

APSU Civic Action Plan for 2020-2021

Executive Summary

Cultivating informed and engaged citizens is the role of any university, and at Austin Peay State University (APSU) we are committed to developing a culture of civic learning and democratic engagement on campus so our students will have the skills and tools to be effective citizens off campus. The diversity of students, faculty, and staff at APSU provide an environment ready to organize and innovate. While multiple actors across campus have been active in voter registration and other civic activities, the campus has lacked an organized central group to facilitate collaborative efforts across the campus in order to be more effective. As APSU has not previously produced a civic action plan, this plan is focused heavily on the developing the foundation from which future efforts will be built upon. We have to start somewhere, and the time is now. This plan will begin implementation immediately for the 2020-2021 academic year.

For the coming academic year, the main goals of this plan are to build and put into place a group to facilitate and coordinate civic engagement activities on campus among faculty, staff, student organizations, departments, centers, and any other entities interested in being involved. Efforts need to focus on the main issues of voter registration, voter information, and voter turnout efforts in the short-term. This year, APSU has joined the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) in order to get campus wide voter registration and participation data, as we do not have current data otherwise. This makes 2020 a base-level year for measurement. Efforts will begin this fall to promote voter registration and voter turnout efforts across campus, but with limited time and the coronavirus pandemic, most efforts will be through digital/virtual communications.

Beyond the immediate focus for the upcoming election, organization will be the major effort for APSU this year. The group will actively recruit new members to add to the leadership team, while identifying key actors across campus and students to assist in efforts. The leadership team will work with APSU's President and Provost to develop a webpage for the university that will serve as an information clearinghouse on civic activities and opportunities. We will work on branding and communication through social media at all levels – from the official university accounts to individual accounts that can message and push specific hashtags (#GovsVote) and information. Together we can institutionalize a culture of engagement and leadership on campus.

Beyond campus, this team will work with outside organizations, like the All-In Democracy Challenge, the Tennessee Campus Democracy Network, the National Conference on Citizenship, and others to connect with other Tennessee universities already engaged in similar efforts. Making APSU part of these existing networks will help to bridge efforts across the state and connect our students with those anywhere in Tennessee. Partnerships such as these will foster collaborative projects and efforts to innovate and enhance the work being done, providing students, faculty, and staff meaningful relationships with counterparts across the state. Beyond

these networks, it will be important this year to establish working partnerships with community and civic groups in Clarksville, Montgomery County, and neighboring counties. Community groups, such as Clarksville Summit, are already working on civic engagement projects and seeking to connect with students and faculty on campus. Our community-based relationships can continue to integrate APSU into the Clarksville community to help address efforts surrounding racial and social justice issues, affordable housing and community growth, education, and other issues of interest to our community. Connecting to local government and community organizations will help expose students to meaningful activism happening at home.

Due to the changed campus landscape brought on by the challenges faced from coronavirus, the first major effort of this plan will be to build a leadership team capable of establishing the needed and necessary short- and long-term goals for our campus community.

Leadership

Dr. Kevin Baron – Assistant Professor, Political Science and Public Management
Dr. Carol Clark - Assistant Vice President for Community and Government Relations
Dr. Matthew Kenney – Professor, Political Science and Public Management
APSU Chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha – Political Science Honors Society
Tennessee Campus Democracy Network
All-In Campus Democracy Challenge
National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Recruitment is beginning in earnest as folks return to campus for fall

Commitment

Our campus mission statement is clear in our goals when it says, “Austin Peay State University is a comprehensive university committed to raising the educational attainment of the citizenry, developing programs and services that address regional needs, and providing collaborative opportunities that connect university expertise with private and public resources. Collectively, these endeavors contribute significantly to the intellectual, economic, social, physical, and cultural development of the region. APSU prepares students to be engaged and productive citizens, while recognizing that society and the marketplace require global awareness and continuous learning.”

APSU’s commitment to prepare students to be informed, engaged, and active citizens provides the institutional recognition and foundation that we can build upon. Our plan is to develop partnerships and opportunities across the campus and in our communities that will give students meaningful experiences, teaching them the skills and tools of effective citizenship and how to make positive change in their world.

Landscape

Currently, we only have basic demographic data for APSU. We enrolled this past spring in the NSLVE program, so we will be provided with their data going forward.

- Basis demographic data can be found for faculty here:
https://www.apsu.edu/dsir/data/webfaculty_data_book.pdf
- Basic student demographic data can be found here
https://www.apsu.edu/dsir/data/enrollment_profile_trends.pdf

Our student population is diverse, not just based on race or ethnicity. APSU has a lot of non-traditional students and military affiliated students, which does include veterans.

Goals

For this plan, our goals are more short-term focused, but by doing so, we will be able to develop more long-term plans and create a sustainable environment in order to achieve them. Right now, we need to build the infrastructure at APSU to understand and support any goals and plans developed on campus.

- Short-Term Goals
 - Recruit members for the leadership team that will work on further developing and leading the implementation of plans across campus and in the community.
 - Identify and begin working with individuals and organizations on campus that can provide assistance and resources to achieve goals and plans. These would be strategic partners that will have input in working with the leadership team.
 - Work with APSU administration to provide a resource page on the APSU website for students with information on voter registration and voting rights – election dates, early voting, etc., along with information on involvement opportunities both on campus and off. This will help to institutionalize the ethos of civic engagement and providing a branding opportunity.
 - Work with APSU administration on integrating voting efforts and other opportunities onto the university's social media and traditional media platforms. Included would be getting information out to students through direct emails and in providing information at various locations across campus.
 - Work with students and faculty immediately to register students to vote for November's election, including providing them with information about absentee and early voting periods.
 - Identify community partners and begin working with them
- Long-Term Goals
 - Create a leadership team that will be sustainable and able to develop achievable goals for institutionalizing a culture of civic engagement and participatory democracy on campus.
 - Develop a diverse and multicultural community on campus that empower students to find, and help them raise, their voice – to understand that they do matter, and they can make a difference.
 - Develop curriculum that can be integrated into the classroom or outside that gives students experiential learning opportunities.

- Develop ongoing opportunities for off-campus experiences, like internship-type programs that will provide students the ability to gain experience and develop skills in the real world.

Reporting and Evaluation

The role of the leadership team will be the share information with all stakeholders on and off campus. That includes not just plans and goals as laid out in this document, but in the development of new programs, opportunities, events, curriculum development, etc. With all members and strategic partners.

When it comes to evaluation, it will be the responsibility of the leadership team to develop evaluative models in order to determine the effectiveness of our efforts. When it comes to voter registration and turnout efforts, once we get the first-year data from NSLVE it will be easier to measure efforts in those areas. When it comes to other programs, events, or opportunities, measurements of evaluation will have to be done by those leading the efforts as well as seeking input and feedback from students and other stakeholders involved.

Strategy

At this time, we are limited in all areas of people, money, and time. The complications from the coronavirus and limited opportunities on campus for activities makes development more difficult. However, as we begin to expand the leadership team and create relationships with more strategic partners on and off campus, the amount of resources available will begin to grow. It is difficult to determine where we are in this moment, until the leadership team can meet and take an inventory of where we stand currently.