



University of Mary Washington

Democratic Engagement Action Plan

2024-2025

March 2024

I. Executive Summary

This **Democratic Engagement Action Plan** is being submitted as part of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and will guide the civic engagement work of UMW students, staff and faculty on the UMW campus in Fredericksburg, Virginia over the next two years. This work will be led by UMW Votes which has a mission to create civically-engaged students passionate about participating in our democracy. UMW Votes is housed in the Center for Community Engagement in the division of Academic Affairs, which provides the financial and other resources for this work, in partnership with several national, regional, state and local organizations. UMW's commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is reflected in the university's 2022 Strategic Vision, the first goal of which is to promote "the values of service and community and civic engagement."

The goals of this **Democratic Engagement Action Plan** build on several years of work (Virginia has an election every year) and will work to strengthen and grow current strategies and tactics. This Plan has 3 short term goals, and 2 long term goals.

Short Term Goals:

1. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will support student civic engagement on the UMW campus by providing information and resources for student voters.
2. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will partner with a broad coalition of internal and external partners to support nonpartisan student civic engagement and learning.

3. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will take actions to be inclusive of diverse populations in their voter education and engagement work.

Long Term Goals:

1. By November 15, 2029, overall UMW student voter participation among all students will have increased by 10% over the numbers reported in our 2022 NSLVE report.
2. By November 15, 2029, UMW Votes will have developed faculty champions who are leading curricular civic engagement work.

This **Democratic Engagement Action Plan** was developed by students and staff at the Center for Community Engagement at the University of Mary Washington (UMW). These individuals include Tonia Attie, Jorin Casa de Calvo, Melanie Billescas, John Leitch, Cameron Golitz, Sarah Tyree-Herrmann, and Dr. Sarah Dewees, Director of the Center for Community Engagement. Students and staff worked on this plan over the last 12 months, including during summer 2023. More recently, students have been meeting weekly in January and February and using the Votes and Ballots materials to develop this Action Plan. This plan will be re-evaluated every spring to assess how well we accomplished our goals and areas for modification or adjustment. We will produce a report on our fall 2024 activities in spring 2025.



II. Leadership

Leadership

A core team of students and staff have been working on civic engagement at UMW over the past six years through the UMW Votes program housed in the UMW Center for Community Engagement. Each fall, UMW Votes students meet with the Director of the Center for Community Engagement at least two times a week, with a regular meeting of the leadership team and separate meetings of each of the subcommittees. UMW Votes has three main subcommittees: Social Media, Voter Registration/GOTV, and Events. Meetings occur more often during the weeks in which UMW Votes celebrates the civic holidays. In the spring, the UMW Votes volunteers meet and discuss upcoming elections and carry out strategic planning and fundraising.

On-Campus Partners

The UMW Votes students and staff have formed a coalition of other interested parties on campus, and work closely with the following institutions and departments:

1. **The President's Office:** President Troy Paino has signed the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment, and our institution is a member of Campus Compact. President Paino is very supportive of student civic engagement.
2. **Student Affairs:** We work with the Student Affairs division staff and leadership to support civic engagement.
 - a. **James Farmer Multicultural Center:** The James Farmer Multicultural Center has been working on civic engagement issues for several years and frequently hosts workshops, teach-ins, and speakers to help students learn more about civic engagement and civic issues. We work with JFMC on civic engagement programming in the fall, bringing speakers to campus to talk about issues related to the election.
 - b. **Student Activities and Engagement:** SAE and student government help promote UMW Votes' information on their social media, amplifying its reach.
 - c. **First Year Experience and New Student Programming:** During Welcome Week and new student Orientation (summer) we provide information about voter registration and the importance of civic engagement.
 - d. **Residence Life:** We try to provide relevant resources to all Residence Assistants (RAs) and Senior RAs so they can be posted on their floor Canvas pages. We participate in the RA resource fair at the beginning of the semester, handing out flyers and other information that RAs can share on their bulletin boards.
3. **Academic Affairs:** The Provost provides funding for the Center for Community Engagement and supports the civic engagement work of UMW Votes. The Center for Community Engagement is located in the division of Academic Affairs.
 - a. **Faculty support:** Staff from the Center for Community Engagement work with faculty teaching civically-engaged classes, such as the First Year Seminar titled Working on Democracy. The Center for Teaching works with the Center for Community Engagement to provide pedagogical support for community-engaged work. Several faculty invite us to speak to their classes, and also help with NVRD and Vote Early Day, as well as sharing information on Election Day. We work with faculty in the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, the Math Dept., and the Honors Program. Finally, the university allows classes to be designated



“community-engaged” or “CE”, indicating that students are involved in the community.

- b. **Honors Program:** The Honors Program offers UMW Votes as a volunteer program that can be used for a class called “Honors Service Learning”; students commit to work 20 volunteer hours with UMW Votes.
4. **University Relations:** University Relations often shares stories about civic engagement on the university homepage and also helps publicize many civic engagement messages during Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day. University Relations also sends out all-campus emails about upcoming civic holidays and Election Day programming.
5. **Students:** In addition to student leaders, UMW Votes also partners with a range of student clubs on campus. Leadership and membership in these clubs changes over time, so partnerships change from year to year. UMW Votes usually reaches out to the following student organizations each fall to invite them to partner on the civic holidays:
 - Young Democrats
 - Campus Republicans
 - UMW NAACP Chapter
 - Latino Students Association
 - Day on Democracy

Support from Upper Administration

President Troy Paino is very supportive of civic engagement on the UMW campus. The 2022 Strategic Vision for UMW includes the goal of *promoting the values of service and community and civic engagement*. Action Step 1.1 is to develop curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular programs that promote civic and community engagement. President Paino has signed the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment, and our institution is a member of Campus Compact. Campus Compact is a national organization with a mission to advance the public purposes of colleges and universities by deepening their ability to improve community life and to educate students for civic and social responsibility. Campus Compact works to “build democracy through civic engagement” and support “...students as they develop leadership skills, strategies for engagement, public applications of academic knowledge, and increased civic participation.” Our Provost is also very supportive of civic engagement on the UMW campus and provides the budget for the civic engagement work.

Our Team

In 2023 and 2024, we worked with a team of students and staff to put together this **Democratic Engagement Action Plan**. In the spring of 2024, UMW Votes students met weekly and used the Votes and Ballots materials to write a draft of the Action Plan and update the previous plan. The following students met weekly in spring 2024:

- Tonia Attie, UMW Votes
- Jorrin Casa de Calvo, UMW Votes, Campus Vote Project
- Melanie Billescas, UMW Votes, Campus Vote Project

- John Leitch, Volunteer
- Cameron Golitz, UMW Votes
- Sarah Tyree-Herrmann, UMW Votes
- Dr. Sarah Dewees, Director of the Center for Community Engagement

Recruitment

Each year we work to add new members to the team by participating in on-campus recruitment events such as Club Carnival, which occurs once at the beginning of each semester. Additionally we use social media to recruit new members that are interested in working with civic engagement on campus. We also share information with the Honors Program.

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

UMW Votes works to be intentionally inclusive of diverse and underrepresented communities and reach out to students involved in programs supported by the James Farmer Multicultural Center, including students involved in the UMW NAACP chapter and the Latino Students Association (LSA). During our celebration of civic holidays, UMW Votes partnered with our Office of Disability Resources to hand out braille constitutions (and they partnered with REV Up), and we handed out pocket constitutions and voting forms in Spanish as well as English during our civic holidays and tabling on campus walk. We continue to brainstorm about ways to make sure our activities are inclusive of diverse populations.



Off-Campus Partners

UMW Votes works with a range of off-campus partners as well:

- Fredericksburg City Voting Registrar - Jessica Atkins
- League of Women Voters of the Fredericksburg Region - Sue Botts
- Virginia National Organization for Women chapter - Katherine Hoffman
- Campus Vote Project - Amber Wilt
- Virginia21 - Kate Slayton
- Newman Civic Fellowship (Campus Compact)
- Local Elected Officials (City Council members, etc.)
- Day on Democracy
- ALL IN Campus Challenge
- Students Learn, Students Vote Coalition

These partnerships help to provide additional support to the efforts of UMW Votes, enabling us to further our influence.

Succession planning

The Director of the Center for Community Engagement currently leads the work of UMW Votes, in loose cooperation with other staff and faculty. If this individual were to leave UMW, the next person hired to be the Director of the Center for Community Engagement would be asked to take on this work. However, there is no guarantee this work would continue under the new leadership. Currently, the voter engagement work on our campus is very siloed within one office, and because we are a small campus, not a lot of faculty/staff are available to help.

III. Commitment

University of Mary Washington’s commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is reflected in the university’s 2022 Strategic Vision. The first goal of this vision is to promote “the values of service and community and civic engagement.” The strategic plan calls for developing academic and co-curricular programs on civic engagement and community-engaged learning and the strengthening of relationships with community partners and organizations. As stated in Action 1:1, we will “Develop curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular programs that promote civic and community engagement, volunteerism, and service learning with partners in the greater Fredericksburg region and across the Commonwealth.”

UMW currently supports several co-curricular programs that complement the rigorous academic experience offered at the university. UMW supports a variety of different programs that provide students with the opportunities for leadership development, volunteerism, service learning, civic engagement, and various other forms of community engagement.



Dr. Troy Paino, the president of the University of Mary Washington, signed ALL IN’s Higher Education President’s Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation in 2021, showing his commitment to increasing civic engagement across the University.

UMW is a member of Campus Compact and works with this national organization to support faculty and staff as they think about ways to include civic learning in curricular and co-curricular experiences. UMW is a member of the Students Learn, Students Vote coalition and was a member of the ALL IN campus challenge in 2023 and received the Voter Friendly Campus designation. UMW is honored to work with Campus Vote Project, NextGen, National Organization for Women (NOW) of Virginia, and Virginia21 to provide civic engagement fellowships on campus to further student civic learning.

Our University Relations team shares information about UMW's commitment to civic engagement through many different channels, internally and externally. They announce student involvement in ALL IN's Student Voting Honor Roll, send out all-campus emails for Constitution Day and Election Day, write an annual story about the Election Day activities, and include a story about civic engagement in their annual report. UMW is proud to be a Voter Friendly Campus and to claim civic engagement as part of our campus culture.

Institutional Context

The **UMW Votes** program, hosted by the UMW Center for Community Engagement, has worked with students for the last six years to design and implement our civic engagement work.

This nonpartisan UMW Democratic Engagement Action Plan was developed by staff and students at the Center for Community Engagement. The Center for Community Engagement is located in the Cedric Rucker University Center on the main UMW campus and has a mission to serve as a catalyst for community engagement between UMW and our greater communities, building bridges between students, faculty, staff, and community partners through effective relationships that bring about student learning and positive social change. In fall of 2018, the University created the Center for Community Engagement to be a hub for community and civic engagement activities on campus, working in partnership with other existing programs.

The UMW Center for Community Engagement works to carry out the 2022 UMW Strategic Vision that includes promoting the values of community and civic engagement. As stated in our 2022 Strategic Vision, "As a public liberal arts and sciences institution, UMW seeks to realize the public purpose of our mission. Drawing inspiration from our 1908 founding as a public school to train teachers as well as the legacies of the students, faculty and staff who inspire members of our community to pursue things greater than self, we equip students to address society's complex challenges and to be active citizens in our pluralistic liberal democracy. UMW graduates have the knowledge, skills, and capacity to improve their lives, their communities, and the world around them."

IV. Landscape

The University of Mary Washington (UMW) is a small public liberal arts university located in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The enrollment at UMW is approximately 4,000 students and it is a residential campus. The most recent NSLVE data we have is from 2020. Our 2020 NSLVE reported a 78.8% voting rate, up 12.2 points from 2016. The student registration rate (89.4%), voting rate of registered students (88.2%), and overall voting rate (78.8%) were all higher than the national average in 2020. In 2018, UMW also had a very high voter turnout rate compared to national averages. UMW won a Gold Seal for high voter turnout in 2020, with 78.8% of our students voting. The political climate on the UMW campus reflects relatively high civic engagement, with high participation in voting, but also several active political groups on campus across the ideological spectrum.

Staff from the Center for Community Engagement have been reaching out to faculty, staff, and students on campus to gather input on this action plan to increase civic learning, political engagement, and voting rates among UMW community members (including students, staff, faculty). Our strongest area of programming involves working with highly engaged students on co-curricular activities.

Co-curricular Activities:

The Center for Community Engagement supports the **UMW Votes** program and works with student leaders each semester to support voter registration, education, and mobilization. Over the past few years, there have been many different civic engagement activities and programs on the UMW campus, and this plan builds on those previous successes. The following activities took place in fall 2022 and 2023:



1. Several events and ongoing tabling (Constitution Day, NVRD, Vote Early Day, tabling three days a week in October and on Election Day, rides to the polls on Election Day).
2. Class presentations to multiple classes, working with Residence Assistants to provide informational flyers for bulletin boards in dorms, and registering people to vote during Welcome Week (working with the Orientation program).
3. Sharing information on social media about early voting, voter registration deadlines, ways to vote (by mail, early, or on Election Day), locations of early voting centers, and more.

Day on Democracy: Starting in spring 2019, a group of UMW students and alumni worked with faculty governance and the UMW administration to design and propose a plan for a “Day on Democracy,” which allowed UMW to cancel most classes on Election Day in November, 2020. This proposal was passed by the University Faculty Council in March 2019. A team of students, staff, and faculty met to design the programming leading up to and on the day of the 2020 election. Programming has continued every year since then to celebrate student civic engagement and also provide rides to the polls for those voting on Election Day. UMW Votes currently provides the majority of programming on Election Day to support and celebrate student participation in voting and celebrate Day on Democracy.

Curricular:

In Fall 2022, Dr. David Stahlman taught a First Year Seminar titled “Working on Democracy” where students planned on-campus events for Election Day, and conducted research revolving around college students and election turnout. The class consisted of around 15 students and they were able to host two events during the Fall 2022 semester, one for UMW’s Day on Democracy

on Election Day and a “Party at the Polls” event where rides were offered to students. Dr. Stahlman plans on teaching this course in 2024, and encouraging his students to help with Civic Holidays and other activities in fall 2024.

The Honors Program teaches a class on service learning and presents their students with a range of volunteer opportunities, including working with UMW Votes and other civic engagement programs. The Honors Program also supports a City as Text program that encourages Honors students to explore Fredericksburg and learn more about local government. Finally, the UMW faculty recently completed a revision of the general education requirements and added a focus on *Diverse and Global Perspectives* and *Beyond the Classroom*, which encourages students to learn more about civic engagement.

Barriers:

UMW has a small number of internal and external barriers to successful student civic engagement. A few internal barriers include limited budgets, and a lack of broad support from faculty on campus. While most faculty, staff, and administrators are very supportive of civic engagement and supporting students as they learn civic engagement skills, as of yet there is no detailed strategy for accomplishing this beyond the work of the Center for Community Engagement and UMW Votes. There are several faculty who teach classes on elections and electoral politics and are very supportive of student civic engagement, but there is no unified, organized approach to discussing civic learning and democratic engagement in the curriculum. This is due to a variety of factors including a lack of current leadership from within the faculty on this particular topic, and the fact that faculty are still recovering from a difficult teaching experience during the pandemic and most are not eager to take on new projects. The external barriers have diminished significantly due to a recent redistricting process in 2021 that removed split districts and precincts that had been a problem for students on the UMW campus. The most significant ongoing external barriers are lack of transportation to the voting sites for some college students, and a lack of understanding of the voting process (how to vote early, or how to vote at their home address rather than their campus address, etc.).

V. Goals

We believe our action plan will continue to support civic engagement on the part of UMW students and help students form the habits of active and engaged citizenship, civil communication, and voting. This Plan has 3 short term goals, and 2 long term goals.

Short Term Goals:

1. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will support student civic engagement on the UMW campus by providing information and resources for student voters.

2. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will partner with a broad coalition of internal and external partners to support nonpartisan student civic engagement and learning.
3. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will take actions to be inclusive of diverse populations in their voter education and engagement work.

Long Term Goals:

1. By November 15, 2029, overall UMW student voter participation among all students will have increased by 10% over the numbers reported in our 2022 NSLVE report.
2. By November 15, 2029, UMW Votes will have developed faculty champions who are leading curricular civic engagement work.

VI. Strategy

The Center for Community Engagement (CCE) has been working to coordinate both new and existing efforts to support and build civic engagement on campus. Working in partnership with the members of the coalition, UMW Votes has begun to build and grow programs and activities that will continue over the next two years. The strategy to support these programs and opportunities are outlined below.

Short Term Goals:

1. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will support student civic engagement on the UMW campus by providing information and resources for student voters. They will do this by:
 - a. **Celebrating the Civic Holidays and civic engagement**, registering voters, providing resources, and sharing information about upcoming elections. Campus activities and celebrations will be held for the following civic holidays and events:
 - i. National Voter Registration Day: Voter registration table, game table, free T-shirts and tote bags to build pride about civic engagement, and free food.
 - ii. Constitution Day - Voter registration and giving away free pocket constitutions.
 - iii. Vote Early Day - game table, free T-shirts and tote bags to build pride about civic engagement, and free food.
 - iv. Voter Education Week - online education on our Instagram account.
 - v. Election Day and Day on Democracy - Free rides to the polls, voter information, sample ballots, and free food.
 - b. **Tabling on Campus Walk** in September and October, registering voters and sharing information about upcoming elections. This includes:

- i. Tabling for Constitution Day -Voter registration and giving away free pocket constitutions.
 - ii. Pumpkins to the Polls and Don't Ghost the Vote in October - Voter registration and giving away free pumpkins and Halloween candy.
- c. Working with **New Student Programs and Student Affairs** to share information:
 - i. Registering voters and sharing information about elections during New Student Orientation and during Welcome Week on the UMW campus.
 - ii. Sharing voter information and posters with Residence Assistants (RAs) during Welcome Week.
- d. **Collaborating with faculty** when possible:
 - i. Doing “class raps” to share information about voting.
 - ii. Working with faculty teaching civically-engaged and community-engaged classes, encouraging them to have their students volunteer with UMW Votes.
- e. Supporting an active **Social Media presence:**
 - i. Informational posts leading up to the election
 - ii. A cameo message on Election Day
2. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will partner with a broad coalition of internal and external partners to support nonpartisan student civic engagement and learning. They will do this by:
 - a. Working in partnership with state, regional and national organizations, when possible and appropriate, such as Campus Vote Project, Virginia21, Students Learn, Students Vote Coalition, National Organization for Women (NOW) VA, and others. These partnerships will provide information, resources, and financial support for student civic engagement on the UMW campus. Financial support often provides the opportunity to offer paid fellowships for nonpartisan student civic engagement work.
 - b. Working in partnership with internal UMW partners to support student civic engagement and learning. UMW Votes will collaborate with members of their coalition and community partners to share information about registering to vote, the importance of voting, and upcoming elections. These partners include but are not limited to student clubs and organizations, faculty, and staff.
3. By November 15, 2024, UMW Votes will take actions to be inclusive of diverse populations in their voter education and engagement work. They will do this by:
 - a. Offering pocket constitutions and voter information in Spanish as well as English.
 - b. Partnering with the UMW Office of Disability Resources to share information about voting with a disability.



- c. Working with the UMW NAACP chapter to support their voter education efforts or partner on voter education efforts throughout the semester.

Long Term Goals:

3. By November 15, 2029, overall UMW student voter participation among all students will have increased by 10% over the numbers reported in our 2022 NSLVE report. This will be accomplished by:
 - a. Growing the number of students touched by UMW Votes. This strategy will be accomplished by adding more student touch points, guided by the *Ask Every Students* research. Additional touch points could include working more closely with new student programming or integrating voter registration into new student welcome.
 - b. Continuing to research ways to implement activities and strategies suggested by the *Ask Every Students* models.
4. By November 15, 2029, UMW Votes will have developed faculty champions who are leading curricular civic engagement work. This will be accomplished by:
 - a. Hosting regular informational meetings for interested faculty to learn more about the student activities in UMW Votes.
 - b. Encouraging faculty engagement in learning communities related to integrating civic engagement into their classes and the broader curriculum at UMW.

VII. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

University of Mary Washington participates in the National Survey of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE). In 2020 our registration rate was 89.4%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased. In 2020, our voting rate was 78.8% and our voting rate among registered students was 88.2%. In our NSLVE report, we had racial data for the following groups: Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White students, along with students who identify as one or more race. We did not have data on race four years ago, and therefore cannot compare trends. In

2020, UMW's voting rate of 78.8% was higher than the national average of 66%. UMW earned a Gold rating for their 2020 voter turnout rate. UMW Votes students use the NSLVE data to assess voter turnout among different majors on campus and different groups, and will work to target science majors in 2024 as they have slightly lower voter engagement rates. As of the writing of this plan, the 2022 NSLVE data have not been released yet. Regarding setting goals



related to these data, UMW Votes plans to continue to look at the NSLVE data to see if we need to change our strategies and tactics as we strive for 100% student voter participation of eligible students.

VIII. Evaluation and Reporting

To evaluate our goals and strategy, we will use a variety of tools and methods. We will use the NSLVE data for our campus to assess changes in voter registration and engagement over time. We also assess the number of civic engagement events and student participation in these events; the number of students touched by the program, the number of students registered to vote, and the number of student volunteers in the program, including the student leaders. This requires tracking of volunteer participation (through SignUp Genius), tracking the number of students registered to vote on an Excel spreadsheet, and tracking the number of T-shirts given away at NVRD and Vote Early Day as a measure of engagement. On Election Day, we will count how many people we give rides to the polls.

The timeline for this work mirrors the timeline for Election season: We collect data in the summer and fall (including activities during orientation, Welcome Week, and the semester), and then compile the data into reports in December and January of the following year. When participating in the All In Democracy Challenge, we produce a detailed report by the deadline.

In terms of reporting, we have a website dedicated to UMW Votes and provide a great deal of information on this website about events, activities, and programs. We also work with University Relations to share civic engagement information through UMW media channels. They write an article about activities on Election Day and share it through their channels. University Relations also shares information about our Voter Friendly Campus status and our Student Voting Honor Roll members. The NSLVE reports for the University are shared through press releases as well as through meetings with other departments, and the NSLVE reports are available for download on our website. We also share our Action Plan with members of our coalition and post reports on our website that provide a detailed overview of the Election season every year, including progress toward our goals.