



# **VOTER ENGAGEMENT**



**NASPA / ADP / TDC**  
**All In Campus Democracy Challenge**  
**2016-17**



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## I. Overview

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) is a four-year, Master's large public university established in 1960. With 25,000 plus students, 2 main campuses (one rural and one urban) and 3 satellite campuses, GVSU is an institution which holds civic learning and democratic engagement as core to our institutional mission and values. We recognize the central role of a public university in our democracy as a bastion for the free exchange of ideas, a place where students learn to think critically, are exposed to opposing viewpoints, and hone their skills of inquiry, dialogue and democratic engagement— all skills essential for the healthy functioning of a robust democracy.

Additionally, GVSU values liberal education and community and it is these values which are reflected in our institutional mission and strategic plan and which guide the work of the Community Service Learning Center (CSLC) and the university-wide Civic Engagement Collective (CEC). The CEC is a coalition of faculty, staff and students who integrate community engagement, civic learning and democratic engagement in to the curriculum and co-curriculum. In 2016, the CEC worked together with University Administration to encourage President Thomas Haas to commit as a signatory to the Campus Compact 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary President's Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education. A fundamental element our institution's commitment to civic engagement is the work of civic learning and democratic engagement, included but not limited to voter engagement.

The National Survey of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE), conducted by the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University in collaboration with the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), provides GVSU with important baseline data regarding voter engagement (see attached). According to the NSLVE, during the 2012 Presidential Election, GVSU had a total overall student voting rate of 44.1%, as compared to 49.2% at Master's Institutions and 48.9% at Public Master's Institutions.

<b>Overall Measures</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2014</b>
Registration Rate	64.4%	57.3%
Rate of Reg. Students that Voted	68.5%	25.5%
Overall Student Voting Rate	44.1%	14.6%

Further, as outlined below, the NSLVE data demonstrates that we have significant room for improvement in the area of voter engagement by age – with our younger students not voting at the same rates as their older counterparts.

Age Breakdown of students who voted	2012
18-21	36.9%
22-24	46.9%
25-29	52.3%
30-39	62.0%
40-49	77.1%
50+	82.7%

During the upcoming Fall 2016 election season, our efforts to create a campus-wide civic ethos will be enhanced by intentional cross-institutional partnerships and programming aimed at preparing our students to be informed, engaged and empathetic citizens who understand and exercise their civic rights and responsibilities. We aim to create a campus culture wherein students recognize the importance of civil discourse, the power of their own voices, the legacy of student leadership in social change and the importance of actively engaging in the public sphere. The All In Campus Democracy Challenge Plan will guide our efforts in the area of voter engagement at GVSU and will elevate this priority for our campus community and beyond to see.

During the upcoming Fall 2016 Presidential Election season and beyond, we at GVSU identify the following three goals for civic learning and democratic engagement:

1. Ensure that every GVSU student has the opportunity to register to vote, and to vote in an effort to increase overall voter participation from 44.1% to 70% or above.
2. Provide opportunities for education and dialogue around public issues for the campus community during the 2016 election season and beyond.
3. Build a coalition of partners from across campus to grow and sustain an ethos of civic learning and democratic engagement at GVSU.

## II. Coalition

A broad and representative coalition of faculty, staff, students and administrators has been assembled to prepare GVSU's campus for the upcoming election season and to support and advance the work of the GVSU Voter Friendly Campus plan. The work of this coalition falls in to several key areas, including:

1. Public space use policy
2. Campus expression policy
3. Communication
4. Education and awareness
5. Voter Engagement *(This proposal will outline our efforts specifically in this area. The additional areas are mentioned to provide context for our work in the area of Voter Engagement)\**

Representatives from the following units, departments and organizations are included in this coalition:

- Division of Equity and Inclusion
- Division of Student Affairs, Dean of Students
- Legal Counsel
- Office of Student Life, Community Service Learning Center, Event Services
- Grand Valley Police Department
- Student Senate
- 5 Social Justice Centers (Women's Center, Office of Multicultural Affairs, LGBT Center, Kauffman Interfaith Center, Disability Resources Center)
- Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies
  - Civil Discourse Initiative
  - Liberal Studies Department
  - Area Studies
- College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
  - Political Science Department
- Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies
- Student Organizations include:
  - GVSU NAACP
  - Advocates for Immigration Reform
  - Laker Familia
  - Asian Student Union

### III. Description of our work

In the area of Voter Engagement, we have organized our work around four major “buckets”: Voter Registration, Voter Education, Ballot Access and Voter Turnout. A highly visible “GVSU Votes!” button will be located on the GVSU homepage throughout the fall which will direct traffic to the Community Service Learning Center website Voter Engagement page. There, students and other campus partners will find access to on-campus voter registration dates and drive sponsorship opportunities, nonpartisan voter guides, voter education opportunities, polling locations and transportation on Election Day. Please see a full description of the work in each “bucket” below. Attached is a specific list of dates and locations for voter engagement and education programming.

#### Voter Registration:

- Partnership with Ottawa County Clerk to register students on multiple dates prior throughout fall
- Michigan Department of State Mobile Unit on campus for National Voter Registration Day (9/27/16)
- Student Senate led Rock the Vote! Concert with on-site voter registration (9/30/16)
- Student Organization sponsored voter registration drives



*Michigan Department of State Mobile Unit at GVSU*



*GVSU President Thomas Haas, promoting voter registration efforts*

### **Voter Education:**

- CSLC “Voter Engagement” web page with regular, updated voter engagement resources:  
[www.gvsu.edu/service/voter-engagement](http://www.gvsu.edu/service/voter-engagement)
  - Student Civic Assembly (SCA) Week (9/26-9/30/16). This week of programming is intended to encourage student civic learning and democratic engagement through:
    1. Empowering GVSU students to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and students on GVSU’s campus
    2. Learning and practicing skills for civil discourse around difficult public issues
    3. Collaboratively organizing themselves around public issues of mutual concern
- \*See attached promotional material and overview of SCA Week events.



- Debate watch parties and discussion for each Presidential Debate with trained student facilitators
- Hauenstein Center Common Ground Initiative: Constitution Day
- Brooks College Civil Discourse Symposium
- Monthly Issues Forums and Democratic Dialogues partnership with the Meijer Honors College
  - October 13 – Climate Change & Sustainability
  - November 10 – Hunger & Homelessness
  - February 9 – Higher Education Funding
  - March 16 – Food Justice
  - April 13 – Gentrification

### **Ballot Access and Voter Turnout (GOTV):**

- GVSU is working with local county officials to secure a polling place on campus in order to ensure ease of access for student, faculty and staff voters registered in Ottawa County.
- Student Senate and the CSLC are coordinating transportation to polls in Ottawa and Kent County.
- GVSU partners are working on providing amnesty for students who need to leave campus to vote. Currently, the Dean of Students is working with the Provost, Faculty and Student Senate to propose this initiative which would improve the ability for students to get to the polls and vote.
- Student organizations, in collaboration with the CSLC, are collaborating with local nonprofit and community organizations (Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, GR Urban League, LINC) to support Get Out the Vote efforts in marginalized communities in Grand Rapids.

**iv. Timeline** *(Please see attached “Voter Engagement Timeline: Fall 2016”.)*

**v. Success**

At GVSU, we will determine the success of our efforts based on two primary data sources: program evaluations for voter education programs, along with NSLVE data, once available. We aim to increase our “Overall Voter Rate”, according to the NSLVE from 44.1% during the 2012 Presidential Election cycle to above that of the national average of our peer institutions, which in 2012 was 48.9%. We would like to highly exceed that percentage and we aim to increase our “Overall Voter Rate” to 70% or above in 2016.

**Grand Valley State University  
All In Campus Democracy Challenge Plan - 2016**

**Submitted by:**

**Melissa Baker-Boosamra, MPA  
Associate Director of Student Life for Civic Engagement and Assessment  
[bakerbme@gvsu.edu](mailto:bakerbme@gvsu.edu)**