



Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership

University of Texas at San Antonio Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022-2023

I. Executive Summary

The University of Texas at San Antonio, a Hispanic Serving Institute located in Central South Texas is home to over 34,000 students. The UTSA vision is *"to be a premier public research university, providing access to educational excellence and preparing citizen leaders for the global environment"* centering student success, public research, and innovative excellence. The UTSA Office of Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership (CCEL) contributes to this vision through its mission "to empower students, faculty and staff to serve society through community engaged scholarship and promotes civic literacy" to prepare students to become socially responsible, prepared and civically engaged social agents, strengthening democracy. CCEL leads the RowdyVOTES team on campus which brings together campus/community partners to promote civic engagement and voter education, registration, and turnout.

According to the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Report (NSLVE) only 4,103 students out of over 17,000 voted in the mid-term election yielding a 15.3% voting rating in 2014. However, in 2018 over 14,000 students turned out to vote in the mid-term elections, increasing the voter turnout rate from 15.3% to 46.15%. This trend is demonstrating significant improvement in student voter turnout and an opportunity to continue to strengthen voter engagement throughout campus. Indeed, the pandemic has impacted engagement in general due to remote, hybrid modalities, yet outreach and engagement was adapted to meet students where they are using digital content.

As the 2022 mid-term elections are approaching and more students are on campus, CCEL has shared NSLVE data with campus partners and is preparing to re-engage campus/community partners, re-strengthening the RowdyVOTES with the goal of building a cohesive effort to activate democratic engagement.

Under the guidance of the CCEL Director, Maria Alejandro and leadership by Noelani Cubillos-Sanchez, Civic Leadership Program Specialist and supported by Program Coordinator, Lukas Valdes, the goal is to increase both the student registration from 56.3% to over 60% and voter turnout rate for voters at University of Texas at San Antonio from 46.1% to over 50% and

promote courses with integrated civic learning outcomes aligning with the mid-term elections. As well as host/co-host one student “platica” about mid-term voting.

The planned activities outlined here will be carried out summer through fall 2022, on the UTSA campus and in the San Antonio community.

The following groups will be leading this work at University of Texas at San Antonio in order to accomplish goals and further institutionalize commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Office of Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership
- Student Affairs
- Faculty
- Community Partners
- Inter-collegiate partners

The mission of the initiative is:

- To broaden and deepen civic learning, democratic engagement, and student voter participation on campus
- fostering a civic ethos on campus; and I
- institutionalize elements of democratic engagement into the curriculum and co-curriculum that persist regardless of election cycles.

The University of Texas at San Antonio stands in a unique position to establish itself as an emergent leader committed to institutionalizing democratic engagement efforts. The newly renamed Office of Civic and Community-Engaged Learning (CCEL) has undergone a name change, formerly the “Center for Civic Engagement.” CCEL is part of the Career Engaged Learning Department within Academic Affairs and seeks to prepare students for civic life beyond the academy.

CCEL will take a leadership role in development, coordination, and implementation of the RowdyVOTES civic action plan.

II. Leadership

The RowdyVOTES 2022 Civic Action plan was drafted by Maria Alejandro, Director and Noelani Cubillos-Sanchez, Civic Leadership Program Specialist for CCEL. Ms Cubillos-Sanchez will have direct oversight over the plan and RowdyVOTES with the focus on increasing civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. A strong effort will be made to gather students, staff, faculty and community members to construct a more participatory version of the action plan based on the Technology of Participation Action Plan (ToP) model to facilitate co-creation of shared ownership and collective impact design as it relates to specific activities.

Internal-Campus Partners

- Maria Alejandro, Program Director, UTSA Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership; Noelani Cubillos-Sanchez, UTSA Civic and Community-Engaged; Lukas Valdes, CCEL Program Coordinator; Leadership Student Government Association; President Taylor Eighmy; Ginnifer Cie Gee, AVP Career Engaged Learning; Brandi Scott, Director of Multicultural Student Center for Equity and Justice; LT Robinson, Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students; Eliot Howard, Director of Leadership and Volunteer Services; Teresa Niño, Vice President of University Relations;
- Faculty - Dr. Patricia Jaramillo and Professor Gina Amatangelo; Public Administration; Dr. Liliana Saldana, COEHD, Mexican American Studies; Amy Rushing, Assistant Vice Provost for Special Collections; Lanie May, Director of Office of Sustainability; Faculty from Political Science and other colleges.
- Registered Student Organizations – Student Government Association, MOVE UTSA; Texas Rising UTSA chapter; NextGen America; and the NAACP chapter of UTSA,

External-Community Partners

- Ernest Martinez, chairperson of Cesar E. Chavez Legacy and Education Foundation; Rebecca Flores; Texas Organizing Project; NowCast SA; disABILITY SA; Southwest Voter Registration Education Project; SA2020, League of Women Voters of San Antonio; City Council offices; Bexar County elections department; Texas Secretary of State; Service-Learning Intercollegiate Collaborative; ALL IN-Democracy Challenge

RowdyVOTES is diverse and inclusive of:

- Representation from different areas of campus, including student leadership; representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise; trusted leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy; and leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus into the work.

Monthly meetings will launch in the summer and bimonthly meetings will start in the fall and held at various locations and various capacities (i.e., virtual/hybrid/in-person) to ensure maximum attendance at everyone's convenience. Outreach and engagement include meeting students where they are at. CCEL staff will present to first year students, attend various campus events such as orientation and welcoming events as well as coordinate presentations for classes and student organization meetings.

If anyone in the civic leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, the TOP participatory action plan may remain. A succession plan will be developed to ensure the plan moves forward through staff transitions. In addition, succession will include asking the exiting members for their recommendation of who should be the new point-of-contact. The platforms Anthology and Givepulse branded as RowdyLink and UTSAEngaged, respectively, will be used to keep campus and community engaged.

CCEL is also partnering with the following organizations from the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition to support efforts on campus:

- Alliance for Youth Organizing; MOVE Texas; League of Women Voters of Texas; League of Women Voters San Antonio; Campus Election Engagement Project; When We All Vote; All IN Democracy

III. Commitment

UTSA and campus leadership demonstrate a commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement as reflected in the institution's values. They state, "UTSA is invested in teaching them to be civically engaged and active participants in civic discourse. We strive to provide students with the tools to express their beliefs with passion and conviction while putting just as much energy into listening and understanding alternate points of view."

UTSA Office of Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership (CCEL) is committed to asking students what their barriers to voting are and co-design programming to meet students where they are at. CCEL also commits to setting the framework for engagement and programming inviting campus and community partners to work together. ToP Group Facilitation methods and other methods will be used to host group meetings, collective action plan and any re-manuevering of the plan.

For Summer 2022 – CCEL commits to hosting three meetings to prepare for a highly active month in September and developing consensus on action plan activities and set the bi-monthly meetings for the fall semester.

CCEL commits to hosting a voter education event as part of Hispanic Heritage Month in September to facilitate a plactica on historical challenges faced by local civil rights leaders and energize voter registration building on those struggles.

CCEL will work with members of the Service-Learning Intercollegiate Collaborative (SLIC) to encourage local universities to participate in the ALL IN Democracy Challenge and share resources and promote events.

CCEL commits to providing an opportunity to build a more participatory action plan with RowdyVOTES members to outline specific activities around National Voter Registration Day, Voter Education Week, Early Voting, and other events leading up to Election Day.

President Eighmy has also signed the ALL IN Presidential Commitment and efforts will be made to engage Athletics and encourage the Coaches Pledge.

On campus, we've seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- On campus polling place
- Voter registration tables
- Signage promoting Election Day
- NVRD Events

On campus, we've experienced:

- Walks / scooter rides to polls
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
- Deliberative dialogues

IV. Landscape

The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of the campus. This information is based on data collected from 2019 when the total student enrollment was 34,742.

Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Graduate	Full Time	Part Time
86.00%	13.00%	23.00%	77.00%

In-State	Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Commuter
98.00%	2.00%	1.00%		

Gender Demographics:

Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
49.00%	51.00%	Not available	Not available

Age:

18-21	22-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50+
17,392	7,997	4,171	2,783	978	407

V. Goals

Before setting the civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration.

Challenges:

We know the campus faces the following challenges internally when it comes to getting out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- The voter engagement work on campus is very siloed within a handful of offices.
- We do not have sustainable or consistent funding.
- It is challenging to engage student leaders for the leadership of the initiative.
- Since 2020 it has been challenging to keep the momentum of the RowdyVOTES going due to COVID and reorganizational shifts.

We also know the campus faces the following challenges externally when it comes to getting out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- Texas state laws make it challenging to support student voter registration efforts. Extra effort is dedicated to ensuring that students are aware of ID requirements and absentee ballot specific instructions.
- Students living in on-campus housing have access to receiving one mail drop. A long-term sustainable solution must be identified to ensure students have access to receiving voter registration cards and mail-in ballots.

Opportunities:

- UTSA is a Hispanic Serving Institute with a public service/urban serving mission that can work to embed a civic ethos as part of preparing the socially responsible graduate
- The office of Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership has "building civic capacity" as part of its mission and has recently hired a fulltime Program Specialist focused on Civic Leadership that can dedicate more time to coordinating civic programming throughout campus supported by Director and Program Coordinator for community and campus engagement through existing programs.
- Faculty and campus leaders have expressed interest in promoting voter engagement and are positioned to implement civic programming in their areas.
- Several faculty already incorporate voter engagement and civic leadership into their courses and some have incorporated into community engaged scholarship in the past.
- There are processes in place for registering large percentages of students in partnership with campus and community partners.
- Tabling, social media and engagement platforms are tools with which we communicate voting information to students. Givepulse has partnered with TurboVote in the past to send important date reminders. Expansion of its use is also a goal of CCEL.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.

- There are working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement and offer support seeking opportunities to work to promote student engagement.

Goals to achieve over the next academic year:

1. Create an opportunity for a participatory action to develop ideas for activities over the goals outlined below as an effort to build cohesion within RowdyVOTES.
2. Increase voter turnout by 4% (voter turnout rate for voters at University of Texas at San Antonio from 46.1% to over 50%)
3. Register 50% of the incoming students during orientation;
4. Identify courses where voter engagement can be integrated aligning civic learning outcomes with the 2022 midterm elections
5. Increase the overall student registration from 56.3% to over 60%
6. Host/co-host one student "platica" about voting and integrate a "platica" about voting with local civil rights leaders as part of Hispanic Heritage Month.

We have also set three goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

1. Create a cohesive RowdyVOTES for long-term engagement
2. Institutionalize voter registration into the admissions process for first-time/transfer students
3. Achieve voter parity in engineering students, and
4. Institute a sustained civic ambassadorship program

VI. Strategy

To increase voter education, registration, and turnout

Existing action items to undertake in the **short term** (within the next year):

- Promote voter engagement through voter registration drives; have staff deputized to register students; coordinate trainings for volunteer deputy voter registrars; hold informative panels; host VDR capacity support, circulate election reminders via social media and the electronic campus newsletter.

Short term action items

- Publish the submission of the civic action plan as well as the awarding of the Communities of Practice grant
- Formalize mailing services for students living in on-campus residence halls so they can receive voter registration certificates and mail-in ballots at no cost to them
- Host panels and town halls that: 1) explore the connection between voting and policy priorities and 2) inform students of the duties and responsibilities of each candidate

- Announce opportunities for faculty to integrate civic learning outcomes into their coursework and update CCEL website with resources.
- Invite Athletics to the RowdyVOTES meeting

Long term action items (beyond the next year):

- Facilitating voter registration drives and providing election reminders
- Build cohesion and expand RowdyVOTES
- Be inclusive by Increasing engagement with undocumented students and noncitizens as well as student and community organization such as Active Minds and disABILITYSA
- Provide opportunities for students to interact with candidates

VII. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

UTSA participates with the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) which provides data that will guide campus work. NSLVE data for UTSA includes mid-term and presidential election voter turnout for 2014 – 2020 providing comparisons between two midterm elections and two presidential elections that provide a baseline and trend. The data will help the campus have access to data for 2020. In 2020, the registration rate was 85%. In comparison to the data from the previous NSLVE report based on the presidential elections, this rate increased. In 2020, the voting rate was 62% and the voting rate among registered students was 73%. It is of concern this voting rate was lower than the national average.

Public Administration and Social Service Professions had the highest voter turnout (79%), and the most underrepresented major was Engineering and Engineering Technologies (53%)

VIII. Reporting & Evaluation

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete providing a copy to

- RowdyVOTES campus members
- campus administration and University Relations
- the President and Provost
- Publish in faculty newsletter
- Publish in UTSA Today article
- Rowdy Corps Community Scholars (community-based work-study program housed in CCEL)

We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete with:

- Community members of RowdyVOTES
- Service-Learning Intercollegiate Collaborative
- SA2020
- City Council officials

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Surveying students about barriers to voting
- Sending a post-election survey to students
- Sending a post-election survey to faculty
- Regrouping with RowdyVOTES for the purpose of debriefing and reflective learning (collecting qualitative data)
- Integrating feedback collection into individual campus efforts
- Re-manuever action plan as outlined by feedback such as best practices and blind spots

We plan to evaluate success by assessing the following quantitative and qualitative data:

- The number of students engaged through activities
- Number of presentations
- Number of registered voters (not exclusively students)
- Qualitative data gathered related to access to voting
- Qualitative data on programming (panels, pláticas,)
- Identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting the short and long-term goals accordingly
 - Document what the barriers were to the proposed goals
 - Document agile re-maneuvering due to unforeseen circumstances
- When 2022 NLSVE report is released, assess if goal is to increase both the student registration from 56.3% to over 60% and voter turnout rate for voters at University of Texas at San Antonio from 46.1% to over 50% was accomplished
- Measure the success of any strategies such as targeting a particular discipline to see if the intervention caused an increase in voter turnout.

A final report will include the proposed action plan and any re-maneuvering/additions of action items along with evaluation data that will be updated once the 2022 mid-term NSLVE is completed. The action plan and report will serve as a reference to modify and apply to local elections.