

# The University of Tulsa

## 2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

### Executive Summary

The Democratic Engagement Action Plan at TU has been collaboratively developed by a multidisciplinary team led by President Brad Carson. The purpose of the plan is to institutionalize engaged citizenship and increase voter participation among TU students, with the goal of fostering a campus culture grounded in deliberative democracy and informed civic participation.

Since its inception in 2022, the plan has seen significant growth and success, driven by collaborative efforts across various campus departments, student organizations, and external partners. Led by the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE), initiatives have expanded to encompass voter registration drives, candidate forums, and community partnerships.

In the short term, the plan aims to register 200 students, host 12 voter registration events, and conduct two candidate forums, among other activities. Long-term goals include developing partnerships for student placements in civic-focused organizations and identifying barriers to youth voter turnout.

The plan will be implemented throughout the 2024 calendar year, with ongoing evaluation and adjustments to strategies based on outcomes. Implementation will involve dedicated staff from the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE), collaboration with academic and cocurricular departments, and leveraging resources from institutional research and data analytics.

Moving forward, the plan emphasizes integration of voter engagement initiatives into academic programs, partnership-building with external organizations, and ongoing communication and coordination among campus departments. By fostering a culture of democratic engagement and civic responsibility, TU aims to empower students to become active citizens and effect positive change in their communities.

## Leadership

In addition to a mission statement aligned with civic engagement, TU President, Brad Carson, is committed to the university being a space for deliberative democracy, where informed participation is embedded in the campus culture. His background in military service, national security, and representing Oklahoma’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District as a U.S. congressman, models civic engagement spanning the range of university initiatives to casual student conversations.

As a member of the Administrative Leadership Team, Vice-President for Institutional Research and Data Analytics, Victor Soe, provides support in tracking engagement and assessing the criteria for meeting national voter engagement designations including the National Voter Friendly Campus and Most Engaged Campus. The administrative leadership support also allows this action plan to extend beyond campus, promoting public good and civic engagement in the greater Tulsa community.

Other campus leaders form a broad working group including academic and cocurricular departments, student organizations, and local and national partners. This action plan is shared with all listed campus representatives, with meetings scheduled as their respective areas participate in upcoming events and activities. Working group members are encouraged to identify others who can represent their department when responsibilities or roles shift. Individuals and organizations who provide support or are instrumental in carrying out this action plan's tactics are listed in the table below.

| Name                | Title  | Dept/Role         |
|---------------------|--|-------------------|
| Melissa Abdo        | Director, Office of Civic Engagement         | Student Affairs   |
| Mike Mills          | Service-Learning Coordinator, OCE            | Student Affairs   |
| Peter Nguyen        | Student Government Association Coordinator   | Student Affairs   |
| Student Leaders     | Sorority Fraternity Life (SFL) (Fall 2024)   | Student Affairs   |
| Student Leaders     | Student Government Association (Fall 2024)   | Student Affairs   |
| Kyle Meador         | New Student Programs                         | Student Affairs   |
| Victor Soe          | VP Institutional Research and Data Analytics | Senior Leadership |
| Matt Ingram         | Dean of Students                             | Senior Leadership |
| Tricia Milford-Hoyt | VP University Marketing/Communications       | Senior Leadership |
| S. Bates-Nealy      | TU Athletics                                 | Campus Partner    |
| Misty Pingleton     | Staff Advisory Council                       | Campus Partner    |
| TBD                 | Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion   | Campus Partner    |
| Student Leaders     | Student Veterans Association (Fall 2024)     | Student Org       |

|                                 |  |                   |
|---------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| TBD                             | TU Young Dems  | Student Org       |
| TBD                             | TU College Republicans   | Student Org       |
| Bruce Bigler                    | Student Gov't Association  | Student Leader    |
| TBD                             | Student Gov't Association – External Relations Committee Chair (Fall 2024) | Student Leader    |
| Kadee Jo Ransom                 | OCE Student Leader   | Student Leader    |
| Jason Collington                | Tulsa World  | Community Partner |
| Emilee Bounds & Kristine Hadeed | Action Tulsa   | Community Partner |
| Lauren Miers                    | Vote 918 TYPROS  | Community Partner |
| Ronni Pierce                    | Tulsa County Election Board  | Community Partner |
| MJ Lindaman                     | League of Women Voters of Tulsa County                                     | Community Partner |
| Catherine Fish                  | Civic Nation ALL IN  | National Partner  |
| Chuck Black                     | Campus Vote Project  | National Partner  |
| Bianca Rosales                  | Students Learn Students Vote Coalition                                     | National Partner  |

### Commitment

At TU, commitment to increasing democratic engagement is demonstrated through various avenues, ensuring its visibility and integration into campus culture. In 2022, President Carson signed on to the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge with the Presidential Commitment to full student voter participation. In the spring of 2024, the ALL IN Coaches Challenge was shared with the university’s Athletic Director to request participation from the head coaches.

TU’s commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement extends beyond campus into the broader community. Our candidate forums are advertised in the Tulsa World newspaper and promoted on the university’s social media platforms, inviting the community to participate. Prior to the school board candidate forum in February, the OCE Directors quote in a [February 27<sup>th</sup> Tulsa World newspaper article](#) captured the university’s commitment.

“Engaged citizens are essential to democracy and we are proud to facilitate this opportunity to the Tulsa community,” said Melissa Abdo, director of the Office of Civic Engagement at TU.

TU is proud to host a precinct location on campus at the Lorton Performance Center, making Election Day in-person voting a convenient option for all students who live on and around campus. The OCE hosts seminars and trains student office employees to answer questions about registering to vote, voting early, or voting absentee. Oklahoma law requires absentee ballots to be notarized before mailed to the appropriate county election board. This often proves to be a barrier for college students, so the OCE promotes the location of all staff who hold a notary public registration on campus for students to find assistance with their absentee ballot notarization.

In support for the Tulsa County Election Board's efforts to recruit more poll workers, President Carson approved a paid time-off benefit for employees to who wish to train and administer elections in this critical role on election day. This unique employee benefit had previously been designated for volunteer work but has been extended to include poll worker activities highlighting the importance of civic participation among campus employees.

"TU Votes" is how we brand the nonpartisan initiative to foster engaged citizenship through voter registration, voter education, and voter turnout among TU students, staff, faculty, and the Tulsa community. The university's marketing department assisted with creating a logo for this campaign, promotes information in the employee and student newsletter, and posts voter registration information on a webpage at <https://utulsa.edu/student-life/civic-engagement/tuvotes/>.

## Landscape

In 2018, the current OCE Director, Melissa Abdo organized the first campus-wide voter engagement plan (under a different department), partnering with the League of Women Voters and the Tulsa Chamber's Young Professional Organization (TYPROS). The motivating factor for creating a campus-wide plan was the 2018 Oklahoma Campus Compact 2018 Voter Registration contest. That effort led to TU's recognition award for voter registrations among similar sized institutions, as well as Abdo receiving the local LWV "Madam President" designation. Each year since, the university has grown in its coordinated effort to increase civic engagement and capture the efforts of many people across campus.

Established in January 2022, the OCE is a department dedicated to community and civic engagement. OCE staff developed a framework to answer the guiding question *What does it mean to be an engaged citizen?* The four pillars in the framework are: serve, advocate, inform policy, vote. OCE's location in the student union makes it a convenient place for students to register to vote anytime, as well as during targeted campaigns throughout an election cycle.

In addition to voter engagement activities, the OCE manages the Community Service portion of the university's Federal Work-Study job opportunities and houses the Public Service Internship course where student can receive academic credit for being interning with a nonprofit organization, government agency, or school. Through these important programs, we have been able to place students each semester with civic and democracy focused organizations including:

- Tulsa County Election Board
- League of Women Voters of Tulsa County
- Congressional Offices – Constituent Services
- OCE – Voter Registration Liaison
- Oklahomans United

In the landscape of our democratic engagement efforts, it is essential to consider any changes in local or state election laws that may impact our initiatives. By staying informed about legislative

developments, we can adapt our strategies to ensure compliance and effectiveness. We continuously monitor changes in local and state election laws to assess their potential impact on our efforts. Any alterations in voter registration requirements, polling locations, absentee voting procedures, or other relevant factors are carefully reviewed to determine their implications for our outreach and engagement strategies.

## Goals

Our short-term goals for this 2024 plan include:

- Registering 200 students between January 1 – October 11 (deadline)
- Schedule 12 campus voter registration events
- Host 2 candidate forums inviting the broader community.
- Exceed NSLVE registration and turnout national average rate
- Nominate a student for 2024 ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll (nominated in spring 2025)

Long-term goals include:

- Develop ten external partnership opportunities for student placement in civic/voting focused organizations by 2026-27 academic year.
- Identify barriers to youth voter turnout, making policy recommendations to increase access and turnout among college age students.

## Strategy

The primary strategy of this plan is to institutionalize engaged citizenship and increase voter participation among TU students – our primary audience. However, we believe creating a campus-wide culture of civically engaged students includes participation of faculty and staff. Additionally, in support of the greater public good, we will invite the broader Tulsa community to campus for candidate forums and as a neighborhood precinct location.

The following sections include the short- and long-term activities that serve as tactics that support meet our defined goals.

## Short-Term Tactics

The planned events and activities to achieve our short-term goals are listed in the table below. Intentional efforts have been made to include departments, colleges, students, staff, and faculty in different activities. The candidate forums are large, public events requiring separate planning documents that can be shared upon request. Activities are categorized by their function:

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Voter Registration Events:</b>  | Union tabling, student org activities, LWV voter reg training    |
| <b>Deadlines:</b>                  | message via social media, digital signage, posters in res halls  |
| <b>Voter Education activities:</b> | forums, vote411, LWV voter guides, absentee ballot notary events |
| <b>Voter Turnout Activities:</b>   | yard signs, social media, digital signage                        |

| Month | Date             | Activity   |
|-------|------------------|--|
| Jan   | 15               | MLK Jr Voter Registration Event at TU's 101 Archer   |
| Jan   | 19               | Deadline: Voter Registration for February 13 School Board Primary & Bond Elections                                     |
| Jan   | 29               | Deadline: Absentee Ballot request for Feb 13 School Board Primary & Bond Election                                      |
| Jan   | 27               | Action Tulsa School Board Forum & Voter Registration Event Vote 918  |
| Jan   | 30               | LWV Voter Reg training - SGA Senate meeting  |
| Feb   | 5-9              | SGA External Relations Committee – Voter Reg in Union all week   |
| Feb   | 8-9              | Early Vote Feb 8-9, 8am - 6pm<br>School bonds, Board of Education Primary  |
| Feb   | 9                | Deadline: Voter Registration for March 5 <sup>th</sup> Election  |
| Feb   | 13               | <b>ELECTION DAY</b> 7am – 7pm School Primary Election  |
| Feb   | 19               | Deadline: OK Absentee Ballot Request for March 5 <sup>th</sup> Election  |
| Feb   | 27               | School Board Candidate Forum – Open to public  |
| Mar   | Feb 29-<br>Mar 1 | Early Vote Feb 29 – Mar 1, 8am – 6pm and Mar 2 8am - 2pm   |
| Mar   | 5                | <b>ELECTION DAY</b> 7am – 7pm; Presidential Preferential Primary   |
| Mar   | 8                | Deadline: Voter Registration for April 2 School Board General Elections  |
| Mar   | 18               | Deadline: Absentee Ballot Request for April 2 General Elections  |
| Mar   | 31               | Deadline: Change Party Affiliation (No changes are allowed between April 1 – August 31 during even numbered years)     |
| Mar   | 28-29            | Early Vote Mar 28-29 8am - 6pm   |
| Apr   | 2                | <b>ELECTION DAY</b> 7am – 7pm; School/Municipal General Elections  |
| May   | 24               | Deadline: Voter Registration for June 18 State & Federal Primary Elections   |
| Jun   | 3                | Deadline: Absentee Ballot request for June 18 State & Federal Primary Elections  |
| Jun   | 13-15            | Early Vote Jun 13-14 8am – 6pm; Jun 15 8am - 2pm<br>State & Federal Primary Elections                                  |
| Jun   | 18               | <b>ELECTION DAY</b> 7am – 7pm  |
| Aug   | 1                | Municipal Candidate Forum  |
| Aug   | 2                | Deadline: Voter Registration for August 27 State & Federal Primary Runoff Election                                     |
| Aug   | 12               | Deadline: Absentee Ballot request for August 27 State & Federal Primary Runoff Election                                |
| Aug   |                  | Early Vote Aug 22-23 8am – 6pm, Aug 24 8am – 2pm<br>State & Federal Primary Runoff Elections                           |
| Aug   | 27               | <b>ELECTION DAY</b> 7am - 7pm  |
| Aug   | 17               | New Student Orientation Explore TU Fair: Voter Reg - first-year students   |
| Sept  | 17               | Constitution Day & National Voter Registration Day Events<br>Student Union, McFarlin Library, Post in TU Parents group |
| TBD   | Sep-Oct          | TU Athletics Voter Reg/Absentee Ballot Event   |
| TBD   | Oct              | FYE Class Voter Reg/Absentee Ballot request  |

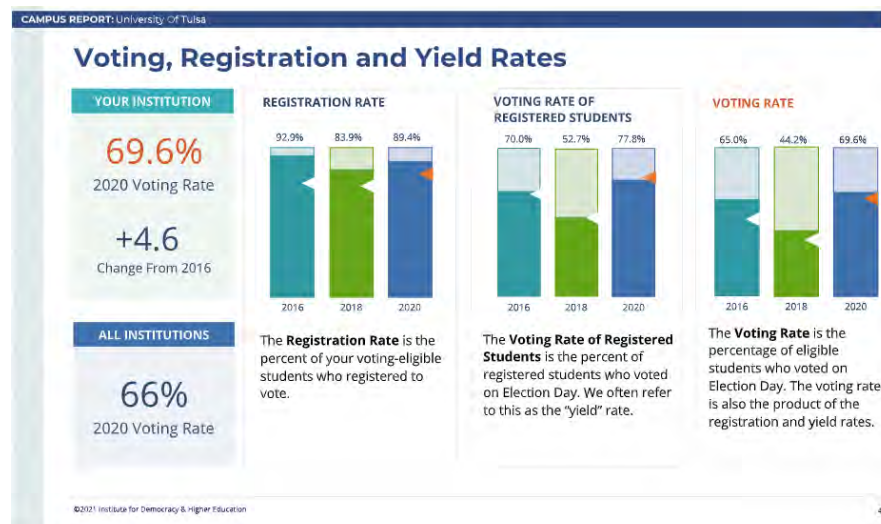
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|-----|------------------|---|
| Oct | 10               | Notarize ballot events locations across campus                    |
| Oct | 11               | Deadline: Voter Registration for November 5 General Election      |
| Oct | 21               | LWV Nonpartisan Voter Guides delivered to campus                  |
| Oct | 21               | Deadline: Absentee Ballot request for November 5 General Election |
| Oct | 21-25            | Notarize ballot events locations across campus                    |
| Oct | Oct 31-<br>Nov 2 | Early Vote Oct 31 – Nov 1 8am – 6pm, Nov 2 8am – 2pm              |
| Nov | 5                | ELECTION DAY 7am – 7pm General Election                           |

## Long-Term Tactics

To deepen our capacity and competence we must integrate voter registration, education, and turnout into our academic programs. In the near future we do not expect to hire additional staff dedicated to voter engagement initiatives, so we must do a better job integrating it into existing programs with faculty and staff and partnering with civic organizations to maximize resources. Long-term tactics include:

- Meet with Vice-Provost about building voter engagement into the First Year Experience (FYE) classes.
- Host a meeting with external civic engagement partners to discuss opportunities to place students in their organizations in a community service federal work-study position or as a Public Service Intern.
- Collect data through an SGA survey of students about voter participation and ease of absentee ballot voting.

## NSLVE





The participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) serves as a crucial component of our evaluation strategy for the Democratic Engagement Action Plan at TU. NSLVE provides valuable insights into voter registration and turnout rates among our student population, allowing us to assess our progress and identify areas for improvement.

Based on the NSLVE data, we have set specific goals and objectives to close any participation gaps among our student population.

- Reduce voting rate disparity between male and female to less than 10%
- Reduce voting rate disparity among 18-21 and 22-24 age groups to less than 3%
- Reduce voting rate disparity among different class years to less than 5%

## Reporting

Ensuring transparency and accountability are core principles of the Democratic Engagement Action Plan at TU. To effectively share progress, data, and insights derived from the plan, we have devised a comprehensive reporting strategy.

### On-Campus Sharing:

Internally, the action plan, along with relevant data and NSLVE reports, will be disseminated through various channels to ensure accessibility and awareness among campus stakeholders:

1. **OCE Internal SharePoint Page:** The action plan, NSLVE reports, and relevant data will be shared on the Office of Civic Engagement's internal SharePoint page. This platform will serve as a centralized hub for all documents related to the plan, allowing staff and faculty to access information conveniently.
2. **Annual Coordination Meeting:** A formal annual meeting will be convened to present and discuss the progress of the action plan. This meeting will facilitate increased coordination across campus departments and provide an opportunity to reinforce the university's commitment to democratic engagement.
3. **Email Updates:** Regular email updates will be sent to campus leadership, department heads, and relevant stakeholders to keep them informed about the latest developments and achievements related to the action plan.

### Public Sharing:

Externally, the action plan and NSLVE reports will be shared with the general public to highlight TU's commitment to civic engagement and transparency:

1. **TU Website:** The action plan and NSLVE reports (with permission) will be published on TU's official website under a dedicated section highlighting the university's civic engagement initiatives. The URLs for accessing these documents will be prominently displayed for easy access by visitors.
2. **Social Media Platforms:** Key highlights, achievements, and updates from the action plan will be shared on TU's social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This will help amplify the university's efforts in fostering democratic engagement and voter participation.



By sharing the action plan, data, and NSLVE reports both internally and externally, TU aims to foster transparency, accountability, and engagement among campus stakeholders and the broader community.

## Evaluation

The evaluation strategy for the Democratic Engagement Action Plan at TU encompasses a comprehensive approach to gather, analyze, and utilize various types of data beyond NSLVE reports. By collecting diverse datasets related to voter registrations, event attendance, email engagement, and strategy effectiveness, we aim to assess the impact of our initiatives and make informed decisions for improvement.

### Data Collection:

1. **Voter Registrations:** Data on voter registrations will be collected through the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) voter registration drives and events. This data will include the number of students registered to vote, their demographics, and any additional relevant information.
2. **Event Attendance:** Attendance at voter registration events, candidate forums, and other civic engagement activities will be tracked through sign-in sheets, RSVPs, and event registration systems.
3. **Email Engagement:** Email engagement metrics, including open rates, click-through rates, and responses, will be tracked for communication related to voter registration, event invitations, and updates on civic engagement initiatives.
4. **Social Media Analytics:** Engagement metrics on social media platforms, such as likes, shares, comments, and reach, will be monitored to assess the effectiveness of social media campaigns promoting civic engagement events and initiatives.
5. **Strategy Tracking:** Each strategy implemented as part of the action plan will be tracked individually, with specific metrics to measure their effectiveness. This may include tracking the number of voter registrations resulting from different outreach methods, the level of student engagement in various campus activities, and feedback collected through surveys or focus groups.

### Data Analysis:

Data collected from the sources above will be analyzed using statistical methods and data visualization techniques to identify trends, patterns, and areas for improvement. Comparative analysis will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of different strategies and initiatives in achieving their intended outcomes.

### Utilization of Results:

The results of the evaluation will be used to make data-driven decisions for optimizing future civic engagement efforts. Insights derived from the analysis will inform adjustments to strategies, allocation of resources, and prioritization of initiatives to enhance overall effectiveness. For example, if email engagement metrics indicate low open rates for communication related to voter registration events, adjustments may be made to the timing, content, or frequency of email

communications to improve engagement. Similarly, if social media analytics reveal higher engagement with certain types of content or platforms, efforts may be redirected to capitalize on those channels.

Regular review meetings will be held to discuss evaluation findings, share insights across departments, and collaborate on action plans for improvement. By continuously monitoring and evaluating our efforts, we aim to enhance the impact of our democratic engagement initiatives and cultivate a culture of active citizenship at TU.