democracy Challenge and the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement through Tufts University's Institute for Democracy & Higher Education since 2016. The Political Science Program is part of the ALL IN research initiative which examined data about voter participation and engagement at UC.

Honors College Directors, Political Science Faculty, and University leadership will have access to the NSLVE data. We have collected institutional measures of participation in our various efforts and plan to evaluate the success of our efforts with these data in mind.

Reporting:

We will report our campus action plan and NSLVE reports in the following ways:

The Action Plan will be available through the Honors College

Our campus NSLVE reports will be posted on our campus website and shared with the campus community.