



2022 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

University of Mary Washington

Voter & Civic Engagement Action Plan

April 2022

I. Executive Summary

This **Voter 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 Kate McDaid who is a member of UMW Votes and has been a Campus Vote Project Fellow, Civic Influencer, Virginia21 leader and Newman Civic Fellow; Katherine Cook, a Campus Vote Project fellow and member of UMW Votes, and Sarah Dewees the Assoc. Director of the Center for Community Engagement. Additional revisionary support of this Action Plan was provided by Keegan Fredrick, a member of UMW Votes who has been a Campus Vote Project Fellow and Civic Influencer; Callie Jordan who is a member of UMW Votes, and who has been a Campus Vote Project Fellow, Civic Influencer and Newman Civic Fellow; and Kaylah Lightfoot, who is a member of UMW Votes and has been a Campus Vote Project Fellow and Civic Influencer. This plan is being submitted as part of the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#).

This action plan will guide the civic engagement work of students, staff and faculty at UMW over the next 2 years. This action plan will be spearheaded by the Center for Community Engagement, in partnership with students, staff and faculty from across the university. This plan will be re-evaluated every spring to assess how well we accomplished our goals and areas for modification or adjustment. This plan is in alignment with the **UMW Strategic Vision** (which was approved by the UMW Board of Visitors on November 17, 2017) that includes promoting the values of community and civic engagement for the UMW community. The main goals that the University of Mary Washington plans to accomplish is to increase voter turnout by 10% over the

next five years, create a culture of civic engagement on campus, support civic learning among students, and to continue to participate in NSLVE.

II. Leadership/Institutional Context

Leadership

On-Campus Partners

A core team of students and staff have been working on civic engagement at UMW through the UMW Votes program. The UMW Votes students and staff have also formed a coalition of other interested parties on campus, and work closely with the following institutions and departments:

1. **Student Affairs:** We work with the Student Affairs division leadership to send out emails about National Voter Registration Day, Constitution Day, and Election Day.
2. **Student Activities and Engagement:** SAE and student government help promote UMW Votes' information on their social media, amplifying its reach.
3. **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. **First Year Experience:** We work with the First Year Experience program to provide voter registration information in their online modules.
5. **James Farmer Multicultural Center:** We work with JFMC to plan and promote lectures related to civic engagement.
6. **Athletics:** We work with athletic teams to help register all their athletes to vote.
7. **Residence Life:** We try to provide relevant resources to all Residence Assistants (RAs) and Senior RAs so they could be posted on their floor Canvas pages.
8. **Faculty:** Several faculty invite us to speak to their classes, and also a few plan to help with NVRD and Vote Early Day, as well as sharing information on Election Day. A team of faculty, staff and students met throughout the semester to discuss civic engagement on campus for fall 2022. We work with faculty in the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, the Math Dept., and the Honors Program.
9. **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.

Our Team

In 2022, we worked with a team of students and staff to put together this Voter & Civic Engagement Action Plan:

- Katherine Cook, student, UMW Votes, Campus Vote Project Fellow
- Keegan Fredrick, student, UMW Votes, Campus Vote Project Fellow, Civic Influencer

- Callie Jordan, student, UMW Votes, Campus Vote Project Fellow, Civic Influencer, Newman Civic Fellow
- Kaylah Lightfoot, student, UMW Votes, Campus Vote Project Fellow, Civic Influencer
- Katharine McDaid, student, UMW Votes, Campus Vote Project Fellow, Civic Influencer, Virginia21, Newman Civic Fellow
- Sarah Dewees, Assoc. 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.

Off-Campus Partners

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

- Fredericksburg City Voting Registrar
- League of Women Voters of the Fredericksburg Region
- Campus Vote Project
- Virginia21
- Campus Election Engagement Project/Civic Influencers
- Newman Civic Fellowship (Campus Compact)
- Local Elected Officials

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

Institutional Context

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

This nonpartisan **UMW Voter Engagement Action Plan** was developed by staff and students at the Center for Community Engagement. The **Center for Community Engagement** is located in the student center 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.

We have been working to carry out the UMW Strategic Vision titled “*An Investment of Hope for the Future: A Strategic Vision for the University of Mary Washington*” that includes promoting the values of community and civic engagement with the belief that this will “provide an increasingly diverse population with the opportunity to improve their lives, their communities, and the world around them” and to equip students to “address society’s demands, to challenge

injustices, and to embrace the world's possibilities." The goal is to prepare students for intellectual, professional, and public leadership. 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.

III. Commitment

University of Mary Washington's commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is reflected in the university's 2017 strategic vision titled "*An Investment of Hope for the Future: A Strategic Vision for the University of Mary Washington.*" The first goal of this vision is to promote "the values of service and community and civic engagement." 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, and various other forms of community engagement.

The president of the University of Mary Washington, Dr. Piano, has signed the Higher Education President's Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation showing his commitment to increasing civic engagement across the University.

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 Center for Community Engagement builds upon a long tradition of, and commitment to, service and community engagement at UMW which can be traced to the institution's founding in 1908 as a state normal school for the education of teachers. UMW's mission is to provide a "superior education that inspires and enables our students to make positive changes in the world."

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 offers several classes that are designated "Community Engaged" and also requires that students complete at least one across-the-curriculum course focusing on diverse and/or global communities. UMW is a member of the Students Learn, Students Vote coalition and was a member of the ALL IN campus challenge in 2021 and received the Voter Friendly Campus designation. UMW is honored to work with Campus Vote Project, Civic Influencers (formerly known as CEEP), and Virginia21 to provide civic engagement fellowships on campus to further student civic learning and identify information.

As mentioned earlier, the **UMW Votes** program, hosted by the UMW Center for Community Engagement, has worked with students to design and implement our civic engagement work. The Center for Community Engagement worked with over 21 students during the 2021 fall election, and continues to work with student volunteers as it organizes for our annual election cycle in Virginia.

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 4,200 students and it is a residential campus. 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 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.

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, and also members of our broader Fredericksburg community). Our strongest area of programming involves working with students on co-curricular activities.

Co-curricular Activities:

The Center for Community Engagement supports the **UMW Votes** program and hires 1-4 interns each semester (called Voting Ambassadors) to help with voter registration, education, and mobilization. Over the past few years, there have been many different civic engagement activities and programs on the UMW campus. The following activities took place in 2021:

1. Several events and ongoing tabling (Constitution Day, NVRD, Vote Early Day, tabling three days a week in October and on Election Day).
2. Over 7 presentations to over 200 students and student leaders (class visits, presentations to resident assistants in dorms).
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.
4. Discussions with the Mayor, the Voting Registrar, and members of the Electoral Board about the challenges associated with the UMW Campus being divided into three different voting wards and 2 different state delegate districts.
 - a. After a long process, the new voting wards for the City of Fredericksburg have been approved by Virginia's Attorney General. All of the



UMW-owned residence halls are now in one single ward in the City of Fredericksburg, Ward 2.

5. Discussions with Virginia 21 and League of Women Voters regarding the redistricting process in the state.

We have been working with the Registrar for the City of Fredericksburg, who has been very helpful regarding information for student voters. The office of the Registrar has set up a webpage with information specific to student voters on the UMW campus. In addition, the Registrar provides voter registration training for UMW students. Starting in spring 2019, a group of UMW students and alumni worked with faculty governance and 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. This goal was met and has continued in the 2021 election so that students could take part in the civic engagement process.

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. In addition, the James Farmer Multicultural Center is working closely with UMW’s local NAACP chapter which has a strong focus on civic engagement. The James Farmer Multicultural Center (JFMC) is located in the student center and has a mission to create an educational environment that broadens our understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice; to build relationships to establish a broader community network, within and external to the university, that is committed to improving the recognition and acceptance of the dignity and worth of every individual; and to provide a warm, welcoming, supportive, and vibrant environment for all underrepresented students that will engage and enhance their social, intellectual, interpersonal, and leadership development and skills.

In addition, UMW historically has had civic engagement programming on our campus supported through the [UMW Center for Leadership and Media Studies](#). The UMW Center for Leadership and Media Studies supports the study of political leadership and of the mass media’s roles in international, national and Virginia politics. In conjunction with the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, the Center’s programs are designed to give students a wide range of academic experiences and professional opportunities by conducting public opinion research and by bringing members of the university community into contact with political figures and media practitioners at the international, national, state, and local levels. The Center for Leadership and Media Studies hosts candidate debates on campus and Dr. Stephen Farnsworth, the director of the Center, is a frequent speaker at campus events

Through these existing efforts, and new programming to be put in place over the next 24 months, UMW is poised to continue to nurture a culture of civic engagement on the UMW campus.

Curricular:

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***. In addition, a faculty Community Engagement committee has been meeting for over 4 years and has been supporting faculty as they work to integrate many different forms of community engagement in their classes. A small cohort of faculty have been participating in a learning community related to civil discourse in the classroom, which has been providing support for instructors as they integrate public speaking, debate skills, and civil discourse into their classes. In addition, the First Year Experience committee is considering creating a working group for teachers of the First Year Seminar (FSEM) to incorporate civic learning into their classes. In the fall of 2022, there are two FSEMs that plan to work with UMW Vote to both share information and provide civically-engaged voting opportunities for students. The Honors Program teaches a class on service learning and presents their students with a range of volunteer opportunities, including with UMW Votes and other civic engagement programs. The Honors Program also supports a City as Text program that encouraged Honors students to explore Fredericksburg and then ended with a panel of Fredericksburg civic leaders, including the Mayor and Vice Mayor.

Barriers:

UMW had a few internal and external barriers to successful student voting. Externally, our campus was divided into 3 different voting districts and there was a lot of confusion about which polling place a student should use, how to change your address when you move from year to year, and how to find a list of candidates. In addition, in 2020 Virginia allowed early voting which meant that Election Day may not be as important as it has been in the past. However, it may provide more opportunities for students to vote successfully. Recently, Fredericksburg went through the process of redistricting and now all of Mary Washington campus is in Ward 2.

A few internal barriers include budget challenges related to the recent economic slowdown, 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 uniform strategy for accomplishing this beyond the work of the Center for Community Engagement, James Farmer Multicultural Center, and the UMW Center for Leadership and Media Studies. There are several faculty who teach classes on elections and electoral politics, 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.

V. Goals

We believe our action plan will increase 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 4 goals:

1. To maintain a culture of civic engagement on campus supported by co-curricular programming.
 1. Celebrating National Voter Registration Day
 2. Celebrating Vote Early Day
 3. Providing information, education, and programming about voting, policy issues, and elections each year (through coordination among clubs and programs)
 4. Helping provide rides to the polls on election days.

2. To support civic learning for UMW students
 1. Provide 1-4 academic internships each semester in the UMW Votes program.
 2. Provide support for faculty who are seeking civic learning opportunities for their students. This is accomplished through class visits that provide information on who is on the ballot in the upcoming election as well as important deadlines and resources for students to register to vote.

3. To prepare UMW students and our broader community members with the knowledge, skills, and disposition to be active participants in a representative democracy and to work for positive change in our communities.
 - a. To provide multiple opportunities for students and others to register to vote so they can participate in the democratic process.
 - b. To support student and UMW community voter turnout by providing education and awareness of civic engagement opportunities and removing barriers to participation.
 - c. To provide multiple opportunities for our UMW community members to learn more about civic engagement and democratic participation.

3. To continue to participate in the NSLVE.

4. To increase UMW student voter turnout in national elections by 10% over the next 5 years.

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 James Farmer Multicultural Center and other student clubs and organizations on campus, the CCE has begun to implement programs and activities that will continue over the next two years. These programs and opportunities are outlined below.

1. Create a Culture of Civic Engagement on the UMW Campus

The Center for Community Engagement will work with partners on and off campus to promote existing programming and create new programming to create a culture of civic engagement at UMW. This will include work to raise awareness of and participation in civic education programs on campus each year. The Center for Community Engagement will work with the James Farmer Multicultural Center and others to advertise, publicize, and promote lectures, social justice teach-ins, and other co-curricular events that raise students' awareness of the importance of civic engagement.

A. Collaboration with others

The CCE plans to partner with other organizations and programs at UMW to support a culture of civic engagement. Potential partners include:

1. NAACP student chapter
2. James Farmer Multicultural Center
3. Day on Democracy working group
4. The Center for Leadership and Media Studies
5. Various student clubs that support civic engagement: College Republicans, Young Democrats, Women of Color, etc.
6. Virginia21 (with student liaison)
7. Faculty on campus - providing informational class visits and partnerships with civically-engaged classes.

We will also work with off campus partners such as:

1. The Fredericksburg City Registrar
2. League of Women Voters
3. Campus Vote Project
4. Civic Influencers
5. Virginia21

B. Supporting Campus-wide events

We will plan, market, and execute the following activities:

- a. Celebrating National Voter Registration Day
- b. Celebrating Vote Early Day
- c. Helping provide rides to the polls on election days.
- d. Constitution Day

2. Support Opportunities for Student Civic Learning

A. UMW Voting Ambassadors

The Center for Community Engagement started a **Voting Ambassador** program in the fall of 2019 that provides academic internship credit to 2-4 students to run a voter registration, education, and mobilization program. Interns will be hired each semester going forward.

Voting Ambassadors will carry out the following activities:

A. Voter registration:

- a. Interns will learn how to register new and existing UMW students for both local and absentee voting. Interns will also learn how to register all other community members as needed.
- b. Interns will meet with Fredericksburg registrar to receive training and make sure they are aware of local and other voter registration requirements.
- c. Interns will table throughout student orientation and the months of September and October to increase voter registration among UMW students.
- d. Interns will serve as resources for any students or UMW community members that are interested in registering to vote.

B. Voter education:

- a. Interns will produce educational materials related to both local and absentee voting (directions to polling places, maps, deadlines related to absentee and local voting, etc.)
- b. Interns will table and provide educational materials throughout student orientation and the months of September and October to educate voters regarding voting options and the value of registering to vote.
- c. Interns will build relationships among campus student groups regarding civic engagement.

C. Voter mobilization

1. Interns will implement a communications campaign using campus media/communications platforms the month leading up to Election Day reminding students about the importance of civic engagement and voting.
2. Interns will work with CCE staff to implement National Voter Registration Day, Vote Early Day.
3. Interns will provide rides to polls on Election Day using campus resources (such as campus vans).

B. Supporting Other Learning Opportunities for Students

1. We will work with local and national organizations such as Campus Vote Project, Campus Compact, Virginia21, and Campus Election Engagement Project to identify opportunities for UMW students to participate in internships and fellowships that support civic learning.
2. We will work to support UMW faculty as they support student civic learning through classroom visits (for voter registration and information about elections, etc.)

In addition, we will continue to participate in NSLVE, and will continue to work to increase UMW student voter turnout in national elections by 10% over the next 5 years by reaching out to new voter populations on campus and increasing our collaboration with some professors in the environmental sciences program.

VII. 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 will also assess the success of our Voting Ambassador program and other efforts using internal rubrics that assess progress along a continuum. In general, we will assess the number of civic engagement events and participation in these events, the student and supervisor assessment of the Voting Ambassador program, and changes in student voter turnout over time.

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. 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.