



GATOR GOTV COALITION

**BOB GRAHAM CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA**

**Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning,
Political Engagement, and Voter Participation
at the University of Florida**

May 2022

Executive Summary

The Bob Graham Center for Public Service has created and will implement the Fall 2022 Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voter Participation at the University of Florida. University President W. Kent Fuchs has tasked the Center to coordinate civic engagement and democratic participation commitments across campus, including the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge to full student voter participation.

Since joining the ALL IN Challenge, UF has consistently performed above national averages in student voting rate, yet there remains considerable room for improvement and opportunity to expand engagement among key demographics, including communities of color, graduate students, and STEM majors.

The Center collaborated in developing this plan with the many student organizations, colleges, University offices, and other partners who participate in the Gator Get Out The Vote Coalition, an alliance organized by the Bob Graham Center during election years to mobilize our campus community. UF has also benefitted from fruitful relationships with TurboVote, Fair Elections Center's Campus Vote Project, the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, and the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition.

Looking to 2022 and beyond, this plan maps out short- and long-term goals for civic learning, political engagement and voter participation at the University to increase voting rates across the student body and institutionalize the Gator GOTV Coalition into a more permanent, broad-reaching civic engagement organization.

Leadership

The Bob Graham Center for Public Service has served as a hub of civic engagement on the University of Florida campus since the Center was created in 2006. UF President Kent Fuchs has committed the university to active work toward the goal of full student participation in elections as described by the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, and tasked the Graham Center with helping fulfill those commitments.

The responsibilities include the coordination and implementation of UF's voter engagement efforts for students, faculty and staff. One of the resources the Center coordinates is the Gator Get Out The Vote Coalition, organized in 2020 as an alliance of student groups and other campus entities dedicated to mobilizing the campus vote. It is a long-term goal of the Graham Center to institutionalize this coalition into a formal Civic Engagement Cabinet functioning in both election years and off-years as a means of fostering ongoing civic learning and democratic participation.

For the 2022 election year, the Graham Center's Civic Engagement Coordinator, Dr. Teresa Cornacchione, will lead this effort with assistance from the civic engagement student assistant Andrew Tarmykin. The Center's Associate Director Marianne Vernetson and Communications Director Dorothy Zimmerman provide additional programming support.

The Center has built relationships with additional units and academic departments throughout campus to help implement its 2022 voter engagement effort, including the Office of the Provost; the Center for Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement in the Division of Student Affairs; the David and Wanda Brown Center for Leadership and Service in the Division of Student Affairs; the Office of the Chief Diversity Officer; the Department of History and the Department of Political Science in the

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; the Center for Public Issues Education in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; the Center for Public Interest Communications within the College of Journalism and Communications; and the George A. Smathers Libraries.

The Graham Center will also draw upon its working relationships with Mr. Aaron Klein, the outreach director of the local elections office, the Alachua County Supervisor of Elections; and the Alachua County chapter of the League of Women Voters.

Commitment

The University of Florida, as part of the State University System of Florida, requires that all students demonstrate civic literacy via a civic literacy assessment and completion of civics related coursework, such as POS2041: American Federal Government or AMH2020: U.S. History Since 1877. This requirement offers a strong foundation for civic engagement to the UF student body, and these courses provide a key opportunity to reach potential student voters, especially freshman students who may have never voted before. UF also enjoys a strong relationship with state and local governments as Florida's flagship university, and offers extensive experiential learning opportunities, on-campus programming, and other opportunities for profound student engagement both at the voting booth and beyond.

The university does not yet have an overarching mission statement or strategic plan regarding civic engagement. Furthermore, while our voting rates have consistently exceeded national standards, students—particularly the representatives of our GOTV Coalition partners—have identified polarization, burnout, and cynicism as pervasive challenges to reaching students who do not vote. Beyond the state's civic literacy requirement and the Graham Center's coordination of civic engagement efforts, there is little emphasis on democratic participation in the school's culture and few metrics by which the University evaluates itself.

Despite these challenges, we still see higher-than-usual engagement, a trend on which we are confident we can build a more enduring culture of voter engagement moving forward.

Landscape

The University of Florida is the flagship educational institution of what is historically the largest swing state in the country. Florida's last three gubernatorial elections were decided by margins nearly equivalent to the student body population of UF alone, signifying the high potential of the student vote in such a diverse and competitive state.

[Per the 2020 NSLVE Campus Report](#), UF achieved a 76.7% voting rate in the 2020 general election, exceeding the national voting rate of all institutions nationwide by approximately 10 percentage points. This performance relative to all institutions is on par with the University's performance in the 2018 midterm elections, which was 49.8%, compared to a national voting rate of 39.1%; and the 2016 presidential election, which was 65% compared to a national rate of 53%.

Although 2022 is a midterm election year, we remain confident that UF can continue its upward trajectory in student voter engagement, especially now that in-person campus life has returned after the pandemic. An early voting location on campus and the beginnings of an 'Active Choice' voter registration system are now in place. In April 2022, the Bob Graham Center convened a roundtable of various civic-minded student organizations and entities on campus to begin developing this Action Plan. This discussion built on the success of the 2020 Gator GOTV Coalition, and has laid the

foundation for a more formalized, permanent institution to coordinate student civic engagement across campus.

Organizations and partners participating in the roundtable included the Fair Elections Center's Campus Vote Project, the Alachua County Supervisor of Elections' Office, the Bob Graham Center Student Fellows, the Future of Florida Summit, Florida Political Review, the Freshman Leadership Council, Sunshine Forum, the University Athletic Association, the Panhellenic Council, the Interfraternity Council, the Hispanic Student Association, and College Democrats.

Multiple other organizations have expressed interest in participating in future efforts. Furthermore, we plan to partner with each individual college within the University on voter outreach to their particular student bodies, and have previously identified institutional partners such as the Division of Student Affairs, Office of Strategic Communications, the Office of Multicultural and Diversity Affairs, and the Office of Government and Community Relations.

The Graham Center has sponsored UF's partnership with TurboVote since June 2012, through which we have served more than 7,400 students—more than 5,500 of whom remain active users. Furthermore, UF regularly participates in the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, whose members share best practices that inform our efforts. Campus Vote Project participates directly in our student civic engagement efforts by sponsoring multiple Democracy Fellows on our campus. These Fellows will work directly with the Bob Graham Center to implement the 2022 Action Plan.

The Alachua County Supervisor of Elections provides us with educational and logistical support for students who register and vote locally in the Gainesville area. As Florida has enacted new election laws ahead of 2022 midterms that will affect vote-by-mail ballots and ballot drop box availability, this relationship become all the more important. UF students who are Florida residents can also register online through the Florida Department of State's Division of Elections website. This website has historically suffered technical difficulties on key voter registration deadlines due to high volume, so we have trained staff and students to register eligible voters through paper forms. Many Florida counties also permit absentee ballot requests to be submitted online, and we have paper absentee ballot request forms for Alachua County on hand.

The Bob Graham Center also maintains its own social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube, and Vimeo, and sends a weekly newsletter that can be used to promote our voter engagement efforts. The Graham Center uses its home in Pugh Hall, a modern, spacious, centrally-located building on campus, to host civic engagement programming. Regular meetings of the GOTV Coalition have traditionally been hosted online; we anticipate in-person meetings in Pugh Hall this season.

Student Government also allocates money from its budget to Chomp the Vote, an executive branch agency responsible for promoting voter engagement on campus. Historically, Chomp the Vote has been a valuable ally and liaison between the efforts of the Bob Graham Center and Student Government.

Goals

- **Achieve a voting rate of at least 60% during the 2022 elections.** This would be an improvement of ~10 percentage points from the 2018 rate of 49.8%, and a 20% increase in the number of students voting.

- **Achieve a registration rate of at least 90%.** This would be an improvement of 2.4 percentage points from 2020 and 6.1 percentage points from 2018.
- **Achieve a voting rate of registered students of at least 67% during the 2022 elections.** This would be an improvement of ~8 percentage points from 2018, and a 13.55% increase in the number of registered students voting.
- **Achieve a total of 10,000 votes cast at the on-campus early voting location located at the J. Wayne Reitz Union.** This would be an improvement of ~2,000 votes cast from 2018 and a ~25% increase in votes cast at the Reitz.
- **Obtain the Voter Friendly Campus** designation in 2023.

Strategy

Student mobilization on a campus as large and diverse as the University of Florida requires a high-degree of coordination, communication, and cooperation among relevant stakeholders, including student organizations, Student Government, colleges and faculty, University partners, and community partners. Fundamental to our approach is the idea of meeting every student where they are, rather than expecting them to seek us out. Thus, the active participation of all stakeholders is crucial to reaching those students who may have historically been underserved by our campus’s civic engagement efforts. The Spring 2022 GOTV Roundtable Discussion was the beginning of a more institutionalized coalition approach to student voting, and civic engagement more broadly.

At the Roundtable, we subdivided our Action Plan into three key categories: Registration, Education, and Engagement.

Registration

The following programs, initiatives, and events will be held from now until Florida’s general election voter registration deadline on October 11, 2022 to encourage and increase voter registration on campus.

It should be noted that Florida law requires voter registration be certified by a Third-Party Voter Registration Organization (3PVRO), a designation the Graham Center holds, but our student organizations do not. Thus, this portion of the Action Plan requires direct coordination by the Graham Center.

1. Ongoing campaign to encourage enrollment in TurboVote, UF’s digital partner for voter registration, ballot requests, and election reminders.
2. Regular voter registration tabling by students from CVP, Chomp the Vote, and other Coalition organizations at key campus locations, including:
 - a. Turlington Plaza, a centrally located area between the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences building and the Marston Science Library,
 - b. The Plaza of the Americas, the main campus quad,
 - c. The J. Wayne Reitz Union, the campus’s student union building,
 - d. Pugh Hall, the location of the Bob Graham Center.
3. Targeted outreach toward key demographics and partners, including:
 - a. Freshman student athlete orientation with the University Athletic Association at Farrior Hall, and other events with athletic teams and student athletes as permitted by the UAA,
 - b. Freshman orientation at UF “Preview,” a summer session where incoming students tour campus and register for classes,

- c. Events hosted by coalition partners, including student organization general body meetings, public programming, and socials.
- 4. Campus-wide campaigns surrounding major deadlines and civic holidays, including:
 - a. The Florida primary voter registration deadline, July 25;
 - b. Constitution Day, September 17;
 - c. National Voter Registration Day, September 20;
 - d. The Florida general election voter registration deadline, October 11.
- 5. A series of Active Choice Voter Registration modules for Canvas, which instructors may disseminate to their students via their course pages to implement voter registration into class curriculum.
- 6. Partner with the Interfraternity Conference, Panhellenic Council, Multicultural Greek Council, and National Panhellenic Council to hold voter registration competitions between Greek organizations on campus.

Education

The following programs, initiatives, and events will be held from now until the general election on Nov. 8th to promote voter education on campus.

- 1. Regular election reminders via TurboVote to ensure enrolled students are aware of dates, deadlines, and procedures.
- 2. Educational sessions for partners, including classes and student organizations, on how to register, request ballots, and vote.
- 3. Creation and dissemination of educational material regarding what is on the ballot in Florida, including:
 - a. Description of offices elected,
 - b. Names and basic information of candidates for statewide office and local offices in Alachua County,
 - c. Explanations of constitutional ballot measures.
- 4. Public candidate forums or meet-and-greet events hosted both on-campus and virtually,
- 5. Informational events about current issues in Gainesville or Florida with elected officials, advocacy groups, nonprofits, etc.,
- 6. Faculty outreach to encourage voter education integration into course curriculum across all colleges (Jennifer Smith, Center for Teaching Excellence),
- 7. Partner with Alachua County Supervisor of Elections to create a webpage with voter information for students at UF and Santa Fe College.

Engagement

- 1. Ongoing campaign to encourage students to create a proactive voting plan to overcome potential barriers to student voting. Components will include:
 - a. Regular TurboVote reminders;
 - b. Voting plan tabling events;
 - c. Online resources, including the Active Choice Voter Registration Canvas modules and a voting information web corner on the Graham Center website;
- 2. Targeted GOTV campaigns at student demographics least likely to vote, including STEM majors and graduate students, through partnerships with the student government representatives of these students; and

3. Promotion of our on-campus early voting location, with the goal of getting 10,000 early votes cast at this location.

Short-term Strategy

The short-term strategy for this plan is focused on creating content to institutionalize the “ask every voter” approach, organizing partnerships, and emphasizing voting as the baseline for democratic participation.

Long-term Strategy

The long-term strategy for this plan is focused on a systematic approach to ask every voter programs that integrate active choice VR into campus life; institutionalization of the student coalition into a formal body; and development of a civic learning plan that emphasizes democratic participation beyond the baseline of turning out to vote.

Implementation Timeline

The Action Plan has been/will be implemented according to the following timeline. Certain events may be adjusted based on availability of staff and opportunity.

April

- Organize the Gator GOTV Coalition and host the Spring 2022 GOTV Roundtable to brainstorm Action Plan ideas and begin planning cross-campus collaboration for the Fall semester

May

- Finalize the Active Choice Voter Registration Canvas Module and distribute to faculty and staff
- Identify new campus leaders for Gator GOTV Coalition member organizations and designate organization representatives
- Schedule regular meetings of the Coalition
- **May 9**—Summer “A” and Summer “C” terms begin
- **May 31**—Action Plan submission deadline
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June

- Coordinate with Coalition partners to ensure all members are prepared for Fall operations
- Begin holding monthly Coalition meetings
- Publish the Civic Engagement web corner on the Graham Center website, including links to TurboVote, information on voter registration, and voter planning guides
- Organize paired events with UAA and begin student athlete outreach
- Table at summer events on campus
- Prepare campaign to incoming freshman via partnerships with Preview, campus presence during Summer “B” term
- **June 17**—Summer “A” term ends
- **June 26**—League of Women Voters x Bob Graham Center Candidate Forum
- **June 27**—Summer “B” term begins; Class of 2026 begins taking classes on campus.

July

- Begin tabling events, class outreach events geared toward freshman taking classes in the Summer “B” term
- Begin digital outreach via email, web advertising, and social media campaigns
- Conduct monthly Coalition meeting
- Plan competitive voter registration drives between Greek chapters, student organizations
- Explore opportunities for competitive voter registration drives between UF and other campuses
- **July 4**—Independence Day
- **July 25**—Florida primary election voter registration deadline

August

- Continue tabling events, begin class outreach for Fall semester courses
- Continue digital outreach campaigns
- Conduct monthly Coalition meeting
- Implement competitive voter registration drives
- Coordinate with UF Housing and Inter-Residence Hall Association to offer voter registration opportunities to students living on-campus during move-in, first weeks of school
- Hold voter registration drive at new student athlete orientation at Farrior Hall in partnership with the UAA
- Host Florida primary GOTV events on-campus and virtually
- Produce and distribute materials and resources explaining Florida primary elections to students
- **August 5**—Summer “B” and Summer “C” terms end
- **August 23**—Florida primary election day
- **August 24**—Fall term begins

September

- Continue tabling events, class outreach
- Continue digital outreach campaigns
- Conduct monthly Coalition meeting
- Produce and distribute materials and resources explaining Florida general elections to students
- Facilitate candidate forums, meet-and-greet events with general election nominees
- **September 17**—Constitution Day
- **September 20**—National Voter Registration Day

October

- Continue tabling events, class outreach
- Continue digital outreach campaigns
- Conduct monthly Coalition meeting
- Encourage student organizations to facilitate group GOTV events
- **October 11**—Florida general election voter registration deadline

November & Beyond

- Continue tabling events, class outreach
- Continue digital outreach campaigns

- Conduct monthly Coalition meeting
- Host Florida general election GOTV events on-campus and virtually
- **November 8**—Election Day
- Establish a permanent civic engagement partnership with student organizations participating in the GOTV Coalition.

Reporting

This plan will be distributed to each partner group affiliated with the Gator GOTV Coalition, and will be published on the Graham Center’s Civic Engagement web corner. Additionally, we will be distributing it to UF colleges, University offices, and community partners. The Action Plan will also be presented to the UF Student Senate for the purpose of seeking a resolution explicitly supporting our efforts, as well as to the Student Body President, Lauren Lemasters.

The Graham Center will be responsible for submitting the Voter Friendly Campus Report by its due date of January 31, 2023.

The Graham Center will schedule and host regular monthly meetings of the Get Out The Vote Coalition to give members a chance to report on campus activities, promote upcoming events and provide feedback on progress to date.

We will participate in NSLVE and publish the 2022 NSLVE report as soon as it is available in early 2023.

The most recent [NSLVE report can be accessed at this link](#) to provide context to readers of the plan.

Evaluation

To check on the progress of our action plan, the Graham Center civic engagement working group will meet twice monthly through the Election 2022 season to monitor progress toward completion of the five objectives outlined in the “Goals” section of this action plan.

Special emphasis will be placed on which methods are most successful and what student segments we are mobilizing. TurboVote enrollments and voter registration numbers will be reviewed, as will attendance at events and social media metrics. Use of the ‘Ask Every Voter’ Canvas module will also be reviewed. These numbers will be shared at the monthly meetings of the Gator GOTV Coalition.

Additionally, the Center’s Civic Engagement Coordinator will provide periodic updates on the formalization of the Civic Engagement Cabinet.