2024

ALL-IN STUDENT VOTING

ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

West Virginia University is committed to civic and democratic participation and in such promotes equitable voting access to all eligible members of our community. With a focus on heightening overall student voting rates, the plan aims to ensure that students of all backgrounds and levels of knowledge can be a part of the electoral process.

This action plan was developed by members of the WVU Center for Community Engagement, other campus stakeholders, and several community members. The plan will be implemented at all three of WVU's campuses: Morgantown, Keyser, and Beckley. Additionally, a digital outreach initiative is in place to inclusively engage students across various campuses as well as full-time online learners. Born out of collective concern for the democratic process and a steadfast dedication to fostering civic awareness among students, this plan reflects WVU's commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement.

This commitment is not just in words but in action, mirroring the University's mission and vision statements, its core curriculum, and its prioritized programs.

With both short-term and long-term goals in mind, this plan is set to go into motion in the spring of 2024 with a long-term plan lasting through the 2028 elections.

LEADERSHIP

This plan was designed within the WVU Center for Community Engagement and is supported by multiple units throughout the University and greater Morgantown community.

Other members of the leadership team include representatives from WVU's President's Office (presidentsoffice@mail.wvu.edu), Office Student Engagement and Leadership (sel@mail.wvu.edu), Office of Student Life (studentlife@mail.wvu.edu), Center for Fraternal Values and Leadership (greeklife@mail.wvu.edu), Extension (extension@mail.wvu.edu), Student Government Association (sga@mail.wvu.edu), and then members of the faculty, staff, and student communities.

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COMMITMENT

Civic engagement holds a central place in WVU's identity as a land-grant institution and is woven into the Center for Community Engagement's mission to offer experiential learning opportunities for all students. Our goal is to guide our diverse body of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to not only become engaged citizens but also leaders and scholars who can navigate the world with a discerning and unique perspective.

At WVU, we're dedicated to fostering a learning environment that's open and receptive to students with a wide range of political beliefs. Our approach to civic awareness is simple and straightforward: Registration, Education, Participation, and Inclusivity.

At WVU, we facilitate open communication and strategic planning within the WVU community for civic engagement efforts. This collaborative atmosphere allows us to efficiently exchange ideas, gather valuable feedback from stakeholders, and ensure that there's productive brainstorming between the leaders of various departments, students, and community partners. In this way, we work together to bring civic engagement strategies to life effectively. This starts at the top with WVU President Gordon Gee who has signed the President's pledge and filters down through many other departments, programs, and individuals.

Statement of Nonpartisanship

The Center for Community Engagement and West Virginia University is committed to providing an open-minded nonpartisan learning environment for all students, faculty,
staff, and other stakeholders. The University does not support or oppose candidates for public office nor take a stand for or against any political party.

Land Acknowledgement

In talking about where we are going, it is also important to highlight from where we have come. The West Virginia University system, with campuses across West Virginia, resides on land that includes ancestral territories of the many Indigenous peoples including Shawnee, Lenape (Delaware), Haudenosaunee (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Tuscarora) and Cherokee. In acknowledging this, we recognize and appreciate those Indigenous nations whose territories we are living and working on. Indigenous peoples have been of the land currently known as West Virginia since time immemorial. It is important that we understand both the context that has brought our university community to reside here, on this land, and our place within this long history. By acknowledging this we endeavor to always seek the truth about who we have been, who we are now and who we can become.

CAMPUS LANDSCAPE

Demographic Makeup

WVU is a public, land-grant institution accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and governed by a Board of Governors. WVU stands as a unified family of distinctive campuses, all committed to a single mission. The main campus in Morgantown has been recognized as the "No. 1 Small City in America" by BizJournals.com, lauded for its exceptional quality of life. WVU has a rich tradition of academic excellence, demonstrated by its recipients of prestigious scholarships. The enrolled student population at WVU is 80% white, 3.92% Hispanic or Latino, 3.8% Two or More Races, 3.71% Black or African American, 2.23% Asian, 0.141% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.0723% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders. This includes both fulltime and part-time students as well as undergraduate and professional students. 51% of students identify as male while 49% of students identify as female.

WVU has over 450 official student organizations, with many being civically engaged. Some of these organizations and hopeful partnerships include ACLU of WVU, Black Law Students Association, Graduate and Professional Student Senate, Labor Law Society, Model United Nations, Mountaineer Mentors, Mountaineers for Recovery, Movement for People's Democracy WVU, Residence Hall Association, and UN-PAC WVU. The Center's partnership with the Student Government Association will continue to benefit and support these growing relationships.

Looking Ahead

The upcoming 2024 Elections present a unique scenario for the WVU community. As we continue to navigate through and beyond the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is anticipated that in-person voter turnout within our community will see a rise compared to the 2022 Midterm Elections. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that the dynamics of these elections are distinct, and the turnout might reflect that.

The CCE is enthusiastic about continuing to engage students in the electoral process. We will collaborate closely with student organizations to register, educate, and encourage student participation during the 2024 elections. The CCE is actively exploring opportunities for broader engagement, involving students, faculty, staff, and the extended WVU community.

These engagement initiatives will take various forms-- from hosting round tables and panel discussions to organizing voter registration drives and other related events. Each of these activities is designed to foster a more engaged, informed, and active WVU community during the upcoming elections. We are committed to providing a platform where everyone can learn, discuss, and participate actively in the democratic process that shapes our society and future.

NATIONAL STUDY OF LEARNING, VOTING, AND ENGAGEMENT

The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) is a study managed by the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE) at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life. This study was initiated to understand and improve student voting rates in higher education institutions in the United States.

Based on 2012 and 2016 NSLVE data, voting rates at WVU were 36.1% and 43.7% respectively (Figure 1). These rates are lower than the national average, which were 46.9% in 2012 and 50.4% in 2016. Looking further in the data, 58.4/50.9% (2012/2016) voted in-person and only 21.6/22.1% voted absentee (Figure 2). With around half of WVU's student population being from out of state, this low absentee rate could be an explanation for WVU's lower voter turnout.

Rates increased significantly in 2020, per data from the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (Figure 3). The Voting Rate on campus raised to 64.0% (+19.8% from 2016) with a Registration Rate of 86.8%. There is ample opportunity for voter turnout to increase at WVU. With the strategies set forth in the following section, WVU aims to increase voter turnout in future elections.

Through the WVU VOTES and ALL-IN Campus Democracy Challenge initiatives, the results of NSLVE and how we got there will be shared not only with the WVU community but with fellow democratically engaged institutions to review, modify, and plan voter engagement initiatives to increase participation on WVU's campuses.

2022 NSLVE Data has not yet been received but we will update this document when it becomes so.

This information will appear in this section of the document when available.

GOALS – SHORT TERM

REGISTRATION	Host at least ten registration booths at high-traffic areas on campus during Election Cycles.
	Register at least 1,000 students before the registration deadline.
	Develop a user-friendly, ADA-compliant webpage to facilitate student voter registration and updates to their information.
EDUCATION	Launch a comprehensive digital campaign, providing resources, FAQs, and important dates related to voting in the summer of 2024, 2025 and 2026.
	Offer at least two non-partisan workshops to help students understand ballots and the significance of every election tier (local through federal). One of these will be with athletics.
	Conduct a pre-election survey to gauge students' understanding and intentions regarding the primary and general elections.
PARTICIPATION	Partner with Monongalia County Clerk for on-campus election day voting booths.
	Partner with at least five student organizations to promote student engagement with the 2024 elections.
	Secure designation as a Voter Friendly Campus through NASPA and the Campus Vote Project, meeting and aiming to exceed the criteria set by these organizations.
INCLUSIVITY	Design and implement at least four educational initiatives aimed at international students, helping them understand and engage with the U.S. electoral process.
	Ensure all voter education and registration initiatives are accessible and inclusive, considering the needs of all students regardless of their nationality, first language, or disability status.

GOALS – LONG TERM

REGISTRATION	Establish a permanent on-campus voting location for future elections that is accessible and publicized.
	Work with New Student Orientation leaders by June 2024 to provide voter registration forms in each of the student packets when they visit in the summer.
EDUCATION	Launch ongoing civic engagement workshops and online courses for the university community that will be housed on the CCE website for the summer of 2024.
	Conduct yearly surveys to gauge student informational needs and political climate each Spring.
PARTICIPATION	Aim for a 3% increase in registered students each election cycle with set targets based off prior years and student enrollment.
	Consistently meet and apply criteria for Voter Friendly Campus designation through continuous improvement efforts.
INCLUSIVITY	Offer a wider range of support and informational resources for international students and work with Global Affairs to deliver the appropriate information each summer.
	Continue to utilize the Nonpartisan Democracy Coalition to create innovative ways to increase voter awareness each year.

STRATEGY – SHORT TERM
(2024 Election Cycle)

Collaborate with Campus Groups for Election Forums

Forge partnerships with the Student Government and political student clubs to organize 2024 election forums. Engaging dialogue about candidates and issues can spark student interest and awareness.

Launch WVU VOTES, an initiative to highlight voter education opportunities, registration, and important dates around the election.

Campus Outreach Stations

Set up consistent information booths across the Downtown and Evansdale campuses. These stations can disseminate election information, registration procedures, and answer any immediate queries.

Civic Engagement Guide

Design a guide on the significance of active citizenship, drawing inspiration from proven models.

Use QR codes on printed materials to direct students to more in-depth online resources or registration sites.

Orientation Week Voter Drive

During the initial week of classes, immerse incoming students in the electoral process by running voter registration campaigns.

Participation in Intercollegiate Voting Challenges

Keep the WVU spirit competitive by remaining active in challenges like the Big XII Voting Challenge.

Share regular updates about WVU's performance in the challenge through campus media channels to maintain excitement.

Strategic Campus Communication

Employ email communications to faculty, staff, and students highlighting crucial electoral dates and civic holidays.

Craft compelling and concise subject lines and integrate with other digital notifications like the campus app or SMS alerts.

Leverage Digital Platforms

Create and promote interactive content on university-affiliated social media platforms.

Infographics, videos, and countdowns to election day can generate enthusiasm.

Organize online challenges or contests to encourage sharing and engagement.

STRATEGY – LONG TERM
(Post-2024 Election)

Freshman Orientation Initiative will allow voter registration forms to be available a at orientation each summer.

Collaborate with the coordinators of first year experience courses. Introduce a module emphasizing the importance of voter registration and active civic participation.

Campus Voting Accessibility

Collaborate with local and state election officials. Discuss the feasibility of on-campus voting booths or centers, aiming to boost student turnout.

Civic Engagement Partnerships

Reach out to other educational institutions championing civic engagement. Jointly explore best practices, creating a network for shared insights and cooperative initiatives.

Partner with Greek Life organizations. Develop programs and resources promoting civic involvement, ensuring they become a part of their regular events and meetings.

Comprehensive Action Plan Review

Assess all implemented measures in the 5-year period. Determine the impact, noting areas of improvement and the next steps.

Solicit feedback from the student body and faculty about the initiatives. Use insights to chart the course for continued growth in civic engagement in subsequent years.

Establishing the Nonpartisan Democracy Coalition

Formulate a board with broad composition. This body will oversee and direct the growth of civic engagement endeavors at WVU.

Faculty Senate and Syllabus Integration

Engage with the Faculty Senate to develop a standard statement on voting rights, civic duties, and opportunities. Advocate for its inclusion in course syllabi across the university.

Strengthen Inter-Institutional Collaborations

Enhance partnerships formed with other institutions.

Jointly organize conferences or workshops, sharing advancements in civic engagement strategies.

Engaging Elected Representatives

Organize regular campus visits from local, state, and federal representatives.

Foster a platform where students can directly interact, raise concerns, and seek clarifications.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

- **Consider including a well-being statement in your syllabus.** *Example*:
  - *"In a democracy, a government is chosen by voting to elect representatives to make policy and enforce laws while representing the citizens. West Virginia University encourages eligible students to exercise their right to vote, and students of all citizenship backgrounds to actively engage in issues of public concern. When more people participate, a broader array of perspectives is represented in policies and laws that impact our country, society, and the world. You can register to vote at [include WVU CCE website link]"*
- **Share a link to iServe to let students easily connect with local partners.**
- **Consider the timing of exams on election day.**
- **Share voting resources with students.**
- **Set up a voting kiosk in various department.**

REPORTING & EVALUATION

Accountability, transparency, and diversity of voices are all essential for a successful system of reporting. The CCE will include feedback and ideas from students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders of the WVU community on how to better address civic engagement on our campus.

Reporting, feedback, and suggestions will be completed via surveys, tabling events, and public forums. These events will be focused on collecting feedback on what WVU is doing right regarding voter education, where the University is missing out, and what can be expanded on. Students will be specifically asked about their interests and motivation surrounding elections, and this information will be used to enhance voter engagement efforts throughout campus.

NSLVE data, contents of this document, and other relevant information will be communicated to the following entities:

- WVU President's Office
  presidentsoffice@mail.wvu.edu

- WVU Office Student Engagement and Leadership
  sel@mail.wvu.edu

- WVU Student Life
  studentlife@mail.wvu.edu

- WVU Center for Fraternal Values and Leadership
  greeklife@mail.wvu.edu

- WVU Extension
  extension@mail.wvu.edu

- WVU Student Government Association
  sga@mail.wvu.edu

- All WVU Students, Faculty, and Staff through a combination of University News

  and other forms of email communication

- All CCE social media platforms and website

- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

- Other Big XII schools via the Big XII Voting Challenge

We are committed to comprehensive and continual evaluation of this Action Plan and its contents. Steps of sustained evaluation of the plan are listed here:

- Build, analyze, and distribute NSLVE data to assess current civic engagement standards at WVU and identify gaps on campus.
- Communicate and collect feedback regularly with campus and community stakeholders, ensuring ideas and initiatives are included that enhance student learning and engagement with elections and voting.
- Hold frequent tabling events to assess student interest and abilities regarding election participation.

RESOURCES AND TOOLKITS

Further Resources for Classroom Learning

The Political Classroom: I Will Register and Vote, If You Teach Me How
Battistoni, R. M. (2017).

Civic engagement across the curriculum: A resource book for service-learning faculty in all disciplines (e-book). Boston, MA: Campus Compact.

Ehrlich, T., & Ehrlich, T. (2000). **Civic responsibility and higher education**. Oryx Press. Episode of Campus Compact's Podcast Nation focused on campus political engagement with Nancy Thomas

Resources for Further Exploration

American Democracy Project - http://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/

Association of American Colleges and Universities Civic Learning – http://www.aacu.org/resources/civicengagement/index.cfm

Association of American Colleges and Universities Political Learning & Democratic Engagement https://www.aacu.org/clde/LearnEngageVote

Campus Compact - http://www.compact.org/

Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000 iCivics https://www.icivics.org/

NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education https://www.naspa.org/focus-areas/civic-learning-and-democraticengagement

CONCLUSION

West Virginia University and the Center for Community Engagement are committed to advancing the civic engagement culture of our campus and surrounding community. We are eager to begin working with students, faculty, and the greater population of WVU to make our campus a welcoming community for ideas all over the civic and political spectrum. As we continue building our campus and culture, we also want to build an Action Plan that incorporates all ideas and goals of our community; as such, this document is fluid and should be treated as a dynamic resource instead of a set-in-stone agenda.