CAMPUS PLAN 2022

Weber State University
Political Engagement Coalition

WEBER STATE
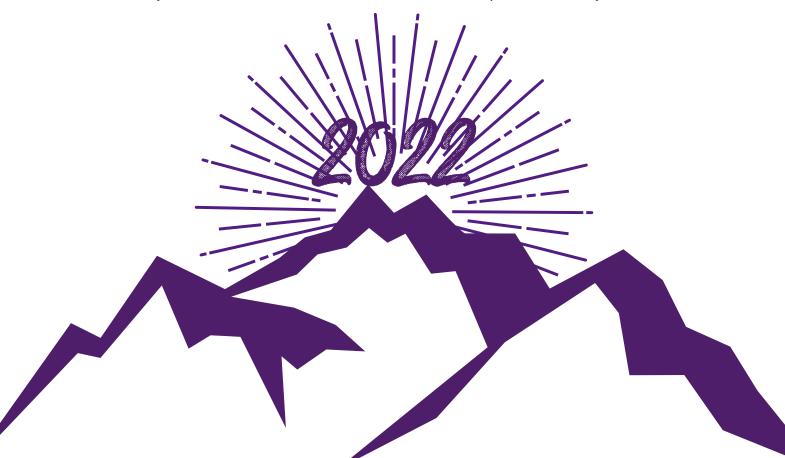UNIVERSITY

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Overview

In 2020, the Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service was restructured to take the lead on voter engagement on campus. The Political Engagement Coalition, which was created in 2018 as a result of a report generated by a joint project of researchers at AASCU's American Democracy Project and the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education at Tufts University, is now housed in the Walker Institute. The Political Engagement Coalition consists of stakeholders from various entities on and off campus who strengthen its political programs and relationships. This campus plan is the result of these efforts and demonstrates the long-term commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement at Weber State University.

Mission

The Weber State University Political Engagement Coalition examines and supports WSU student political learning and participation in democracy.

Vision

The political learning environment of Weber State University fosters an atmosphere of mutual concern, goodwill, and respect for this campus community.

2022

Executive Summary

Weber State University has a 40+ member Political Engagement Coalition (PEC). This group meets quarterly to discuss, assess and plan political engagement on campus. The PEC developed this action plan and is responsible for its implementation and assessment of its work. We identify gaps in our efforts and plan to address them. Generally, the PEC sees itself as working for a politically engaged campus climate, so the bulk of the work is done with students, faculty, and staff in mind and is available on campus.

Weber State University promotes inclusivity, which means embracing and valuing the diversity of its campus members.[1] This value aligns with the university's broader mission to encourage freedom of expression and strengthen our diversity.[2] This plan, developed and implemented by the PEC, ties to these broader institutional norms and values by placing a premium on political diversity.

Weber State University makes a conscientious effort every year to meet the needs of its community through programming around voter registration, voter education and voter mobilization. We also address more generally civics skills. This plan covers the 2022 election cycle, which overlaps with Weber State's Spring 2022, Fall 2022 semesters. Thus, this action plan services long-term goals of creating a welcoming environment for all kinds of political speech and also focuses on specific short-term goals across the campus for the 2022-2023 academic year.

While the PEC is a clearinghouse of political engagement on campus and will engage in assessing the work that is happening across campus, the action plan will be implemented in a relatively decentralized way as we partner with various divisions and programs. We will assess our efforts and update our plan for the 2022 election cycle. In this capacity, we will be working every year specifically on what needs to be addressed on campus. Generally, the PEC lives in the Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service, which coordinates the efforts. Specifically, the PEC will focus on the tools of good citizenship every year.

1. weber.edu/DiversityOffice/inclusivitystatement.html
2. weber.edu/DiversityOffice/missionstatement.html

Leadership

Weber State University's Political Engagement Coalition Co-coordinators:

Teresa Martinez, *Center for Community Engaged Learning*
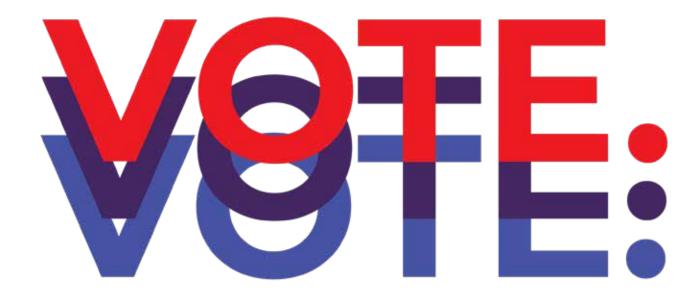**Leah Murray**, *Academic Director, Walker Institute of Politics and Public Service*

Membership:

Kaylei Morris, *Student*
Nancy Collinwood, *Alumni Relations*
Anne Bialowas, *Arts & Humanities*
Emily January Peterson, *Arts & Humanities*
MariadelMar Gonzalez, *Arts & Humanities*
Meagan Thunell, *Athletics*
Will Pridemore, *Athletics*
Eric Smith, *Business and Economics*
Becky Jo Gesteland, *Center for Community Engaged Learning*
Sandy Crosland, *Community Member*
Laurie Huntington, *Davis Campus*
Dan Hubler, *Education*
Luke Fernandez, *Engineering Applied Science & Technology*
Rieneke Holman, *Health Professions*
Lauren Busby, *Housing & Residence Life*
Heather Chapman, *Institutional Research*
Jeremy Harvey, *Institutional Technology*
Brad Howell, *LDS Institute*
Terri McCulloch, *League of Women Voters*

Diana Meiser, *Stewart Library*
Wendy Holliday, *Stewart Library*
Brad Mortensen, *Office of the President: President*
Adrienne Andrews, *Office of the President: Chief Diversity Officer*
Michael Hernandez, *College of Science*
Jlie Rich, *Social & Behavioral Sciences*
Gary Johnson, *Social & Behavioral Sciences*
Carla Trentelman, *Social & Behavioral Sciences*
Kelly Simerick, *Strategic Initiatives*
Sheldon Cheshire, *Student Involvement & Leadership*
Jennifer Bodine, *Energy & Sustainability Office*
Shelly Jackson, *Utah Elections Office*
Ryan Cowley, *Utah Elections Office*
Becky Stromberg, *Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service*
Devin Wiser, *Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service*
Andrea Hernandez, *Women's Center*

The PEC has made a concerted effort to find kindred spirits who care about the work of making our campus a politically diverse and welcoming place. As we host events, we recruit people to our membership. We have made sure we have people who care, but who also represent a wide diversity of stakeholders and political ideologies. Depending on the event or the need, different people's strengths and connections get mobilized.

In addition, our University President, Brad Mortensen, absolutely supports the work. For example, we were told that faculty and staff felt like they could not be involved in politics or speak to their state legislators. The PEC asked President Mortensen if he would send someone from the development office to talk about the issue. President Mortensen himself came and spoke for an hour about how the University interacts with the State Legislature: what helps and what hinders the efforts. His doing this added legitimacy to the PEC's work and to the larger political conversation on campus.

Commitment

Weber State University is committed to civic engagement, as is evident in its mission statement.[1] The university understands itself as having three themes, one of which is community. In this regard, the institution and its leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. However, there is no explicit statement of democratic engagement or political engagement. That commitment is demonstrated through the placement of the PEC in the Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service. Educating for community-based learning is a pervasive part of institutional culture. There are courses that are identified as community-engaged learning courses. Many student groups (athletes, honors students, club and organization members) require students to conduct community service as part of their membership and that work can be politically based, as long as it is non-partisan. In the case of general education (https://www.weber.edu/GenEd/), the institution requires a signature assignment that can include community-based learning outcomes. When democratic engagement is done on campus, generally it uses the umbrella of community engagement which allows us to connect directly to organizations and to the mission statement.

The institution's civic learning outcomes are reflected from the Center for Community Engaged Learning rubric[2], however, our Institutional Research office reports that no one is reporting the usage if it is being used. Currently, there is not a process in place to use the rubric at the university, but Institutional Research has a process by which it measures learning outcomes. In 2016 and 2017, Weber State University distributed the Civic Engagement module from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to its first-year and senior students. The report informed the university of some gaps to improve civic engagement on campus from the first-year experience through graduation for students. The PEC plans on streamlining assessment to ensure it educates areas to include civic engagement as they assess their programs. In addition to participating in the NSSE report, WSU has participated in the NSLVE report since its inception in 2014 to report our voter turnout and registration percentages.

1. weber.edu/universityplanning/Mission_and_core_themes.html

2. weber.edu/ccel/cel-learning-outcomes.html

Landscape

Weber State University's study from IDHE indicated that our institution has the following:

Strengths *(could support more political engagement):*

No habits of discussion
Culture of politeness
Lack of political learning in the curriculum
Lack of interest in political issues
External political pressure
Strong church influence
Commuter school
Separated non-Utah students
Election challenges
Little student activism

Challenges:

Student-centered environment
Openness to new teaching methods
Tradition of shared governance
Commitment to diversity and inclusion
Some infrastructure for political learning
Strong community ties
Some basic political engagement

In certain regards, Weber State University is unique: we have a strong Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints presence on campus and Utah has a history of, and still retains, a strong one-party system, with the Republican Party dominating. In other regards, Weber State University is similar to other institutions: we have a culture of politeness and no habits of discussion.

We need to use the strengths we have to meet the challenges we uniquely face. One of the strengths we have leveraged is our strong ties to the community. We have a close working relationship with the Weber County Elections office and the Lieutenant Governor's Elections Office. We have connected our students to these offices to do the work of elections. We have built a ballot on campus so that people have voting access. The work is situated in a place that is fully supported so we can meet our unique challenges.

Our voting turnout rate in 2020, according to our NSLVE data, was 50.3% which was up 3.7 points from 2016. While we were happy that we increased our voting rate, we were significantly lower than the national voting rate at 66%. We were able to register 69% of our students in 2020 and their voting rate was 72.8%.

Goals

Weber State University intends to be a place where political discord is handled with respect for the dignity of the people involved. We intend to build a campus climate of discussion that allows us to address bigger issues better. The University claims its graduates are "broadly educated, capable and prepared for meaningful careers, graduate and professional schools, and civic engagement."[1] We believe the work the PEC is doing contributes to those claims.

We intend, within the next ten years, to create and foster a vibrant political campus culture that has the capacity to meet the demands of our republic. We intend to register, educate, and mobilize our student voters through highly focused events as well as ongoing efforts. These efforts will be assessed at each touchpoint with students as well as annually through a campus-wide survey. This will allow us to use our IDHE report as a baseline and see how much we grow and address those challenges. Our long-term goal is to answer those challenges and demonstrate that we have through these assessments.

To meet our long-term goals, the PEC looked closely at our NSLVE data to see where we can make changes to elevate voting on campus. We are also in the process of creating the tools necessary to measure our progress. Within the next two years, we will have an assessment protocol in place that will allow us to keep on track for our longer-term vision of a vibrant political campus culture. The Office of Institutional Research is committed to the PEC which is the resource Weber State University needs on board to be able to measure this work. Our PEC has involved all the important stakeholders necessary to create and foster a vibrant political campus climate that is inclusive and welcoming.

1. weber.edu/prospectiveemployees/wsuoverview.html

Specific *Short-term Goals* include:

Promote Presence on Campus
- Continue to create opportunities for administration, faculty and staff to understand the value of political dialogue in and outside of the classroom and to utilize effective tools to address political conversations.
  + Develop a political dialogue toolkit for faculty and staff on campus.
- Continue to update our website and keep it live and interactive
- Roll out our Civic Champion program
  + We have built a program that awards the work of Civic Champions on our campus: faculty, student, staff, and department level awards will be announced. It exists, we need to make sure that people know about it and start recognizing the work.

Implement Campus Political Assessment
- Create and implement continuous assessment of campus political engagement to determine if we are falling below or improving from our baseline. This will allow us to adjust our methods to meet our needs.
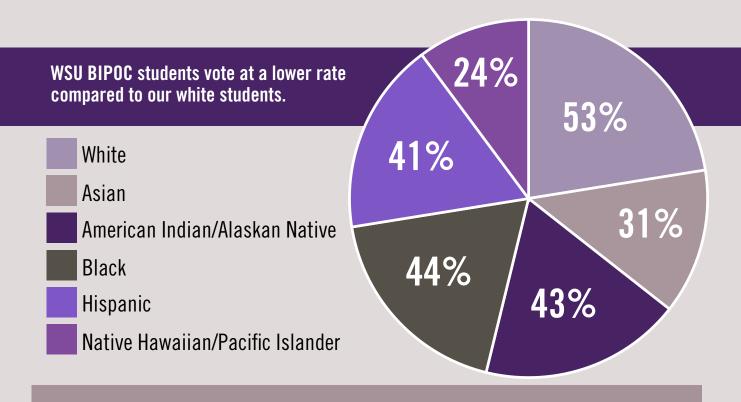
NSLVE Data

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY
VOTING RATE

50.3%
OVERALL

72.8%
REGISTERED
STUDENTS

Our intent is to focus on our registration efforts this year. We know if we can get our students registered, **we will increase our voting rate.**

WSU BIPOC students vote at a lower rate compared to our white students.

- White
- Asian
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Black
- Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

24%
53%
41%
31%
44%
43%

All of these numbers increased from 2016 - 2020 and we closed the gap between the groups. In our 2020 work, we specifically targeted these students to invite them to our democratic process. Given that it worked to close the gaps, we will continue these efforts to use peer to peer messaging and to have all of our voter engagement materials in Spanish given that we are an aspiring Hispanic Serving Institution.

Strategy

Our work is to fully embed political engagement across campus during this presidential election cycle. Different members of our group will be responsible for different events and initiatives. As our PEC represents various groups on campus, they will do planning that is specific to their area and also be a part of trying to mobilize students to attend broader events as well. In this way, we ensure we are reaching diverse populations with particular attention to those groups we know are feeling alienated on our campus.

2022 *(each area is committed to the following)*:

The campus will emphasize *voter registration* in **August and September** by doing the following:
1. **Incorporation of a TurboVote link with area-specific referral code**
   - Faculty will craft a message that pertains to the fields of study in their college and invite students specifically to register to vote
   - Staff in each area will craft a message that pertains to the work they do and invite students specifically to register to vote
2. **The American Democracy Project student team will**
   - Promote via social media posts
   - Deliver donuts to students in return for registering on National Voter Registration Day
3. **The Walker Institute will**
   - Promote the Utah State Higher Education Campus Cup which is a competition for campuses across the state for who can get the most students registered
   - Promote the Big Sky Votes Challenge which is a competition for campuses across the Big Sky Athletic Conference for who can get the most students registered
   - Promote the Civic Champion program which recognizes students, faculty, staff and departments for elevating civic learning and democratic engagement

The campus will emphasize *voter education* in **September and October** by doing the following:
1. **The Walker Institute will**
   - Host in concert with Utah State University and the Utah Debate Commission the Congressional District 1 debate
   - Host an undergraduate research symposium for Constitution Day
   - Conduct the Future Policy Leaders of America scholarship competition which asks students to write a policy position and then pitch it to state legislators
   - Host Voter Education week on campus in October bringing in speakers to be determined later
2. **The College of Science will**
   - Host a candidate night on campus with a focus on scientific issues
   - Host a field trip to the local Elections Office to see the science behind counting ballots

The campus will emphasize *voter mobilization* in **October and November** by doing the following:
1. **The College of Science will create an ARCGIS map with voting locations: both on-site and ballot boxes**
   - This will include a geocaching feature in which Weber State people can upload images of themselves voting
2. **The American Democracy Project student team will promote with videos and images on all social media platforms of students voting**

The campus will elevate *civic learning and democratic engagement* throughout **the year** by doing the following:
1. **The Political Engagement Coalition will**
   - Promote the use of the civic engagement rubric
   - Work with Institutional Research to capture curricular information
   - Specifically create and deploy an assessment tool to measure our progress
   - Work with CCEL to capture co-curricular information
   - Collect data on who is hosting what programming for reporting purposes
2. **The department of Residential Life will**
   - Have voter registration tabling at check in
   - Have absentee ballot training at check in (https://www.vote.org/absentee-voting-rules/)
   - Host debate watches
   - Host an Election Night watch
3. **The department of Student Involvement and Leadership will**
   - Conduct a Project LEAD Leadership Conference for students - February 11 - 12, 2022

Strategy continued...

4. The Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service will
- Create a communications mechanism allowing people on campus to know what is happening at the state legislature (January - March 2022)
- Create a bill tracking system allowing our faculty to write scientific impact notes on individual bills (January - March 2022)
- Conduct a Political Leadership Institute (February - April 2022)
    + February 2, 2022 - Advocacy Training conducted in partnership with Save the Children to teach people how to track bills, talk to elected officials with a specific focus on Early Education and Afghan Refugee Resettlement, both issues are of specific interest to people in Utah
    + February 9, 2022 - Training for students who want to run for Weber State University Student Association
    + February 23, 2022 - Caucus training conducted in partnership with local party officials to teach people how to become delegates for the caucuses happening in March 2022
- March 23, 2022 - Candidate night at which every candidate in Davis and Weber counties are invited to table, recruit volunteers, and campaign ahead of the convention
- Participate in coordination with the Economics Department in the National Debt deliberative Dialogue - February 22, 2022

Each area will be responsible for implementing the work and then reporting numbers of attendees as well as qualitative feedback on how events went. If we want to specifically look at a group, the PEC will create a survey instrument to do so. We will also choose a few events around which to survey the entire campus and compare to a specific subgroup we targeted to see the level of impact of the event. Most events will be connected to the presidential election specifically because we would like to leverage the attention the national election gets to draw students in.

Reporting

We shared our 2020 NSLVE data with campus via a number of presentations and have it on our website. Every college has a representative on the PEC and they all know how they did with regard to voting in the last election. We awarded the departments that had the highest turnout rates, so we hope that by continuing to report and recognize the work, we foster a competitive spirit around this work and thus mobilize activity on campus. We will also share our plan externally via our website.

Our NSLVE report will be made public, as we have done so since its inception. This allows us to have transparency with our work. It also allows the public to see that we are operating in a non-partisan way.

Evaluation

The PEC will curate information about civic learning and democratic engagement. We will use the rubric, the NSSE data, internal surveys around events, and possible future focus groups to evaluate how our political engagement has grown on campus. Generally, we want to know if more of our people feel politically welcome on campus as well as particularly the subgroups identified by the IDHE report. We will use as one baseline our NSLVE data from 2014 and 2016, which predate the PEC's existence on campus. We will also use the IDHE report as a second baseline, as it also predates the coordination of efforts through the PEC. One audience for our evaluation will be internal so that we can be thoughtful about future planning. A second audience will be the President's Council, members of which submit information for other initiatives, such as Carnegie. The evaluation of our work will inform other relative efforts. We will conduct evaluations on every specific programming event as well as using the larger surveys as biannual touchpoints.

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