

# Civic Impact: ***Learner-Centered Voter Engagement***

## **UHCL's Civic Action Plan**

*Submitted December 2024*

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# CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Leadership

Commitment

Landscape

Goals

Strategy

Reporting

Evaluation

Appendix

A. 2020 NSLVE Campus Report

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Civic Impact: Learner-Centered Voter Engagement* is a civic action plan for the University of Houston–Clear Lake that provides the framework for empowering Hawks as informed voters and active citizens in their community. A living, breathing document, the plan provides practical avenues for building institutional capacity related to civic engagement. It includes an overview of institutional goals and existing programs and envisions a path forward for impactful and learner-centered civic education. It will guide the planning, implementation, and assessment of innovative programs and services to promote voter participation.

This plan will:

- define 2024 institutional priorities related to civic and voter engagement.
- identify strategies to achieve civic and voter engagement priorities, and set the stage for UHCL to reaffirm its designation as a Voter Friendly Campus.

This plan was developed by the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership with support from the UHCL Civic Engagement Coalition and the Division of Student Affairs. It will be executed between June and December of 2024, to reflect the United States 2024 Election Season. The plan will be evaluated throughout the year and reconceptualized in January 2025.

The plan reflects the university's understanding that civic and community engagement are foundational to the university's growth per the strategic plan, and central to the formation of well-rounded Hawks.

## LEADERSHIP

The Office of Student Involvement and Leadership serves as the principal civic programming department across the institution. Programs and services related to civic learning and democratic engagement are coordinated primarily by the following program team:

- a full-time Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership who facilitates all leadership, community service, and civic engagement programming, as well as
- a work study-funded community engagement student staff member, and two Democracy Fellows sponsored by the Campus Vote Project.

The Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership is responsible for the conceptualization, execution, and assessment of community service and civic engagement programs. The two Democracy Fellows sponsored by the Campus Vote Project help execute voter engagement programs as part of their leadership role. The Work-Study Student Program Assistant joins the Democracy Fellows in reporting to the Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership by providing primary support to civic engagement programs. The Assistant Director reports to the Director of Student Involvement and Leadership who reports to the Assistant Vice President for Student Engagement as part of the Student Engagement portfolio of the Division of Student Affairs.

The Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership retains oversight over the execution of this campus plan. Civic engagement programs are embedded within the Leadership & Community Engagement area of the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership. The inclusion and integration of these programs as part of a student engagement office provides a failsafe that ensures that these programs will be maintained and that this plan is carried out in the absence of the Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership.

From the launch of the initial plan to August 2023, a Coordinator for Community Engagement led civic engagement initiatives while reporting to the Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership. As of August 2023, this position has not been filled. It is our hope to fill the position in 2024 and return the duties of oversight over the execution of this plan to that position.

### *Civic Engagement Coalition*

While the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership executes these programs and services, the Civic Engagement Coalition serves as the advisory board for the development of civic and voter engagement strategy at UHCL. The Coalition meets monthly during the academic year to provide feedback on current initiatives, advise

on potential collaborations and partners, and guide future initiatives. Founded in 2020 as part of the Voter Friendly Campus designation initiative, this diverse group of students, staff, faculty, and community partners are key to our democratic engagement.

*Current membership includes:*

- Bianca Avery, Advisor – Community (Campus Vote Project)
- Isabel Neman – Student (Student Involvement and Leadership)
- Doug Peterson, Member – Community (Harris County Precinct 2)
- Dr. Se-Hyoung Yi, Member – Faculty (Political Science)
- Dr. Wanalee Romero, Member – Faculty
- Josafat Contreras, Member – Student (Campus Activities Board)
- Maritza Sepulveda, Member – Community (Harris County)
- Dr. Natalie Pecknold, Member – Staff (Strategic Partnerships)
- Dr. Anne Gessler, Member – Faculty (First Year Seminar)
- Dr. Andrew Wiemer, Member – Administrator (Student Engagement)
- Annie Benefield, Member – Community (League of Women Voters)
- Judith Oppenheim, Member – Community (League of Women Voters)
- Ariel Bale – Student (Democracy Fellow)
- Leslie Alfaro – Student (Democracy Fellow)

### *Key Partners*

Beyond the scope of the Coalition, we partner with several groups to bring together the success of our civic education programs for our students.

#### UHCL DEPARTMENT PARTNERS

From facilitating the local elections to hosting collaborative programs, campus-wide collaborations allow for greater educational impact and logistical success.

*UHCL Department Partners:*

- Anthropology Program
- Women and Gender Studies Program
- Political Science Program
- Psychology Program
- Common Reader Program
- First Year Seminar Program
- Department of Liberal Arts
- College of Human Sciences and Humanities
- Student Housing and Residential Life
- Center for Student Advocacy and Community
- Campus Recreation and Wellness Center
- Orientation and New Student Programs
- University Police Department
- Parking and Transportation Services
- Scheduling and Facilities, Management and Construction
- Strategic Partnerships
- Campus Dining

## STUDENT ORGANIZATION PARTNERS

While many organizations have been invited in conversation related to civic learning, student organization engagement largely remains with the following groups. Initiatives to engage additional organizations are detailed in the next section.

*Student Organization Partners:*

- MOVE Texas Student Organization

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

UHCL enjoys close relationships with several local and national partners to help execute voter engagement initiatives. Engagement with these organizations include campus visits and promotional material to monthly phone calls and financial support for institutional initiatives. We also have a close relationship with our local elections coordinator, the Harris County Elections Administrator, including both the voter registration and education branch as well as the polling site team.

*Community Partners:*

- Campus Vote Project – Fair Elections Center
- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
- League of Women Voters of the Bay Area
- National Vote Early Day
- National Voter Registration Day
- MTV Vote Early Challenge
- MOVE Texas
- Harris County Elections Administrator
- Harris County Precinct 2 – *Commissioner Adrian Garcia*

Each constituent group provides strengths that help propel this plan forward. Diversity in professional, academic, and service experience, gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, and geographical location are considered throughout such partnerships. Faculty and academic affairs involvement ensures that cross-campus collaborations are embraced, and that learning is embedded into the curricular experience. Student affairs departments help complement the co-curricular experience by providing collaborative opportunities that empower a diverse group of students from various spaces and backgrounds (i.e. residents, students of color, veteran students, etc.). Community organizations provide frontline civic education information and connect our students through high-impact opportunities through volunteering, internships, and even full-time roles in non-partisan civic education work. Most importantly, students guide the demand and nature of these programs and serve as an integral part of the planning and execution of these initiatives.

### ***Future Membership and Partner Consideration***

The Office of Student Involvement and Leadership has seen many changes in the last year. As we onboard new staff and re-envision our department's mission, we are eager to continue to pursue new partnerships with the following on-campus groups:

- Racial and ethnic affinity-based student organizations
- Residence Hall Association
- University Staff Association



- Marketing and Communications Department
- Student Publications

Establishing relationships with these groups will allow civic education a greater platform for student and community outreach, embed civic learning into the leadership experience of marginalized communities, and further institutionalize democratic engagement. Further, in congruence with our desire to support civic engagement work comprehensively and inclusively, we seek:

- Relationship with Brazoria County to help establish a polling site at the UHCL Pearland campus for our student and staff voters in Brazoria County and at Pearland.

# COMMITMENT

UHCL has a demonstrated history of supporting the formation of civic consciousness among its students. Our work is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of the

- Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change,
- *A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future*,
- the Active Citizen Continuum, and
- Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching selected UHCL as one of 119 U.S. colleges and universities for its 2008 Community Engagement Classification. UHCL is also a five-time recipient of the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement. Our passion for civic engagement was reinvigorated through the commitment of senior university leadership who ensured that the value of civic participation was embedded into student learning and the university's [Impact 2025 and Beyond](#) strategic plan. As part of our commitment to the Voter Friendly Campus initiative and the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, this plan supports our university's strategic plan in the following domains:

- Improve Collaborative Community Presence
- Improve Student Experience Process
- Improve UHCL Experience

**Increase University Recognition** UHCL has continued to provide curricular and co-curricular learner-centered experiences that prepare students to make meaningful contributions to their community and engage in service, civic and voter engagement.

## *Curricular*

UHCL continues to develop new academic programs and refine academic leadership as we approach our semi-centennial anniversary. Our academic commitment to civic learning is centered around two key experiences – the core curriculum and the university's *Quality Enhancement Plan*.

### *Core Curriculum*

As a state institution, the Texas Education Code §51.301 requires UHCL students to complete six semester hours of coursework in government/political science as part of the Core Curriculum, thus integrating civic learning as key to the graduating student's knowledge. In addition, the university's [First Year Seminar](#) program embeds civic engagement into the fabric of the academic class all new

students are required to take: PSYC1300 – Learning Frameworks. The course is described as follows:

An inquiry around the broad, interdisciplinary concepts of civic engagement and citizenship for students to explicitly examine and engage in advanced critical thinking and cognition, acquisition of resources, introduction to research and service learning. This course promotes intellectual readiness by helping students build and find the resources to become personally responsible and active members of the university community, their education and their world.

#### *Quality Enhancement Plan*

The Quality Enhancement Plan – [Becoming Aware: Global Engagement at UHCL](#) is part of the university's reaccreditation process with the SACSOC. The plan centralizes civic engagement at the core of student learning outcomes and provides a roadmap for the university to prepare students to thrive in an increasingly diverse global environment where the ability to adapt and be engaging, while appreciating diversity in all forms, represent marketable skills that will prepare students for whatever the future may hold. The QEP complements the university's strategic plan as it is learner-focused, embraces diversity, creates a service culture, fosters adaptability, and demonstrates the desire to provide a comprehensive civic education for our students.

#### *Co-Curricular*

Civic learning and democratic engagement are largely spearheaded by co-curricular departments of UHCL, primarily in the Division of Student Affairs (DSA). DSA demonstrates a co-curricular commitment to civic education through its mission and values, co-curricular transcript, and the several programs, services, and recognition opportunities that highlight civic involvement. Subsequent sections of this action plan will further discuss strategies and initiatives that culminate in co-curricular civic learning.

##### *DSA [Mission, Vision, and Values](#):*

The DSA Core Value of Service remains integral to our mission, aligning with the UHCL Voter Friendly Campus Coalition's (VFCC) objectives in fostering civic engagement. Our commitment to civic duty is exemplified through our involvement in the VFCC, a coalition dedicated to promoting a Voter Friendly Campus. By leveraging the collective expertise of staff, faculty, students, and community partners, we contribute to building an inclusive and engaged campus community:

By collaborating with various partners, including the Center for Student Advocacy and Community, Student Housing and Residence Life, and

Student Involvement and Leadership, we actively contribute to creating a Voter Friendly Campus.

**Impact:** Through active participation in campus events and strategic engagement initiatives, including representation from Democracy Fellows and key student leaders, students not only learn the importance of dedicated service but also become catalysts for positive change in their communities.

### [League of the Rising Hawks](#)

League of the Rising Hawks is an initiative dedicated to student success and creating a unique campus culture that engages students through co-curricular experiences. Students will be challenged to become more engaged with UHCL departments and campus activities to achieve student learning competencies and distinctions. At the completion of the League of the Rising Hawks experience, students will reflect upon their involvement and earn a graduation stole.

League of the Rising Hawks was established by the Division of Student Affairs as a co-curricular experience for student success, retention, and celebration. It allows students to choose engaging educational programs and experiences to help students achieve their specific goals.

**Civic and Social Responsibility Distinction:** Understanding the needs and issues within a community to become an informed and engaged citizen.

**Connection and belonging** – Ability to demonstrate awareness, attitude, and knowledge to engage others from different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences.

**Active citizenship** – Ability to build awareness and engage with communities in community which they are involved.

**Global perspective** – Ability to maintain the skills, values, and behaviors to engage in a diverse and interconnected world.

**Advocacy** – Ability to support various persons, groups, or causes within societal structures and systems that are different from oneself

This distinction not only enriches a student's personal and academic journey but also aligns with the broader goals of fostering civic responsibility and social awareness at UHCL.

### *Campus Co-Curricular Programs*

From panels and workshops, there are several opportunities offered to students each month to engage in dialogue and increase their knowledge as voters and global citizens. Whether it is civic values workshops and tabling or hosting the local county for educational workshops and polling sites, these programs form the bulk of our commitment to civic engagement.

# LANDSCAPE

UHCL was founded in 1974 as an upper-level institution part of the University of Houston System. In 2014, the university expanded to welcome freshmen and sophomore students to the campus. The institution began with 1,069 students and 60 faculty and has since grown to include over 6,758 undergraduate and 2,386 graduate students. In its short history, UHCL has earned a reputation as a student-centered, community-minded, and partnership-oriented university. We maintain strong connections to area industries, organizations, schools and individuals that enhance the region’s educational, economic, cultural, scientific, and professional environment.

UHCL takes pride in its designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, acknowledged by the U.S. Department of Education, where a substantial 44% of our student population identifies as Hispanic. Furthermore, our university embraces diversity, with students of color collectively constituting 65% of the overall student body, solidifying UHCL as a majority-minority institution. UHCL opened its first residence hall, Hunter Hall, in 2019 and remains a primarily commuter campus. About half of the student population are Harris County residents.

### *Land Acknowledgement*

UHCL is situated on the traditional and ancestral home of the *Karankawa*, *Akokisa*, *Coahuiltecan*, and *Atakapa-Ishak* people. We honor and respect them and their sacred land, which was forcibly taken through genocide, and to this day holds meaning and connection to many Indigenous people. As we advance our commitment to equity and inclusion, we must consider the ways in which government and civic education has historically been used to abuse and oppress marginalized communities. As such, we must be intentional in developing strategies that are conscious of these issues.

### *National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement*

In 2021, UHCL became a participant in the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE), sponsored by the Tufts University Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life. A copy of the report is available in the appendix. While UHCL did participate in the 2022 study, the report has not been received yet.

Key findings from our 2020 Campus Report are as follows:

| <i>UHCL<br/>Registration Rate</i> | <i>UHCL<br/>Voting Rate</i> | <i>All Institutions<br/>Voting Rate</i> | <i>State of Texas<br/>Voting Rate</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 81.1%                             | 62.8%                       | 66%                                     | 66.73%                                |

1. UHCL's voting rate is 3% below the national institutional average. However, since the 2018 election, UHCL has witnessed a jump in the voting rate from 48% to 62.8% - a substantial increase of almost 15%!
2. UHCL students are registering to vote, but not turning out to the polls to vote.
3. A large majority (85%) of UHCL students vote early. Students who vote, vote early!
4. The voting rates of Asian, Hispanic, Multiracial, and Race Unknown students are below the overall UHCL voting rate.
5. Students ages 40+ demonstrated the highest voting rates with an average of 72%. Student age groups of 18-21, 22-24, and 25-29 have voting rates below the institutional rate, with ages 25-29 having the lowest rate at 59%.
6. The voting rate of male students (60%) falls below the institutional voting rate.
7. While the voting rate of graduate students is above average at 69%, the voting rate of undergraduate students remains below average at 61%.
8. First and second years students have voting rates below average at 56% and 59%, respectively.

# GOALS

## Short-Term Goals

| GOALS         |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Goal 1</b> | By December 2024, UHCL will increase student attendance at student led civic and voter engagement initiatives, programs, and workshops.   |
| <b>Goal 2</b> | By December 2024, UHCL will see an increase in involvement of the Civic Engagement Coalition members with programming efforts. Emphasis will be placed on engaging Coalition members in the programming efforts that are being hosted by the student leaders. |
| <b>Goal 3</b> | By December 2024, UHCL will fill the position of the Coordinator for Civic Engagement, further committing to advancing civic education efforts on campus.   |

## Long-Term Goals

| GOALS         |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Goal 1</b> | By 2028, UHCL will increase its student registration rate from 81.1% to 90%.  |
| <b>Goal 2</b> | By 2028, UHCL will increase its student voting rate from 62.8% to 70%.  |
| <b>Goal 3</b> | By 2028, UHCL will be an established and consistent early voting polling site for Harris County. In 2020, 85% of UHCL students voted early. |





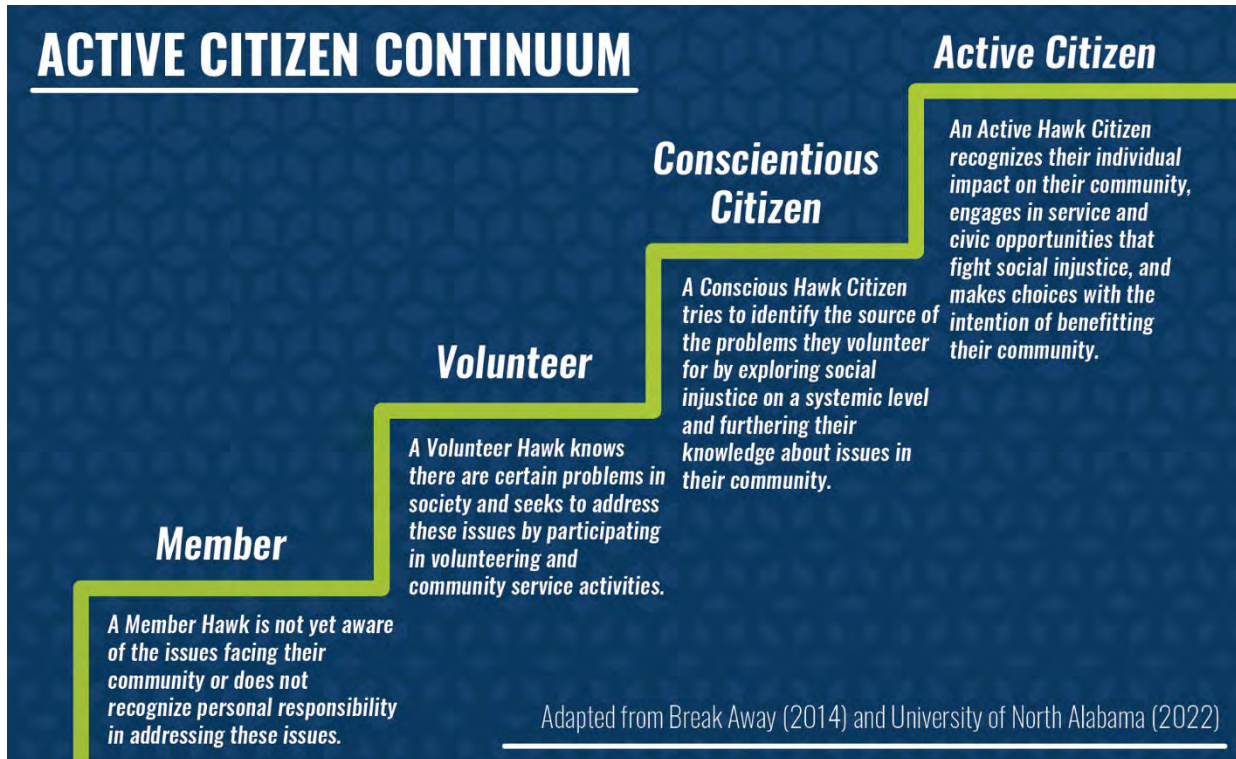
# STRATEGY

The following section explores the theoretical framework and practical strategies we seek to employ to achieve our goals. We are committed to a programmatic and civic action philosophy that is grounded in three principles.

| GROUNDING PRINCIPLES OF THE UHCL CIVIC ACTION STRATEGY |   |
|--|---|
| <b><i>Non-Partisan</i></b>                             | We maintain programs and opportunities that are politically neutral and do not endorse any political party or activity. By extension, we welcome participation and discussion with all groups on campus.                    |
| <b><i>Inclusive</i></b>                                | We seek to advocate for marginalized groups and invite them to decision-making spaces. We welcome a diversity of thought and establish programs and services to meet the diverse needs and experiences of the student body. |
| <b><i>Intentional</i></b>                              | Rather than host programs for the sake of hosting them, we seek high student impact and critical student learning. Our work is grounded in student development theory and models of civic consciousness.                    |

## ***Active Citizen Continuum***

We adopt the Active Citizen Continuum as a framework to promote student civic and community engagement. When students participate in our learning experiences, we invite them to expand their understanding of themselves and their experience as it relates to the greater community. The Active Citizen Continuum maps a pathway for students to deepen their social awareness and become engaged and active citizens.



More information about the Continuum and an accessible version is available [here](#).

**Strategy Details**

The following tables enumerate five strategies UHCL will employ to achieve our goals. Each strategy is described, initiatives are listed, metrics for success are established, and responsible parties are identified.

| STRATEGY 1: STATIC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING   |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Description: Static programs that include displays or tables for students to interact with.</i>   |   |
| <i>Initiatives:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bulletin Boards</li> <li>▪ Voter Education Tabling</li> <li>▪ Library Displays</li> </ul> | <i>Metrics for Success:</i><br>Number of participants engaged, voter registrations achieved each month. |
| <i>Responsible Person(s): Democracy Fellows</i>  |   |

## STRATEGY 2: ACTIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

*Description: Programs and services that actively engage student participation and promote student learning.*

*Initiatives:*

- Civic Holiday Celebrations
  - Constitution Day
  - Vote Early Day
  - National Voter Registration Day
  - Election Heroes Day
- Hosting Harris County for Polling Sites for both Early Voting and Election Day
- Election Night Watch Parties
- Panel Discussions and Civic Dialogues
- Movie nights and discussions
- Deliberative Dialogue Program
- Voter Registration Drives
- Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrar Initiative – recruitment and training of students and staff
- Canvassing at Hunter Residence Hall and University Forest Apartments
- Cultivate and support civic-oriented student organizations
- MTV and CVP Vote Early Challenge – to promote early voting on campus

*Metrics for Success:*  
Number of event attendees, student learning outcomes achieved at a 90% learning and event satisfaction rate.

*Responsible Person(s):*

Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership, Civic Engagement Coalition, Student Program Assistant – Civic Engagement, & Democracy Fellows

## STRATEGY 3: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

*Description: Opportunities for students to engage with community organizations and partners.*

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Initiatives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Invite local and national civic and voter engagement organizations to campus</li> <li>▪ Continue fostering relationships with the Campus Vote Project, ALL IN, as well as fellow institutions</li> <li>▪ Maintain and seek out external grants and funding</li> <li>▪ Host city, council, and state representatives for student dialogues and town halls</li> <li>▪ Facilitate alumni engagement and participation</li> <li>▪ Harris County election judges trainings</li> <li>▪ Community service programs with local non-profits focused on civic learning</li> <li>▪ Foster a relationship between UHCL Pearland and Brazoria County</li> </ul> | <p><i>Metrics for Success:</i><br/>Number of participants engaged, partners reached.</p> |
| <p><i>Responsible Person(s):</i><br/>Assistant Director, Civic Engagement Coalition</p>  |  |

**STRATEGY 4: ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS**

*Description: Collaborating with faculty and academic affairs units to establish curricular experiences, embrace civic learning as an interdisciplinary concept, and reach students attending classes only.*

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Initiatives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Voting 101 classroom presentation</li> <li>▪ Civic values identification workshops</li> <li>▪ Establish an inventory of classes and programs that include civic learning outcomes.</li> <li>▪ Establish an inventory of faculty with civic engagement research interests.</li> <li>▪ Further discussion and collaborations to promote civic-oriented internships for course credit and experiential opportunities for classroom learning.</li> <li>▪ Work with departments with low voting rates according to the NSLVE to improve voting rates among these students.</li> <li>▪ Explore university holiday or no classes initiative for Election Day, as well as other incentives for voter turnout.</li> </ul> | <p><i>Metrics for Success:</i><br/>Number of participants established, student learning outcomes achieved at a 90% learning and satisfaction rate.</p> |
| <p><i>Responsible Person(s):</i><br/>Democracy Fellows &amp; Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership</p>  |  |

## STRATEGY 5: TECHNOLOGY AND MARKETING

*Description: Use of student and voter engagement platforms, as well as university marketing strategies to promote voter participation on campus.*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Initiatives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ TurboVote Interface and Anthology Engage for Voter Engagement</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">UHCL GetInvolved</a> – UHCL's student engagement platform.</li> <li>▪ Milestone and Guided Paths</li> <li>▪ Recognition of “Civic Leadership” in student awards, Milestone, or other programs.</li> <li>▪ Social Media Outreach and Education Campaigns</li> <li>▪ Establish a voter education and Election Day polling site campaign with UHCL Marketing Communications.</li> </ul> | <p><i>Metrics for Success:</i><br/>Number of participants engaged, social media engagement metrics.</p> |
|---|---|

*Responsible Person(s):*  
Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership & Democracy  
Fellows

## REPORTING

This plan will be shared internally throughout the Division of Student Affairs and through the university's Core Leadership. This includes meetings with senior university leadership, campus partners in academic affairs, and with student government. The plan will be shared on the UHCL website, embedded within the [Civic Engagement programs](#) area of the website, along with data and information used to inform the plan (i.e. NSLVE reports, previous campus reports, etc.).

## EVALUATION

The campus plan will be evaluated through qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure effectiveness of programs and achievement of institutional goals. This includes post-event surveys, focus groups, and informal evaluation strategies at various campus programs. Assessment will be guided and coordinated by the Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Leadership.

Evaluation of this plan will occur each semester and involve an assessment of the metrics for success of each of the strategies listed in the Strategy section. Evaluation will focus on two primary metrics, the number of students engaged and the achievement of learning outcomes. Evaluation information will be tracked using *Qualtrics*, the Universities Assessment software. The plan will be reviewed by the Civic Engagement Coalition and relevant data will be presented to the advisory board to ensure adherence to the campus plan. At the conclusion of the 2024 plan, the plan will be evaluated by the Student Involvement and Leadership team and the Civic Engagement Coalition to determine steps for the 2023 plan and provide updates to senior leadership and shared governance regarding progress of institutional goals. Evaluation will engage all stakeholders and campus partners discussed in the Leadership section.