

2020 Civic Action

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UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI – ST. LOUIS

2020 Campus Action Plan

VOTER
FRIENDLY
CAMPUS



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OVERVIEW

The University of Missouri – St. Louis (UMSL) is proud to be a civically engaged campus. This is reflected in the engagement and interactions of students, faculty and staff both on the campus and in the community. Since 2013, UMSL has been a part of the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) coordinated by the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education at Tufts University. To date, the study has revealed that UMSL has an active and engaged student body with a higher voting rate compared to other universities. This trend is significant, even when controlling for age of student population, commuter status and the civic health of the state.

In 2016 UMSL submitted its first ALL IN action Plan to identify and support activities that encourage voter registration, voter education and voting. Additionally in both 2016 and 2018, UMSL pursued designation as a Voter Friendly Campus and put together Campus Action Plans. Implementation of these plans resulted in increased voter engagement and participation in these elections cycles, and UMSL received the Voter Friendly Campus designation both times (<https://blogs.umsl.edu/news/2019/03/01/voter-friendly-campus/>). An impressive 67.4% of eligible UMSL students voted in the November 2016 election, according to NSLVLE data. That was an increase of 5.7% over the school's 2012 numbers, which were already considered an outlier among the more than 1,000 institutions that took part in the study (<https://blogs.umsl.edu/news/2017/09/23/voting-engagement/>). Midterm elections saw an even greater increase in voter participation moving from 26% voting rate in 2014 to 56% in 2018, a 30 point increase.

This new Campus Action Plan which will launch during the 2020 election cycle was created by the campus Civic Engagement Coalition and continues to focus on better coordination of voter registration and education activities across the university. Different organizations and departments across campus will continue to be responsible for implementing the Plan. The Coalition provides oversight, reviewing accomplishments on a regular basis, and supporting the various groups as they carry out the initiatives. Though the Plan specifically covers activities that will take place leading up to the 2020 Presidential elections, these types of programs will continue to be implemented at the university throughout the year. For instance, seminars, workshops and forums related to legislative issue, lunch-and-learn interactions with elected officials, and advocacy visits to the Missouri State Capital have become regular events at UMSL.

As UMSL continues work to strengthen democratic engagement on campus by being a part of the Voter Friendly Campus designation process and other initiatives, long term goals for these efforts are to:

- Increase student participation in local elections throughout the year.
- Increase participation in programs and activities focused on regional challenges as well as national interests.
- Engage more faculty as “champions” in promoting civic engagement, voter registration, and voting amongst the students with whom they interact.

Coalition

The Civic Engagement Coalition at UMSL is comprised of representatives from student leadership organizations, especially those with a mission related to civic engagement, representatives from Colleges and departments across the campus, and individual faculty and staff who are interested and active in democratic engagement work. This Coalition meets monthly as a whole to share information, and coordinate, develop and support civic engagement events and activities throughout the year. The Coalition is chaired by the director of Community Engagement & Outreach at UMSL in the Office of Academic Affairs. The following people are standing members of the Coalition representing their affiliated departments and units as well as a personal commitment to this important work:

- D’Andre Braddix, Associate Vice Provost, Office of Student Affairs
- Austin Culbertson, Admissions Representative, Office of Admissions
- Rainer Gall, Coordinator of Student Organizations, Office of Student Involvement
- Scott Gericke, Faculty, Graphic Design
- Marlo Billie Goldstein Hode, Sr Manager of Strategic Diversity Initiatives, Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Karl Guenther, Director, Anchor Institution Initiative
- Harry Hawkins, LGBTQ+ Coordinator, Office of Student Involvement
- Alan Heisel, Faculty, Communication
- Laura Holt, Licensed Psychologist and Outreach Coordinator, Health, Counseling and Disability Access Services
- David Kimball, Faculty, Political Science
- Jonathan Lidgus, Director, SUCCEED
- Anita Manion, Faculty, Political Science
- Courtney McDermott, Faculty, Social Work
- Blaine Milligan, Support Staff, Departments of English & History
- Katy Mike Smaistrle, Sustainable Energy & Environmental Coordinator, Facilities
- Lynn Staley, Faculty, English and Service Learning Faculty Fellow - Center for Teaching and Learning
- Lynn Voss, Program Director, Sue Shear Leadership Academy & Citizenship Education Clearing House in the College of Education
- Patricia Zahn, Director of Community Engagement & Outreach, Academic Affairs

Representatives from two student groups that represent the full student body are standing members of the Coalition. They are the Student Government Association and the UMSL Chapter of the Associated Students of the University of Missouri (ASUM). The following people represent these organizations:

- Brandon Fenton, President of the ASUM UMSL-Chapter
- Joe Methner, President of the Student Government Association

As new students come onboard each fall, members represent other student organizations on the Coalition which frequently include the Associated Black Collegians, the Pierre Laclede Honors College Student Association, and the Political Science Academy among others.

UMSL collaborates with national and community organizations to support this civic engagement plan. We have been very fortunate over the past few years to partner with the Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP). In addition to providing resources, CEEP has funded a student fellow to work with our campus team to implement election activities including voter registration and voter education events. UMSL is a member of Campus Compact and serves on the advisory team for Missouri Campus Compact which provides a variety of resources and support for civic engagement on campus. Closer to campus, the League of Women Voters assists in voter registration events. The St. Louis County election board is located near campus and serves as a resource as well. The election board does election poll worker training and the plan is for them to offer the training on campus in early fall for students to be deployed as poll workers at election sites across the community.

Community Partners are essential for working with UMSL in carrying out the initiatives in the Plan. In addition to those mentioned above, key partners include:

- Local elected officials and area governments
- East-West Gateway
- Focus St. Louis
- League of Women Voters
- Missouri Campus Compact
- Missouri Ethics Commission
- The Missouri Municipal League
- St. Louis County and City election boards
- St. Louis Public Radio
- University of Missouri Extension
- National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE)

Institutional Commitment

UMSL makes civic engagement a priority. It is woven into the culture of the institution and is reflected in the institution's mission, learning outcomes, and in both curricular and co-curricular activities. As noted above, the Civic Engagement Coalition, a diverse group broadly representative of units across campus, meets monthly to discuss, develop and support civic and community engagement initiatives. They crafted the first Campus Compact Civic Action Plan in 2017 to reinforce the campus commitment to advance the public purposes of higher education through direct and indirect support of community-based teaching, learning, research, and practice that improves the quality of life in the community and educates and encourages students to embrace their civic and social responsibility

UMSL administration is strongly supportive of civic engagement initiatives on campus. To elevate the importance of Civic Engagement at UMSL, a new recognition was implemented in 2018. The Excellence in Civic Engagement award is presented annually by the Chancellor to one student, faculty and staff member who demonstrate sustained commitment to civic engagement, both on and off campus. Additionally, the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has started a badge program at UMSL for faculty and staff and students. One consideration is to develop a Civic Engagement Ambassador designation and badge. Throughout the year, information about civic engagement responsibilities are shared campus wide including information not just about voting, but encouraging participation in such things as the 2020 Census, volunteerism, and philanthropy.

UMSL's fundamental purpose is to educate and graduate diverse students as they seek different and better lives. Through collective efforts, UMSL is committed to institutional outcomes for all graduates grounded in core values of trust, inclusion, innovation, access, success and engagement. These are outlined in the institution's strategic plan. Integrative thinking is one of the specified outcomes which aligns with the core values, and the statement is that UMSL Graduates will promote community engagement or civic action to benefit the public good and integrate relevant experience, breadth of study, and focused disciplinary expertise to strengthen personal and professional growth.

In addition to explicit statements of civic responsibility in institutional documents, there are several classes that align with civic responsibility. For example, one course offered through the Honors College is called "Where We Live." The course syllabus for WWL states that, "this is a service learning course that combines community service with academic instruction as part of our personal and civic responsibility to the area where we live, work, play, and study. In this course, students will work and visit with the city leaders in order to create research projects that will benefit these communities." Both curricular and co-curricular activities support civic development and engagement.

Landscape

Built on a 128-acre golf course as the first public university in the St. Louis region, UMSL was dedicated in 1963 with 672 students and 32 faculty members. UMSL has grown into a 470-acre campus with 2,500 faculty and staff and 17,000 students (including about 6000 dual-enrollment high school students). The student population is diverse and inclusive—59% female and 31% reporting an ethnicity other than "white, non-Hispanic." Over half are part-time students and the majority are undergraduates (82%).

Most UMSL students (approx. 75%) have transferred from another institution. They are largely nontraditional, with many first-generation, and returning students with personal and professional responsibilities. Only about 10% live on-campus. To meet their needs, academic programming is delivered using a range of platforms including day and evening classes, online courses, and hybrids, in both traditional and accelerated formats. Additionally, the university offers relevant and impactful co-curricular opportunities, which complement its academic programming and fulfill the transformative mission. Civic engagement activities like lunch and learns and forums are part of these efforts.

It should not be surprising that UMSL students vote at higher rates than other college students throughout the nation, since most of them live, work and have families and ties in the community. However, the NSLVE reports have shown UMSL students as a positive outlier in voting, after controlling for age, residency and other demographics.

What has been helpful from the NSLVE reports has been the breakdown in voting rates by age, ethnicity and field of study. While UMSL students in the 18-24 year old age brackets have increased in both mid-term and Presidential election years significantly (from 15 to 60% and 55 to 61% respectively), this is still the age group with the lowest voting rates among all others. First year students also vote at a lower rate than others, and that is an area where we can provide more focus. This is one reason we have embedded voting information and civic engagement education in our first-year student classes. Additionally, a couple of disciplinary areas that have lower voting rates have been in Health Professions, Physical Science and Computer and Informational Science (all near 50% in the 2016 and 2018 elections). Sharing this information has been useful in engaging leadership within these Colleges and departmental units to promote voter registration and civic engagement. Also, the Civic Engagement Coalition has been more intentional about including educational activities that involve international students. Though the results of this effort will not show up in voter participation rates, it requires a more inclusive approach that may reach some of those students in these fields who are eligible, but currently do not vote.

One unknown for the fall election is the result that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on voter participation. During the legislative season which ended in May, one bill that passed is an expansion of absentee voting. This absentee ballot legislation expands voting by mail through the rest of 2020 in Missouri. Because elderly people are considered at greater risk and are vulnerable to COVID-19, it first expands absentee voting to those 65 and older. Notarization is not required for those 65 and older or who are vulnerable. Anyone under 65 is also now allowed to vote by mail, but requires notarization. There is usually a fee for notary services; however, this fee is waived for voting in Missouri. Getting information out to students about the availability to vote absentee and that notary fees will not be charged is something that will be included in the UMSL voter education campaign.

Goals & Strategies

The focus on civic engagement at UMSL takes place not only during Presidential election years, but every year. Though this Plan covers more short-term activities, a long-term goal for the campus is to promote regular participation and voting every year for local and statewide elections. Though NSLVE does not provide data for participation at this level, student involvement in issues forums and local election debates and activities is one way to measure engagement.

Additionally, UMSL is adding courses each year that support civic and community engagement. In the past two years, intersession classes have been developed around civil rights education and have included trips to civil rights memorials and museums. In fall 2020, two new courses are being offered focused on elections. One is on Communication in the 2020 Presidential election. Because so much of the campaign work is being done online instead of in-person due to COVID-19, there should be plenty for the students to research. Another is an interdisciplinary course within Political Science and Graphic Design focused on voter registration and engagement in which students will design a social media campaign for campus and the surrounding community in addition to hosting election-related events. Resources will be made available through the UMSL Canvas Learning Management System site and mentor support will be available to other faculty members in developing related courses in future semesters. In fall 2020, UMSL will also launch its first Faculty Learning Community on community engaged teaching and scholarship.

As mentioned previously, UMSL has a Civic Engagement Coalition that meets monthly to support this work. A subcommittee of members has been formed to focus specifically on developing and implementing election engagement activities. They will work with representatives from student organizations to coordinate and support these efforts. Additionally, UMSL will engage a Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) fellow to help

manage voter registration and election education beginning late summer to prepare for the fall semester. Currently, the following initiatives are in development.

2020 Work Description

- Voter registration (including social media campaign and online information and links)
 - Disseminate information about student voting guides for all states available online at www.campusvoteproject.org
 - Include voter registration information at orientation activities for undergrad, transfer, graduate and professional programs
 - Distribute information about voter registration in first-year student classes
 - Hand out voting FAQ document in new student orientation mock classroom
 - Advertise voter registration with posters and campaign in campus housing and around campus
 - Provide voter registration information during the semester
 - Move-In and Welcome Week programs
 - Fall Involvement Expo and Volunteer Fair (August)
 - Debates and forums
 - Constitution Day (September 17) related events
 - National voter registration day (September 22)
 - Last day to register in Missouri (October 7)

- Voter Education/ Programs and Forums (all include voter registration activities as well)
 - Update and distribute FAQ sheet for students, area residents, etc.
 - Summer – Virtual workshop for faculty on building civic engagement into the curriculum
 - Summer – Virtual forum on Medicaid Expansion ballot initiative
 - Fall – Voter engagement information web campaign
 - Fall – National Debate watch parties (online) with Faculty Q & A in real time
 - Fall – Program with St. Louis County and St. Louis City election officials on becoming election poll workers with follow-up training session
 - August - Complete and implement #UMSLVotes social media and poster campaign
 - August - Informational Session on voter registration, absentee voting and supporting elderly community and family members with absentee ballot access
 - September – Forum on Ballot issues and Ask and Expert
 - September 14 through 17 - Constitution Day events
 - Virtual cards – 6 words project
 - Documentary Screening and panel discussion on suppression and disparity in voter turnout (online and in-person options)

- Engaging Elected Official interactive online program with area Missouri State Senators and Representatives
 - September 22- National Voter Registration Day celebration and registration activities
 - October - ASUM Campus Town Hall/forum – What’s going on in local and state politics and why it matters to students
 - October – Local candidate debate/Q & A with candidates in a local race
 - November 3 - Election Night Voting “Watch” Party
- Voter Turnout
 - Advertise deadlines for registration
 - Send out link for online sample ballot review
 - Provide free public transportation/ Metrolink passes to students. (UMSL has two Metrolink stops on campus and one bus stop.)
 - Encourage students to make a logistics “plan” for voting day (when, where, how, and with whom they will travel to vote)
 - Invite election board representatives and candidates to speak in classes
 - Deploy social media campaign with election day reminders
 - Deploy social media campaign with positive “I Voted” types of messaging (Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)
- Students as Voter Advocates
 - #UMSLVotes campaign
 - UMSL Radio and Television stations conduct interviews and provide election information
 - Market and promote ASUM political internship to increase and diversify pool of candidates

Reporting and evaluation

UMSL put together a comprehensive Civic Action Plan in 2017 which informed several goals and objectives in the Institutional Strategic Plan. This plan is available online. UMSL also just recently put together a web page where civic engagement reports and activities can be found in one place. This updated Civic Action Plan for the 2020 election will also be included on this site. Further, we will continue to allow NSLVE, ALL IN and other organizations who have request to include our NSLVE reports on their web pages.

Projects and activities will be assessed for effectiveness throughout the year with feedback from attendees. These formative evaluations will help improve subsequent events. The Civic Engagement Coalition subcommittee will work with the CEEP fellow to review the all programs and activities and provide a report to the full committee in early 2021 for future planning.