

2016

Voter Engagement Action Plan



7/12/2016

Introduction

James Madison University is a public, comprehensive university with approximately 19,000 undergraduates. We are named in honor of James Madison, the father of the U.S. Constitution and fourth President. Inspired by his political legacy, our institutional mission states: “We are a community committed to preparing educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives.” In 2014, our Board of Visitors adopted a bold new strategic plan that calls us to become the national model of the engaged university--engaged with ideas and the world. Engagement for us has three aspects: engaged learning, community engagement and civic engagement. While overlap between and among the three areas is expected and encouraged, we recognize that each requires its own specific learning outcomes. At JMU, civic engagement refers to the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed for effective participation in a representative democracy, and voter registration and education are essential components for student success.

What We Know about JMU Students' Civic Engagement

JMU is a nationally recognized leader in the assessment and measurement of student learning. We employ a combination of external and internal (home-grown) instruments, and combine direct and indirect measures. By this means, we have gathered a great deal of information about our students' civic agency. These are some of the studies that undergird our recent work:

NSLVE (National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement)

JMU is one of roughly 800 institutions participating in this project, which is housed at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, Tufts University. Since NSLVE's launch in 2013, JMU has received two reports showing our students' voting rates for the 2012 and 2014 elections. We will receive a third report with data from the 2016 election. These reports will help us track voting behavior as one important indicator of civic engagement. For example, in 2012, our overall voting rate was 47%. In 2014, that figure dropped to 9% during the midyear election cycle, but we can expect the 2016 rate to go back up, possibly even surpassing the 2012 rate. The reports also break down the data by

race/ethnicity, gender, and choice of major. Additionally, the report compares JMU's rates to similar Carnegie classified institutions. In 2012, our rate of 47% was roughly equivalent to that of our peer institutions, however, our 9% rate in 2014 fell far below similar campuses' rates.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

In 2014, JMU opted to add the Topical Module on Civic Engagement that asks students to assess their conflict resolution skills and examines how often students have engaged with local or campus and state/national/global issues. The module was developed in partnership with AACSB and piloted that year by 22 institutions, so it provides us with baseline data. There were 14 Likert response items and one open-ended response item. Although our students (divided into freshmen and seniors) scored about the same as their peers on the other campuses, they show room for improvement. For example, a high number of both freshmen and seniors reported that they "sometimes" or "often" discussed state, national, or global issues with others, yet the majority said they "never" or "sometimes" worked to raise awareness or address those issues. Helping students translate interest into action thus seems an important project for the future.

American Experience (AMEX) Assessment Instrument

The American Experience area of Cluster Four: Social and Cultural Processes is a signature part of the General Education program and reflects JMU's long-standing commitment to prepare undergraduates for citizenship. The area came about after the Virginia House passed a joint resolution in 1997 directing the boards of visitors of the sixteen public colleges and universities to review their general education programs to implement a US History requirement. JMU's Board supported this idea and the Provost established a task force to consider the "American History issue" (as it was called). Today, students may choose among three unique 4-credit courses, either HIST225: US History, POSC225: US Government, or JUST225: Justice Studies. According to recent data shared with JMU by ACTA, JMU is one of only three Virginia campuses that still require undergraduates to take a course focused on America's democratic heritage.

The outcomes for this requirement state that “students . . . will be able to identify, conceptualize and evaluate:

- Social and political processes and structures using quantitative and qualitative data
- Key primary sources relating to American history, political institutions and society
- The nature and development of the intellectual concepts that structure American political activity
- The history and operation of American democratic institutions
- The history and development of American society and culture
- The history and development of American involvement in world affairs.”

The AMEX instrument that measures students’ ability to meet these outcomes has 40 items and is delivered during Orientation (Freshman pre-test) and again on Assessment day (sophomore post-test), when we cancel classes and thousands of students participate in assessment. Although mean scores fluctuate somewhat each year, assessment reports consistently show that students who took a JMU course consistently scored HIGHER than students who had not taken any JMU course. Further, the reports show that students who bring in transfer credit for the area requirement score LOWER than students who take a JMU course. By contrast, students with dual enrollment credit score no better than students who did not take a class at all. The assessment thus shows the value-added by a JMU course to our students’ acquisition of essential civic knowledge.

Leadership of Civic Engagement at JMU

There are two groups charged with promoting non-partisan civic engagement at JMU. The first is a steering committee composed of faculty, staff, and administrators, each of whom represents an office or program closely affiliated with civic engagement. It is co-chaired by an Associate Vice Provost and an Associate Dean, and it meets monthly. The committee also includes the

Legislative Action Committee Chair of the Student Government Association. The second group is called DukesVote. This is a unique student-led body comprised of the presidents of prominent student political organizations (e.g. College Democrats, College Republicans, Madison Liberty, VA21). It is convened by the Legislative Action Committee Chair of the Student Government Association (SGA) and meets bimonthly. The Associate Vice Provost and faculty members from the Civic Engagement Steering also sit on DukesVote to provide overlap and continuity since student representative change annually. Both groups were formed in 2014-15 and together have made great strides.

Key Voter Engagement Accomplishments for AY2014-15

- Established an official university DukesVote website (www.jmu.edu/vote)
- Defined the structure and function of DukesVote team leaders
- Sent blast emails from the President’s Office and SGA encouraging all students to register (timed with Constitution Day & National Voter Registration Day)
 - Included link to JMU’s TurboVote portal
 - Tabling for voter registration at JMU Commons
- Successful student-led effort to obtain **on-campus voting precinct!**



Key Voter Engagement Accomplishments for AY2015-16

- Revised and expanded DukesVote website
 - Updated deadlines and procedures for voter registration in Virginia
 - Added links to icitizen, TurboVote, and BallotReady
 - Added link to Virginia Citizens' Portal for in-state, online registration
 - Expanded information about absentee registration and balloting for non—Virginia residents
- Coordinated outreach to icitizen and TurboVote
 - Discussed joint projects with staff at icitizen
 - Participated in icitizen and AASCU/ADP sponsored virtual watch party for Obama's State of the Union Address, January 2016
 - Partnered with TurboVote to get revisions to JMU/VA TurboVote web portal
 - Monitored TurboVote analytics on JMU student voter registration
 - JMU ranked 18th on TurboVote leaderboard with 455 users by November 2015
 - Added 200+ more users in January 2016
 - Participated in icitizen/ADP-hosted webinar on election 2016, April 2016
- Established open line of communication with local Registrar and Electoral Board
- Clarified new voter photo identification laws for students (use of JMU ids)
- Campus-wide voter registration drive in Jan-Feb, 2016 that resulted in **2000+ new voters on campus, plus hundreds more off campus**
 - Bimonthly DukesVote meetings to align registration efforts of multiple student-led political organizations
 - Sent bulk emails from President's office and SGA urging registration & linking to TurboVote website, Sept 2016 (timed with Constitution Day & National Voter Registration Day)
 - Attended Electoral Board meetings to support JMU campus precinct
 - Purchase of voting machines
 - Provided access to JMU Convocation Center (precinct site)

- Reserved parking for community members and poll workers
- Organized voter registration tables at multiple locations on campus
- Scheduled visits to classes by trained student volunteers to distribute and collect paper voter registration forms
- Coordinated fact-checking of forms and delivery to Election Board
- Multimodal communications campaign: social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), bulk emails, postcards in campus mailboxes
- **JMU Precinct opened March 1, 2016**, for Virginia Presidential Primary
 - SGA hosted welcome tent with refreshments
 - Facilities Management coordinated with Electoral Board (reserved parking, voting machine set up, signage etc)
 - Signs noting precinct locations at off-campus apartment complexes
 - Provided JMU driver and van to shuttle students to other precincts
 - DukesVote volunteers answered questions, directed foot traffic
 - **1,076 voters turned out**, the third highest in Harrisonburg city



Members of Election Board at the JMU precinct with JMU alum Joshua Humphries, who conceived and led the precinct project, and Dr. Rob Alexander, faculty member and poll volunteer.



Poll workers and students inside the JMU precinct, March 1, 2016.

"I love how I was able to be a part of the election process. Being able to go to a polling precinct and go through the whole process was fun and exhilarating because my vote counted." Gabrielle Rios, junior and first-time voter

Voter Engagement Action Plan for AY2016-17

- **September launch of inaugural voter registration program in the residence halls.**

The Office of Residence Life has agreed to partner with the Civic Engagement Committee and DukesVote to design and implement an innovative new prerequisite program that targets our 4,500 resident freshmen. The educational program will include several components:

- Orientation Onebook included a notice about civic engagement and the DukesVote weblink
 - Important dates and deadlines embedded in the ORL Guidebook (a wall calendar given to each residential student)
 - DukesVote “bulletin board in a bag” (identical materials posted in all 28 residence halls during the month of September: URLs, sample forms)
 - Face to face registration program during the week of Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day (third week of September)
 - Informational session at the Community Activities Board leadership workshop on the evening of Sunday, September 25th
 - Non-partisan resources and tools (e.g. igitizen) related to candidates, issues, absentee balloting, and change of address procedures
- Set up secure voter registration “command center” where trained volunteers coordinate fact-checking, store forms, deliver to Election Board
 - September (Constitution Day/National Voter Registration Day) email from the President’s Office and SGA encouraging all students to register or change their address if needed and directing them to the DukesVote website for online registration options (TurboVote and Virginia Citizens Portal).
 - Coordinated tabling for voter registration at locations around campus
 - **October Get Out the Vote campaign**
 - Targeted email/social media messaging concerning balloting procedures in Virginia and how to locate off-campus voting precincts
 - Re-post SGA’s “10 Reasons For JMU Dukes to Vote” video
 - Voter awareness white papers posted on DukesVote website (local, state, federal elections)
 - VP and Presidential debate forums and watch parties
 - Host Harrisonburg City Council candidates’ forum
 - Other activities by student political organizations
 - **November 8, Election Day**
 - JMU Precinct open 7am-7pm
 - DukesVote volunteers to help with questions, foot traffic, lines

- SGA tent to welcome voters
- Signs with precinct locations at apartment complexes
- Provide shuttles from campus to nearby precincts
- DukesVote 2016 buttons/t-shirts for first 100 voters
- Campus watch party at Festival Conference Center, 8pm-12am
 - With partners icitizen and AASCU/ADP, based on State of the Union event hosted at Southern Illinois University
 - Live streaming of election results, live polling via icitizen, social media
 - AASCU member campuses participate via Twitter etc.
 - Festive activities for student-participants
 - JMU faculty experts/icitizen-AASCU speakers

Activities beyond Voter Registration, AY2016-17 (Selected)

- **Host a series of year-long civic engagement forums.**

The Civic Engagement committee will partner with the JMU library system to host JMuse Café. This popular program offers an informal and lively café experience for students, faculty, staff and the Harrisonburg Community to explore together topics of public interest. Programs begin with a light buffet, then speakers provide expert-disciplinary perspectives on a topic or problem, followed by small group and large group conversations. The Civic Engagement Committee's proposed events will explore what civic engagement does and can look like in various arenas of public life. Each Café will include members of the committee, JMU faculty experts, and at least one community member with expertise. Topics include:

- Civic Engagement and The Media (early October) to leverage media coverage of the presidential election
- Civic Engagement and The Performing Arts (December)
- Civic Engagement and Business (February)
- Civic Engagement and the Sciences (April)

- **Madison Vision Speaker Series** <http://www.jmu.edu/president/mvs/>

This annual lecture series honors James Madison's conviction that cultivating an informed and educated citizenry is essential to the health of our republican

democracy. The series brings scholars, thinkers and leaders of all kinds to campus for lively explorations of issues facing our society.

- John Bridgeland, CEO Civic Enterprises, Constitution Day 2016
- Other speakers TBA

- **Events for faculty and students that explore our new *I am Madison's Legacy* framework for civic learning.**

Created in partnership with colleagues at Montpelier, the framework is a set of six affirmative statements (each with its own set of learning outcomes) that identifies the contemporary civic qualities we associate with the political legacy of our institutional eponym, James Madison:

I learn from and with others.

I foster collaboration.

I embrace complexity.

I value pragmatism.

I advance the public good.

I lead.

Activities include:

- A new website about the historic James Madison with relevant resources (short essays, a bibliography, links to Montpelier and the Madison Papers, etc)
- Course redesign workshops for faculty
- A student video competition to raise awareness of the legacy framework
- 225th anniversary of the Bill of Rights event, December 2016
- Speakers and forums during our annual Madison Week (coincides with March 16 birthday)

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