

## 2020 Student Voting Action Plan, University of Northern Iowa

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### **Executive Summary**

UNI has a tradition of being a high turnout campus. For 2020, our plan is to build on our past success in several ways. First and foremost, we intend to broaden our coalition. Second, we plan to target areas of campus that have traditionally had lower levels of turnout. Finally, we plan to increase staffing around voter engagement. Our 2020 efforts began in the summer of 2019 with outreach to various campaigns to attempt to get them on campus, and will extend through Election Day. Our goal for 2020 is 72% turnout. In addition to 2020, we are working to institutionalize our voter engagement efforts so that we can continue this work into the future and make it part of our campus culture.

### **Background and Past work**

In 2018, the American Democracy Project chapter on campus moved to the department of Political Science. We decided that one of our goals was to increase the role of ADP in get out the vote efforts. What we discovered from our old NSLVE reports is that UNI already had very high turnout (67.2% in 2016). A variety of groups were involved in registration and get out the vote efforts, especially NextGen and College Democrats, but there was little coordination among these groups, duplicated efforts, and little institutional support. Additionally, we had concerns that some of these efforts were largely based on particularly motivated students, and in other years, there might not be this kind of leadership. Our plan was to use ADP not to replace other groups, but to help them coordinate their efforts, and to identify and engage student leaders in the process. We united stake holders from a variety of organizations including College Democrats (at this point the College Republicans were in a rebuilding phase and chose not to participate), student government, the political science department, the Black Hawk County Auditor's office (who runs elections), university marketing, and the Student Organizations Coordinator. We dubbed the effort #panthersvote, so that we could have a consistent brand across campus. The provost provided funding for merchandise, activities, etc.

We had a number of volunteers, as well as 3 paid staff, 2 from CEEP, and one who was a paid intern from the auditor's office.

Our 2018 efforts focused on both registration and voter education. In addition to tabling, our volunteers got access to a number of large classes to do registration there. They also gave out stickers and water bottles to spread the word. On the education side, the political science department gave a series of presentations on campus, and duplicated it at the public library, on information literacy, foreign policy, state government, and congress. As a result of this effort, our midterm Turnout increased from 29.7% in 2014 to 46.2 in 2018. The #panthersvote campaign also won the best emerging program award from Iowa Campus Compact in 2019. These results were shared throughout campus and the community. I prepared a summary for university leadership, presented the findings to a meeting of the student

government, and we sent out a press release that got coverage both in the campus and local newspapers.

### **2020- Growing #panthersvote**

We have been continuously working on voter engagement since the 2018 election, and are gearing up to start our big push in the spring and summer of 2020.

#### Caucuses-

Over the Summer, ADP coordinated with the campus Office of Government relations to meet with representatives of most of the major Democratic candidates for the caucuses to encourage them to come to campus. In the past, our campus has not consistently attracted candidates to campus. By pitching them with our NSLVE numbers and other opportunities, we have gotten most of the major candidates to stop on campus at least once this year.

In January, ADP will be putting on a Mock Caucus. The caucusing process in Iowa is a little complicated, especially on the Democratic side. To make students feel more comfortable with the process, we will be doing a Mock Caucus in January, a week before the real thing. There will be a simulation of both parties' methods.

We have also done voter registration, including tabling, registration at freshman orientation, and an event with student athletes in conjunction with the League of Women Voters.

#### Broadening the Coalition-

Our past coalition members are all on board for 2020. Our goal is to expand our partnerships. I have met with the student organizations coordinator to identify which groups to reach out to. While we don't expect most to do a large amount of engagement work, our plan is to get opportunities to speak at their meetings, do voter registration there and potentially pick up a few of their members as volunteers. We are especially interested in bringing in the College Republicans (under new leadership, they are an active organization) and several student groups representing racial and ethnic minorities. We have also partnered with the League of Women Voters on a campus event and plan to continue their involvement. Finally, we are reaching out to the Athletic Department, with a goal of getting student athletes involved in #panthersvote.

#### Targeting Low Turnout Majors-

Our 2016 and 2018 NSLVE reports show several large majors with substantially lower turnout than the campus average. Leisure Studies and Business stand out as having lower than average turnout, and a large number of students. We have reached out to the College of Business about partnering to increase turnout, and will do the same for Leisure Studies. These majors represent our biggest opportunities for increasing turnout.

#### Building up Staffing-

As we did in 2018, we will apply for staffing through the CEEP fellows program. This was a tremendous resource in the last election cycle. We are also in talks with the Provost for creating a permanent civic engagement position starting in the spring of 2020. He has expressed support and we are currently working on the job description. This position would be the student coordinator for student voting, and would work on other civic engagement and learning activities between elections. We are also working on securing funding on campus for a few student staff from August to November. The Political Science Department has secured office space and a computer for students in this role.

#### Providing Access-

Iowa allows early voting at satellite locations. In 2018, we had a week of satellite voting on campus, and used multiple sites to bring the opportunity to as many students as possible. We plan to do this again for 2020. Additionally, we are working on getting links for voter registration in several web spaces that students use frequently to make it as easy as possible to get registered

#### Activities-

The 2018 speaker series was well received and well attended. We will continue that in 2020. We will also reach out to both candidates in the general election to try to get them to do on campus events. Finally, we plan to add some additional fun events in the fall to get students engaged in the process and turn registrations into voters.