

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

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.

Following the success of increased student voter turnout in 2018 and 2020 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 and associate professor in Political Science and International Studies and Faculty Liaison to the Regula Center, Lori Kumler. Our plan is supported by numerous faculty and staff serving in our campus civic engagement group. 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 2022 and concluding in the spring of 2024. The plan will be implemented by current leadership, three student Democracy Fellows, and student employees of the Regula Center for Public Service and Civic Engagement 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 Regula Center and the library have collaborated 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. Moving forward the work will be lead by Abby Honaker Schroeder, Director of the Regula Center for Public Service and Civic Engagement with support from the library and various faculty members across campus.

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 individuals in the group will represent the offices and groups below and a full directory of those involved will be maintained by the Regula Center.

Center for Student Success

Office of the Registrar

Office of Student Involvement and Leadership

Department of Social Sciences

Department of English

Department of English

Office of the Integrative Core

Office of Marketing

Office of Alumni Engagement

Office of the Chaplain

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 Democracy Fellows

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, civic engagement teaching resources, 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 Social Sciences, together represent substantial University resources devoted to implementing high quality educational opportunities for Mount Union students as well as individuals in the community. This team 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.

Table 1. University of Mount Union undergraduate learning goals.

To accomplish the mission, the University 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.

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.

The Regula Center recently completed its first internal and external program assessment in August 2020; the Center's assessment represents the University's first assessment of a co-curricular program. External reviewers recommended that the Regula Center create a new mission statement that clearly defines civic engagement, community outreach, and community-engaged learning. They also recommended that the center establish clear objectives/outcomes in terms of impacts on student learning, with a plan to routinely measure and assess outcomes. Going forward, this work will help the University better meet civic engagement needs while also supporting ALL IN objectives.

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.

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 Social Sciences, and the Library included numerous co-curricular opportunities for students. Examples of the opportunities in the past 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”**
- **Unveiling the Civic Corner initiative on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in 2018**
 - Annual Meet the Candidates events
 - Roundtable featuring county election officials and the Secretary of State’s Office
 - Weekly voting tables
 - I vote because... poster events

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 in three broad fields of study: education, health professions, and liberal arts/sciences/humanities. Results indicate that for education majors, student voting jumped from 46.9% in 2012 to 69% in 2016 to 79% in 2020; 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 but an increase to 62% in 2020. In midterm elections, education majors increased their voting rates from 13.9% in 2014 to 45% in 2018; students in the health professions increased midterm voting rates from 13.8% in 2014 to 24% in 2018. Including student data from all fields, voting increased overall from 46.1% in 2012 to 48.8% in 2016 to 63% in 2020 (see Table I below). Midterm election voting rates likewise increased from 12% in 2014 to 29.5% in 2018. Among students who are registered to vote, voting rates increased from 64% in 2016 to 76% in 2020.

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 2).

Table 2. 2012-2020 NSLVE data, voting and registration rates, UMU and private bachelor's institutions.

	Mount Union	<i>All private bachelor's institutions</i>
Voting Rates		
<i>2012 Presidential</i>	46.1	45.1
<i>2016 Presidential</i>	48.8	55
<i>2020 Presidential</i>	63	69%
<i>2014 Midterm</i>	12	16.7
<i>2018 Midterm</i>	29.5	39%
Registration Rates		
<i>2012 Presidential</i>	74.1	*
<i>2016 Presidential</i>	77.8	*
<i>2020 Presidential</i>	82	*
<i>2014 Midterm</i>	65.8	*
<i>2018 Midterm</i>	71.3	*

*Data not provided

Greek Members Self Reporting, 2016 and 2020

In the late fall of 2016, we collected survey data from student Greek organization members regarding their voting and registration habits. In late fall 2020, we collected data via a survey of all Mount Union undergraduates. During fall 2016, we focused on incorporating student Greek organization leaders and members into our debate watch events and into campus voter registration efforts. In fall 2020, we did not work specifically with Greek organizations. While our sample was not a probability sample and cannot be considered fully representative, results indicated an increase in both voting and registration among students in Greek organizations based on surveys (see Table 3). Interestingly, while registration and voter turnout were both higher among Greek students sampled in 2020, a significantly smaller proportion registered to vote during fall semester 2020 compared to fall 2016. This suggests that more students were already registered prior to fall 2020, which we take to be a positive sign that our registration efforts were reaching students earlier and/or that our 2016 efforts helped to build a culture around voting for Greek organization members. Table 3 also indicates

that a significantly smaller percentage of Greek organization students attended an on-campus presidential debate. This finding is not surprising given the Covid pandemic and different conditions surrounding the events.

Table 3. Comparison of 2016 and 2020 Greek organization sample proportions who voted, registered, and attended campus presidential debate events.

	2020 percentage n=107 (2016 percentage) (n=203)
Voted in presidential election	82 (72.9)*
Registered voter	90.7 (85.7)
Registered to vote in fall preceding presidential election	34.6 (52.7)*
Attended an on-campus presidential debate event	15 (40.9)*

*statistically significant, $p < .01$

The Covid-19 pandemic proved to be the primary barrier to our civic engagement efforts. We had smaller and dispersed audiences (in person and online) for our presidential debate watch events. We found that fewer students returned to in-person events in fall 2021 as well.

At the same time, the pandemic offered new voting opportunities as states made absentee voting far more accessible. Mail-in voting also became a “norm” in 2020, whereas previously the norm had been in-person voting, which itself can often be a substantial barrier for student participation.

Additional resources we would like to see would include sustained efforts and cooperation of the integrative core faculty and director and a stronger role for our campus civic engagement group.

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.
- Continue to include links to voter registration and absentee ballot information on the Civic Corner website.
- Work with the Faculty Development Center to help them encourage faculty to include a link to voting on their course learning management system websites.
- Regularize meetings of and actions of our Civic Engagement Working group.
- Given the recent departures of faculty and staff, solicit new faculty, staff, and students to serve on, meet together, and make decisions as Civic Engagement Working Group.
- Continue to reach out to Deans of new colleges to enlist their assistance with incorporating civic education into each college.
- Create both online and in-person opportunities to include civic engagement as part of first year programming and/or orientation.
- Begin offering student organizations a formalized partnership agreement to assist with voter registration and participation.
- Continue participation in OAC votes and increase participation by UMU teams and coaches.

Long Term Goals

- Increase student voter participation by 10-15% by 2024.
- Increase student registration via Civic Corners by 10% from fall 2020 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.
- Refine Regula Center mission statement such that it clearly defines civic engagement.
- Regularize assessment of civic engagement efforts.
- 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 Corner. Work with student leaders to host postcard writing campaigns.
- Orientation: Find ways to engage with first year students during their preview and orientation events
- Week of Welcome: Provide all students with a doorhanger about voting when they move in and co-sponsor an event the first week of school.
- 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.
- Raider Programming Board: Work on partnering with RPB to offer entertainment for students that is civic themed.
- Library Partnership - trained student employees on voting and civic resources; make relevant books available at events
- Sponsorship of student participation at community events including Legislative Breakfast
- Off Campus Outreach: Sponsor mailing about the importance of being an engaged citizen and reminding constituents to vote.
- Voting tables: We will continue to offer a voting ambassador table at least 2 hours per week.
- Conference Attendance

REPORTING

We will share the plan internally via face to face meetings and electronic communications. Externally, we will continue to share civic engagement data and evaluation as well as elements of the plan at conferences such as the Midwest Political Science Association and other teaching and learning conferences.

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.

Table 4. Long term program objectives, measurement, and analysis plans.

Long term outcome	How measured?	Analyzed?
Increase student voter participation by 10-15% by 2024.	NSLVE data	Percentage change
Increase student registration via Civic Corners by 10% from fall 2020 numbers (data not yet known).	Tracking Civic Corner submissions	Percentage change
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 and events	Percentage change
Incorporate Civic Corners into campus tours.	Confirmation by tour leaders	Number of tours
Incorporate civic education into 20% of foundations courses and 30% of first year seminar courses.	Consult IC director	Percentage change
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	Mean of at least 3 per year
Increase off campus outreach reminding citizens to be engaged.	Track events open to greater community	Percentage change
Refine Regula Center mission statement such that it clearly defines civic engagement.	Change in statement wording	Definition of civic engagement present
Regularize assessment of civic engagement efforts.	Established data sources and times of year to collect	Written assessment results
Improve scores on NSSE related to civic engagement.	NSSE results related to civic engagement	Percentage change in first year and senior civic engagement results

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.

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 departments/centers across campus, this action plan provides the framework for initiatives that will take place in the coming months and years.