

Civic & Voter Engagement Campus “Action Plan” Draft
University of Puget Sound | Dec. 2017
Compiled by Skylar Bihl, Asst. Dir. for Civic Engagement

Executive Summary

This document expands upon the included Fall 2018 Voter Engagement Strategic Plan written and developed by our Voter Engagement Specialist, Matthew Bell, in the Center for Intercultural and Civic Engagement. The attached plan is limited in its focus to the work of the Voter Engagement Specialist, because the institution is in the process of developing our new strategic plan. Due to this campus reality we have paused any further development of our voter engagement action plan as a separate committee. The Assistant Director for Civic Engagement is a member of the broader campus’ strategic plan sub-committee on community and civic engagement, which will impact the work and direction of the Civic & Voter Engagement Committee once the new campus strategic plan has been completed and approved by the cabinet and president. Thus, due to the broader campus planning realities, this document is being submitted to meet our obligations to the All In Campus Democracy Challenge and their support for this work on campuses across the nation, but serves only as a preliminary draft of the targeted work of our Voter Engagement Specialist for these pertinent campus-wide reasons.

Leadership

The leadership of this work is currently in flux as the campus strategic plan sub-committee on civic and community engagement is currently being assembled by the President’s Office. However, the Assistant Director for Civic Engagement who supervises the Voter Engagement Specialist has been invited to participate in the strategic planning sub-committee. We anticipate that both a broad understanding of the campus direction for civic engagement work will be a central outcome of this work, as well as a coordinated campus approach to voter engagement. These newly articulated directions will allow a concrete voter engagement action plan to be developed and will likely also serve to help build a strong coalition and leadership committee for this on-going work, once the strategic plan is completed.

This past semester the work has primarily been led by the Voter Engagement Specialist. This work is outlined in more detail in his own report (included below), but a portion of that was to work to recruit members and convene a committee focused on voter engagement on campus. This was a struggle on an already overcommitted campus, but he was successful in recruiting a faculty member from the Politics and Government Department. Members from the Center for Intercultural and Civic Engagement, specifically the Voter Engagement Specialist and the Assistant Director for Civic Engagement, will also be on the committee. We hope to recruit a few additional key players when the strategic plan sub-committee concludes its work and anticipate that the structure and leadership of the committee will be determined in the strategic planning process.

Commitment and Landscape

The creation of the civic and community engagement sub-committee for the overall campus strategic plan demonstrates the level of commitment to this work from the highest levels of leadership on campus. Our current university mission statement includes affirming our role in “preparing the university’s graduates to meet the highest tests of democratic citizenship.” In

academic affairs, one of the educational goals is that through engagement with the undergraduate curriculum, students will develop an “informed appreciation of self and others as part of a broader humanity in the world environment.” Beyond this educational goal, all students must satisfy the KNOW requirement as an overlay for their individual course plans. The KNOW (Knowledge, Identity, and Power) requirement was implemented by the faculty to “provide a distinct site for students to develop their understanding of the dynamics and consequences of power differentials, inequalities and divisions among social groups, and the relationship of these issues to the representation and production of knowledge...and consider linkages between their social positions and course themes relate to these issues.” These courses are designed to “promote critical engagement with the cause, nature, and consequences of individual, institutional, cultural, and/or structural dynamics of disparity, power, and privilege” which are foundations for civic learning and democratic engagement. There are 36 courses that meet this course overlay requirement spanning 20 departments. Assessment of the educational goals takes place on a departmental level annually.

In the Division of Student Affairs, one of the learning goals is active community engagement (this was recently edited from older language that explicitly named ‘active citizenship’ so as to better include international students). The Division of Student Affairs assesses each of its learning goals on a four-year cycle. This current academic year happens to be the year we are assessing Active Community Engagement in the Division, so we will have more information about what our assessment data shows for this learning goal next academic year. This learning goal is considered important for each department in the division and assessment is conducted on this learning goal in each department with the support of our Divisional Assessment Working Group. Additionally, the existence of a student staff position dedicated to voter engagement demonstrates the strong commitment to engaging students as voters in the political process, expanding and targeting this component of civic engagement among our students on the co-curricular side. For a more detailed report on the work out of the Center for Intercultural and Civic Engagement directly related to voter and civic engagement, please see the document by Mr. Bell which follows at the end of this report.

One of the biggest challenges for us related to voter engagement and specifically voter registration is that 79% of our students come from out of state. As you may read in the attached document, we are working on pop-up voter registration stations where Mr. Bell will be able to provide 1-1 time to help students navigate registering either here in Washington state or in their home state and learn how to request and vote via an absentee ballot. We do not have a polling location here on campus, because Washington state votes exclusively by mail.

Goals

Goals (both long- and short-term) and action plans will be part of the strategic planning process and thus cannot be included at this time. That being said, the below document by Mr. Bell outlines his goals for the expansion of his work in the role of Voter Engagement Specialist. We will continue to move forward with his position and the work he is doing while the strategic planning sub-committee meets in the coming months and will revise and update both Mr. Bell’s goals and work as well as the campus’s based on the outcomes of the strategic planning process.

University of Puget Sound | Center for Intercultural and Civic Engagement
Voter Engagement Strategic Plan | Spring 2018
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Overview

This document will outline the desired direction in which I want to take the role Voter Engagement Specialist and further develop it within Center for Intercultural and Civic Engagement. I will discuss what my successes have been thus far, areas for growth, ideas on how to utilize the data provided by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), and how to best utilize the Campus Civic Engagement Committee. A central mission statement has not been included because I believe that process ought to be done with the coalition so that it can better encompass the mission of the entire team rather than one individual. It will be an ongoing process and not limited to one initial meeting. I recognize that there will be more work that will go into this process but acknowledge that this is only a starting draft.

Successes

The main success of the fall 2017 semester was the event with Washington Secretary of State, Kim Wyman. This event had moderate turnout and was a fantastic way to celebrate National Voter Registration Day. I was able to learn many things about event planning and the various steps that need to be taken into account. In preparation of Sec. Wyman's visit, I was in regular communication with her office, Skylar, room reserve, and the communications team to ensure that information was shared to the appropriate people in a timely manner. This process allowed me to better understand what it takes into planning a successful event with the focus on voter engagement. Granted, not all events will be on this scale but the ability to draft a comprehensive plan will continue to be useful going forward within this position. It will enable me to draft timelines, organize effective voter registration drives, and communicate in a timely manner with the appropriate people in order to set myself up for success. Many did not register to vote as this event—it is reasonable to assume that this is because the audience of interest are most likely registered already.

The night in which I got the largest amount of voter registration forms filled out was when I attended the floor meetings in the Register Residence Hall. I was invited to come by my RA from last year and talk to Register about voter registration and provide them with both WA and that national voter registration forms. It took less than 30 minutes to collect 14 voter registration forms. It was a fast, efficient, and effective way to not only give first-year students the opportunity to register to vote, but to connect with a representative from CICE.

I also serve at the Director of Publicity for the Resident Student Association (RSA). During one of our general council meetings, I took the time to register our members to vote. Considering this organization is filled primarily with first-year students, it was a great opportunity to reach out to those who are the least likely to be registered to vote. While I will not be in this position for the 2018-19 academic year, going to RSA and spending a couple of minutes in a meeting of theirs can become a continued practice. This will allow RSA members to get registered as well as give them information to share within their respective residential communities.

Finally, I keep voter registration forms in my backpack at all times and there were numerous

occasions where a friend, peer, member of Residence Life, etc. asked me how to register to vote. By keeping these forms on my person at all times, I am able to get people registered immediately when asked about it. Additionally, this ensures that the forms are turned in to the appropriate office in a timely manner as I collect and send in the completed forms. This does not yield high quantities of completed voter registration forms, but it is an easy way to continue to make voter registration more accessible to members of the campus community.

Areas for Growth

The amount of people I registered to vote in the fall 2017 semester was not as high as I originally hoped. Looking forward to spring and fall of 2018, I want to change that. With the midterm elections coming up in November, I believe that it will be crucial to make voter registration as accessible as it can be to the campus community. One thing I would particularly like to focus on is making sure that when voter registration drives are conducted, there are both the Washington state form and the national form. This will give students the opportunity to choose which community they would like to engage with when it comes time to vote. In order to increase the quantity of students registered I would like to do the following:

- Pop-up voter registration
- Voter registration drive at floor meetings
- Club outreach
- Get out the vote (GOTV)

Pop-Up Voter Registration

This idea is based off of Career and Employment Service's "Pop-Up Career Advising." Their pop-up model allows a CES representative to provide quick, accessible support to students at several locations throughout campus. I would like to establish a system similar to this. What this would look like is spending part of my weekly work hours outside of the Yellow House and setting up Pop-Up Voter Registration throughout campus. This will allow me to be available to provide individualized support to students who wish to register who aren't able to be in the SUB during normal CICE tabling hours. Furthermore, this will support students who don't wish to vote in Washington as I will be able to work directly with them to register within their home state. The main places I have in mind are Collins Memorial Library, Wyatt Atrium, Diversions Cafe, Oppenheimer Cafe, Student Diversity Center, and Harned Hall. Once approved, I will communicate with the appropriate people to get permission to table in these locations. This will be in addition to adding voter registration sheets into the Yellow House tabling box at the SUB.

Voter Registration Drives at Floor Meetings

As previously mentioned, going to the Register floor meeting was a great success and I believe it would be a great strategy going forward. This tactic will primarily target first-year students due to the fact that continuing student residential areas do not have nearly as many floor meetings. By launching a pilot program in spring 2018, a relationship with Residence Life will be created, allowing the program to hopefully continue on into fall 2018. This effort will require multiple volunteers in order to reach all of the six first-year residence halls. After careful organization and effective volunteer outreach, I believe that many first-year students will register to vote.

Club Outreach

Part of how I envision this role and how it fits into CICE is that it does not exclusively focus on voter registration. I would like to see this position branch out into areas that can help people better engage with their government beyond the ballot box. In order to accomplish this, I would like to create a non-partisan presentation on how to best contact elected officials with individual concerns. Once that is completed, I would like to reach out to campus clubs who may have an interest in this subject and offer to schedule a time in which I can attend one of their meetings and present this information. There are three primary goals in doing this: voter registration, increased civic engagement, and CICE visibility. Before the presentation, I could offer to register members to vote who have not already done so. By giving a presentation on how to best connect with governmental officials, this type of civic engagement becomes less intimidating and more accessible. And finally, it would allow me to represent CICE and give a brief introduction to all the other work that we do.

GOTV

During the timeframe in which voter registration is closed and the election is held, I would like to see a GOTV effort. This would consist of a social media campaign, club outreach, and event programming. As of now, this idea is not thoroughly thought out and will need further development. However, I deem that to be more appropriate to be done in fall 2018.

NSLVE Data

The NSLVE data will be a key tool going forward in the Campus Civic Engagement Committee. It will give members the opportunity to better understand the environment on campus with regard to voter registration and turnout. I would like to see the data broken down by area of study, if possible. I believe this would be beneficial because it would allow me to plan which buildings to do things such as pop-up voter registration.

Campus Civic Engagement Committee

Due to various scheduling conflicts, this committee has not yet started and will begin in the spring semester of 2018, pending direction from the campus strategic planning process.