

Pennsylvania Western University – California

2022 All In Campus Action Plan

Strengthening American Democracy: Voter Education, Registration and Mobilization



Executive Summary

This action plan for the 2022-2023 school year is the product of Pennsylvania Western University – California’s American Democracy Projects advisory board – a group made up of faculty, administrators, staff and students who support civic engagement – voter registration, education and mobilization. Under the guidance of the university’s Provost, this group has met regularly to plan, carry out and evaluate efforts focused broadly on civic education with special attention to voter education, registration and support for almost a decade. However the university is in an era of transition so at the time of the writing of this plan, there are many unknowns. Nonetheless it is the goal of the plan to bring the university in to compliance with both the 1998 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965’s requirement for campuses to engage in voter registration [HEA Section 487(a)(23) and the requirement for institutions receiving federal funds to offer educational programs on Constitution Day and we feel certain this will happen.

Pennsylvania Western University is in a state of flux as it is the product of an integration of three Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education schools (Clarion University, Edinboro University and California University) that will be launched in July 2022. The California campus of the university is building on the work of the former California University of Pennsylvania in creating this action plan. We are working closely with staff on the soon to be newly integrated campuses to plan for, and coordinate, efforts. It is expected, post-merger, the ways in which these efforts are managed and coordinated may undergo substantial changes as the new university will have a new mission, vision and strategic plan. At the time of the writing of this plan much remains unsettled including the key issue of leadership for the campus action plan on this campus going forward – in particular it is unclear whether a faculty member with a workload release or a staff member will be assigned the work outlined here.

Nonetheless California (in whatever form) is continuing in its long term commitment to voter registration, education and mobilization and has plans to remain active and engaged as we move in to the 2022 school year. This document contains our plans for the next school year to be implemented by our advisory board and the student groups we work with and by whomever is appointed to lead these efforts. We hope to maintain our excellent record on both voter registration and student voter turnout even as we move in to a mid-term election year which, historically, have shown lower turnout rates than presidential election years. Our goal is to increase our voter registration level above our record high of 80% and achieve a participation level on par with, or above, our 2018 level. We also plan to maintain a robust schedule of campus programming focused on civic education and action, including our regular Constitution Day and Election Analysis events, and our issue oriented “Ask an Expert” series – offering at least two programs a semester. We will continue with our efforts at voter mobilization and voter support. We also hope to spend the year planning our transition to a consolidated university with a broadened three campus advisory board and efforts,

going forth, that leverage the experience and resources of the new consolidated university.

In the long run we are looking to better institutionalize our efforts, connecting them with a specific staff or faculty position and placing voter registration and voter education within our curricular or orientation efforts.

Leadership

At this time the action plan is the product of Pennsylvania Western University – California’s American Democracy Projects advisory board – a group made up of faculty, administrators, staff and students who support civic engagement – voter registration, education and mobilization. If a work release is awarded, ADP will continue to run all the voting related activities listed here – if it is not, the role will be assigned to a yet unnamed staff person.

The American Democracy Project Board is a coalition of staff, faculty, administrators and students. It is directed by Dr. Laura Tuennerman, a Professor of History, who serves by appointment of the Provost. The ADP director is responsible for recruiting new members from all areas of campus with an eye towards diversity, equity and inclusivity. The current board includes twenty-one faculty members who represent a variety of departments drawn from both university colleges and from the library; administrative and staff representatives including the university Provost, a Development Assistant, our Director of Equity, Compliance and Title IX Coordination, the Vice President for Communications and Marketing, the Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer and the Student Association Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life. Our students included both undergraduate and graduate students, including our current Campus Election Engagement Project fellow – changing from year to year because of graduation.

CURRENT PLANNING COMMITTEE

Academic Affairs

Dr. Daniel Engstrom, Acting Provost/Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Communications and Marketing

Ms. Christine Kindl, Vice President for Communications and Marketing

American Democracy Project Advisory Board: Faculty

Dr. David Argent, Department of Biological, Geology and Environmental Sciences

Dr. Carol Bocetti, Department of Biological, Geology and Environmental Sciences

Dr. Sheri Boyle, Department of Health & Human Service Prof.

Ms. Nancy Carlino, Department of Health & Human Service Prof.

Dr. Kelton Edmonds, Director of African American Studies Program

Dr. Craig Fox, Honors Program, Department of Culture, Media and Performance

Dr. Kyle Fredrick, Department of Earth Sciences

Dr. Debbie Goh, Department of Culture, Media and Performance
Dr. Justin Hackett, Department of Social Science
Dr. Paul Hettler, Department of Business, Economics and Enterprise Science
Dr. Michael Hummel, Department of Social Science
Dr. Ayanna Lyles, Director of Frederick Douglass Institute
Mr. William Meloy, Library
Dr. Connie Monroe, Department Education
Dr. Keat Murray, Department of Culture, Media and Performance
Dr. Louise Nicholson, Department of Biology, Geology and Environmental Science
Dr. Michael Slaven, Department of Humanities
Dr. Emily Sweitzer, Department of Humanities
Dr. Michelle Torregano, Department of Education
Dr. Laura Tuennerman (ADP Director), Department of Humanities

American Democracy Project Advisory Board: Administration

Dr. John Burnett, Director of Equity, Compliance and Title IX Coordination
Ms. Sheleta Camarada-Webb, the Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer
Ms. Christine Kindl, Vice President for Communications and Marketing
Ms. Mariah Peoples, University Development and Alumni Relations

American Democracy Project Advisory Board: Student Association, Inc.

Ms. Joy Helsel, Director, Fraternity & Sorority Life/Special Publications

American Democracy Project Advisory Board: Staff

Ms. Cindy Speer, Administrative Assistant, Department of Humanities

American Democracy Project Advisory Board: Students

Chris Lisle, Graduate Student

DeMont Davis, Undergraduate Student and current CEEP Fellow

Additional students are currently being recruited for next year.

The advisory committee is made up of some of the most dynamic and active faculty members on campus who share a commitment to civic education. The group is also highly diverse in terms of areas of interest, race, gender, sexual orientation and includes the two highest level admiration members working in the area of DEI – our Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer and our Director of Equity, Compliance and Title IX Coordination and our faculty chair of the Frederick Douglass Institute. Partner organizations beyond the American Democracy Project include All In, Campus Election Engagement Project and Campus Vote Project.

The advisory committee meets regularly, by zoom because of the pandemic, to plan for the future and evaluate existing efforts. The programing and staffing of events is shared between committee members, supported by interested student groups and organizational co-sponsors like the Frederick Douglass Institute or individual academic departments, and we work closely with the Department of Communications and Marketing to coordinate coverage and publicity for our activities.

Commitment

Pennsylvania Western University – California is to be a newly formed (July 2022) university, the product of the integration of three Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. While its mission and vision are under development, this plan is currently based on our previous institutional identity - California University of Pennsylvania – and its core values of integrity, civility, and responsibility. Its commitment to imbuing students with a sense of civic obligation and developing tomorrow's leaders is reflected in Objective 5.2 of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan: ***Enhance and integrate programs in leadership, career preparedness, civic engagement and other critical life skills.***

It is only natural that Cal U was among the initial group of colleges and universities to pilot the American Democracy Project, a collaborative effort of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and *The New York Times*, as a means to engage students in issue awareness, electoral politics, and community matters. In 2008, Cal U was selected to participate in the Deliberative Polling® Initiative. George Mehaffy, vice president of Academic Leadership and Change at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and James Fishkin, director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University, were on campus for the day-long event that included more than 200 Cal U students. College Democrats and College Republicans debated presidential candidates' issue positions in a standing room only auditorium. Cal U was the first campus to host four DebateWatch events, where the university community viewed the three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate. Students and faculty facilitated post-debate discussions, all from a strictly nonpartisan perspective. Most impressive, Cal U made national news (*Roll Call*) because more than 2,000 students registered to vote and turnout in the four borough precincts quadrupled. The University held its first Election Analysis Forum just one week after the election, which has since become a biennial event that features nationally acclaimed political scientists and a leading journalist. Inauguration Day capped the election-year activities, where the campus community watched President Barack Obama take the Oath of Office.

Since then, Cal U has continued to provide extensive programming to the university community and area residents. In 2017, Cal U was one of just 83 campuses nationwide to be recognized by the Campus Vote Project for practices encouraging students to register and vote. It has been, three times, designated as a Voter Friendly Campus. In the past Cal U won an ALL IN Democracy Challenge Award for most improved student voting rate among all four-year, medium sized public universities nationwide. In the years tracked by NSLVE we have maintained a 70%+ voter registration rate peaking at 80.6% in 2020. In 2020 we were awarded a silver seal by ALL IN for our 66.4% voting rate. We use our NSLVE data and our recognition by partner organizations as one way of measuring the overall success of our efforts.

We have a strong presence on campus. Our Department of Communications and Marketing has devoted a great deal of effort to sharing and celebrating our activities and successes – covering our NSLVE data, ALL IN and Voter Friendly Status, and

programming through press releases to off campus media sources and announcements and coverage in campus publications for our on campus audience. We proudly display our seals and statuses on our webpage and have an American Democracy Project specific webpage, tied to our voting information webpage.

Building on our long term legacy, California seeks to continue to imbue students with a sense of community that will last a lifetime. Voting is an important part of the equation as are being educated on candidates and issues, volunteering on campaigns, performing community service, and more. Cal U is proud of its students, alumni, and faculty who hold elective office and work in the public sector. Civic education is an important part of our co-curricular activities

Landscape

Pennsylvania Western University – California, is one campus of a three campus integrated university and is part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. Cal U's enrollment in 2020-2021 was 6,885 students, just over two thirds of whom are undergraduates. About 6% of our undergraduate students are active military, reserves, National Guard or veterans. Nearly one third of our first year and transfer students are first generation college students. 20% of our undergraduate students are underrepresented minority students, 16% for graduate students fall in that category. Almost half our students completing undergraduate degrees are Pell recipients, nearly 40% of our students are adult earners.

Our efforts to engage students come in many forms reflecting the great diversity of our student body. Normally we offer a variety of extra-curricular campus programs open to our broader community, but because of the pandemic many of those activities moved on to Zoom in the 2020-2021 school year and have been offered hybrid this year. For example in fall 2020 we held Zoom informational programs on "Fake News", "Policing and Race," the 19th Amendment, and a post-election Dr. Melanie Blumberg Election Analysis Forum. These programs reached approximately 450 audience members including university staff, faculty and students and community members and students at our sister schools – Clarion University and Edinboro University. We also hosted virtual debate watch parties for the two Presidential and one Vice Presidential debate, and had a virtual election night watch party. We celebrated National Voter Registration Day with virtual registration tables and in-class registration efforts supported by an email message to faculty from our Provost. We produced social media videos for Instagram, Twitter and Facebook that collected more than 3,250 views and we sponsored a student voting challenge on Instagram. We also host a campus specific voter information page that is regularly updated and shared through campus announcements and social media campaigns.

We gauge the success of our efforts in multiple ways – we gathered information at events, both counting overall attendees and using a simple Likert scale survey to gauge the impact of the programs on the audience. The planning committees complete

a debrief after events to consider the strengths and weaknesses of our attempts. We also participate in the NSLVE study to better understand our impact in terms of student voter registration and student voting.

We engage with student groups directly. Our social media voting challenge, for example, included participation from the cheer squad, the honors program and the theater honors society. We regularly host CEEP fellows who both serve on American Democracy Project and plan their own campus activities, most recently by creating and supporting Cal U Votes twitter, Instagram and Facebook accounts. In the past we have worked with the College Democrats and Young Republicans on campus to host discussions and debates and have worked with student government to arrange walks to and rides to the polls.

We also connect our efforts to curriculum where possible. Faculty members are provided voter registration information for inclusion in their courses where appropriate. In the fall of 2020, our director taught a special topics course on elections and voting through the university honors program that not only taught the history of voting and elections, but also required students to undertake service learning work related to these issues. In the past we have also offered a variety of political science courses focused on American politics, campaigns and elections, etc. which often help us to identify students interested in leading activities on campus.

Though we have a strong history of voter education, registration and mobilization, at this point we face some significant barriers to success. Organizationally we are in a period of transition. As the integration and accreditation of our new institution moves forward many changes to staffing and past practices will be required. Our administration will be almost entirely new to the California campus – we will have a new President, Provost and several new deans for example. We also suffered the loss of our founding director, Dr. Melanie Blumberg, and while a new ADP director has been appointed, we have not hired a faculty replacement in the area of American politics, so we are struggling to teach those courses on campus. As a state we also face some challenges because Pennsylvania does not offer same day voting registration, and while mail in voting was expanded because of the pandemic, its future in the state is somewhat unclear.

We do look forward to working with colleagues at the Edinboro and Clarion campuses and believe we may be able to benefit from collaboration and shared programming.

Goals and Strategy

- Institutionalize our efforts through the creation of a staff or faculty position directly responsible for civic engagement and voter registration and mobilization on the California campus to work with Sarah Zerfoss, on the Clarion and Edinboro campuses. (measured by the creation or non-creation of a position)

- Continue to offer a diverse schedule of programming to encourage civic engagement, political action and voter mobilization to be shared on all three campuses of the new integrated university. (measured by number of programs, attendance and program evaluations)
- Engage in activities to support voter registration, voter education and voter support. (Measured by number of activities and NSLVE data).
- Engage in activities to encourage voter mobilization.
- Increase our voter registration and voting rates to 2-5% above our 2018 rate. (NSLVE data)

Our long term goal is to continue to build on our thirteen year tradition of success – maintaining our partnerships with the American Democracy Project, All In, Campus Election Engagement and the Campus Vote Project and our involvement in NSLVE. Our most important long term goal is to better institutionalize our efforts since it is crucial that we tie leadership of these efforts to a specific position on campus since we know efforts are most successful when they are institutionalized by being included in someone’s job description. We face the challenge of growing beyond the leadership of our founder, Dr. Melanie Blumberg, so that our voter education, registration and mobilization efforts become a permanent part of the campus culture. It is crucial that Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion form a partnership and find a specific staffing home for our efforts, supported by the appropriate assignment of staffing time or course release for the individual.

We also plan to better institutionalize our efforts including voter registration and voter information in the new student orientation process.

For short term goals, we plan to maintain a robust schedule of campus programming focused on civic education and action, including our regular Constitution Day and Election Analysis events, and our issue oriented “Ask an Expert” series offering at least two events a semester. Hosting candidate debates, watch parties for debates and for election returns are also a mainstay of our programmatic offerings. We will continue to count program and attendance number and also evaluate programs using an audience survey.

We will continue our voter registration efforts – maintaining our Calu.edu/vote (to be renamed during integration) webpage of voter information that includes registration, deadline and absentee/mail in ballot information, providing links to non-partisan voter’s guides, creating informational videos for social media and hosting in person or Zoom registration sessions. Reminders of approaching deadlines will be shared through announcements, social media and student newspaper coverage.

In terms of voter support, if health and safety allow, Student Government Association will organize walks to the polling place where students who reside in campus related housing vote. The American Democracy Project may run a shuttle service from off-campus locations to the two borough polling locations where most students vote depending on pandemic restrictions. If allowed, faculty will be stationed

outside both polling locations in case students have difficulty navigating the system. If not we will have live Zoom support.

In terms of voter mobilization Campus-wide announcements with information about in-person and absentee voting will be posted. Election Day reminders will be distributed via university-wide announcements, social media, and flyers. Faculty will be encouraged to remind their classes to vote. Election FAQs and talking points will be provided to all faculty. The Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows, Campus Election Engagement Project Fellows, and American Democracy Project Advisory Board student representatives, will keep their peers informed about election-year activities and mobilize them on Election Day.

Over the next two election cycles we hope to maintain our excellent record on both voter registration and student voter turnout, even as we move in to a mid-term election year which, historically, have shown lower turnout rates than presidential election years. Our goal is to increase our voter registration level and voting rate 2-5% our 2018 level. We will judge our success there based on NSLVE data.

We also hope to spend the year planning our transition to a consolidated university with a broadened three campus advisory board and coordinated efforts.

Reporting

As in previous election cycles, the campus will work with NSLVE to gather and publicize voting related data. Our campus will allow the All In Challenge to post our NSLVE data on their website. We will also share this data with our campus (through announcements) and with the general public (through press releases). Throughout the semester we work closely with the Department of Communications and Marketing to publicize events and to report measures of our success through the university website (especially the American Democracy webpage), press releases and social media. Our student interns also maintain social media accounts related to our efforts. We are fortunate to have a strong relationship with local media agencies so that our events are regularly covered in the local press. The ADP director also works with the campus student newspaper to cover campus events and topics related to voter education, registration and engagement.

Evaluation

Beyond NSLVE data on voter registration and voter turnout, we will also evaluate our efforts in terms of the number of events held, event attendance and qualitative polling at the conclusion of live events (using a four point Likert scale: Was the presentations were informative; Was the presentations were well-organized; Was the content provided was of personal interest to me; After attending I feel motivated to engage in the democratic process; I would like to see more events like this at Cal U). This data will be included in the American Democracy Project annual report which is submitted to Academic Affairs on campus to be included in reports related to university

outcomes provided to our accrediting body (Middle States) and to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.