

WASHINGTON STATE  UNIVERSITY



Fall 2020 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, designated as a Voter Friendly Campus after the 2016 and 2018 elections, and was recognized as a Gold Seal Campus in the 2018 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge.

This Democratic Engagement Action Plan for the Fall 2020 election serves not only to engage students in the democratic process, but to institutionalize civic learning and democratic engagement at WSU going forward. Through the development of this action plan, we hope to strengthen WSU's commitment to democratic engagement and enhance student participation in our democracy.

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 presidential elections than the voting rate average for all institutions included in this study. Significant energy, both in the national landscape and on campus, led to a big increase in WSU's midterm voting rate, increasing from 18.7% in 2014 to 41.5% in 2018. At WSU, we want to capitalize on this energy to further imbed democratic engagement into the culture moving forward.

With most of WSU's students being registered in the state of Washington, which utilizes vote-by-mail, there is still room for improvement. 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. Through the Cougs Vote Coalition, students, staff, faculty, and the community will co-create a student-driven culture of democratic engagement throughout the WSU system of six campuses.

Fall 2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Goals

The goals for this action plan are for the fall 2020 election and were developed in relation to the NSLVE data from the 2016 election and 2018 midterm elections. The following goals are for democratic engagement during the fall 2020 election:

- Engage the WSU community in a celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, protecting women's right to vote in the US.
- Implement a student-driven voter awareness and democratic engagement campaign utilizing "Cougs Vote" that includes re-envisioning a branding strategy that is flexible enough to be used on every WSU campus.
- Increase voting rates of WSU students above 2016 election 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.
- Institutionalize democratic engagement at WSU through participation in the ALL-IN Campus Democracy Challenge and aspiring to be recognized as Voter Friendly Campus due to democratic engagement efforts in fall 2020.

Primary Contact

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Cougs Vote Coalition

The Cougs Vote Coalition consists 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 following stakeholders have been involved in the past or have expressed their intent to participate in 2020. This list is not exhaustive nor exclusive.

Fall 2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Student Organizations

The work of the Cougs Vote Coalition will be student driven and student focused, making their work a priority, and doing everything to support their engagement in the Cougs Vote effort.

Student government and organizations include, but are not limited to:

- Associated Students of Washington State University (ASWSU) – Pullman
 - Cougar Lobby Team
 - Issues & Forums Committee
 - Director of Legislative Affairs
- Graduate and Professional Students Association (GPSA) – Pullman
 - Professional Development Initiative
 - Director of Legislative Affairs
- WSU Health Sciences (Spokane) – ASWSU and Civic Engagement Council
- WSU Tri-Cities ASWSU
- WSU Vancouver ASWSU
- WSU Global ASWSU
- WSU Everett ASWSU
- Student Government Council (statewide)
- The Daily Evergreen (student newspaper)
- Registered Student Organizations
 - Black Student Union
 - WSU Political Science Club
 - Young Democrats
 - College Republicans
 - Young Libertarians
 - Washington State University GOP



Fall 2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Community/External Partners

Community members will act as local democratic engagement experts and support for on campus programming. For example: providing training for student volunteers and campus staff; providing voter registration forms and voter information pieces; providing voter registration guidelines; answering questions via email and phone; holding voter registration tables; and collaborating with students in planning events.

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



Campus Partners

Partners on campus will work with students in developing events or act as support for the overall program and share their events with the CCE, which takes the lead on the Cougs Vote campaign, to share through the Cougs Vote website and CCE social media. At the end of the semester, coalition members will provide outputs (e.g. participation) for the final report.

- The Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service
- Gender Identity/Expression and Sexual Orientation Resource Center
- Student Affairs Marketing
- Multicultural Student Services
- Women's Resource Center
- Service-Learning Faculty & Instructors
- Provost's Office
- WSU Libraries
- Common Reading Program
- Office of Student Involvement
- Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life
- Residence Life
- Compton Union Building

Fall 2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Cougs Vote

Since 2012, the CCE has coordinated the Cougs Vote campaign. Cougs Vote is an ongoing campaign that significantly ramps up for midterm and general elections. The goal is to provide 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. Cougs Vote helps partners collaborate, align efforts system-wide, and provides a variety of branded materials that all partners can access and use when promoting their events.

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:
 - Voter registration and voting instructions for the state of Washington, as well as links to guides for other states, that 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 will be used in the following ways to promote Cougs Vote:
 - The CCE will be promoting all election related events on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (all @WSUCCE).
 - The hashtag #CougsVote will be emphasized for all partners to use on their own voting related social media posts.
- Event Support:
 - Cougs Vote logos, designs, and t-shirt options
 - Community organizations for partners to work with
 - Voter registration drive instructions
 - Voter Friendly Campus information
 - Event and marketing ideas

Fall 2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Implementation

The Cougs Vote Coalition meets throughout the year but fall 2020 planning will begin more intentionally in July, with regular bi-weekly meetings to follow through November. At this writing, the only specific event scheduled is an on-campus election hub at the Compton Union Building in partnership with Whitman County. Due to a new state law, there will be similar election hubs at each WSU campus during the week leading up to the election. These hubs will allow for in-person voter registration and voting right up until 8 p.m. on election day. Below are key dates identified to provide a framework to schedule around that is also flexible in order to work with students to empower them and implement their ideas to get more students engaged.

- **July:** Student Government Council statewide meeting
- **August 16–22:** WSU Week of Welcome
- **September 17:** Constitution Day
- **September 22:** National Voter Registration Day
- **October 16:** Start of the 18-day voting period in Washington.
- **October 26:** Deadline for online voter registration in Washington.
- **October 27–November 3:** Whitman County Election Hub open at WSU Pullman.
- **November 3:** General election – drop boxes close promptly at 8 p.m.

While Washington state residents do make up most WSU students, there are also a sizable number of students from surrounding states. According to the National Student Clearinghouse 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. Based on this data, WSU will focus primarily on the Washington state voter guidelines and resources, with additional information for other states available on the Cougs Vote website and will be promoted as part of the general WSU voter awareness campaign.



Fall 2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Assessment – Measuring Success

It is important for WSU to examine its success with the Cougs Vote campaign. Assessment will be utilized throughout fall 2020 and after the elections to gauge success. The following measures will determine the campaign's success at increasing student democratic engagement and voting:

- Contributing partners, both on and off campus.
- Event attendance and participation
- NSLVE - voter registration and voting rate data
- Student social media participation with #CougsVote
- Center for Civic Engagement student survey
- Voter Friendly Campus designation



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 2016 general election to the 2020 general election, 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 engaging students.

The Center for Civic Engagement student 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.

Finally, receiving the designation of Voter Friendly Campus due to WSU's democratic engagement efforts in Fall 2020 will serve as an indicator of success.