

**University of Washington Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning,  
Political Engagement, and Voting Rates for the 2020 general election**

**Executive Summary**

The University of Washington's action plan was developed by members of WashPIRG UW's New Voters Project in coalition with ASUW's Office of Government Relations and faculty from the university's department of leadership education. It was then written by Reem Sabha and Allison Kirste, who are students at the University of Washington. This action plan was created in order to provide groups on campus with a voter engagement roadmap to follow going into the 2020 election cycle. This plan aims to build on the voter registration success that groups found on campus in 2018 for the midterm election. Implementation efforts for this plan will be led by WashPIRG UW and ASUW OGR, along with other groups interested in participating in the coalition. The plan is already in action, as we begun our voter registration efforts with local Seattle elections, and will be updated and revised as we gain a better understanding of the known obstacles to engaging more students to vote.

## **Leadership**

The coalition is led by students in WashPIRG's New Voters Project as well as students from ASUW's Office of Government Relations. Members of the coalition fluctuate and change from year to year, as groups on campus develop new leadership with new priorities.

Organizations can participate in the coalition by sending at least one representative to meetings to discuss how to improve voter engagement on campus.

Furthermore, the coalition and its leadership is nonpartisan, and is dedicated to encouraging engagement from all students on campus. Any organization or individual is welcome to get involved, and we are committed to ensuring that there is a diverse population of students represented in the coalition.

### ***WashPIRG New Voters Project***

The Washington Public Interest Research Group (WashPIRG) is a student run, student funded nonprofit that works on affecting change in a variety of ways, mostly working on environmental and social issues. WashPIRG at UW is one of the many PIRG chapters at universities across the country. Students can get involved with WashPIRG by volunteering at a table or coming to chapter meetings and other fun events. WashPIRG elects a new leadership team each year, with the only prerequisite for eligibility being to attend one chapter meeting.

The New Voters Project is the nation's largest and longest running nonpartisan student voter mobilization effort, having registered over 2 million students to vote, nationwide, since the 80's. At the UW, the New Voters Project coordinates fun voter engagement events like

registration tables, election day parties, and even class blitzes to give announcements before lecture and register students to vote there.

### ***ASUW Office of Government Relations***

ASUW's Office of Government Relations (OGR) is the official lobbying arm of the ASUW, responsible for educating students on issues pertaining to higher education, advocating at the city, county and state level for student interests, and mobilizing students to express their concerns in the political realm. Additionally this office is in charge of ASUW's voter registration and Get Out the Vote Efforts. They also work to build on-campus coalitions, engage students in the work of the OGR, and direct OGR outreach. They meet frequently with local officials and communities' stakeholders, and research legislative issues of relevance to the students of the University of Washington. Students can get involved with the OGR as interns or volunteers by applying to work with the office.

Current members of the coalition include the American Constitution Society, BSU, the D center, J Street at UW, Huskies for NARAL, and KSA.

## **Commitment**

### **UW and Youth Voting Participation**

The UW should invest in increasing youth voter participation as this initiative is in line with the University's stated values and mission statement, which are published in multiple locations across the University's websites and catalogs. One of the core values of the University of Washington, as articulated by the [mission and values statement](#), is to cultivate world citizens:

*“We are compassionate and committed to the active pursuit of global engagement and connectedness. We assume leadership roles to make the world a better place through education and research. We embrace our role to foster engaged and responsible citizenship as part of the learning experience of our students, faculty and staff.”*

UW students who can vote are uniquely situated to leverage this privilege to grow as global citizens. The American political system influences not just the 350 million Americans living in the contiguous United States, but also millions of individuals who travel, work, study and immigrate to the US. Policies created within the American political system also often affect individuals living in other countries--it is imperative that the next generation of voters is aware of the transnational ripple effects of political decisions that happen in this country. Given these realities, as an institution dedicated to shaping future generations of global leaders, UW has an interest in cultivating informed, active voters.

## **Landscape**

### **UW Historical Data**

In terms of voter registration and voter participation, UW is already performing above-average. The National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) (commissioned by the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education at Tufts University) determined UW's overall voting rate was 52%, above the average voting rate of 39.1%. UW's 2018 voting rate increased 23.2% from 2014.

However, there are areas that UW can improve in:

Maintaining a high registration rate. In 2018, the registration rate dropped from 81% to 76%, reflecting higher enrollment. The UW should invest in maintaining a steady registration rate despite fluctuations in enrollment.

Mitigating differences in voting participation between age groups. For instance, in 2018, 42.5% of 18-21 year old UW students voted while 64.6% of 40-49 year old UW students voted. The UW should invest in voter outreach and voter education programs to increase youth participation.

Institutionalizing voting. Currently, the process of registering to vote is detached from the UW student experience. The UW should intertwine the UW experience with the greater civic experience, allowing students to register to vote or update their voter registration during orientation.

## Goals

### Long term goals

- Increase voting and voter registration levels each year, until they are at 70% and 90%, respectively.
- Institutionalize voter registration on campus through partnerships with dorm leadership as well as administration.
- Establish a second ballot box on campus to serve students (preferably one more central to campus).
- Encourage students to engage in civics in other ways besides just through voting (i.e. lobbying, letters to representatives, etc.)

### Short term goals

- Register 2,000 students to vote before the November 2020 election
  - Focusing on majors and communities that have historically voted at lower rates
- Increase number of active members in the coalition to 15
- Pass legislation in ASUW Student Senate recognizing the coalition and action plan as the official opinion of the UW student body

## **Reporting**

This plan will be shared with other organizations around campus as well as important campus administrative players to be sure that we are being held accountable with what we aim to do. Additionally, we will use the NSLVE data to compare our goals to the results.

## **Evaluation**

We will evaluate the effectiveness of this plan using the NSLVE report, as well as by hosting lunch and learns with participating parties in order to better understand how everyone felt about participating. Additionally, we will conduct a campus wide survey to gauge how effective our outreach methods were and how far reaching they were. These surveys will be read and recorded by both WashPIRG UW and ASUW OGR in order to improve our plan for the next election



## Plans and Strategies

### Registration

- Voter registration drives in front of the HUB and in Red Square
  - These events will be coordinated by WashPIRG NVP and ASUW OGR in two of the most central locations on campus. These are spots that students are probably walking by every day, and so being out there will be an effective way to ensure that resources for voter registration are visible and accessible
- Working with First Year Programs to provide voter registration forms at A+O this summer
  - Training A+O and FIG leaders about nonpartisan voter registration will allow us to lock down first year students, which are a key group on campus. It will also get them in the habit of registering to vote every year as necessary
- Coordinating with the residence halls in order to conduct larger scale registration drives
  - Training RA's on nonpartisan voter registration will allow us to collect more registration forms as RA's are one of the people that students living in residence halls interact with the most.
- Emailing professors to ask if we can register their students to vote in class
  - Focusing on STEM departments in order to engage students that are less participatory will be more effective than trying to register these students at a table on campus because these students will hear the importance of voter registration from someone who they respect and look up to
- MyVoteEverywhere and StudentVote.org

- Using these online tools and promoting them around campus in order to engage students who don't have the time to stop at a table/want to do it online
- Events with Husky Athletics to create a sense of school spirit around voting
  - There is a relatively large culture at UW around athletics, and having some star athletes and coaches at tables to register students to vote will be good promo for the teams, as well as an effective way to bring in more students for the coalition.
- Competitions with Greek Life to register the most sorority/fraternity members
  - Fraternity and Sorority houses are a huge community at the UW, and engaging them would bring up our registration levels a lot
- Partnership with the Ethnic Cultural Center, the Q center, and the D Center to establish voter registration boxes in their offices, which will be checked regularly
  - This will make our plan more inclusive and provide voter registration opportunities to communities that may feel erased or left out at UW
- National Voter Registration Day table
  - A large voter registration drive on National Voter Registration Day will create some momentum that will allow us to continue to register large numbers of people in the first couple of weeks of the Fall Quarter
- PAC-12 All In Challenge
  - Friendly competition will create stronger senses of urgency around voter registration that will encourage students to get involved as volunteers, or at least register to vote
- Collecting pledges to vote with voter registration forms

- Will allow us to contact students later to send them reminders to vote

### Education

- Creating a voter education pamphlet that students can refer to when registering to vote
  - Emphasis on the process of voting by mail and what to do in the case of out of state students will ensure that there is no confusion around the process of registering to vote
- Holding educational events like lunch and learns to better understand the strengths of the voter registration infrastructure as it exists and how to make it even stronger
  - These events will help coalition partners understand what we need to do better, and get reinvigorated around running successful registration drives
- Mass emails from student body president or other academic advisors providing information about how to register to vote and important deadlines
  - These emails are far reaching and will help us reach any students that these other efforts missed.

### Get Out the Vote

- A concert to remind people to vote
  - This will be a fun way to wrap up our efforts around civic engagement and will be a nice reward for participating organizations, while still serving an important purpose
- Poster campaigns around campus and social media campaigns

- We will use this tactic to gain more visibility around voter engagement, and hopefully students will see this and remember to send in their ballots
- Class announcements
  - Similar to announcements for our voter registration drive, these announcements will hopefully be harder hitting because of the impact and reputation that professors have on campus
- Tables in strategic places on campus to remind students to vote
  - Like our voter registration tables, these tables will be fun ways to increase voter engagement and serve as a resource to anyone confused about how/when to vote
- Get Out the Vote Phone/Text Banks
  - We will contact students using Pledge to Vote cards to ask them if they have turned in their ballots/if they have a plan to, and also answer any questions they may have around voting.