



MIDDLE TENNESSEE

STATE UNIVERSITY

Register to Vote!

I AM *true*
BLUE

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Middle Tennessee State University Campus Vote Plan Civic Action Plan

2018

Overview

Through the MTSU office of the American Democracy Project for Civic Learning (ADP) since 2005, Middle Tennessee State University has been proactive in developing, facilitating, and increasing student civic engagement and student voter participation. Over the years our tools have changed, our strategies have matured, and our hard work has yielded varying results. Being part of NSLVE, the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, since 2014, we've been able to more closely track our successes and challenges. We continually renew and reinvigorate our commitment and campus action planning, thanks to student energy, ever expanding across-campus involvement, administrative determination, wonderful county and state partners, and the resources and guidance of our national partners who cheer our efforts and achievements and create for us a wider community.

Here's our plan going into the fall 2018 semester and the fall 2018 elections:

Voter Registration

Voter Registration is the First Big Push. In Tennessee, voter registration for us ends Tuesday, October 9, 2018, for the November 6 election. We have been working on registration all throughout spring and summer 2018, and we push on through October 9.

Voter information in 2018 CUSTOMS folders. As we do every year, a big splash with dates, details, instructions, links, and full information on voter registration, fall elections, voting, and absentee balloting was added this past spring to the New Students' Handbook for 2018's new student orientation--which we call CUSTOMS--that all incoming freshman and transfer students receive when they come to campus to register for classes. CUSTOMS began in May 2018 and ran through July, preceding student move-in and the start of classes on August 27, 2018.

Online registration for voters in Tennessee. The CUSTOMS sheet of instructions of voter information looks different in 2018 than it did when it was designed and printed in 2017 and the years prior. The Tennessee's Secretary of State shifted our Tennessee to an online voter registration process – which anyone can utilize if s/he has a Tennessee driver's license – in September of 2017. We began to learn about, experiment with, and use the online capability during academic year (AY) 17-18. Mastery of it last year has allowed us to embrace it and to share it widely now with our students going forward, <https://ovr.govote.tn.gov/>.

Helpful online voter registration web portals. MTSU is loaded with online sources of voter information – beyond the national portals – for our specific community, campus, and student use. Our students are directed to these portals through numerous directives, media, postings, and processes during their time at MTSU: <http://www.mtsu.edu/amerdem/register-to-vote.php>, <http://www.mtsu.edu/stuaff/vote.php>, <http://election.rutherfordcountyttn.gov/students.htm>.

On-campus registration tables throughout summer 2018 CUSTOMS. Our local election commission officials, from the Rutherford County Election Commission (RCEC), came to campus spring and summer 2018 and set up tables in the MTSU Student Union during all ten of our new-student, two-day CUSTOMS registration and orientation events held on campus for our brand new students. RCEC registered as many students as possible throughout the summer, as an integral component of the university's new **True Blue Voter** initiative, which was developed by the MTSU Board of Trust chairman, Mr. Steve Smith; MTSU Vice President, Mr. Andrew Oppmann; and Rutherford County Election Commission Administrator, Mr. Alan Farley: <http://www.mtsu.edu/truebluevoter/>.

Online student voter registration as part of course registration. For our returning students – the bulk of the MTSU student body – a button to invite our students to register to vote was placed right before their exiting course registration for classes for fall 2018 (for *half* of our student body). The software, button, and linkage to course registration was accomplished between October 2017 and March 2018, to be in place for fall course registration that began April 2018. MTSU responded to a call by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) in Oct. 2017 to sign up to be part of a new national study by Indiana, Temple, Princeton, and Brigham Young Universities, called the **Registration Enrollment Study** (RES), which seeks to compare rates of student voter registration if a voter registration portal is embedded in universities' course enrollment process. Because Tennessee now has online voter registration and because of the proactive advocacy of MTSU's Provost, Dr. Mark Byrnes, MTSU joined the study in 2017 – and as it has turned out, we are the only university in the nation that was actually able to create and emplace the software in under six months, in time for spring course registration. A caveat of course is that this program is indeed a study: meaning, only 50% of our registering students get the voter registration link, and 50% do not. But we are pleased to have advanced the study, developed the software, offered this opportunity to our students, and now to have the capability, going forward, of providing the voter registration link to 100% of MTSU students registering for their classes in future semesters.

Register to Vote!

Our brand new Register to Vote! button for voter registration. A sweet byproduct of the software work carried out by the MTSU Information Technology Division (ITD), to create the voter registration portal embedded in student course enrollment, is that the university now has a new online “button” tool that we are free to place anywhere online that is equitably accessible by all MTSU students. (We clearly will not jeopardize the RES, but our registration efforts continue to be ubiquitous all over campus, and we have RES permission to apply the button as universally as we choose, without targeting any specific subset of students.) Therefore, most offices, departments, colleges, centers, and programs have added the Register to Vote button to their homepages, to catch the eyes of as many students as we possibly can (<https://www.mtsu.edu/amerdem/register-to-vote.php>). What’s great about the new button is that in setting it up, we created a series of yes/no clicks to direct students to specific questions and processes that fit their specific, individual needs. We had developed a series of questions -- questions relevant specifically to our student body -- over many years of student voter registration on campus. We simply coded these questions, which guide students through a successful voter registration process for their particular situation, to fit their own unique living/driving/ commuting residential circumstance.

The button/link has been placed on numerous pages already. We’re attempting to spread it as pervasively across campus as possible this fall. Here are just a few examples of where it’s posted already:

- <http://www.mtsu.edu/provost/index.php>
- <https://www.mtsu.edu/cbas/>
- <https://www.mtsu.edu/business/>
- <https://www.mtsu.edu/education/>
- <http://www.mtsu.edu/honors/index.php>
- <http://www.mtsu.edu/seigenthaler/index.php>
- <http://www.mtsu.edu/involve/index.php>
- <http://www.mtsu.edu/mtengage/index.php>
- <https://www.mtsu.edu/education/cem.php>
- <http://www.mtsu.edu/history/>
- <https://www.mtsu.edu/accounting/>
- <https://www.mtsu.edu/econfin/index.php>
- <https://www.mtsu.edu/management/>
- <https://www.mtsu.edu/marketing/>
- <http://www.mtsu.edu/sos/index.php>

Post the button more, even more widely across campus. The American Democracy Project staff this fall will be contacting departments that have yet to post the button, to achieve as widespread posting and dissemination of it as we possibly can.

On-campus voter registration tabling events this fall, before Oct. 9. Classes start at MTSU August 27, 2018. We have just six weeks, before the Oct. 9 deadline, to register -- and re-register – as many of our MTSU students as we can get to, talk to, help, share information with, update, re-inform, reinvigorate, and energize. Here are just a few of the voter registration tabling efforts we already have planned for this fall:

- Mon., Aug. 27, First Day of Fall Semester – AAUW to host voter registration table by Student Union
- Mon., Sept. 17, Constitution Day – 6 Constitution readings across campus: voter reg tables at each;
 - AAUW to host all-day voter reg table at Honors College;
 - Rutherford County Election Commission at College of Liberal Arts and College of Behavioral and Health Sciences

Tues., Sept. 18-Thurs., Sept. 20, Constitution Week – Voter reg tabling at Walker Library
Thu., Sept. 20, Gubernatorial Forum – League of Women Voters to host reg table at candidate debate
Tues., Sept. 25, Nat'l Voter Reg Day – MTSU SGA to host voter reg table with TN Sec. of State's
office and Rutherford County Election Commission
Tues., Oct. 9, Last Day of Voter Reg in TN – AAUW to host voter registration table
And there will be many more: The objective is to have a voter registration table somewhere on campus
every day from Aug. 27 through Oct. 9, 2018.

Please note that many of our student organizations are anxious to plan and carry out voter registration tabling events. Many more of our local neighbors and community partners also plan tabling events for our students on campus. We will fully fill in the tabling calendar when everyone is back on campus. Our campus student organizations presidents are away at "Presidium" right now -- the retreat for student organizations -- with the voter registration tabling sign-up sheet!

National Voter Registration Day with the Tennessee Secretary of State's office. The Tennessee Secretary of State, Mr. Tre Hargett, or his staff have come to MTSU every year since 2014 for Constitution Day or National Voter Registration Day. This fall is no exception. The Rutherford County Election Commission joins him for a day of outdoor tabling at MTSU with our Student Affairs officials and the Student Government Association.

Invade Connection Point activities and set up at events already happening. Our University Provost sent a team of MTSU students and faculty, April 2018, to the CivicTN summit, which was the inaugural meeting of newly formed the Tennessee Civic Campus Coalition. At the summit, voting facilitators and students shared best practices. One of the tips our students came away with and brought home from that weekend with the idea to go to events already existing, don't reinvent the wheel, invade an activity already planned and maximize its fun and attendance to do voter registration. That principle has motivated the "invade Connection Point" plan. Connection Point events are sponsored by Student Affairs, students are encouraged to attend, and students are given Connection Point buttons to put on their backpacks for participating (<http://www.mtsu.edu/buttons/>). Connection Point activities, programs hosted by or supported by Student Affairs, are happening all fall semester. Some examples of events at which voter registration and voter information tables are going to be set up include the Department Fair, the Volunteer Fair, the Student Organization Fair, and various others.

Tailgating before football games. MTSU has two home games before voter registration ends in early October. We have asked the Rutherford County Election Commission (RECE) to come to campus the afternoon of both games to tailgate with us – to set up voter registration tables in the middle of Walnut Grove lawn behind the Cope Administration Building. If RECE can't come for those two games, our American Democracy Project (ADP) students will do the registration tabling.

Emails, memos, and top-down encouragement and directives. We know emails' limited effectiveness, nevertheless we use all the tools at hand. American Democracy Project sends email reminders. The Office of the University Provost sends email reminders. The Office of Marketing and Communications will be sending reminder emails. All quarters of our campus will be receiving instructions and reminders all fall.

Making time in every class for voter registration. Among the emails being sent out by the University Provost is a request to all faculty that every professor take 10-15 minutes in each of his/her classes at the beginning of the semester to have students check their voter registration (<https://tnmap.tn.gov/voterlookup/>) and to register or re-register now that they have moved back to our county (<https://www.mtsu.edu/amerdem/register-to-vote.php>). We reiterate this objective and request at every opportunity. We have met with the AY18-19 president of the Faculty Senate, to ask for support from the Faculty Senate in this objective as well.

Permanent voter registration offices located geographically all across our campus. Additionally, we have multiple permanent on-campus registration sites situated in many spots on campus with on-site personnel who can help students in need with voter registration anytime they walk in. There is signage to catch students' attention to direct them to these spots every single day -- when university offices are open and school is in session. With online registration, with options to just click to register, we think we still need physical locations where students can go to get help and have their questions answered.

TurboVote portal now available. MTSU's Center for Student Involvement and Leadership (CSIL) has added TurboVote to our Student Affairs MyMT activity portal. MyMT is our university's platform through Campus Labs, which has a new Voter Engagement Extension

There's nothing but room for improvement. We know from our NSLVE data that 72.3% of our students were registered in 2016 (https://www.mtsu.edu/amerdem/docs/NSLVEReport2012_2016MTSU.pdf), and 2014, 61.4% of our students were registered in the last interim election year (https://www.mtsu.edu/amerdem/docs/NSLVEReport2012_2014MTSU.pdf). We're trying to exceed both of these percentages in 2018.

Voter Education

Educating Student Voters goes on All Fall.

Gubernatorial forum is our Constitution Day program this year. The Tennessee League of Women Voters (LWV) and the Nashville/Knoxville/Memphis/Chattanooga Public Television stations' gubernatorial forum -- a debate between the two winners of the Aug. 2 Democratic and Republican primaries for Tennessee Governor -- will be held at MTSU on Thursday evening, Sept. 20, 2018. Although the state governor's race is not the only election in November, it is an important one. Our students will get to hear both candidates in person on our campus. A portal is already open asking our students to submit questions to the candidates (<http://www.mtsu.edu/2018forum/>), for faculty to work with students to engage their submission of questions for the candidates, and for faculty to include the forum as a course requirement in their syllabi.

Senate candidate forum watch party on campus. The two main candidates for U.S. Senate are debating the evening of Tuesday, Sept. 25 -- National Voter Registration Day. The (also a LWV) forum is being held at another Tenn. university, Cumberland University in Lebanon, and it will be streamed live on Public Television. We are setting up a watch party at MTSU, with discussants and discussion.

Candidates for Congress from the Fourth Congressional District. Working with our local Murfreesboro/Rutherford County LWV, we are working to set up a forum between the two candidates for our local House of Representative seat. The challenger is anxious to debate. The incumbent is probably not going to accept the invitation. According to LWV national rules, a true debate of ideas must take place in order for the forum to happen. We await the outcome of this.

Candidates on campus from both major political parties. Both the MTSU College Democrats and MTSU College Republicans are planning to bring multiple of their candidates to campus this fall, under the auspices of the Rutherford County Democratic and Republican parties and the state parties.

Candidate information provided on ADP website. Reputable candidate-assessment websites will be posted on the American Democracy Project public access portals.

Polling places mapped and disseminated. Posters locating both Early Voting and nearest Election Day polling places are being prepared to print as posters. There will be hundreds of them, pinned all across campus and provided to each of the 80+ student residence hall floors for their bulletin boards.

Absentee balloting information provided widely. The dates for applying for absentee ballots and the processes for applying will be repeatedly offered and supported by the voting assistance team throughout the fall, <https://sos.tn.gov/products/elections/how-do-i-request-absentee-ballot>.

Sample ballots provided on ADP website. American Democracy Project will post all the links necessary for our students to have ready access to preparatory materials they will need to get ready to vote. This information will be regularly supplied to faculty through Academic Affairs emails, in order for faculty to assist students inside their classrooms.

Calendars also provided by ADP. The dates by which all the getting-ready-to-vote events need to be accomplished will also be repeatedly disseminated to students throughout the fall semester: dates to apply for absentee ballots, the deadline to register, the start of Early Voting, the times of open polls.

Hustle texting platform for MTSU. Thanks to our partnership with CivicTN, the Proud Voter program has offered to purchase for our student team a Hustle platform so that our student voting leaders can text-communicate to MTSU students, since we know students respond to texts more than they do to emails. Texting will be to inform students of dates, deadlines, events, programs, links, information, and anything that will prepare them better to vote.

Constitution Day 2018 is coming up fast this fall. MTSU does a bang-up Constitution Day every year (<https://www.mtsu.edu/amerdem/const-day-archive.php>). We read the U.S. Constitution at every college across our campus. We will continue that again this year; it's an MTSU tradition. Personally interacting with the Constitution is a baseline form of citizen education in which we engage and advance for all our students.



RBG documentary film showing and panel discussion. Hosted by the College of Media and Entertainment in KUC Theater on Sept. 13 at 2:30 p.m., the RBG documentary discussion is a time to talk about the impact of the U.S. Senate race on the character and quality of the U.S. Supreme Court, and average Americans' voting role in shaping the composition of SCOTUS.

Get Out the Vote

Students Voting will be Most Energized by Other Voting Students. The MTSU Student Government Association, which will only next week be reconvening for the start of the academic year, will provide the leadership and energy for our campus' Get Out the Vote efforts. We will be pushing to get MTSU student voters to the polls from October 17 through November 6, 2018.

Early Voting in Tennessee. Begins Wed., Oct. 17 and runs through Thurs., Nov. 1.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 6.

Absentee ballots need to be applied for a.s.a.p. For students who want to vote at home by absentee ballot -- "by-mail ballot" -- applying for an absentee ballot for the Nov. 6 election has **already begun**. It's not too soon to email your local county election commission. Tennessee has 95 counties. You need to be in direct contact with your own specific election commission to request your by-mail ballot. Email your commission (<https://sos.tn.gov/products/elections/absentee-voting>) for your absentee ballot now. Do it asap, to make sure you indeed *can* vote by mail, while you still have time to adjust your registration if need be. We will communicate this messaging throughout the fall.

ADP, growing our base. This fall's incoming student leadership team is growing the American Democracy Project student group, to have the widest possible student activist cohort and a bigger student leadership team.

Energizing the **Political Science** students. Voting is about all our students and must engage students in every major, but the Poli Sci students are seeking to *carpe diem* and take a leadership role this fall. The students in the Political Science department are looking to further their political experience and involvement on campus, and this initiative gives them these opportunities. They want to step up and take on more responsibility with student voting this fall, to integrate ADP work more proactively with the outreach and objectives of the Political Science department.

CEEP Fellow, the Campus Election Engagement Program. Our CEEP Fellow is leading in all we do! Go team!

WAVE, Wake-up and Vote Early. MTSU has been involved with the WAVE, Wake-up and Vote Early, program since the 2012 election. Various groups on campus will be voting early, on the very first day of Early Voting, Wednesday, Oct. 17. Some classes will drive students to the polls during class time 10/17/18.

#VoteTogether party at the polls. On Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 6, our SGA and ADP plan to host an election party at Central High School, the nearest-to-our-campus county polling location. Central is right on East Main Street, a neighbor of our university, just a mile away, and just up the street. The permitting for the party is only now beginning. MTSU has applied for party funds from Civic Nation, through CivicTN's Proud Voter project. We intend to have food, music, games, community involvement, bringing everyone together, and a lot of fun!

Students' **Hustle** texts. We offer TurboVote to all our students, to sign up for election reminders, and ProudVoterTN is providing our student group a Hustle account to rally students, to allow them to text each other with reminders.

Snapchat and Instagram chatter. ProudVoterTN is also providing our student organizing group with funding to create a Snapchat filter for voting and Voting is a Good Look and for Instagram ads.

Election Day **Convenience Voting**, exclusive to Rutherford County. Located just outside of Nashville, with large international corporations nearby, the city in which our university is located is one of the top-ten fastest growing communities in the entire country (<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/cb17-81-population-estimates-subcounty.html>). Our expanding population has positioned our county to reimagine voting options. The Tennessee General Assembly passed a law in 2016 that has established for our county a special exception, a pilot project with a trial run, that went into effect in 2018. It permits any Rutherford County voter to vote in any Rutherford County polling location on Election Day, rather than having to go to their assigned precinct that day. The new procedure, called "convenience voting," pertains exclusively to Rutherford County. It has several impacts, but for MTSU students, its primary impact is that our students may vote at voting centers **closer to our campus** than ever before. (We do not have on-campus voting.) Our student voters will take advantage of this change on Election Day with hopefully increased voting.

Create buzz, create excitement, **all student led!** Our plans are to shake things up this fall, create excitement, create buzz, get students moved off their duffs and into action. It's ground up. Of the students, by the students, for the students.

Our Coalition

Support for Increased Student Voting Has Max Buy-In. The organizational and departmental team members from across campus who are engaged in advancing student engagement and student voter participation and increasing our students' understanding of and commitment to the personal, direct, shared responsibilities in the American democratic process represent all divisions, colleges, offices, and programs across campus:

SGA/Student Government Association
MTSU's CSIL/Center for Student Involvement and Leadership
American Democracy Project MTSU
Albert Gore Research Center
Center for Educational Media
MTSU Poll
Seigenthaler Chair of Excellence in First Amendment Studies
MTSU ITD/Information Technology Division
MTSU MAC/Marketing and Communications
MTSU University Honors College
MTSU College of Liberal Arts
MTSU Office of the University Provost
MTSU Board of Directors
The on-campus, hands-on team continually expands...

Our Leadership

Key Students, Faculty, and Staff. The movers and shakers who carry the greatest leadership responsibilities in implementing our action plan include the following:

Monica Haun, SGA, ADP President, Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) Fellow
Delanie MacDonald, SGA Vice President
Samantha Eisenberg, SGA Attorney General
Dr. Mark Byrnes, University Provost
Prof. Andrew Oppmann, Vice President for Marketing and Communications
Dr. Dan Kelley, Asst. Vice President for Student Affairs
Dr. Ken Blake, MTSU Poll
Prof. Deborah Fisher, Seigenthaler Chair
Dr. Lara Daniel, Jones College of Business, Co-chair of LWV
Dr. Louis Kyriakoudes, Director, Albert Gore Center
Dr. Laura Clark, Director, Center for Educational Media
Dr. Philip Phillips, Assoc. Dean, University Honors College
Ms. Susan Lyons, Coordinator, University Honors College
Dr. Mary Evins, American Democracy Project for Civic Learning
Ms. Sarah Williams, American Democracy Project for Civic Learning
The leadership team continually expands...

Our Community, Local, and Tennessee Partners

Civic Engagement Office, Office of the Tennessee Secretary of State
Rutherford County Election Commission
League of Women Voters of Murfreesboro/Rutherford County

American Association of University Women
CivicTN and Proud Voter
Tennessee Civic Engagement Task Force
Our community and civic partners continually expand...

Other Resources

Both the local Democratic and Republican parties contribute to our campus voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts at MTSU this fall. There are active College Democrats and College Republicans at MTSU, with their chapters fully registered with Student Affairs. They will provide space and access for their candidates to be on campus this fall. Our College Dems and College Repubs tend to work together, table together, and support each other. We trust that will continue to be their pattern this fall.

Ballot Access

Leave a Legacy: An Early Voting and Convenience Voting Location on Campus. MTSU is a university that does not have a polling place on campus, as many universities do. It's a need we have recognized and worked for consistently for over a decade. Although there is a long history we can share about the situation, we can say in short that getting an Early Voting and now a Convenience Voting location approved by our county election commission inside our Student Union is a clear, focused, articulated objective for our university. Many entities on campus and in the community are working proactively toward this goal. There is renewed energy now from new quarters.

MTSU does not aim for a precinct at this point. We have considered that route and know a precinct is much more difficult to accomplish. Now with Convenience Voting bill, a precinct is actually no longer necessary. Our immediate objective is getting the Rutherford County Election Commission to name MTSU a county-wide Early Voting and Convenience Voting/Election Day polling location.

Learning that the Illinois legislature has passed legislation requiring that all public universities to have polling places on every public campus has very much enlarged our vision. Pushing for comparable legislation by the Tennessee legislature is now an objective, which should be bipartisan, to positively impact not only our university but our sister campuses as well.

To institutionalize a polling place at MTSU is our strategic objective, a goal that continues to be elusive but toward which we again push.

Your Timeline

How often will your coalition meet?

Because we are registering students on campus every day up through the last registration day, and because our voter education and get-out-the-vote energy can't relax a bit until Nov. 7, the core ADP volunteers will meet weekly, as will the majority of our coalition. Some of us will meet daily. We will be emailing and texting each other nonstop.

What groundwork are you laying for future elections?

ADP has an energized membership that understands the importance of civic engagement. This fall's critical interim election is another step building us toward and getting us better ready for the presidential election in 2020. We will continue with our voter registration and voter education efforts

in the semesters that follow. The process of building engaged citizens on our campus does not stop after Nov. 6. This 2018 effort provides our students an intense experience in being more directly involved in our state's new voter registration processes, getting to know the candidates, and becoming more knowledgeable about the voting sites newly available to us than in any previous year. This year is just the newest iteration of creating a vibrant voting culture on campus. We are giving our student organizations fresh opportunities to sponsor their own voter registration days, hoping that not only their members but also their many friends and connections will get registered as well, get involved, get excited, and vote.

At what point in the next year will you evaluate the successes and challenges of your current plan once it is completed?

Spring semester 2019, before our SGA officers graduate, we hope to be receiving our 2018 NSLVE results from Tufts, as well as the results from 2018 Registration Enrollment Study, potentially even by March 2019. We will be interested to learn our outcome, to see where we stand vis-a-vis prior election engagement as captured by NSLVE. Our objective is to show measurable progress compared to our 2014 interim election data.

Point of Contact for Designation Process:

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MTSU 8/20/2018

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Students, College Administrators, Faculty, and Election Officials
Working Together to Overcome Barriers to Student Voting



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