



2024 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan

Formulated by Kira Davis, AS OCE Voter Recruitment & Engagement Coordinator



Executive Summary

This plan was developed by the ASWWU Office of Civic Engagement's (OCE) 2023-24 Voter Recruitment & Engagement Coordinator, Kira Davis, with the intention of building on the 2023 voter turnout in 2024. The ASWWU OCE and the 2024-25 Voter Recruitment & Engagement Coordinator will use this plan to increase voter turnout, build support networks, and improve democratic engagement on WWU's Bellingham campus for the 2024-25 year. The plan will be updated spring of 2025 for the 2025-26 year. The Voter Recruitment Coordinator and the rest of the OCE office is in charge of making sure the plan is implemented with help from the AS Government Advisor, Adam Lorio.

Leadership

The working group for this plan is made up of the OCE programming staff, Voter Registration staff, and elected student government members. They are supported administratively by Adam Lorio, the AS Government Advisor, the Munro institute, and the rest of the Viking Union staff. Outreach is also often done through the political science department and the AS Communications department. There is potential for additional support through the League of Women Voters, Washington Bus, and ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. Local election officials at the Whatcom County Auditor office have been good allies and collaborators especially in assisting with the campus Voter Hub for the general election in November.

Commitment

WWU has strong values around community, responsibility, and justice. Increasing voter turnout directly supports these values by encouraging informed, engaged citizenship. We hope WWU leadership will continue demonstrating our commitment to democratic engagement in multiple ways: through faculty putting out voter registration information to their classes/on Canvas, through AS Executive Board and Senate members promoting voter drive efforts, and through the AS as a whole showing up to support the fall Voter Hub.

Landscape

We do not have data about political climate or democratic engagement on campus. The OCE is the only office on campus dealing with student voter registration and democratic engagement. The Political Science department and the Munro Institute encourage civic learning and democratic engagement, but it is not present in the curriculum of most other colleges at WWU. A few introductory political science classes that deal with civic learning and democratic engagement are offered as General University Requirements (GURs) open to all students, though most are restricted to majors.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic WWU has seen a decline in student participation in campus events in general, and it has been especially detrimental to the OCE's annual Move-In Voter Drive, as the pandemic greatly altered move-in protocols. In the past year we have also struggled with having professional staff leadership dedicated to civic engagement work as well as having budget cuts to the entire AS.

The demographic makeup of WWU is overwhelmingly white, so the OCE is committed to assisting marginalized groups on campus in being civically engaged. We are mindful that there are undocumented members of our campus community who are not able to vote, and that there are many students from communities who have been historically disenfranchised from participating in the democratic process.

We are lucky in the state of Washington to have voting fully by mail, and to have legislation allowing us to have a Voter Hub on campus on Election Days. While not an official polling place, this allows us to register voters and help them cast their ballot on the same day. In the past we have served numbers of students and community members comparable to the courthouse, our only other local polling place.

Goals

We want to see a return to the kinds of voter engagement numbers we saw with Western Votes. WWU has always been proud of our campus's record of civic engagement and we want to continue being one of the most engaged campuses in the state of Washington. In order to reach that goal we want to have reliable data from the 2024 election so that our increases in voter turnout can be tracked year to year.

Strategy

Our short-term 2024-25 strategy involves coordinated voter drive efforts in the fall, the Voter Hub, and continuing voter registration efforts in the spring. We will hold our annual Move-In Voter Drive this fall, having made adaptations to be more in line with the new post-COVID protocols. We will register voters at the dining halls and residence halls that weekend, then continue tabling at the Viking Union and in Red Square for the rest of fall quarter. Then in the week leading up to the election, we will table with a printer to print students' ballots to minimize traffic at the hub on election day.

In the long-term, we hope to revitalize WWU's voting coalition by increasing visibility and recognition among the campus community, partnering with external organizations, and creating continuity despite the high turnover rate of campus staff. We hope to have strong reports of voter involvement dating back several years that we can look to for analysis. We also hope to reorganize our hiring structure so that we can have paid voter registration staff in both fall and spring quarters, instead of just fall. Creating more consistent voter registration work would allow us to expand our network of people involved in civic engagement on campus and find more reliable volunteers.

Reporting

This document will live in a shared file that all AS OCE staff will have access to. It will be re-evaluated each year by the Voter Recruitment & Engagement Coordinator, with assistance from the AS Governmental Advisor. Our progress throughout the All-In Challenge will be shared with the AS Community, the WWU student body, and the Whatcom County Auditor's Office.

Evaluation

This evaluation is designed to create a foundation that future members of our voting coalition can work off of. Since the pandemic and the dissolution of the Western Votes coalition there has been very little consistency and communication in our year-to-year voter engagement efforts, and we are attempting to build back that consistency. By having a more clear idea of our goals, our resources, and current voter numbers, we can build on our work instead of starting over each fall.