

# ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge **ACTION PLAN**



**FALL 2020**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the University of Mount Union is to prepare students for fulfilling lives, meaningful work, and responsible citizenship. Guided by this mission and our liberal arts foundation, Mount Union has a deep commitment to civic engagement, democratic participation, and community outreach.

Collaboration has led to an increased effort to promote civic engagement on Mount Union's campus and in the surrounding community. The University is home to an active Department of Political Science and International Studies, a vibrant public service center, the Ralph and Mary Regula Center for Public Service and Civic Engagement, and a thriving library, the Kolenbrander Harter Information Center (KHIC), all of which are dedicated to improving the democratic climate at Mount Union and beyond. These three offices/departments have come together in recent years to create new programs, offer new opportunities for civic learning, and promote voter education in a variety of capacities.

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Following the success of events like Constitution Day and the implementation of Civic Corners at Mount Union, the University has created the following action plan to guide additional work in this area. We seek to increase student civic engagement on campus, measured by student voter registration, student voting, student contact with government officials, and student attendance at civic-focused events both on and off campus. We also seek to enhance civic engagement in the larger Alliance community through resource collaboration, including campus/community events and connecting with local community groups.

The plan was developed by the Director of the Regula Center, Abby Honaker Schroeder, Associate Professor in Political Science and International Studies and Faculty Liaison to the Regula Center, Lori Kumler, and Library Circulation Manager in KHIC, Gina Maida. Through the leadership of these staff and faculty members and the resources of their respective departments, the plan expands our engagement efforts across campus and incorporates improved benchmarks for future initiatives.

The plan here spans three academic years beginning in the fall of 2020 and concluding in the spring of 2022. The plan will be implemented by current leadership (listed above) and will expand over time to include individuals and students from additional departments to ensure diverse participation, integrated civic education, and continued innovation.



# LEADERSHIP

## Executive Leadership

The following individuals have worked to make strides towards a campus culture that demonstrates civic mindedness all year, every year, and is dedicated to civic education at Mount Union and in the greater Alliance community. They will continue to meet and communicate regularly, driving the action plan with guidance from the working group.

Abby Honaker Schroeder, Director of the Regula Center for Public Service and Civic Engagement

Lori Kumler, Associate Professor,  
Department of Political Science and  
International Studies

Gina Maida, Library Circulation Manager,  
Kolenbrander Harter Information Center



## Civic Engagement Working Group

The working group will bring in individuals from across campus who have demonstrated knowledge of student behavior, classroom learning, extracurricular activities, the local community, and other key information that will drive the action plan. This group will communicate regularly via email, meeting once each semester. The group was to meet in 2019 but never came together in person. In 2020 this group will have their first meeting.

**Jesse Cunion**, Assistant Dean for Student Success

**Kate Carnell**, Director of Student Involvement and Leadership

**Brian Boatright**, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs - Academic Systems

**John Recchiuti**, Professor, History

**Gwen Schwartz**, Professor, English

**Keith Miller**, Associate Professor, Chemistry & Biochemistry & Director of the Integrative Core

A combination of students representing at least four of the following:

- Regula Scholars
- Pi Sigma Alpha
- Department of Political Science and International Studies
- Pre-law Society
- CEEP Fellows
- Becuase I Care

# COMMITMENT

The Ralph and Mary Regula Center for Public Service and Civic Engagement (“Regula Center”) has served as the University’s focal point for civic engagement efforts since its founding in 2003. The Regula Center provides experiential and community engaged learning opportunities within and beyond courses, voter registration resources, and events highlighting civic leaders as well as a variety of other programs to enhance classroom learning at Mount Union. The Center has become a hub of active students who are committed to public service, leadership, and making a positive difference. The Center was initially founded through a government grant and based on the ideals of the late Congressman Ralph Regula; the University has since institutionalized and expanded the Center. The Center’s most recent annual report can be found at: <https://www.mountunion.edu/regula-center>.

The Regula Center, combined with the strength of the Department of Political Science and International Studies and the KHIC, together represent substantial University resources devoted to implementing high quality educational opportunities for Mount Union students as well as individuals in the community. This trio provides the leadership necessary to continue work that ties classroom learning to opportunities for learning outside of the classroom.

An academic commitment is demonstrated through Mount Union’s integrative core which incorporates the University’s mission of engaged citizenship throughout a student’s four years via first-year seminars, disciplinary foundational courses, and cross/interdisciplinary courses in the junior and senior years. The full description of the integrative core can be found here: <http://www.mountunion.edu/integrative-core>.

Furthermore, the institution’s broad undergraduate learning goals clearly define outcomes aligned with the University’s mission and its commitment to civic engagement. While part V, below, is most pertinent to civic learning and democratic engagement, all parts help to support and reinforce each other.



# COMMITMENT CONT.

Table 1. University of Mount Union undergraduate learning goals:

## Undergraduate Learning Goals

*To accomplish the mission of the University, the faculty has established guidelines to help students:*

### I. Demonstrate Core Abilities

- A. Demonstrate ability to acquire and assess information.
- B. Demonstrate research skills (both quantitative and qualitative).
- C. Develop ability to think critically.
- D. Develop ability to think creatively.
- E. Develop communication skills.

### II. Foundational Knowledge and Integration

- A. Acquire knowledge in humanities, arts and sciences.
- B. Demonstrate the use of concepts and methods in humanities, arts, and sciences.
- C. Develop the ability to view the world from multiple disciplinary perspectives.
- D. Integrate knowledge and techniques across multiple disciplines.

### III. Preparation for Fulfilling Lives

- A. Acquire the tools for self-development in order to assess and improve physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth and wellness.
- B. Find and cultivate intellectual pursuits.
- C. Find and cultivate pursuits for personal enrichment.

### IV. Preparation for Meaningful Work

- A. Acquire discipline specific knowledge and skills needed at a professional level.
- B. Demonstrate use of discipline specific knowledge and skills.
- C. Integrate discipline specific knowledge and abilities with multiple disciplinary perspectives.
- D. Develop ability to collaborate with others to solve problems.

### V. Preparation for Responsible Citizenship

- A. Develop knowledge and appreciation of the individual's culture and other cultures in a global context.
- B. Understand and employ ethics within diverse cultural, social, professional, environmental and personal settings.
- C. Demonstrate civic engagement by active involvement in and beyond the classroom.



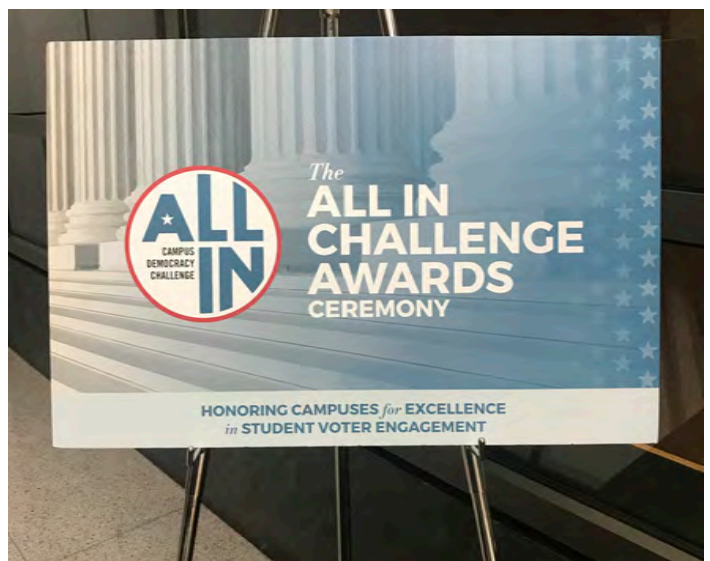
# COMMITMENT CONT.

All departments within the University are responsible for aligning their learning goals with the University's learning goals (listed above). Each department's learning outcomes support these learning goals, and yearly, each department assesses and measures student learning outcomes (directly and indirectly) within the department.

In addition, departments demonstrate use of self-assessment results to improve student learning. Departments compile all results into a yearly report which is submitted to the Committee on Assessment, where reports are evaluated by faculty and staff and returned to the department to inform programmatic improvements.

In addition to academic departments and entities whose direct mission is to further civic engagement, many other offices and departments at Mount Union promote involvement. Examples of this can be found in the University's diverse offering of more than 80 clubs, the office of Student Involvement and Leadership, and an athletics program dedicated to community engagement. Greek organizations at the University have strong ties to the community and support a host of philanthropic organizations.

Overall, the University has made substantial commitments to community engagement and to preparing students for responsible citizenship. Thanks to the many resources available, Mount Union is well positioned to improve civic learning and democratic engagement at the University level and beyond.



# LANDSCAPE

As indicated under the Commitment section (see Table 1 above), the University includes civic learning and democratic engagement in overall campus learning goals, which are included within each department's learning goals. At this time, we have not systematically analyzed the learning outcomes in each department specific to civic learning and democratic engagement. Obtaining and analyzing this data is one of our action plan goals. In the next section we provide an analysis of other available data, including National Survey of Student Engagement data and National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data.

## National Survey of Student Engagement(NSSE) 2016 Data: First Year Students

University of Mount Union's NSSE 2016 data indicate that on average, first-year students fell between sometimes (2 on a 4-point scale, with 4 being "very often") and often (3 on the scale) for connecting learning to societal problems or issues and having been exposed to diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments. Our student average of 2.5 fell below peer/aspirant schools and below private colleges in general, suggesting this as an area of focus for us.

Other results point to strengths that we can build on. For example, students fell between often and very often (3.1) for how often they had conversations with people who had different political views than their own; this average is equivalent to other peer/aspirant institutions and other private

institutions, though significantly higher than private colleges in Ohio. For number of courses with community-based projects, the student average equaled that of all private institutions and private institutions in Ohio, while it exceeded that of peer and aspirant colleges.

Students also indicated that the University emphasized "attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues" at a rate equal to students at other private institutions (peer, Ohio only, and nationwide), along with contributing to student development of "being an informed and active citizen". First-year students indicated that they did substantially more community service and volunteer work than students at other institutions.





# LANDSCAPE CONT.

## National Survey of Student Engagement(NSSE) 2016 Data: Seniors

As with freshmen, seniors averaged significantly lower than those at other institutions for connecting learning to societal problems or issues and having been exposed to diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments. Other responses show areas of relative strength. Seniors averaged the same (3, often) as seniors at other institutions for how often they had conversations with people who had different political views than their own.

Seniors averaged significantly higher than peer/aspirant colleges and private Ohio colleges and equal to seniors at all private colleges for number of courses with community based projects. As with first year students, seniors indicated that the University emphasized “attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues” at a rate equal to students at other private institutions (peer, Ohio only, and nationwide), along with contributing to student development of “being an informed and active citizen”.

For hours devoted to community service and volunteer work, seniors averaged the same as seniors at other private institutions.

In general, 2016 NSSE results suggested that we had slightly greater success with (self-reported) measures of student civic learning and democratic engagement among our first-year students than seniors, relative to other institutions. Exceptions include assignments that ask students to connect learning to societal problems or issues and including diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments.

While we do not yet have data regarding courses that teach civic learning and democratic engagement, we can speak to the co-curriculum. Collaborations among the Regula Center, Student Affairs, the Department of Political Science and International Studies, and the Library included numerous co-curricular opportunities for students. Examples of the opportunities in the past four academic years include:

- **Debate watch events hosted and led by students for the fall 2016 Presidential elections**
- **Annual Constitution Day events including a speaker on redistricting reform efforts in Ohio and other states, a showing of “RBG” and “Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook”**
- **Hosting Ambassador Connie Morella through the Woodrow Wilson Visiting Scholar program**
- **Student led debate panel of candidates for local city council**
- **Unveiling the Civic Corner initiative on Martin Luther King, Jr. day in 2018**
- **Annual Meet the Candidates events**

# LANDSCAPE CONT.

## National Survey of Learning, Voting and Engagement Data

Since August 2016, Mount Union has participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). NSLVE collects student voting and voter registration data and provides participants with formal reports. NSLVE data is broken down by field of study. However, in Mount Union's report, the fields of study for 2012 and 2016 do not align, with the possible exception of education and health professions. Results indicate that for education majors, student voting jumped from 46.9% in 2012 to 70.7% in 2016; students in the health professions (which may include only our physician assistant graduate students) saw a decline from 60.3% in 2012 to 52.9% in 2016. In midterm elections, education majors increased their voting rates from 13.9% in 2014 to 42.4% in 2018; students in the health professions increased midterm voting rates from 13.8% in 2014 to 24.8% in 2018.

These two categories of students, however, accounted for only approximately 5-8% of all students in those years. All other students were grouped together under "unknown" in 2012 and "liberal arts" in 2016. Including student data from all fields, voting increased overall from 46.1% in 2012 to 48.8% in 2016 (see Table I below). Midterm election voting rates likewise increased from 12% in 2014 to 29.5% in 2018.

While we have not consistently matched the mean voting rate at all private bachelor's institutions, the upward trend in our voting rates is encouraging. Importantly, our voter registration rates have increased for each successive presidential and midterm election (Table I).

Table 1: 2012-2018 NSLVE data, voting and registration rates, UMU and private bachelor's institutions

	Mount Union	All private bachelor's institutions
<b>Voting Rates</b>		
2012 Presidential	46.1	45.1
2014 Midterm	12	16.7
2016 Presidential	48.8	49.1
2018 Midterm	29.5	38.1
<b>Registration Rates</b>		
2012 Presidential	74.1	*
2014 Midterm	65.8	*
2016 Presidential	77.8	*
2018 Midterm	71.3	*

\*Data not provided

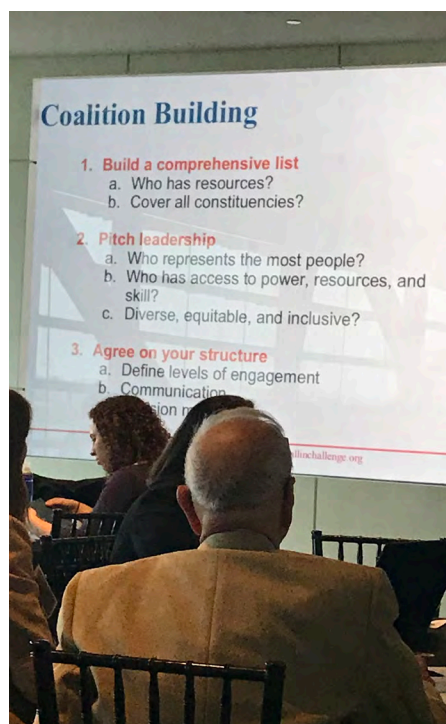
# LANDSCAPE CONT.

## Greek Members Self Reporting, 2016

In the late fall of 2016, we collected survey data from student Greek organization members regarding their voting and registration habits. During that fall, we focused on incorporating student Greek organization leaders and members into our debate watch events and into campus voter registration efforts. Survey results indicated that over 50% of our student sample (38.8% response rate of all students in Greek Organizations, n=203) registered to vote just that fall, with 85.7% registered overall. Within our sample, 72.9% reported voting in fall 2016 elections. These efforts may have partly accounted for the bump in voting rates shown in Table I above.

We experienced few if any internal barriers to our civic learning/engagement efforts. External barriers include a low percentage of students registered to vote at their university address; thus, most students must find time to drive home or to request an absentee ballot. While students may now register to vote online in Ohio, they cannot request an absentee ballot online. We lacked a single location for students to find information regarding voting, registration, and contacting officials. However, as of January 2018, we now have two well-marked locations (Civic Corners) on campus that serve as voting information hubs.

Additional resources we would like to see would include sustained efforts and cooperation of the integrative core faculty and director.





# GOALS

## Short Term Goals

- Continue current programming that relates to Civic Engagement
- Increase student awareness and usage of Civic Corners for absentee ballot requests, voter registration, and contacting representatives
- Include links to voter registration and absentee ballot information on the Civic Corner website and the University's learning management system
- Solicit faculty, staff, and students to serve on, meet together, and make decisions as Civic Engagement Working Group
- Connect with Deans of new colleges to enlist their assistance with incorporating civic education into each college
- Create a mechanism for inclusion in first-year student orientation, first-year seminars, capstone courses, and other academic components
- Begin offering student organizations a formalized partnership agreement to assist with voter registration and participation
- Seek information and work towards chairing a competition among colleges and universities in the Ohio Athletic Conference
- Increase the sales of Civic Corners to reach an additional 10 organizations
- Explore additional resources, including CEEP Fellows, Because I Care, Ask Every Student, and other organizations to support our efforts

## Long Term Goals

- Increase student voter participation by 10-15% by 2024.
- Increase student registration via Civic Corners by 10% from fall 2018 numbers (data not yet known)
- Increase student use of Civic Corners to contact officials; on average, at least three student groups will host postcard writing campaigns per year by 2024.
- Incorporate Civic Corners into campus tours.
- Incorporate civic education into 20% of foundations courses and 30% of first-year seminar courses.
- Maintain coordinated events related to civic engagement, such as debate watches, candidate panels, and the like. On average, we will have at least three such events per year.
- Increase off campus outreach reminding citizens to be engaged.
- Improve scores on NSSE related to civic engagement.

# STRATEGY

We will continue to build upon successes we have seen while implementing new initiatives annually. Our current strategy includes the items below but is something we consider extremely fluid, knowing we will add programming and make changes as the leadership team deems appropriate.

**Civic Corners:** continue to get word out about Civic Corners. Work with student leaders to host postcard writing campaigns.

**Orientation:** Find ways to engage with first year students during their preview and orientation events

**Integrative Core:** Work with IC Director to promote civic engagement and community engaged learning opportunities in IC classrooms from FYS to senior capstones. Work with director to get information to all FYS students regarding voting and registration.

**Online Learning Platforms:** Make announcements and other information available in our online learning platforms including D2L.

**Constitution Day:** continue to coordinate across campus and with student leaders on activities each year

**Publicity:** use online newsletter (UMU Today) to advertise events and voting deadlines; post rotating Posters and free stickers at Civic Corners

**Debate Watch Events:** Regula Center and PSIS coordinate on debate events (local and national)

**Meet the Candidates Night:** Regula Center and PSIS bring in local candidates for office in town hall format. Also open to the public.

**Library Partnership:** trained student employees on voting and civic resources; make relevant books available at events

**Off Campus Outreach:** Sponsor mailing about the importance of being an engaged citizen and reminding constituents to vote.

## Conference Attendance

**Sponsorship** of student participation at community events including Legislative Breakfast

# REPORTING

We will share the plan internally via face to face meetings and electronic communications. Externally, we will share elements of the plan at conferences such as the Midwest Political Science Association, the American Political Science Association and other teaching and learning conferences, National Council for the Social Studies, the Ohio Private Academic Libraries conference, the Ohio Library Convention, and the Association of College and Research Libraries.

# EVALUATION

The purpose of the evaluation is to measure the success of our efforts and accordingly, to adjust our efforts in a way that will better enable us to achieve our goals. The executive leadership and working group will be the primary audience for the evaluation, but we imagine that administrators and others not in the working group will also be interested in the evaluation.

Objective/goal	How is this measured?	Analyzed?
Increase student voter participation by 10-15% by 2024.	NSLVE data	Look for increase in student voting rates
Increase student registration via Civic Corners by 10% from fall 2018 numbers (data not yet known)	Tracking registrations at Civic Corners. Students collect data, Abby Honaker compiles and shares via Google spreadsheets.	Increase in absolute numbers
Increase student use of Civic Corners to contact officials; on average, at least three student groups will host postcard writing campaigns per year by 2024.	Track numbers of postcards mailed and number of letter writing events.	Look for increases in postcards and average of three letter writing events.
Incorporate Civic Corners into campus tours.	Interview with admissions staff.	Tours include stops and mentions.
Incorporate voter registration information into freshman orientation.	All first-year students receive voter information.	Information given to all incoming first-year students.
Incorporate civic education into 20% of foundations courses and 30% of first-year seminar courses.	Content analysis of syllabi; interview of IC director.	Looking for inclusion. (yes/no)
Maintain coordinated events related to civic engagement, such as debate watches, candidate panels, and the like. On average, we will have at least three such events per year.	Track events each year.	Looking for yearly mean of 3.
Improve scores on NSSE related to civic engagement.	NSSE results on items relevant to civic engagement (see narrative).	First-year and senior mean scores improve.

Executive leadership will carry out the evaluation. Results will be shared in a short publication via email that may also be suitable for printing and mail distribution. We will share results with the working group, with college Deans, and other interested groups.



# CLOSING

With a mission of preparing students for fulfilling lives, meaningful work, and responsible citizenship, the University of Mount Union is dedicated to increasing civic engagement on our campus and beyond. Backed by the leadership of the Regula Center for Public Service and Civic Engagement, the Department of Political Science and International Studies and the University Library, this action plan provides the framework for initiatives that will take place in the coming months and years.



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