



Fall 2018 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

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Executive Summary

Washington State University (WSU) is a public research and land-grant university that was founded in Pullman, Washington in 1890. As a land-grant institution, WSU is dedicated to strengthening communities across the state and developing civic-minded students and alumni who will continue their service to society throughout their lives. WSU has earned the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Classification from 2008 through 2025, the National President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll five times, and recognition as a Voter Friendly Campus after the 2016 election.

This Democratic Engagement Action Plan for the Fall 2018 midterm elections serves not only as a way to engage students in the democratic process, but to continue to institutionalize civic learning and democratic engagement at WSU going forward. Through the development of this action plan, WSU hopes to earn the Voter Friendly Campus designation again for 2019–2020 and strengthen WSU's commitment to democratic engagement and enhancing student citizenship.

According to the Tufts University National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report, WSU students voted at a higher rate in both 2012 and 2016 than the voting rate average for all institutions included in this study. In 2016, despite an increase in the total number of students who registered to vote and the number that voted, the voting rate at WSU decreased to 51.9% from 52.1% in 2012. Though the difference is small, the decrease was disappointing, especially in the context of significant university-wide efforts.

WSU wants to do better, and this action plan will serve as a framework for WSU staff to work with students as colleagues to implement the plan utilizing new and existing partnerships, as well as the "Cougs Vote" campaign. Students, staff, faculty, and the community will co-create a student-driven culture of democratic engagement at WSU.

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Goals

The goals for this action plan are for the 2018 midterm elections, and as such were developed in relation to the NSLVE data from the 2014 midterm elections. WSU has identified the following three top goals for democratic engagement during the fall 2018 semester:

- Implement a student-driven voter awareness and democratic engagement campaign utilizing “Cougs Vote”, an existing campaign which references the WSU mascot, the Cougar.
- Raise awareness of the importance of midterm elections through an emphasis on issues and local and state elections.
- Increase voting rates of WSU students above 2014 midterm levels through co-created democratic engagement opportunities of deliberative dialogue, community engagement, voter registration and information, and more.
- Increase voting rates among multicultural and other underrepresented students through intentional partnerships and collaboration with departments and organizations that directly serve these students.

Primary Contact

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Ben Calabretta serves as the coalition chair and primary contact because he leads on the Cougs Vote campaign through the Center for Civic Engagement. Ben has attended three Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement conferences, and has knowledge of campus and community partners.

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Cougs Vote Coalition

The Cougs Vote Coalition will consist of students, staff, faculty, and community members who are interested in increasing student democratic engagement at WSU. They will serve as a steering committee, and a planning group to develop methods and events to engage WSU students in the democratic process, including forums for deliberative dialogue. The work of the Cougs Vote Coalition will be student driven and student focused. The following stakeholders have already expressed their intent to participate or have been involved in previous campaigns, but is not exhaustive.

Students

- Associated Students of Washington State University
 - Cougar Lobby Team
 - Issues & Forums Committee
 - Director of Legislative Affairs
- Graduate and Professional Students Association
 - Professional Development Initiative
 - Director of Legislative Affairs
- The Daily Evergreen (student newspaper)
- Black Student Union
- Young Democrats
- College Republicans
- Young Libertarians

Community members will act as local democratic engagement experts and for support for on-campus programming or offer events as suits their organization best. For instance, by providing voter registration forms and voter information pieces, providing voter registration guidelines, and answering questions via email and phone, holding voter registration tables, and collaborating with students in planning events.

Community

- Pullman League of Women Voters
- Whitman County Election Office
- Washington Secretary of State Office

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Partners on campus will guide students in developing events or act as support for the overall program, and share their events with the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) so that they can be promoted as part of the Cougs Vote campaign on the Cougs Vote webpage (cce.wsu.edu/cougsvote) and CCE social media. At the end of the semester, coalition members will provide outputs and attendance from their events for the final report.

Staff (Departments)

- Center for Civic Engagement
- The Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service
- Student Affairs – Community, Equity, & Inclusive Excellence
 - Multicultural Student Services
 - Women’s Resource Center
 - Gender Identity/Expression and Sexual Orientation Resource Center
- Office of the Dean of Students
- WSU Libraries
- Office of Student Involvement
- Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life
- Residence Life
- Compton Union Building

Faculty

- Community Engagement Faculty Fellows
- Service-learning faculty and instructors
- Common Reading Program
- Martin Luther King Jr. Program at WSU



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Implementation

The initial Cougs Vote Coalition meeting will be in July 2018, with regular meetings taking place after to allow for collaboration and planning to occur. At this writing, there are no specific events set, and this is intentional. Instead of planning an entire schedule of events, the thought is to be more flexible in working with students to empower them and implement their ideas to get more students engaged.

While a schedule is not set, there are key dates (including Washington specific election-related dates) for planning purposes are below as follows:

- **August 11–15:** Residence Hall Move-In
- **September 17:** Constitution Day
- **September 25:** National Voter Registration Day
- **October 8:** Deadline for online voter registration, address changes, and other updates.
- **October 13:** State voters' pamphlets mailed to every household.
- **October 19:** Start of the 18-day voting period. Ballots are mailed out and voting can be completed at Election Offices.
- **October 29:** Deadline for in-person new Washington State voter registration.
- **November 6:** General election – drop boxes close promptly at 8 pm.

While Washington state residents do make up the majority of WSU students, there are also a sizable number of students from surrounding states. According to the National Student Clearinghouse (2016) data for WSU, the top five states in which students have residency include Washington, California, Idaho, Oregon, and Hawaii. Residents from these five states cover 95.5% of WSU's students who are eligible to vote in the US. So while WSU will focus primarily on the Washington state voter deadlines and requirements, information for all top five states are available on the Cougs Vote website, cce.wsu.edu/cougsvote, and will be promoted as part of the general WSU voter awareness campaign.

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Cougs Vote Campaign

Since 2012, the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) has run the Cougs Vote campaign. The campaign includes a variety of branded materials that all coalition members can access and use when promoting their events. It also includes a centralized website for listing events, sharing voter information, and more.

The Cougs Vote campaign includes the following aspects:

- Website (cce.wsu.edu/cougsvote): The website includes the following components to assist students with navigating the voting and election process:
 - Event listings for easy navigation by students.
 - Voter registration and voting instructions for the top five WSU student home states and general instructions for all other students. Instructions include upcoming deadlines, how to register to vote, how to vote, and how to request and submit absentee ballots.
 - Links to several nonpartisan or bipartisan sites or apps to help students research politicians and their stances and determine which politicians best align with their views.
 - An election FAQ section to help new voters navigate the election process.
- Social media: The CCE will be promoting all election-related events on their Facebook (facebook.com/wsucce), Twitter (twitter.com/wsucce), Instagram (instagram.com/wsucce), or YouTube (youtube.com/wsucce) pages. Events will be searchable using #CougsVote for students to discuss the elections.
- Coalition Event Support: The CCE has developed a Cougs Vote events packet that any coalition members can download and use for their events. Including:
 - Cougs Vote logos, designs, and t-shirt options
 - Voter registration drive instructions
 - Voter Friendly Campus information and logo
 - Event and marketing ideas

The Cougs Vote campaign will be ongoing throughout the fall semester and provides information to students and others about voter registration, provides opportunities for deliberative dialogue, works toward increased voter education, works to make ballot access easy for students, and strives to increase voter turnout.

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Assessment – Measuring Success

It is important for WSU to examine its success with the Cougs Vote campaign, and assessment will be utilized throughout Fall 2018, and after the elections to gauge success. The following measures will determine the campaign's success at increasing student democratic engagement and voting:

- Event attendance and participation
- Number of students registered to vote at Cougs Vote events
- NSLVE Report – voter registration and voting rate data
- Student social media participation with #CougsVote
- Center for Civic Engagement student survey
 - Voting and democratic engagement
 - Student awareness of the Cougs Vote campaign

Event attendance, number of students registered to vote, and NSLVE Report data will all offer direct clues as to the success of the Cougs Vote campaign. The NSLVE Report data will directly show if WSU saw an increase in voter registration and voting from the 2014 midterm election to the 2018 midterm elections, and an increase in these rates would indicate that the Cougs Vote Coalition succeeded in increasing student democratic engagement. The attendance and voter registration levels for different events can be used as correlative support for the campaign success and used to compare success of future democratic engagement campaigns at WSU.

Student participation in (and awareness of) the Cougs Vote campaign will also be measured by how actively students share and create their own posts using #CougsVote. As the elections draw closer, more students will use this hashtag to discuss election-related issues and share posts tagged with the hashtag. These types of interaction will indicate that the campaign is successfully reaching and engaging students.

Lastly, the Center for Civic Engagement asks WSU students who participated in civic engagement activities if they are registered to vote and if they did vote. This survey will be administered after the election season, and will provide more information on the voting habits of civically engaged WSU students to complement the NSLVE report.