

University of Missouri-St. Louis Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voter Participation for the 2022 Elections

For the purposes of this action plan, we have made the decision to intentionally reference the 2018 midterm election as opposed to the 2020 presidential election – as it is most comparable to the upcoming race(s).

Executive Summary

This Voter Friendly Campus action plan was developed at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) by the Civic Engagement Coalition. The Civic Engagement Coalition, formed in 2016, has representatives from a variety of departments and student organizations across the campus. The Civic Engagement Coalition includes representatives from the Office of Student Affairs, Operations & Events Services, the Gender Studies program, as well as the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, the Student Government Association, Sustainability/Environmental Health & Safety, and the Departments of Communication, English and Political Science, among others. Members of the UMSL Civic Engagement Coalition meet monthly. The Coalition helps coordinate voter registration and voter engagement efforts around campus. They host a voting information web page and created a Frequently Asked Questions sheet that, among other things, offers answers to how and where to register to vote. These materials will be updated for upcoming elections. At least three of the faculty members who are part of this team will offer courses on elections or voter engagement in fall 2022, and some will include a community outreach component. The university community also will continue to offer civic engagement forums and events throughout the year.

This action plan is for the 2022-23 academic year. In addition to ongoing efforts to promote voter registration and voter engagement, the coalition has three specific goals for the coming year.

1. Increase coordination with local institutions involved in voter outreach and increase student participation in local elections during the year.
2. Engage more faculty as “champions” in promoting civic engagement, voter registration, and voting amongst the students with whom they interact.
3. Make UMSL a polling place for the 2022 general elections, and promote the UMSL polling location to students, staff, faculty, and the surrounding community.

In the sections below we describe how we will implement these goals.

Leadership

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. The following people have been standing members of the Coalition representing their affiliated departments and units as well as a personal commitment to this important work:

Coalition Leader:

Patricia Zahn
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2022 Coalition Members:

- D'Andre Braddix, Dean of Students and Associate Vice Provost
- Jill Delston, Associate Teaching Professor, Department of Philosophy
- Scott Gericke, Associate Teaching Professor, Department of Art and Design
- Alan Heisel, Professor, Department of Communication and Media
- David Kimball, Professor and Interim Chair, Department of Political Science
- Anita Manion, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
- Courtney McDermott, Associate Teaching Professor, School of Social Work
- Katy Mike Smaistrila, Sustainability Energy & Environmental Coordinator
- Lynn Staley, Teaching Professor, Department of English
- Tanisha Stevens, Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Lester Stewart, Associate Director for Operations and Event Services
- Doug Swanson, Labor Studies Program Coordinator
- Jim Wallis, Adjunct Instructor, School of Social Work and Alumni Legislative Advocacy Committee representative
- Sydney Young (student), Political Science Graduate Student Association
- Lara Zwarun, Associate Professor, Department of Communication and Media
- UMSL Associated Black Collegians (student representative)
- Associated Students of the University of Missouri-UMSL Chapter (student President)
- Student Government Association (student President)

Local Elections Office:

- Eric Fey, Democratic Director, St. Louis County Board of Elections
- Rick Stream, Republican Director, St. Louis County Board of Elections

Other Important Community Organizations:

- Local elected officials and area governments
- East-West Gateway
- Focus St. Louis
- League of Women Voters
- Missouri Campus Compact
- The Missouri Municipal League
- Ferguson PROUD
- 24:1 Municipal Partnership
- Beyond Housing
- University of Missouri Extension
- National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE)

Commitment

Civic Engagement is a strong priority at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL). 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. It takes shape through a variety of formats guided by the mission and vision in the university's Civic Action Plan.

We strive to be a university where civic learning and engagement is pervasive, where people think critically, where deliberative conversations and engaged research address real-world problems, where diversity and inclusive practice is not just an ideal, but a reality, and where collaboration is commonplace. We want all UMSL students to have the competence and confidence to be informed and engaged citizens both now and throughout their lifetimes and to take an active role in community life. We address these goals through the academic curriculum, research and scholarship, integrated community partnership activities, volunteerism, and personal and professional development opportunities, so that UMSL students, faculty and staff will have the capacity to be informed, empowered and active participants in creating a more robust, equitable and livable community.

Landscape

UMSL is proud to have been designated as a Voter Friendly campus in 2016, 2019, and again in 2021. Further, 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 since 2012. The study has revealed UMSL's high voting rate compared to other universities (even after controlling for demographics including student population's age, commuter status and the civic health in the state).

Participation in this study has shown a continual increase in students registering to vote and participating in elections than in previous years. UMSL had a high voter registration and turnout as compared to other universities with a voter registration rate of 88% and voting rate of 71% in the 2020 presidential election. For the most recent midterm elections, UMSL had a voter registration rate of 84% in 2018 and a voting rate of 56%. These figures are increases from previous elections for UMSL.

Goals

Our action plan is designed to address one short-term goal and two long-term goals.

Short-term goal: Make UMSL a polling place for the 2022 general elections, and promote the UMSL polling location to students, staff, faculty, and the surrounding community.

Long-term goal: Engage more faculty as "champions" in promoting civic engagement, voter registration, and voting among the students with whom they interact.

Long-term goal: Increase coordination with local institutions involved in voter outreach and increase student participation in local elections during the year.

Strategy

UMSL has been intentional in developing partnerships to support voter registration and engagement efforts. In 2018, UMSL formed a partnership with the Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) to help mobilize students to participate in the electoral process. The League of Women Voters of St. Louis has also been an important partner in this work and has been helpful in the voter registration efforts. The St. Louis County Board of Elections is a partner, and they along with a representative from the City of St. Louis Board of Elections are regular presenters in classes and election information sessions for students. Further, the UMSL alumni legislative advocacy group has become a partner in supporting civic engagement activities on campus focused on elections as well as creating opportunities for students to interact with civic leaders. For

the midterm elections, their voting engagement subcommittee helped recruit and provide training opportunities for more than 20 people to become public notaries, which were needed to process mail-in ballots in Missouri. They also helped coordinate voter registration events both on campus and throughout the community. These efforts, combined with others hosted by departments and groups across campus, led to a successful election and engagement process at UMSL in 2020. This group is actively engaged in planning to support 2022 civic engagement and voter registration efforts.

In May of 2022 we confirmed with the St. Louis County Board of Elections that UMSL will be a polling place for the August 2022 primary election and the November 2022 general election. UMSL will serve as a polling place for Election Day and for two weeks prior for early voting. St. Louis County has a voting system that allows registered voters to cast their ballots at any polling location in the county (rather than an assigned polling place). This provides us an opportunity to attract many voters to the UMSL polling place. The next step is to educate the UMSL and local community about the UMSL polling location. We will work with coalition members to create educational materials and develop a communications plan to share that information with the campus community. We will work with community organizations to inform and educate the people living and working in the communities surrounding campus about the UMSL polling location.

The polling location at UMSL will be a substantial benefit for the campus community and the broader residential community. In the 2020 election, the nearest early voting location was five miles from the UMSL campus. Voter turnout for the communities around UMSL (67%) was substantially lower than in the rest of the county (80%) in the 2020 election. This new location will make it easy for those at and around UMSL to vote. The polling location also provides an opportunity for some students to work as poll workers and election judges. Outreach activities will include print materials, social media, features in the online UMSL community newsletter, and an op-ed in local newspapers.

After the 2022 elections we will continue to work with local community organizations to promote voter participation in Missouri local elections, which take place in April 2023.

Voter Registration

Our coalition has several ongoing efforts to promote voter registration. For example, we organize voter registration events on campus each year. A couple of years ago Missouri began offering online registration using a mobile device, tablet, or touchscreen computer where someone could complete the form and electronically provide a signature. This made registration much more accessible, and was the primary method of registration during our events in the 2021/2022 academic year. It also allows people

to go online to check and confirm their registration information. We also worked with faculty to share voter registration information in some online courses.

Another ongoing project is to share voter registration, absentee, and mail-in ballot forms with each department in the College of Arts and Sciences and other colleges on campus. In doing so, we encourage faculty members to announce to students where they could access this information, whether online or in-person on campus. The coalition also designed a designated webpage and easy URL for fall elections at www.umsl.edu/go/vote. The webpage includes voter registration deadlines as well as a link to find out what is on the ballot using <https://www.ballotready.org/>. The site also included a sign up form for people to get reminders for voter registration, mail-in and absentee ballot request and return dates, in addition to Get-Out-the-Vote notifications through Vote.org. As judges in Missouri are also included on the ballot during the fall national elections, a link to information is available for researching judges. The website includes a link for voter identification laws for all states throughout the U.S.. Finally, UMSL plans to again participate in National Voter Registration Day in 2022. Throughout the fall, messages reminding students to register to vote will be sent out campus-wide by various campus offices through email and social media mostly, and by flyers with voting information and QR codes for easy access to online registration.

Voter Education

As in previous years, we plan to hold several events on campus, including debate watch parties, film screenings, panels and forums, to provide students and the broader community nonpartisan voter information. These events will address some current topics (how the candidates were polling, the Supreme Court status and potential implications of the elections, concerns around the voting process, etc.), and then engage in question and answer sessions with the participants. In the past, these events have been well-attended. One event will likely be a panel discussion on two Missouri Constitutional amendments that are on the ballot in the fall. There will also be some programming related to voting and elections in Constitution Day activities in September.

We also plan to invite election board officials from both the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County to present information to students about how to become election judges to work at the polls on Election Day. As in the past, this presentation can be recorded and then made available for others to view. We hope to have students help create brochures that could be printed or put on social media sites with easy to follow guidelines to help people understand the processes for mail-in and absentee ballots. Voter related materials including absentee and mail-in ballot request forms, instructions, envelopes, as well as postage stamps to help students, faculty, and staff request these ballots will also be available in the UMSL library, the Office of Student Involvement, and other locations around campus. We have a student social media manager to help with these outreach efforts.

At the height of the pandemic in 2020, several faculty members and alumni went through training to become notary publics and the alumni group helped cover some of the associated costs for 22 new alumni notaries. In Missouri, absentee ballots sent via mail need to be notarized. We plan to promote these notary services again in 2022, although we are not sure how many voters will need these services. Voters who cast their ballot at a polling location do not need a notary, and having a polling place on campus may alleviate much of the local need for absentee voting by mail.

Finally, we hope to be able to have student voter engagement fellows again this fall who will help coordinate our voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts with the various entities on campus. These fellows did a lot of outreach into classes during the previous election cycle and the peer-to-peer approach was effective. The fall 2022 graduate intern in the Economic & Community Development office will also have responsibilities in supporting these efforts.

NSLVE as a Resource

Our campus has participated in NSLVE for many years, and the data show that the UMSL student voting rate is consistently higher than the voting rate for other NSLVE institutions. In addition, our campus registration rate and voting rate have increased in each successive election cycle. For example, UMSL had a voter registration rate of 88% and voting rate of 71% in the 2020 presidential election. For the most recent midterm elections, UMSL had a voter registration rate of 84% in 2018 and a voting rate of 56%. The voting rate for Black students at UMSL was 60% in the 2018 election. Our goal is to maintain these high registration and voting rates in 2022.

In the high turnout 2020 presidential election, the average St. Louis County polling place had 1,334 voters. Turnout in midterm elections is substantially lower, so our goal is for 1,000 voters to cast their ballots at the UMSL polling place in the November 2022 election. We believe this is a reasonable goal, since our student population is comprised mostly of commuter students and many classes remain online or hybrid options. Therefore, we will encourage those students who are not on campus to vote at their regular polling places.

Reporting

We include our NSLVE reports on our campus website and we share them with UMSL administration and college deans. Furthermore, UMSL Daily (our campus newsletter to all students, faculty, and staff) will continue to do feature articles on UMSL Civic engagement activities, highlighting the student efforts in particular around voter registration and engagement. The Civic Engagement Coalition, made up of representatives from across the campus community, also reviews the report and can use it to identify areas where there may need to be more direct programming or student outreach. We have similar plans to review and make public data on voter turnout at the

UMSL polling place in the 2022 election, including comparisons between the UMSL polling place and other polling places in St. Louis County.

Evaluation

The coalition will evaluate voter turnout at the UMSL polling location, as well as NSLVE data on voter turnout, to evaluate our action plan. We will review the data to identify areas where there may need to be more direct programming or student outreach for future elections. We also will engage in a post-election debrief with St. Louis County election officials to get their perspective on the UMSL polling location and discuss future plans.