



## University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) 2024 Nonpartisan Political Engagement Action Plan

Developed by: Veronica E. De La Garza

### Executive Summary:

This nonpartisan political engagement action plan was developed by The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) in Texas for the 2024 election. The purpose of this action plan is to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter registration, education, and turnout in the 2024 election. The goals of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley for the 2024 election are to reach the height of our voter registration and turnout numbers seen during Elections 2000. The pandemic caused a decline in student voter registration and turnout, so the 2024 goals are: Voter Registration Rate of 78%, 71% Voting Rate of Registered Students and overall Voting Rate of 56%. Estimate of 23,637 students registered to vote and 16,765 voting.

### Leadership:

Our leadership team includes the following, campus groups, and organizations:

Veronica E. De La Garza, Director of Governmental Relations  
Richard Sanchez, Associate Vice President of Governmental Relations  
Mabel Cortinamatos, Assistant Director, Center for Student Involvement  
Raul Leal, Program Coordinator, Center for Student Involvement  
Estela De La Garza, Program Manager, Engaged Scholarship & Learning

Additional Contacts include:

Hidalgo County Elections Office  
Cameron County Elections Office  
AACT - Advocacy Alliance Center of Texas, nonprofit, nonpartisan local organization.

### Commitment:

It is important to understand the backdrop of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), in South Texas and the impact of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) on this geographic area. UTRGV is a regional university with campuses and off-campus sites across the 120-mile Texas/Mexico border known as the lower Rio Grande Valley.

The RGV is mainly a Hispanic dominated area of Texas with 94% of individuals of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and 6% Non-Hispanic/Latino. Diving deeper into the UTRGV student demographics, of the 31, 939 students attending UTRGV in fall of 2021, 92.4% students come from the Rio Grande Valley and 90.8% are Hispanic. This makes UTRGV one of the largest Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) in the nation. Moreover, the Median Household Income for Hispanic families living in the RGV is \$38,164 and 62.4% of the undergraduate students are Pell grant eligible. Many low-income households in the region also have other concerns that hinder voting outcomes like food insecurity, technology issues, transportation concerns and more. Historically 6 out of 10 residents vote in Texas. In the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), 4 out of 10 residents' vote. But UTRGV is making great strides to increase voter registration, access/turn out and education despite the obstacles the students and community face.

**Commitment:** Soon after the opening of UTRGV in August 2015, staff realized that there existed a unique opportunity to cement voter engagement as part of the foundation of the new University's identity. In 2016, engaged and action driven staff and faculty created an initiative titled Vaqueros Vote. Vaqueros Vote became a non-partisan coalition of UTRGV faculty, staff, students, and nonpartisan 501c3 community organizations dedicated to increasing political and civic participation among the UTRGV community and increase public awareness about the value of participation in democracy through the electoral process. The Vaquero Vote Initiative at UTRGV aims to register, educate, and engage students, staff, and faculty.

**Communication:** UTRGV staff oversees the communication of voting information for the UTRGV community. Vaqueros Vote posts web banners on the university website, utilizes social media, campus newspapers, student media, university wide student bulletins, and campus wide emails from the University President to remind the Vaquero community about federal, state, and local elections, including special elections and run-offs. UTRGV is always looking at innovative ways to communicate the importance of voting and has hosted GOTV virtual dance parties during COVID and has hosted speakers such as the Texas Secretary of State and Voto Latino co-founder, Wilmer Valderrama.

One of our biggest accomplishments has been securing and growing the presence of polling locations on the Brownsville and Edinburg campus. The Edinburg campus polling location is one of the highest-traffic and most used voting locations in Hidalgo County. The polling location in Brownsville has been secured after a few years of hiatus. UTRGV is a voting/polling site.

[ALL IN Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation:](#) President Guy Bailey is a current signatory to the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation most recently signing the commitment in 2020.

## Landscape:

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) is a public 4-year institution and joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2018. Our institution is designated as the following: Minority-Serving Institution, Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Our campus demographic and voting data: During Fall 2023, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley reported 32,000+ students on the first day of class.

The Fall 2022 Student profile (31,559 students) includes this information:

Ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	978	3.1%
Black	267	.8%
Hispanic	28,699	90.9%
Asian	431	1.4%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	19	0.06%
International	822	2.6%
Unknown or Not Reported	278	0.9%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	14	0.04%
Two or more Races	51	0.2%

Gender		
Male	12,532	39.7%
Female	19,027	60.3%

Average Age		
Undergraduate	21	
Master's	31	
Doctoral	38	
Medical	26	
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	

Residency Distribution - Rio Grande Valley		
Hidalgo County	19,111	60.6%
Cameron County	9,354	29.6%
Starr County	874	2.8%
Willacy County	193	0.6%
<b>Total Rio Grande Valley</b>	<b>29,532</b>	<b>93.6%</b>

Residency Distribution - Out-of-Valley		
Other Texas Residents	1,508	4.8%
Other U.S. Residents	202	0.6%
Mexican Nationals	200	0.6%
Other Foreign Nationals	117	0.4%
<b>Total Out-of-Valley</b>	<b>2,027</b>	<b>6.4%</b>

Prepared by: Office of Strategic Analysis & Institutional Reporting (SAIR), UTRGV, TX

## **ELECTION 2024: Important Election Dates in Texas**

### **Primary Election**

Monday, January 1, 2024*	First day to apply for a ballot by mail using Application for a Ballot by Mail (ABBM) or Federal Postcard Application (FPCA)
Monday, February 5, 2024	Last Day to Register to Vote
Tuesday, February 20, 2024* *First business day after Presidents' Day	First Day of Early Voting
Friday, March 1, 2024	Last Day of Early Voting
Tuesday, March 5, 2024	Primary Election Day

### **Primary Runoff Election**

Monday, April 29, 2024	Last Day to Register to Vote
Monday, May 20, 2024	First Day of Early Voting
Friday, May 24, 2024	Last Day of Early Voting
Tuesday, May 28, 2024	Primary Runoff Election Day

### **General/Presidential Election**

Monday, October 7, 2024	Last Day to Register to Vote
Monday, October 21, 2024	First Day of Early Voting
Friday, November 1, 2024	Last Day of Early Voting
Tuesday, November 5, 2024	Election Day

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley has authorized the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), from the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education at Tufts University and will receive campus voting data for the 2022 Election in Fall 2023. Our NSLVE authorization runs through 2033. \*UTRGV has not received the 2022 NSLVE report.

Our 2020 campus voting rate was 55.6%.  
Our 2020 campus voter registration rate was 78.4%.

Our 2018 campus voting rate was 41.1%.  
Our 2018 campus voter registration rate was 74.9%.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley has been recognized by ALL IN with the following seals of recognition for past elections: 2018 Gold, 2020 Bronze.

Additionally, our institution had a student recognized on the 2022 ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll for their efforts to support and increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voting.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley participates in the following initiatives to support the development and implementation of our nonpartisan democratic engagement efforts on campus: Ask Every Student - a national joint initiative that facilitates collaboration between campus leaders and nonprofit partners to help campuses ask every student to participate in the democratic process and achieve full student voter registration, and National Voter Registration Day (2017, 2018, 2021, 2022, 2023); National Voter Education Week (2022); Vote Early Day (2022).

## Goals:

Our institution's nonpartisan democratic engagement goals are:

We are keeping our goals similar to our 2020 numbers/% because we think we dipped in voter registration and voter turnout as a result of the ongoing COVID pandemic and its surges. We will not know for sure until we received the 2022 NSLVE report.

- Increase student voter registration rate to 79% in 2024 and 81% in 2026.
- Increase student voter turnout rate to 56% in 2024 and 58% in 2026.
- Add voter registration to new student orientation for Fall 2024.
- Incorporate voter registration into Welcome Week activities.

## Strategy:

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley will implement these strategies to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter participation.

Student Life Integration: Integrating voter registration into processes like orientation, welcome week, National Voter Registration Day, and other student programming. Host Get Out The Vote parties at the start of Early Vote.

Secure two Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows in the Spring and Fall. The Fellows will collaborate and talk to their peers about registering to vote, educating them on election dates and what's on the ballot, and make sure students at their campus are ready to engage with democracy. The goal is to have a fellow focused on the Brownsville campus and another on the Edinburg campus. <https://www.campusvoteproject.org/democracy-fellows-spring-2023>

Academic Integration: Work with Faculty Senate to integrate civic engagement into their classroom and prepare students to register to vote and Go Out and Vote.

Have in-house VDRs (volunteer deputy registrars) at each college in each campus to increase access to voter registration leading up to the 2024 election.

Campus Communication: Use campus communications resources to promote Early Vote and Election Day ex student newspaper, posters on campus, university social media, posters in libraries, etc. Use web banners on Blackboard to remind students to Register to Vote and to Vote (GOTV).

### Evaluation:

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley will use the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) to evaluate the increase of student voting by comparing our campus voter turnout and voter registration rates to past elections to measure progress on increasing both.

### Reporting:

Our campus action plan will be posted on our campus page on ALL IN's website <https://allinchallenge.org/campuses/university-of-texas-rio-grande-valley/>.

Our institution has given ALL IN permission to publish our past NSLVE reports, which can also be found on our campus page above.