



CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

2018

ALL-IN CAMPUS DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE

**VOTER EDUCATION, REGISTRATION & MOBILIZATION:
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THE CAL U WAY**



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INTRODUCTION

California University of Pennsylvania's core values are 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.

American Democracy Project: Overview

California University of Pennsylvania is one of the first institutions of higher education to pilot the American Democracy Project. With the passage of the Byrd Amendment, in 2004, Cal U honors Constitution Day by holding university-wide events featuring talks on issues ranging from civil liberties at time of war to ethics in government. Voter registration tables are a staple at the events. Early programming consisted of panel discussion on topics, such as protest movements and health care reform. During election years, there were and still are CampaignWatch roundtable discussions where students, faculty, and staff discuss issues, candidates, and parties.

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. The next day, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. spoke on regional environmental issues.

The same year, students across campus were involved in election activities. 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 continues to provide extensive programming to the university community and area residents. Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day are mainstays. Highlights include “Kids Talk Democracy,” where fourth-grade students from an area elementary school shared their views on several constitutional topics, and “Leadership and Public Service,” where a nationally recognized juvenile court judge discussed the “right” reason for seeking public office. “Passion or Pension” drew a capacity crowd as did a former Ohio secretary of state and Kennedy Profile in Courage awardee who discussed voting rights. “Help for Haiti” raised funds for the earthquake-ravaged country (<http://www.calu.edu/academics/american-democracy-project/index.htm>).

Spring 2016, the American Democracy Project partnered with the League of Women Voters of Washington County to host the Pennsylvania 49th Legislative District debate. Cal U students hosted Penn State-New Kensington students who were interested to learn of the university’s programming. A nationally recognized elections forecaster spoke at the annual spring event, which again drew a capacity crowd.

Summer 2016, Cal U sent two students to the national conventions as part of The Washington Center Seminar Series. Another student was one of three in the Commonwealth to be selected to participate in CollegeDebate16 (<http://collegedebate16.org/>). Of particular note, Cal Campaign Consultants, a nonpartisan student organization, provided volunteers for statewide and national races. Students in Campaign Management, an upper division course, were required to register voters and work on campaigns of their choosing.

In 2017, Cal U received the ALL-IN Democracy Challenge Best in Class Award for the most improved student voting record among medium-size public universities. Its efforts increased voter turnout by 12.7 percent and exceeded the national average by 4.2 percent. It was also one of seven Pennsylvania universities to be designate by the Campus Voter Project and NASPA as a Voter Friendly Campus (NSLVE, 2016).

Cal U seeks to instill 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 and faculty who hold elective office and work in the public sector.

BY THE NUMBERS

Voter mobilization is a challenge for political parties for several reasons, ranging from feelings of political alienation or political inefficacy to restrictive voting times or inconvenient polling locations. Mobilizing the youth vote is particularly difficult, as many young adults fail to perceive themselves as stakeholders or they get more gratification from volunteering than they do from voting.

Registering students to vote is the first part of the equation. Educating them about the issues, convincing them their vote matters, and getting them to vote take an almost herculean effort.

In 2012, 41.9 percent of Cal U students voted as compared to 46.9 percent nationally. Its registration rate was 66.6 percent. The voting method numbers are telling: 85 percent voted in-person on Election Day with the remainder voting absentee (9.1 percent), voting early (1.4 percent), voting by mail (0.6 percent), and other (3.9 percent). In the 2014 midterm election, when turnout is precipitously lower than it is in presidential election years, Cal U's numbers lagged 3.1 percent behind the national college vote (15.7 percent to 18.8 percent). Similar to 2012, 88.5 percent voted in-person on Election Day (NSLVE 2012, 2014). As mentioned previously, in 2016, voter turnout increased by 12.7 percent and exceeded the national average by 4.2 percent (NSLVE, 2016).

Although the nearly 13 percent increase is impressive, it is clear there is work to be done to encourage students to register to vote in California Borough and mobilize them on Election Day.

VOTER EDUCATION

- Fall 2017, Cal U hit the ground running with voter education programming. Constitution Day 2017 featured Kent State University Professor Patrick Coy,

who is a world renowned authority on peace movements and nonviolent direct action. Dr. Coy spoke on “The Right to Dissent.” The same day, Professors Loring Prest and Bill Meloy conducted two workshops on “[U]ntruths and Consequences,” which schooled students on how to detect “fake news.” The next month, the American Democracy Project and Department of History, Politics, Society & Law co-sponsored a week-long exhibit of presidential memorabilia. Mr. Stephen Russell, an area historian and educator, shared his knowledge of American presidents with students. Political Science, Sociology, and Legal Studies arranged a panel discussion and poster session on “Bullying Has No Borders” as part of National Prevention Bullying Month. The panel discussion was especially timely, given the uptick in vitriol and incivility, both of which are so prevalent in government.

- The American Democracy Project, as part of its spring programming, will be hosting Dr. Alan Abramowitz of Emory University who is one of the nation’s leading election forecasters. There will be at least two Issue Expos during the semester. Although the topics have yet to be finalized, two contenders are “taking the knee” and ethics in government.
- The **Constitution Day 2018** topic will be decided in the spring when the American Democracy Project Advisory Board next meets.
- There will be at least two **CampaignWatch** events, where students discuss the candidates, issues, polling, and the election outlook. Faculty will act as facilitators, and will guide the dialog so it remains on point and respectful.
- At minimum, there will be two **Issue Expos** on topics drawn from the news. Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., is Common Hour in which no classes are scheduled. It is an optimal time to attract a large student audience.
- The American Democracy Project Department, in conjunction with the Department of History, Politics, Society & Law will hold impromptu **Teach-ins** on timely issues.
- “Bring It to the Table” will be shown in the Vulcan Theater and made available to any professors wanting to show it in their classes.

- Copies of the League of Women Voters of Washington County Voter Guide will be available at the Library Circulation Desk and Natalie Student Center Information Desk.
- The **2018 Election Analysis Forum** will be held on November 13, 2017. Jon Delano, KDKA-TV “Money & Politics” host, will moderate a panel of nationally acclaimed parties and elections experts: Alan Abramowitz, Emory University, William Binning, Youngstown State University, Lou Jacobson, *Governing* and *PoliticsPA*, and Costas Panagopoulos, Fordham University. They make sense of the election results for the campus community and local residents.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Cal U, once again, will partner with the Washington County League of Women Voters and Campus Election Engagement Project to mount an aggressive voter registration drive.

- On **National Voter Registration Day**, multiple voter registration tables will be staffed by students, faculty, and staff in high-traffic locations. In addition, Provost Bruce Barnhart will email all faculty, encouraging them to set aside the first five minutes of class to have students register to vote on their mobile devices. Faculty who teach online will be encouraged to post reminders along with links to websites where students can register.
- Cal U will be participating in a national voter registration effort and study headed by Dr. Elizabeth Bennion at Indiana University-South Bend.
- Registration materials will be available at Constitution Day, the Manderino Library Circulation Desk, and Natali Student Center Information Desk.
- A link to the “Information for Student Voters” webpage will be available both via a link on the Cal U homepage carousel and by visiting the American Democracy Project website. The homepage will be updated with reminders about approaching deadlines.
- University-wide announcements will remind the campus community about the registration deadline and where people can register to vote.

- There will be a voter registration table at the Move-in Day picnic.

BALLOT ACCESS

- Information on in-person and absentee voting will be available on the homepage carousel and American Democracy Project website.
- Sign-up announcements for rides to the polls will be distributed one week prior to the election. In 2016, Student Government arranged for vans to transport students.
- Student Government will organize a walk to the polling place where resident students vote.
- First-time voters, in Pennsylvania, must show identification at the polls. Students will be reminded to take their university identification card, which now includes an expiration date, with them.

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.
- An American Democracy Project intern will use social media accounts, such as Twitter and Instagram, as a means to keep students informed about election-year activities and mobilize them on Election Day.