

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 that we have planned for Fall 2020 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.

Over the last few years, the Department of Political Science and International Studies faculty and Office of Student and Engagement staff have made significant strides in providing programming and education for civic engagement. We have operated as a smaller group informally and now we look forward to working with a formal coalition, which includes representation from across the campus and some members from the Tampa Bay community. Through this coalition, we have developed a formal plan to better engage students and increase UT’s voter rate for the 2020 Presidential Election and beyond.

In Spring 2020, we started widespread messaging to students about civic engagement:

- We provided the following voter registration e-mail to every student at UT:

Florida is a CLOSED Primary State. When voting in a Primary Election you can only vote in the party with which you are registered when the registration books close for that election. If you wish to participate in the Presidential Primary on March 17, you must be registered with a party (this means that those registered as Independent or No Party Affiliation are not able to participate in the Presidential Primary). All registered voters, regardless of party are able to vote in nonpartisan races.

The deadline to register in Florida or change parties is Feb. 18.

To register to vote in Florida, or to change parties, click [here](#).

- We held voter registration tables on campus in connection with our community partner, The Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections Office.
- Met with students in large gatherings (i.e. BUS101) to explain voter registration procedures in Florida.
- Informational pamphlets from the Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections were posted in residence halls.

Leadership

In Spring 2020, we formed a coalition consisting of members from across the UT community and members of the Tampa Bay Community. We hosted meetings in January and February. Due to COVID-19 and the shift to online learning, we had to cancel the March and April meetings. During the academic year, we plan on having monthly meetings, these may be virtual or in person.

Coalition Leadership

- Ian McGinnity
Director, Office of Student Leadership and Engagement
- Dr. Mary Anderson
Professor, Political Science and International Studies

Coalition Members (University of Tampa)

- Tim Harding
Associate Dean, Career Development and Engagement
- Dr. Chris Gurrie
Director, Communication and Speech (College of Arts and Letters representative)
- Dr. Rebecca Olsen
College of Natural and Health Sciences
- Dr. Natasha Veltri
Associate Dean, Sykes College of Business
- Tiffany Garcia
Assistant Director, Alumni Relations and Event Management
- Jessica Richard
Bonner Student Coordinator, Office of Student Leadership and Engagement
- Student Government Representative

Coalition Members (External Partners)

- Digna Alvarez
Deputy Director of Communications, Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections
- Casey Bauer
UT alumnus
- Lindsey Dickerson
UT alumna

Coalition Potential Additions

- College of Social Sciences, Mathematics and Education faculty member
- Office of Transition and Persistence or Office of Student Leadership and Engagement staff member to help with the effort to reach underrepresented students
- Office of Public Information staff member to assist with communication plan
- City of Tampa Mayor's Office representative

Coalition Transition Plan

- When a member leaves the Coalition, the Coalition will brainstorm possible replacements and the Leadership Team will reach out and solidify a replacement.

Commitment

In Spring 2020, the Faculty Senate approved a new faculty standing committee for Community Engagement and Responsible Citizenship. It passed unanimously. We are excited that this committee places us in a position to have a campus wide reach. Faculty members from multiple disciplines will retain positions on this committee.

The Division of Student Affairs is invested in civic engagement and the Office of Student Leadership and Engagement and has allocated at least \$2,000 in funding for Fall 2020 events.

The Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections staff members are strong partners and want to participate in monthly voter registration tabling and provide resources to students.

Landscape

Voting registration and voting rates: We began our informal civic engagement with students in the Fall of 2016 with a loosely organized group of interested political science, journalism, and speech faculty and several interested student affairs staff. A few faculty attended a teaching and learning conference in Long Beach CA in Feb 2017 to present some data from our 2016 campus efforts and to learn more about cross campus civic engagement. While there we learned about NSLVE. The University of Tampa joined NSLVE in 2017. We have data on student voting for the 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018 elections. The 2012 data form our baseline for presidential elections. In 2012 our campus registration rate was 75.2, in 2016 unfortunately it dropped to 73.5. However, our voting rate increased from 37.3 in 2012 to 38.2 in 2016. We recognize that we are approximately 12 points off from other institutions however, so we have much work to do in this area for the 2020 election.

Data from 2014 and 2018 suggest that the cross campus work we have done since 2016 is having a positive impact. In 2014, a midterm election year, our campus registration rate was 60.8, in 2018 that increased by 12 points to 72.1. Our voting rate had a similar increase. In 2014 our voting rate was 11.1 but by 2018 we increased the rate to 26.5, an increase of 15 points! While we may be lagging behind other campuses our efforts since 2016 suggest that we are indeed having a positive effect voting rates and registrations.

University of Tampa challenges: Our campus has a very geographically diverse population and this poses a challenge and likely contributes to our lower rates. About half--50%-- of our students are from out of state. This means that we have to be more creative and find ways to facilitate student registration and voting. This includes educating students about absentee/mail in ballots or registering students in the state of Florida. As we stated earlier, voting registration efforts with our community partners are a step in the right direction. Furthermore, students who were registered locally faced challenges to voting. The precinct assigned for our campus was a twenty-minute walk for students. Our informal campus group rented vans to shuttle students to the precinct on election day but this was challenging. Working with our partners at the Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections we have been able to secure a precinct change for the 2020 election. In 2020 students will now be assigned to a precinct across the street from campus. We believe this will ease at least one hurdle for voting and help to facilitate increased voter turnout among our students.

Data from CIRP: From the results of the Fall 2018 survey, 76.9 percent responded there was a very good chance or some chance of voting in a local, state or national election. That question was answered by 794 students.

A change in the UT Landscape: In sum, heading into the 2020 election we have made several changes that we anticipate will help us increase our voting registration and voting rates:

1. A campus-community coalition to focus on student voter registration and voting.
2. A newly created standing faculty senate committee with a focus on Community Engagement and Citizen Responsibility.
3. A precinct change for students with a University of Tampa address

Short-Term Goals

Our first goal is to provide the following opportunities for students. The events are modeled after our programming from 2016, which was the first time Political Science and International Studies and Student Leadership and Engagement (more broadly an Academic department and a Student Affairs department) intentionally collaborated for a Presidential Election year. We recognize that this goal will be evolving as higher education and UT specifically decide how to adapt to Fall 2020 and COVID-19 challenges.

Events will be planned and implemented by the Coalition members with Anderson and McGinnity leading the efforts. Additional support will be provided by the Faculty Senate Community Engagement and Citizen Responsibility Committee, Student Affairs staff, student staff from the Office of Student Leadership and Engagement and student leaders from Student Government and Registered Student Organizations that focus on politics.

- January to October 2020 – Monthly voter registration by Supervisor of Elections staff in Vaughn Center
- February 2020 – Information sent to students about Presidential Primary in March
- March 17, 2020 – Presidential Primary Voting in Florida
- September 2020 – New Student Voter Registration during Week of Welcome
- September 17, 2020 – Constitution Day Event
- September 22, 2020 – National Voter Registration Day Event
- September 29, 2020 – Presidential Debate 1 Watch Party
- October 2020 – Information sent to students about Presidential Election in November
- October 5, 2020 – General Election Deadline (Florida)
- October 7, 2020 – Vice Presidential Debate Watch Party
- October 15, 2020 – Presidential Debate 2 Watch Party
- October 22, 2020 – Presidential Debate 3 Watch Party
- November 3, 2020 – Presidential Election
- November 3, 2020 – Presidential Election Results Watch Party
- Faculty presentations to address current affairs, political engagement and issues related to self and society.
- Additionally, we know there will be events that arise throughout the election cycle that will be added as unanticipated events.
- Social media can be utilized through Student Leadership and Engagement's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. In addition, UT's Instagram, managed by Public Information, can be a tool.
- Engage UT, the co-curricular management software, can also assist with these efforts with events students can RSVP to as well as banner advertisements.

During the debate watch parties, either members of the coalition, faculty from various departments on campus or campus Student Affairs leaders provide information and/or lead brief discussions related to the event. For example, previously Speech faculty debriefed students during and after debate parties, Political Science faculty discussed civic engagement and voting at voting registration events, and Communications faculty discussed reliability of the news media.

For the activities listed, we have developed a set of learning outcomes. Students will be able to:

- Explain the fundamental concepts of civic engagement
- Explain the role of citizens in a democracy
- Explain the American electoral process

Additional initiatives:

- Create website for students to easily find election resources.
- Distribute nonpartisan materials prepared by national organizations.
- In student media outlets, highlight issues relevant to young voters.

Voting Rate

Our next goal is to increase the voting rate from our 2016 NSLVE report. Based on the increases from the midterm election of 2014 to 2018, we are aiming for a 10% increase in the voting rate for the 2020 election.

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 to more widely and strategically develop informed, responsible and actively engaged student citizens. Unfortunately, budget considerations prevent this for the 2020-2021 academic year but we hope it could exist in the future. Nonetheless, we will continue to pursue this long-term goal.

Reporting

This plan will be shared with all members of the coalition as well as stakeholders in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. We would like to create a better web presence for these initiatives and we are going to explore different options to find a location that students can readily access. As mentioned above, social media will be utilized.

Evaluation

We would like to know if our civic engagement efforts are effective in increasing student participation in the areas of voter registration, education, and participation. We would like the evaluation to give us information that will help us continue to improve student civic engagement, build stronger coordination for civic engagement efforts among faculty and staff, and help us advocate for this work to become a University-wide priority that is supported with some institutional resources.

The coalition and faculty senate committee will lead the evaluation process, building on what we have already started. We will continue to consider attendance at events, implement evaluations at events, and work with NSLVE and our local elections board to get data on voting rates. We plan to gather information throughout the process, and adjust programming and outreach based on the data we receive.