

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 Fall 2022 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.

For a few years, the Department of Political Science and International Studies faculty and Office of Student Leadership and Engagement staff made significant strides in providing programming and education for civic engagement. We operated as a smaller group informally.

In 2020, we formed a formal coalition, which includes representation from across the campus and some members from the Tampa Bay community. Through this coalition, we developed our first formal plan to better engage students and increase UT’s voter rate for the 2020 Presidential Election and beyond. This is the second formal plan we are submitting to the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge.

Leadership

In Fall 2021, we hosted meetings in September and November. Due to COVID-19 and the inclusion of off-campus partners, we had these meetings over Zoom. In Spring 2022, we hosted a February meeting and had a paper meeting in April.

Coalition Leadership

- Ian McGinnity
Director, Community Engagement
- Dr. Mary Anderson
Professor, Political Science and International Studies

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
- Jane Bianchi

Writer/Editor, Public Information and Publications

- Representative from Office of the Chief Diversity Officer
- Representative from Alumni Relations and Event Management
- Student Government representative
- Student representatives, which may include student coordinator and executive board members

Coalition Members (External Partners)

- Digna Alvarez
Deputy Director of Special Projects, Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections
- Gerri Kramer
Chief Communications Officer, Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections
- Casey Bauer
UT alumnus
- Lindsey Dickerson
UT alumna

Coalition Potential Additions

- 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. During the 2020-2021 academic year, this committee created a handbook for faculty describing how to incorporate service-learning in their courses.

In the Winter 2021 issue of the *UT Journal*, the Coalition's work was highlighted in an 8-page feature.

In Fall 2021, UT was recognized with a bronze seal by the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. This information was shared on the UT website and included in presentations to UT's Board of Trustees.

Community Engagement has allocated at least \$2,000 in funding for Fall 2022 events.

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

Landscape

Voting registration and voting rates: We began our informal civic engagement with students in Fall 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. At that conference, we learned about NSLVE. The University of Tampa joined NSLVE in 2017.

From the 2020 NSLVE Campus Report, we can review data from the 2016, 2018 and 2020 elections. In 2016 our campus registration rate was 71 percent, in 2018 it was 70 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, in 2018 it was 25 percent and in 2020 it was 58 percent. There was a 17 percent increase between the 2016 and 2020 elections.

This data suggests that the cross campus work we have done since 2016 is having a positive impact. While we may be slightly behind other campuses (the 2020 average was 66 percent), we are encouraged by this progress and aim to keep improving.

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 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. As we stated earlier, voting registration efforts with our community partners are a step in the right direction.

Since the last plan, we can report that the changed precinct (across the street from campus instead of a 20-minute walk) has eased one hurdle and helped facilitate greater turnout among our students.

Short-Term Goals

Our first goal is to provide the following opportunities for students. The events are modeled after previous programming, which included adaptations for COVID-19.

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 Government and Registered Student Organizations that focus on politics.

- August 2022 – New student voter registration during Week of Welcome in partnership with Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections (HCSOE)
- Fall 2022 – Speaker about Civic Engagement open to University community
- September and October – Additional voter registration tabling with HCSOE
- September or October – HCSOE representative attends one Student Government General Assembly meeting
- September 17, 2022 – Constitution Day event
- September 20, 2022 – National Voter Registration Day event
- October 2022 – Information sent to students about General (Midterm) Election in November
- October 11, 2022 – General (Midterm) Election Registration Deadline (Florida)

- October and November 2022 – Competition between athletic teams, fraternities, sororities and Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) to encourage high voter participation among their members
- November 8, 2022 – General (Midterm) Election
- Spring 2023 – Speaker about Civic Engagement open to University community
- Spring 2023 – Voter registration tabling with HCSOE
- April 2023 – Recognize one student, one faculty/staff member and one RSO for their Civic Engagement contributions during the annual Leadership Awards Night
- Additionally, we know there will be events that arise throughout the election cycle that will be added as unanticipated events.
- We plan on having Spartans Vote giveaways/swag at these events.
- The new co-curricular management software can also assist with these efforts.

Social media can be utilized including the Coalition’s Instagram account. A new idea is to partner more closely with Student Government officers to share SG Election and Coalition stories.

- We also think a competition to encourage faculty and staff, departments and colleges to follow us on Instagram could be effective.

For the activities listed above, 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

Our second goal is a critical thinking assignment centered on voting that will be incorporated into all Fall 22 First-Year Experience 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.

Students will work at their own pace through a set of modules that will be designed specifically towards UT students. Students will learn how to register to vote, how to research candidate positions, how to cast a ballot and how to seek out additional resources.

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.

Our third goal is to create a website page for the UT community to easily find election resources. This includes lesson plans aimed at faculty to incorporate voter education in their courses.

Voting Rate

Our fourth goal is to increase the voting rate from our 2018 NSLVE report. We are aiming for a 5 to 10 percent increase in the voting rate for the 2022 election because we have not had the Coalition and an action plan in place for a midterm election. We are interested to see how we can share this information with students and lead to greater civic engagement at UT.

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 have prevented this from occurring 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. As mentioned above, 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. Also, 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 provide information that will help us continue to improve student civic engagement, build stronger coordination for civic engagement efforts among the Coalition and UT community and help us advocate for this work to become a University-wide priority that is supported with some institutional resources.

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 UT VOTES module to the First Year Experience course will permit us to assess and evaluate students' understanding of the voting process. The module includes a quiz at the conclusion of the module to assess student learning of the materials.