

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
AT ARLINGTON

CAMPUS
DEMOCRACY
CHALLENGE



FALL 2020

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OVERVIEW



The 2020-2021 Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan was developed to aid in civic engagement efforts at the University of Texas at Arlington. While we have seen a considerable jump in the number of students registered to vote (62.1%, up from 26.5%) and in the number of students voting (46.7%, up from 18.8%,) there are still considerable gaps in certain groups of students.

At the University of Texas at Arlington, we are committed to ensuring that students from all walks of life have the means, knowledge, and motivation to be civically engaged. To that end, we are continuing and updating our campus democracy challenge to better reflect the progress we've made, and to look to the future. At the University of Texas at Arlington, our democracy challenge has the following focuses:

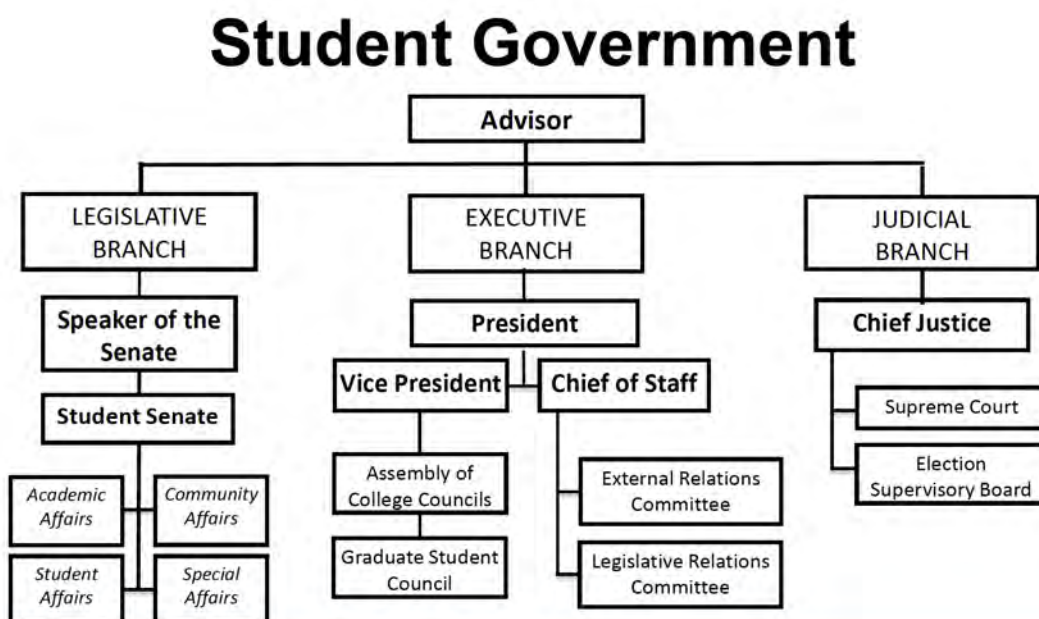
1. **Knowledge** - Educating students on the importance and logistics of voter registration, electoral process, and candidates' viewpoints on issues during each election. Education helps explain the "why" voting is important.
2. **Distributing Resources** - To better educate the student population, Student Government, faculty, and staff will be encouraged to share online resources and integrating information in the classroom setting
3. **Civic Engagement** - With a more educated student population, we hope to see an increase in voter turnout, early voters, attendees at city council meetings, letters sent to our representatives, etc.

CONTEXT AND TEAM

The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to working towards a civically engaged student body. This commitment will be upheld by Student Governance.

In Student Governance, the Student Government of UTA will be responsible for enacting this action plan. Student Government (SG) is an organization of approximately 70 undergraduate and graduate students whose mission is to serve the students of the University. The University has placed the responsibility of coordinating voter registration and civic engagement efforts in the hands of Student Government.

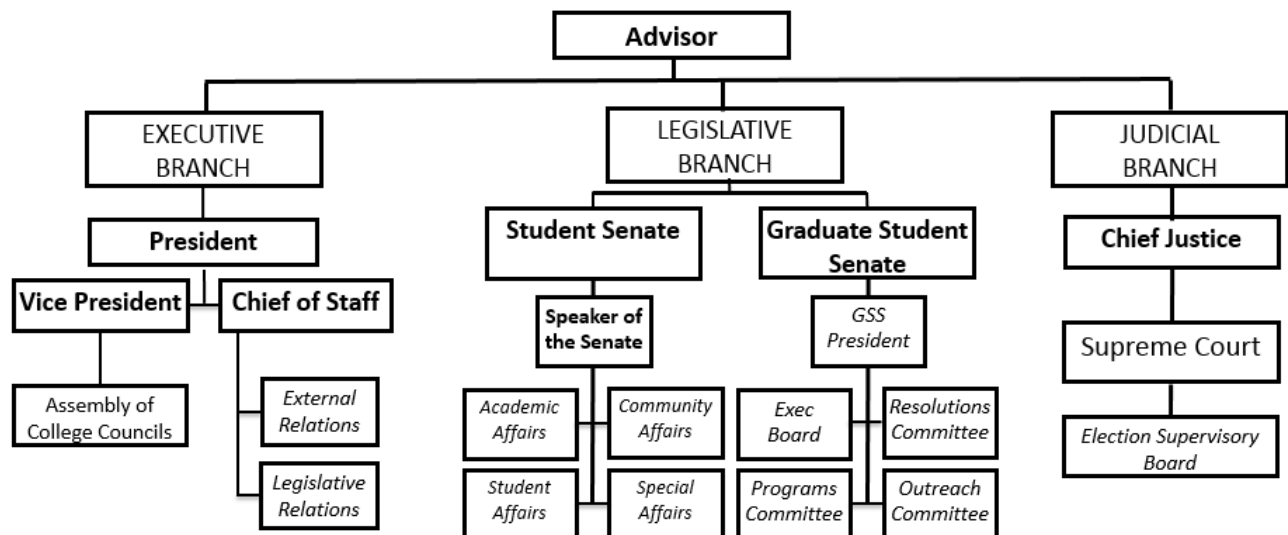
UTA Student Government Structure



The SG Legislative Relations Committee (LRC), Student Body President, SG Chief of Staff, and Graduate Student Assistant will take primary responsibility for the implementation of this Action Plan. The LRC is made up of members in Student Government from all different backgrounds and majors.

Besides Student Governance, we hope to uphold and foster our relationships with College Constituency Councils, the Division of Student Affairs, Freshmen Leaders on Campus (FLOC,) and other relevant University organizations. These organizations can help and

Student Government



Climate

As of the 2018 midterm elections, our campus has a voting rate of 62.1% for registered students, and 46.7% of all of the eligible voting population. This is slightly above the national average, but still only half of the eligible voters. There are weaknesses in the areas of first year students, male students, students in the age range of 25-29, Business students, Math and Statistics students, and Computer Science/Engineering students. Campus democracy challenge goals will target some of these weak turnout populations. Furthermore, students will be encouraged to be civically engaged throughout the year- not just during elections.



BARRIERS



There are numerous barriers to enacting this action plan and empowering students at UTA to be civically engaged. However, we do not see any of these barriers as something that cannot be overcome. The following are barriers that must be considered:

- The University of Texas at Arlington has a considerable amount of students who are classified as "returning college students." These are students who took time off after high school before enrolling, or even adults who are attending a university for the first time. Students like this who are in the age range of 25-39 saw the lowest percentage voting rate increase from 2016 to 2018 (compared to other age groups.) These students often live busy lives, and hardly have time to vote. Providing an on-campus voting location is imperative for such students, as it would allow for greater flexibility in schedules.
- The commuter nature of the student population at UTA further demands a flexible voter registration and polling place. Students must be able to fit time into their busy academic life.
- Male students vote at a lower rate than women at UTA. While the cause of this is unknown, it is something to be considered when approaching students about civic engagement.

- Texas Legislation has recently been enacted to take away temporary early voting locations across the state. While UTA was affected by this, our advocacy in Student Government is hoping to ensure an early voting location is present for all future elections. Either way, Student Government will ensure that students have means to go to the polls regardless of where they may be. This is accomplished through renting shuttle services through UTA Parking and Transportation, which SG did in the Fall of 2019.



VISION AND GOALS



Our goals and vision for civic engagement aim to ensure every student has a means to have their voice heard. We lay out our goals in the SMART format (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Relevant, Time-Based.)

Create a campus culture focused on voting.

- S - Begin changing the culture of the campus, normalizing voting.
- M - Focus on the age brackets between 18-25. If people begin voting at a younger age, they are more likely to continue voting throughout their life.
- A - Talking to students about voting their freshmen year, using platforms including, but not limited to: PAL classes, Freshmen Leaders on Campus, New Maverick Orientation, and Activity Fairs. Setup tabling events raising awareness of voting rules and locations. Include informative advertising in the school's newspaper, the Shorthorn.
- R - It is never a bad time to begin informing eligible voters about how to register and how to vote. This goal will be achieved best by using multiple platforms including social media, fliers, and interpersonal communication.
- T - Over the next year, we will be working on finding the best way to integrate voter education into programs. We have prepared a lesson for our University Introduction Course, and have tested it on two classes so far. As we move forward with this initiative, we will keep taking feedback and identify new ways to integrate voter education into University Programs.

Increase voter participation in our male population by 5% in the next election.

- S - Our active male voting population is still substantially lower than our female active voting population. We would like to close this gap by 5% (from 36.6% to around 41%.)This will bring the number of female and male voting participation closer to even, while accounting for the inevitable jump in participation we are likely to see in a General Election year.
- M - Since we are able to obtain the demographic data for our campus, we can view how many more males have participated.
- A - We will work on this goal by reaching out specifically to male students, and make sure we are engaging male students during outreach events. In colleges with high male enrollment, including Engineering, we can hold focus groups to figure out the reason why males are voting at such a lower rate.
- R - The first step in this process is to make sure males are registering when they have change of address. One thing most voters don't know is that registration must happen 30 days before the election to be eligible to vote in that election.
- T - We will be able to check if the number has increased in the local elections occurring in November 2022. A less formal way of measuring is to take simple hand-raising polls in classrooms at the beginning of the semester. This allows time for a professor or deputized individual to assist students in registering before the deadline. If a professor would not want to take time out of class, they could promote National Voter Registration Day events by making an announcement or posting on Blackboard.

Encouraging civic engagement through social media.

- S - Civic engagement includes writing letters to public officials, staying informed on political issues that impact our community, paying taxes, signing petitions, attending city council meetings, registering to vote, voting, etc.
- M - Student Government leads these efforts by sending students to city council meetings. By informing constituents of these meetings and encouraging attendance, they can be informed on local issues. Further, we will share websites and other informational resources students can use to educate themselves. Social media clicks and metrics can be seen on Facebook and other sites.
- A - By working to improve our social media and user interaction, students will be more likely to click links and use the resources we will be sharing. Recently, SG hired a Marketing Coordinator to assist with this.
- R - Our efforts will be focused on social media and using tabling events to inform people about not only voter registration but also ways to become more civically engaged.
- T - At the end of each semester, we will evaluate the increase in interaction with our social sites, and based off of our results, will target our audience to increase interaction by the end of the semester. After the hiring of our Marketing Coordinator, we have been posting more frequently, and will continue to do so. In addition to posting campus events, we will be posting outside events, reminders, and information bytes that encourage active civic participation.

To increase overall voter participation by 5% for the 2020 election and 3% more for the 2022 election.

- S - Our voter participation is higher than the national average for campuses across the nation, but it is not where it could be. We will continue our efforts through tabling, registering new students, advertising early voting, civically engaging students, etc.
- M - This is a goal that we will be able to see once the next NSLVE Report comes is received.
- A - All of the smaller goals include increasing voter participation and education. More educated voters are more likely to vote, and therefore are contributing to our big goal. Further, by making efforts to reach out to distance learners, we hope to see an increase in our numbers.
- R - With continuous efforts from Student Government and other campus entities, we hope to have a larger reach on students across the campus.
- T - This goal will be measured in the years after the elections take place to ensure accurate data is gathered.



STRATEGIES



A large part of our plan is to use social media to engage students. Students spend large amounts of time online due to school and social media. Our Student Government has a Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. With Facebook, administrators of the page are able to see the page activity including total views, likes, and engagements. Using this data we will continue to find the most effective way to market to users. Promotions will include websites with important information including current registration status in Tarrant County, who is on the ballot for each election, their stances on important issues, and other ways to become civically engaged. For Instagram, we will post a series of graphics that explain what issues are being voted on. These graphics will be made by both the graphic design staff in the Involvement and Engagement Unit, the SG Marketing Coordinator, and a member of the legislative relations committee. Upon completion of the graphic, it will be approved by the University.

We will have organization members share these graphics from our own page as well as their own personal pages to attract more traffic. For Twitter, we will use the same graphics as Instagram, along with short snippets about our events. Once the social media has an increase in traffic, we will begin more regular civic engagement activities including polls on current issues within the University, City of Arlington, state and nationwide.

Since our Legislative Relations committee regularly attends City Council Meetings, we will ask them to upload their meeting notes onto a location that is shareable and accessible to UTA students. This will allow students access to these notes and be able to find out what is discussed at city council meetings if they cannot attend themselves. To make sure students are engaging with these notes, we will conduct polls about topics covered in the meetings. The polls could strike interest within the students if they see a topic they are passionate about. Conducting polls based off City Council meetings helps accomplish our overall goal of interacting with students through Social Media.

Student Government members will participate in tabling that is focused on voter education and awareness. These tables will be held in high traffic areas during peak hours to maximize the range of students we can connect with. We will also provide flyers and information for students to take with them for their own reference, as well as develop plans and strategies to incentivize students to vote.



Websites to promote:

<https://gisit.tarrantcounty.com/VoterLookup>

- Allows students to search their name, view current voter registration address, and view their representatives with links to their websites.

<http://access.tarrantcounty.com/en/elections.html>

- Official general information website for all things elections related in Tarrant County.

<https://www.allsides.com>

- Allows students to view news stories from “all sides” meaning articles from each perspective (left, right, middle).

<https://icitizen.com/>

- Encourages students to voice opinions on different issues. Can be used by the university to put out their own questions as well

<https://www.uta.edu/studentgovernance/student-government/index.php>

- Website of UTA Student Government. Provides information on what UTA SG is doing for campus democracy, as well as containing links to important voting resources

Events

- Student Government tabling throughout the year to encourage students to register to vote, engage with their local governments, and staying knowledgeable about being civically engaged
- Debate Watch Parties
- Election Day Social / Watch Party
- Volunteer Deputy Registrar Events
- Philanthropy Events and Volunteering for Awareness and Voter Registration
- Early Voting Location Events
- Early Voting shuttle stops (if needed)

Data Collection

- Data collection for voter registration numbers will be counted each time there is a tabling or other voter registration event.
- The Division of Student Affairs releases a survey every two years. We will continue to work together for the possibility of adding data points on civic engagement on the next survey in 2020.
- The University of Texas at Arlington has received our 2018 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report. This report was able to assist us in identifying areas for improvement on our campus. We will continue to work towards a campus with greater voter participation.

Timeline

Spring 2020

- Begin shifting focus towards national elections in November
- Provide resources for students to be informed about the different candidates and their stances on issues
- Pop-Up media: buttons, t-shirts, yard signs, posters, etc
- Approach professors on speaking to students / SG about government and politics to spread awareness and knowledge
- Identify and engage in volunteer opportunities outside of Student Government to involve the greater Arlington community
- Plan Trick-Or-Vote for November / Fall 2020

Fall 2020

- Voter Registration tables every week of school being in session
- Continue to provide resources for students to be informed about the different candidates and their stances on issues
- Massive social media campaign for voting (times, locations, importance)
- Trick-Or-Vote early voting promotion event, as well as any other voting promotional voting event
- Meet goal of 450 students registered to vote by National Voter Registration Day
- Election Day watch party for SG members and students

Spring 2021

- Continue to register students to vote
- Inauguration watch party / other political watch parties
- Plan Trick-Or-Vote for November / Fall 2021
- Develop plans for possibility of off-campus early voting site for November elections
- Raise awareness of local issues on ballot for November 2021

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