

Democratic Engagement Plan

East Carolina University, Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement

Overview

The primary responsibility of democratic engagement falls under the responsibilities of the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE) within Student Involvement and Leadership (SIL) at East Carolina University (ECU). The Director, Associate Director for Curricular Programs, and Assistant Director for Curricular Programs supervise and advise democratic engagement efforts across campus. The Assistant Director supervises two Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassadors and one Service and Leadership Assistant for Democratic Engagement. During the 2016 election year, the Assistant Director also supervised two Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows.

While CLCE is not solely responsible for hosting, promoting or implementing democratic engagement initiatives, this is the only entity on campus where democratic engagement is included within the mission and vision of the center. Throughout the summer and fall 2016 semester, CLCE prepared for, promoted, developed relationships, and educated students on the importance of voting and how to vote. The focus on the 2016 general election served as a foundation for continuing democratic engagement work.

Other entities on campus working with legislative officials or promoting democratic engagement include ECU's Director of Strategic Initiatives, Political Science Department, and Student Government Association.

Landscape

National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement

ECU participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). NSLVE began in 2013 and now provides federal voting rates for more than 1,000 colleges and universities and over 9 million students. NSLVE is a signature initiative for the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE) at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life. The mission of IDHE is to shift college and university priorities and culture to advance political learning, agency and equity.

The voter registration and voting rates in our report reflect the percentage of our students who were eligible to vote and who actually voted in the 2012 and 2016 elections. These results are based on enrollment records ECU submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse and publicly available voting files collected by Catalist. Institutional voting rates are also adjusted based on data submitted to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Race and ethnicity data was not submitted by ECU, therefore our NSLVE report does not include that information.

Prepared by: Tara Kermiet, Associate Director and Alex Dennis, Assistant Director (December 2017)

The 2016 ECU report includes our numbers from the 2012 election, which provides us with a basis of comparison. According to the report, we saw an increase in our total student enrollment, total number of eligible voters, number of students registered, and the number of students who voted. The voting rate of registered students increased by 1.4%, which is on pace with other institutions in the study. While the number of students who voted increased in the 2016 election, our overall voting rate remained constant at 46.2% and our voter registration rate dropped slightly from 71.9% to 70.2%. This slight dip could be attributed to the irregularity of the 2016 election, which was very negative and divisive. New voters, especially millennials, do not respond well to such negativity and divisiveness, which may have caused some to not participate at all in the election process.

One-stop voting (commonly known as “early voting”) allows any registered voter to cast an absentee ballot in person on select days prior to Election Day and has been an important initiative in North Carolina for a several years. The number of our students who voted “early” increased by 3.6% between the 2012 and 2016 election. Early voting was definitely the most popular method of voting for our students, accounting for 58.9% of total votes. Absentee ballots were down by 3%, which could indicate that more of our students are now registered in Pitt County and voting early. This increase is also a good indicator that our initiative to encourage students to vote early is in fact working and our need for a polling place on campus is very important.

When accounting for age, our vote totals increased for every age group except one, 18-21 year old student voting rate dropped by 2.4% compared to the 2012 election. Age groups of 22-24 saw an increase of 2.9%, 25-29 saw an increase of 4.3%, 30-39 saw an increase of 3.4%, 40-49 saw an increase of 2.3% and 50+ saw an increase of 3.4%. Overall, young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 have the lowest voter turnout of any other age group, which will be a target group for our work for the 2018 mid-term elections.

When accounting for gender, our vote totals dropped for men and women but there was definitely a larger drop for women than men. The voting rate for women decreased by 10.2% and for men it decreased by 6.5%. This is very interesting because one would assume that having a female presidential candidate on the ballot would increase female interest and participation but clearly the results show this did not occur at ECU. Female students will be a target group for our work for the 2018 mid-term elections.

The NSLVE report breaks down student voting data by student’s field of study, which showed that Library Science majors voted at the highest rates (75.8%), followed by History (57.1%), English (55.7%), and Education (51.8%). The STEM majors (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) had the lowest voting rates, all less than 50%. This corresponds with national trends, therefore STEM majors will be a target group for our work this school year.

Voter Engagement Coalition & Partnerships

In the 2016-2017 academic year, CLCE worked to organize the university’s first voter engagement coalition for students, faculty, and staff. The ECU Voter Engagement Coalition’s (VEC) mission was to *promote voter engagement through nonpartisan focuses on access, registration, education, and turnout*. Many offices and departments across campus promoted various voter engagement events, and VEC aimed to connect and promote events through weekly emails and updates on campus events and changes in local

and state-level laws. The purpose of the VEC was to create a diverse cross-section of stakeholders at ECU to promote voter engagement throughout their networks in an effort to advance and increase voter engagement institutionally at ECU.

Additionally, CLCE established a critical relationship prior to the general election by partnering with the local Board of Elections (BOE) through attending BOE monthly meetings, holding individual educational meetings for employees, and creating resources for students. This relationship will continue to be important as we lobby for an on-campus polling location.

General Election Initiatives

For the 2016 general election, ECU committed to being a Turbovote campus, registering 902 voters through the system. Due to budgetary needs, the CLCE decided not to renew its contract with Turbovote for 2017 and will revisit in time for the 2018 midterm elections.

Through a partnership with Student Government Association, CLCE organized a Candidate Discussion Forum to be held in late October. The forum would consist of tabling opportunities for partisan and nonpartisan student organizations at ECU to discuss their values and how it aligns with the current election topics. Two representatives from each Greenville, NC political party were invited to join the discussion forum. The objective of this event was to educate students on how to find opinions and views related to their values, not campaigning or promoting a specific candidate or viewpoint. Due to Hurricane Matthew, this event was cancelled and unable to be rescheduled. Through the planning of the event, strong relationships were created and we look forward to partnering in the future.

To increase general knowledge regarding the election, CLCE focused on physical and digital marketing efforts across campus. Marketing included voter registration information, polling place information, voter ID laws and changes, and other appropriate information. Information about Turbovote was also shared during new student orientation through various avenues.

COAD (first-year seminar) instructors are able to request a 10 or 30 minute presentation by a CLCE student or professional staff member to discuss the importance of being an educated voter and registering to vote. Resident Advisors were also given access to this resource and several have requested the presentation for their residents.

CLCE has partnered with the Political Science Department to co-host presidential debate screenings on campus, in addition to issue forums focusing on relevant issues during the election season. This relationship with the Political Science Department remains critical to institutionalizing democratic engagement work.

CLCE hosts various voter registration drives throughout the year, including National Voter Registration Day. Additionally, CLCE partners each year with the Dean of Students Office to celebrate Constitution Day.

Commitments for 2017-2018 and Beyond

Staffing

We will update the Assistant Director position description in CLCE to reflect the focus on democratic engagement. We will also add a Service and Leadership Assistant position for Democratic Engagement to our student staffing structure. We will seek out additional funding and professional development opportunities to increase staff and student capacity to continue democratic engagement work.

Discussion Forums

In advising the Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassadors, CLCE will host three Race in Our Space discussion forums each fall semester and three Politics in Our Space forums each spring semester. These events include a panel of students, faculty and staff that provide participants an opportunity to discuss how race and political issues affect our personal experiences within various contexts. Panelists and participants will practice respect and civility in discussing the impact of race and political issues on personal stories and experiences. Race in Our Space and Politics in Our Space aim to create an open, safe, and supportive environment to explore race and political issues within the context of an individual's experiences.

Voter Registration

In order to address our slight dip in voter registration between the 2012 and 2016 elections one of our goals for the 2017-2018 school year and beyond is to promote voter registration at all of our events such as Race in Our Space and Politics in Our Space. We will have voter registration forms on hand and encourage students to register and we will take care of mailing the forms for the students. We will also hold several voter registration drives on main campus and on the health sciences campus, in an effort to increase voter registration numbers. We would also like to see a pop-up box, providing some brief information and a link for voter registration, in Pirate Port for all new students. This would target the 18-21 age group which was the only age group at ECU that saw a decrease in vote totals. Another institutional policy that we intend to lobby for is the addition of voter registration deadlines, primary dates and election dates on the university calendar. The goal is to create a climate where the "norm" is that our students register to vote when they are admitted, if they aren't already registered. The data shows that if students are registered, they are more likely to vote.

Targeted Programming

To combat the ECU trend of lower voter turnout for women and the national trend of lower voter turnout for African-American students, our goal is to offer more programs that are geared for these groups of students. These programs should be partnerships with student organizations such as Greek Life (specifically sororities) and the Black Student Union (BSU). We would also like to see more partnerships with campus offices such as the Ledonia Wright Cultural Center. We know that millennials are issue driven voters so it is important for our programming to reflect the issues that are important to all millennials but specifically women and African-Americans. We intend to use our series Race in Our

Prepared by: Tara Kermiet, Associate Director and Alex Dennis, Assistant Director (December 2017)

Space and Politics in Our Space as a platform for students, faculty and staff to discuss issues that are important to them in a safe, inclusive space and to encourage our students to take the next step with their passion and vote.

We would like to focus on increasing the voting rate of our STEM majors by targeting these students when promoting our voter registration events and democratic/civic engagement events. Our Andrew Goodman Vote Everywhere Ambassadors could meet with a focus group of STEM majors to inquire as to what issues are most important to them and how we could increase their voter registration numbers. Some other ideas include short presentations at their student group meetings and tabling at some of their events where we could register students to vote. We should also be coordinating with the faculty within the STEM fields so that we can try and imbed civic and voter information into the curriculum. If we can appeal to STEM students and faculty on the issues that are important to them, then hopefully we can encourage them to become involved and engaged with the democratic process.

On-Campus Polling Location

Since One-stop (early) voting increased by 3.6% from 2012 to 2016 at ECU, it is important for our office to continue to promote One-stop voting as a way for our students to vote on their own time before Election Day. The closest One-stop location for our students is currently at the Willis Building, which is on 1st street and not very convenient for students on main campus. We will continue to lobby the Pitt County Board of Elections for a campus polling location in the new student center, which is slated to open in November of 2018. This will not be in time for the 2018 mid-term elections but for future elections a polling site on main campus would be very beneficial. The easier and more convenient it is for our students to vote the more likely they are to vote.

Citizen U

Another one of our goals, to be introduced in the Spring 2018 semester, is the development of a citizens' academy in partnership with the city of Greenville. The purpose of Citizen U is to educate students about how to be a responsible, engaged citizen and to inspire them to be involved in their communities and our democracy. A curriculum will be developed that spans 10 weeks and includes information about state and local government, how to be civically and democratically engaged, what it means to be a responsible citizen, and how to run for office. Our goal is to have the first cohort of 10-15 students complete the Academy in the Spring 2018 semester. The goal for this program is to educate our students on the importance of local government and the impact they can have by getting involved and being engaged.

Democratic Engagement Coalition

The responsibility for increasing democratic and voter engagement work on our campus cannot solely rest on the shoulders of the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement. The purpose of the Democratic Engagement Coalition is to bring together faculty, staff, students, and community members, who are passionate about democratic and voter engagement work, to help advise and give direction for the work that needs to be done on our campus and within our community. We envision the Democratic

Engagement Coalition being composed of 8-10 members who met 3-4 times per year. Unlike the Voter Engagement Coalition, the Democratic Engagement Coalition will be tasked with developing new partnerships, brainstorming new programming and covering all aspects of voter and democratic engagement work. Since Citizen U is a new program we would like to utilize the Democratic Engagement Coalition to provide feedback regarding the curriculum and help serve as supporters and facilitators for the program. Individual members will serve two year terms on the Democratic Engagement Coalition and will be instrumental in the continuation and growth of our work.