



## 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 Community of Practice on campus which brings together campus/community partners to learn and 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 NSVLE 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 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 organizations
- Community Partners
- Student Affairs
- Faculty

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
- 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), formerly the “Center for Civic Engagement” is part of the Career Engaged Learning Department within Academic Affairs and seeks to prepare students for civic life and promote social responsibility 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**

### **Academic Affairs**

- UTSA Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership; Maria Alejandro, Program Director, Noelani Cubillos-Sanchez, Civic Leadership Program Specialist, Lukas Valdes, Program Coordinator, along with Rowdy Corps Community Scholars will lead the RowdyVOTES efforts coordinating meetings, voter deputy registrar trainings, student/community outreach and engagement as described in this proposed action plan. It is important that the staff of CCEL can step into leading #RowdyVOTES efforts on behalf of CCEL at any point. This plan and the work behind it builds an institutional framework that can provide continuity through organizational shifts if the collaborative
- Senior leadership such as President Taylor Eighmy is a strong supporter of voter engagement on campus and will promote voter participation on campus. Provost Espy, Senior Vice Provost Shipley and Associate Vice Provost Cie Gee also support CCEL's mission to broaden civic participation and democratic engagement. The Department of Career Engaged Learning (CEL) also houses Undergraduate Research, Health Professions, Institute of Law and Public Affairs, Najim Center and University Career Center where students from a wide-array of disciplines are served.
- Student Success Centers housed within each college provides an opportunity for broad outreach. SSCs help promote events to students served and help expand outreach.
- Faculty – CCEL has established working relationships with faculty from COEHD, Mexican American Studies, College of Health Community and Policy, UTSA Libraries, College of Liberal and Fine Arts and others. Efforts continue to develop working relationships across all colleges prioritizing according to NSLVE disciplines data. A working collaboration with political science professors is in development with an aim to align goals for encouraging civic engagement by creating a video for the introductory courses attended by all disciplines. The video will consist of programs offered by CCEL including RowdyVotes. CCEL Director will also encourage faculty to integrate, where appropriate, opportunities such as becoming a volunteer deputy registrar or poll worker to earn course credit. If so, student is eligible for to receive an experiential designation on their transcript and become eligible to count course as part of requirement for the community-engaged leadership certificate.

### **Student Affairs**

- Multicultural Student Center for Equity and Justice; Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Director of Leadership and Volunteer Services; CEL Department, Student Activates. Each of these offices engages students and registered student organizations. Strengthening a partnership with Student Affairs will enhance the student experience by providing unique opportunities to become volunteer deputy registrars, work together to identify and address barriers to voting, and promote voter engagement before and during elections.

## **Registered Student Organizations**

- Student Government Association, MOVE UTSA; Texas Rising UTSA chapter; NextGen America; and the NAACP chapter of UTSA are student organizations which have worked with CCEL to register voters, table and promote voter engagement, distribute voter guides. RSOs can greatly contribute to learning from their peers how to best meet students where they are as it relates to their civic action.

## **External-Community Partners**

- CCEL will establish a point of contact with the Bexar County Elections office to gain insight on strengthening volunteer deputy registrar training, voter registration efforts, learn about specific changes to voting laws, and encouraging opportunities for students to be involved.
- The following groups will be engaged in campus forums and as established leaders in voter engagement such as 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; ALL IN-Democracy Challenge, City Council offices; Texas Secretary of State. The service-Learning Intercollegiate Collaborative of which CCEL is a member of will share and exchange resources and best practices across the local campuses.
- CCEL will continue to strengthen working relationships with national organizations such as ALL In Democracy, Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, Campus TakeOver, National Voter Registration Day, Alliance for Youth Organizing, Campus Election Engagement Project; When We All Vote, and others.

RowdyVOTES Community of Practice 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.

Mid-term election debrief will bring involved and potentially new members to reflect and strategize. Monthly meetings will launch at start of semester followed by bi-monthly meetings as elections approach. Meeting will be 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.

The community engagement platform GivePulse will create a community of practice named RowdyVOTES. inviting the above mentioned and students, staff, faculty community

organizations to sign up to be part of the community that will work together to promote democratic engagement on campus. Grouping the team on the online platform creates shared learnership, a touchbase to find updated information on events, and offers an opportunity to survey the team on a variety of topics.

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. Key is to create shared leadership and develop a framework that can transcend organizational changes.

### **III. Commitment**

UTSA and campus leadership demonstrate a commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement as reflected in the institution's values statement: *“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.”* President Eighmy has signed the ALL IN Presidential Commitment and efforts will be made to engage Athletics and encourage the Coaches Pledge. University Communications created a shared RowdyVOTE webpage to host updated election information. President Eighmy consistently sends messages via social media and email to encourage students to exercise their right to vote.

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 to promote voter engagement on campus and in surrounding community.

Civic learning exists within the institutional culture as exemplified by campus partners such as Student Leadership and Volunteer Services and the Multicultural Student Center for Equity and Justice as well as faculty led coursework and programming of the Office of CCEL. Through committee work such as Hispanic Heritage, Black History and others are opportunities to create programming to promote civic literacy.

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.

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

Pending is exploring how to integrate civic learning into the core-curriculum.

**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:**

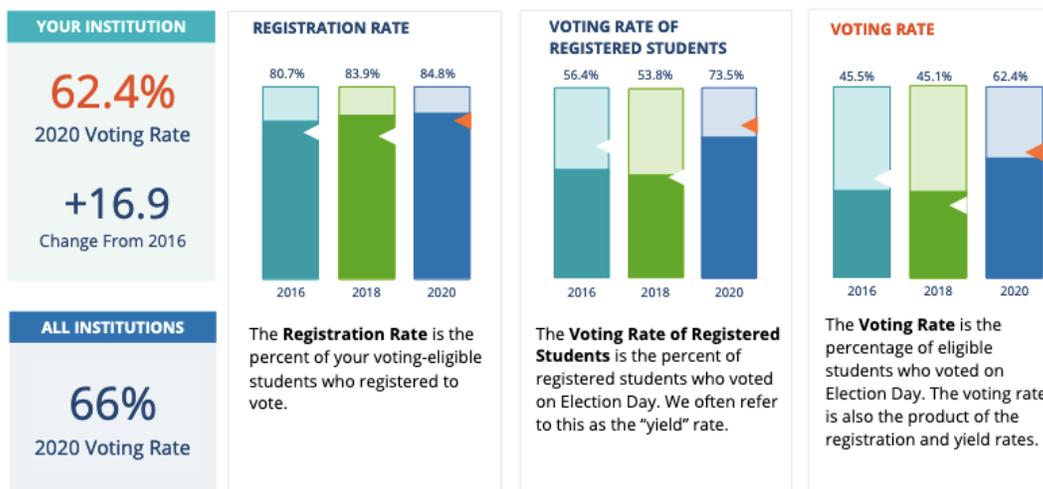
Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
49.00%	51.00%	Not available	Not available

**Age:**

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

Although UTSA has reached a voting rate of 62.4% up +16.9% from 2016, it is below the national average of 66% for all institutions in 2020.

## Voting, Registration and Yield Rates



Forthcoming is an opportunity to work with a team to ensure civic engagement is part of the core curriculum.

Internal barriers include limited funding and organizational shifts during the set-up stage of this plan. In addition, Texas voting laws can create some confusion and may, at times discourage voter turnout. And organizational shifts have yielded new offices and staff changes that may require partnership re-establishment. The pandemic brought great challenges that have also resulted in implementation of virtual programming that enhances engagement.

Partnering with campus and community partners can help augment funding to expand programming and better serve students. Important is to identify ways to keep students up to date on voting laws and work toward strengthening campus relationships with offices that are important toward institutionalizing civic engagement across campus. It is important to consider a funding infrastructure to support the preparation of active, socially responsible and democratically engaged members of society.

### 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 siloed and can benefit from more intentional collaboration.
- There is a need for sustainable or consistent funding to plan programming and partnerships.
- 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 graduates
- 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 and opportunities 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 CoP with campus partners, student organizations and community partners. A mid-term debrief will gather partners to identify challenges and strategize on how to address them and better

coordinate voter engagement efforts on campus by targetting outreach to expand engagement and more effectively reach diverse groups.

2. Increase voter turnout rate for mid-term elections at University of Texas at San Antonio from 45.1% (2018) to 50% 2022.
3. Register 50% of the incoming students during orientation through programs such as First-Gen, ACE Scholars, Transfer Student and core curriculum courses. Attention will be applied to ensure equitable access to voter resources under the guidance of the Office of Disability, community partner disAbilitySA and students.
4. Identify courses where voter engagement can be integrated aligning civic learning outcomes
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 Heritage Months.

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

1. Create a cohesive RowdyVOTES Community of Practice for long-term engagement
2. Institutionalize voter registration into the admissions process for first-time/transfer students
3. Achieve voter parity with students of all fields based on NSLVE data
4. Institute a sustained civic ambassadorship program
5. Seek to secure fellowship programs based on civically engaged experiential learning(i.e., Democracy Fellows through Campus Vote Project

## **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 and encourage Coaches commitment signature.

**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%)

Voting rate for the 2018 mid-term elections is at 45.1%. Most of the students tend to vote during the early vote period with younger students voting at a rate of about 42% compared to older students with a voting rate of 60%-72%. Efforts can be made to reach younger students and engage and encourage voter education and turnout during the early vote period with targeted outreach to fields of study with lower voting rates such as architecture and construction science. Important is to share the NSLVE data with various groups on campus and obtain feedback through a listening tour to gather ideas about strategizing engagement.

**I. 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
- 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
- Community partners

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Surveying students about barriers to voting
- Regrouping with RowdyVOTES CoP and any new partners for the purpose of debriefing and reflective learning (collecting qualitative data) to identify challenges, strategize on next steps and better coordinate collective resources.
- 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)
- 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-manuevering 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-manuevering/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. In addition, this plan with follow up report will be published on the CCEL website.