

University of Tampa Action Plan

Executive Summary

The University of Tampa is committed to the development of each student to become productive and responsible citizens according to the institutional mission statement. Our educational approach balances “learning by thinking” with “learning by doing.” The Spartan Ready® definition also speaks to our commitment of preparing our graduates “to be leaders who contribute to society.”

Experiential learning is at the heart of UT’s mission. Opportunities such as those planned for 2024 election cycle hold the promise of deeper civic engagement and the application of liberal-arts learning ideals inherent in the pursuit of democracy. It is a project that must be renewed with each generation.

In 2017 the University of Tampa began to participate in NSLVE and in 2019, we joined the ALL-IN for Democracy Campus Challenge. We formed the University of Tampa ALL-IN for Democracy Coalition in 2020. Our coalition includes representation from faculty, students, alums, and staff from different offices, and representatives from the Supervisor of Elections office. We also work closely with senior leadership including the Provost’s office and the VP for Student Affairs. Through this coalition, we developed our first action plan to better engage students and increase UT’s voter rate. We have increased our voting registration rates and voting rates every year since forming the coalition, earning the Bronze Seal in 2020 and the 2022 Most Engaged Campus Award. This constitutes the third action plan we are submitting to the ALL-IN Campus Democracy Challenge.

The overall goal of the coalition is to increase student engagement and voting on the University of Tampa campus. Since our last action plan submission, we have been working on a number of initiatives to meet that goal:

1. Building a partnership with First-Year Studies to incorporate voter education into the fabric of the University of Tampa curriculum.
2. Reorganizing our structure to include greater student involvement, more direct language about duties related to civic engagement to staff positions.
3. Rebranding our organization and working with Communications and Public Affairs to design a new website for **UTampaVotes!**
4. Establishing a student-led e-board.

First, we are partnering with the First-Year Studies (formerly First-Year Experience) on a curriculum proposal and we expect that beginning in fall 2024 a set of new modules on voting will be a critical thinking assignment that instructors may choose to use in their First-Year Studies course. Our hope is that faculty will choose to assign these modules and that by 2028, a large percentage of UT students will have had voter education as part of the University of Tampa curriculum.

Second, we are rebranding as the **UTampa Democracy Coalition**. The **UTampa Democracy Coalition** stands as our collaborative team, entrusted with leading our endeavors and fostering awareness of responsible citizenship activities throughout the UT community.

Third, we are working with the Office of Communications and Public Affairs to build a website “UTampaVotes!” that will have information for the UT community on voting which will include how to register to vote, request an absentee ballot, and other election resources. In addition, it will have information on the UTampa Votes Initiative and the UTampa Democracy Coalition.

Fourth, and most exciting we have created a new structure specifically aimed at attracting student leaders who will serve on an E-board and will manage the **UTampaVotes** initiative with a goal to increase student involvement and give students agency over this type of responsible citizenship work.

Leadership

Our coalition includes the following members:

Coalition Leadership (University of Tampa)

- Ian McGinnity
Director, Community Engagement
Co-Director, UT Democracy Coalition
- Dr. Kathryn VanderMolen
Associate Professor, Political Science and International Studies
Faculty Director, UT Democracy Coalition

Coalition Members (University of Tampa)

- Tim Harding
Assistant Vice President, Career Development and Engagement
- Brittany Garcia
Assistant Director, Service and Leadership Development
- Four faculty representatives from UT’s different colleges
 - College of Arts and Letters
 - College of Natural and Health Sciences
 - College of Social Sciences, Mathematics and Education
 - Sykes College of Business
- Representatives from:
 - Athletics
 - First-Year Studies

- Office of Communications and Public Affairs
- Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Office of Residence Life
- Student Government (student)
- UTampa Votes E-board (student)

Coalition Members (External Partners)

- Representative from the Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections Outreach Office
- Gerri Kramer Chief Communications Officer, Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections
- UT alumni Casey Bauer, Lindsey Dickerson, Kevin O’Hare

Potential Additions

- City of Tampa Mayor’s Office representative

Coalition Transition Plan

Our coalition is led by a Faculty Director and the Director of Community Engagement. The Director of Community Engagement position includes co-leading this coalition. The Faculty Director is a service position. If the Faculty Director steps down, a request for a replacement will be advertised to the faculty, though we expect that one of the faculty representatives on the coalition would be the likeliest candidates to take the faculty director role. When a member leaves the Coalition, the Coalition will identify possible replacements and the Leadership Team will invite new members to the Coalition. In 2023 the university restructured two positions to include dedicated time to civic engagement in the position description. These include the Director of Community Engagement and the Assistant Director of Service and Leadership Development. The new position descriptions have been revised to include the following language:

Director of Community Engagement

- Recruit, hire, train, and supervise five student coordinators for the Bonner Leader Program, OSLE, Student Marketing, and Civic Engagement. (One position is dedicated to Civic Engagement)
- Collaborate with faculty and provide resources for service learning, civic engagement, and voter education initiatives.
- Co-chair the UT Democracy Challenge Coalition and partner with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections Office to plan and implement voter registration and mobilization programming

Assistant Director, Service and Leadership Development

- Participate in planning and implementation of voter registration and education initiatives and programming.

Commitment to Responsible Citizenship

The President of the University of Tampa has signed the Presidential Commitment, the seal indicating this commitment will be present on the UTampaVotes! webpage. The mission of the university is clear that “UT is committed to the development of each student to become a productive and responsible citizen.” The University of Tampa Faculty Senate has a standing committee on Community Engagement and Responsible Citizenship. This demonstrates a strong commitment by the faculty to support civic engagement across the disciplines. The committee facilitates programming and education between departments, faculty, students, and staff to increase community engagement opportunities and incorporate experiential learning into courses. Some of the work the committee has accomplished related to civic engagement include the following:

- Designed a faculty guidebook for best practices in civic and service learning.
- Created of a video that augments the faculty guidebook with testimonials from students and staff.
- Presented best practices in civic and service learning to faculty as part of the Center for Teaching and Learning professional development series.

The Community Engagement Office has allocated \$3,050 in funding for 2024-2025 programming and events, an increase of 60% from 2022-2023.

In 2023, the Coalition established an award for civic engagement that is awarded to a student or Registered Student Organization (RSO) who has had an impact on civic engagement. It is awarded at the annual Leadership Awards Night in April.

The Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections staff members are strong partners and participate in voter registration tabling alongside the Coalition three times a semester and provide resources to students.

Other commitments outside of the Senate Committee include the requirement of a civic engagement assignment in the Spartan Studies (general education) curriculum for all social science courses. Assignments and outcomes are tracked and vetted by a social science committee member of the Spartan Studies committee.

Landscape

University of Tampa challenges: Our campus has a very geographically diverse population and this poses a challenge for registration and voter turnout. About half--50%-- of our students are from out of state. This means we have to be more creative and find different ways to facilitate student registration and voting. This includes educating students about absentee/mail in ballots or registering students in the state of Florida.

Through tabling with our Hillsborough County Election partners, we encourage students to register to vote. For those who live on campus and register to vote with their campus address, the creation of a new voting day precinct across the street from campus has eased one hurdle for our students. We encourage students who are registered with a Hillsborough County address to vote early. We have an early vote precinct within 5 blocks of campus (a 10-minute walk) that students can easily access. For students who are registered outside of the county or out of state we encourage them to request absentee ballots when we table and through targeted social media messages.

Current issues on our campus center around equity. The University of Tampa has recently created an Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion led by a Chief Diversity Officer. We are excited about building a partnership with ODEI to address issues of equity related to voting on our campus. Polarization on campus is relatively low, we have student led groups that share space in the campus student center when tabling for their organizations and we have had very few issues. Political discourse is benign.

Working alongside ODEI we will pull data from the NSLVE report to develop plans to better understand where weaknesses lie and develop plans to bolster support for different groups on campus. We will plan to collaborate with the Unity organizations within ODEI as well as other RSOs focused on underrepresented identities.

Goals

Our main goal is to continue to increase our voter registration and voter turnout rates. We do not yet have our 2022 NSLVE report to work from but we aim to increase our turnout rates by 5% across all groups.

Short term Goals

To facilitate our main goal, we have several short-term goals. The first is around **campus civic engagement programming**. These include events that are planned and implemented by the Coalition with additional support provided by the Faculty Senate for Community Engagement and Citizen Responsibility Committee, Student Affairs staff, Student Government and RSOs that focus on politics.

For the activities listed below, we have developed a set of learning outcomes that will lead to greater equity among students in knowledge about the voting process. Through participation in UT Democracy Coalition programming, students will be able to:

- Explain the how to register to vote and how to vote
- Explain the how the American electoral process works

Programming for a two-year cycle 2023-25

Academic year 2023-24

- August 2023 – New student voter registration during Week of Welcome in partnership with Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections (HCSOE)
- September 2023 – Constitution Day event
- September 2023 – National Voter Registration Day event
- October 2023—National Voter Education Week, additional voter registration tabling with HCSOE
- January 2024 – New student voter registration during the Involvement Fair in partnership with Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections (HCSOE)
- Spring 2024 – Speaker about Civic Engagement open to university community
- Spring 2024 – Voter registration tabling with HCSOE (Feb, March)
- March 19, 2024 Florida Presidential Preference Primary
- April 2024 – Recognize one student, one faculty/staff member and/or one RSO for their Civic Engagement contributions during the annual Leadership Awards Night

Academic Year 2024-2025

- August 2024 – New student voter registration during Week of Welcome in partnership with Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections (HCSOE)
- Fall 2024 – Speaker about Civic Engagement open to university community
- September or October – HCSOE representative attends one Student Government General Assembly meeting
- September 2024 – Constitution Day event
- September 2024 – National Voter Registration Day event
- October 2024 – National Voter Education Week events
- October 2024 – Information sent to students about General (Midterm) Election in November
- October 7, 2024 – General Election Registration Deadline (Florida)
- October 21 to Nov 3, 2024 – Early Voting in Florida
- October and November 2024 – Competition between athletic teams, fraternities, sororities and RSOs to encourage voter participation among their members
- November 5, 2024 – General Election
- Spring 2025 – Speaker about Civic Engagement open to university community
- Spring 2025 – Voter registration tabling with HCSOE (Jan, Feb, March)
- April 2025 – Recognize one student, one faculty/staff member and one RSO for their Civic Engagement contributions during the annual Leadership Awards Night

A second short-term goal is to **increase our social media @UTampaVotes** through competitions to encourage faculty, staff, departments and colleges to follow us on Instagram. UTampa Votes will be charged with this initiative.

Our third goal is a **critical thinking assignment centered on voting that will be incorporated into First-Year Studies courses**. The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that every University of Tampa student understands voting and its importance to democratic citizenship. Thus, it is not a topic that is reserved to only students who are US citizens but to our entire student body. The Spartan Ready® Critical Thinking competency focuses on a student's ability to gather facts, understand context, analyze relevant information and make decisions. A responsible citizen uses these skills to make informed choices to support and elect candidates. This module demonstrates critical thinking and the importance of using those skills in exercising the right to vote as a responsible citizen.

Long-Term Goals

We have proposed the creation of The Institute for Community Engagement and Responsible Citizenship (ICERC) to bring synergy to new and existing service learning and co-curricular community engagement experiences. We hope to develop a strategic plan that leads to more informed, responsible and actively engaged student citizens. Unfortunately, budget considerations have prevented this from occurring but we hope it could exist in the future. Nonetheless, we will continue to pursue this long-term goal.

NSLVE

Voting registration and voting rates:

In 2017 the University of Tampa joined NSLVE. The UT Campus Report, we can review data from the 2016, 2018, 2020 and once it is released, 2022 elections. For presidential election cycles we can examine data from 2016 and 2020. In 2016 our campus registration rate was 71 percent and in 2020 it was 82 percent. In four years, the registration rate increased by 11 percent. In 2016, the voting rate was 41 percent and in 2020 it was 58 percent. There was a 17 percent increase between the 2016 and 2020 elections.

In mid-term election cycles we can look at 2018 and 2022 data, once it is realized. In 2018 our campus registration rate was 70 percent and our voting rate was 25%. Once data is released for 2022, we will closely examine that data and see how it compares to 2018 results.

This data suggests that the cross campus work we have undertaken since 2016 is having a positive impact. We earned the Bronze Seal in 2020 and we were recognized as a 2022 Most Engaged Campus. We are encouraged by this progress and aim to keep improving. We will partner with ODEI to work on plans to target specific populations on campus.

Strategy

Our strategy is explained in earlier sections, particularly around the use of NSLVE data, voter education modules in the First-Year Studies courses, and programming activities that we have planned. Our social science core classes (Spartan Studies Curriculum) have a civic engagement

assignment and assessment that is now common to all classes which will allow us to assess engagement in our next action plan cycle. We will work with the Dean of the College of Social Sciences, Mathematics, and Education on a budget to support programming and collaborate with her on building community partnerships and goals around civic engagement in support of a campus center.

Reporting

Our plan will be shared across the campus community. The co-directors of the Coalition (the Director of Community Engagement and the Faculty Director) will share the action plan at staff and college faculty meetings. We will also share it with the Office of Communications and Public Affairs and it will be available on the UTampaVotes! website. We will also push out our plan and NSLVE report via social media.

Evaluation

The NSLVE report is a strong tool that we can use to evaluate if we are seeing increases in voter registration rates and voting rates. The addition of the modules to the First-Year Study course will permit us to assess and evaluate students' understanding of the voting process. An assessment is included at the conclusion of the module so that we can assess learning and track it over time. The evaluation will fall under the duties of the coalition and the co-directors are charged with leading that assessment and compiling the report for the next action plan cycle. By the time of our next reporting we should have assessment data from AY 2024-25 to include from the First-Year Study modules and from the Spartan Studies social science core classes.