

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

All In Democracy Challenge Action Plan 2019-2020



Office of Community Engagement with We the People Campus Committee

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

ALL IN DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE

ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is ALL IN to encourage, develop, support and educate about civic engagement and participation in the democratic process. This document summarizes the activities happening throughout the campus during this election season.

“CSUN is committed to our nation’s democratic ideals and is proud to receive this national recognition of our efforts to encourage student voter registration and voting. We want our students and graduates to be civic-minded participants of our democracy, and voting is truly the cornerstone of our political system. Our faculty, staff, administrators, and students worked together to energize and increase student voter engagement, which is critically important as we look to the global challenges facing us now and in the next generation.” – CSUN President Dianne Harrison

CSUN’S WE THE PEOPLE CAMPUS TEAM

- *Julia Heinen, Interim Director of Community Engagement & Faculty, Dept. of Music*
- *Deborah Cours, Assistant Vice President of Undergraduate Academic Programs*
- *Patrick Bailey, Executive Director, CSUN Associated Students*
- *Vicki Allen, Assistant Director, Matador Involvement Center*
- *Mary-Pat Stein, President, CSUN Faculty*
- *Diana Vincente, President, Associated Students*
- *Leslie Aguirre, Chair of Community and Government Relations, Associated Students*
- *Rafael De La Rosa, Assistant Director of Government and Community Relations, University Advancement*
- *Claire Davis, Co-Interim Administrator in Charge & Director of Student Housing*
- *Marcos Pineda, Activities Coordinator, Fraternity and Sorority Life at Matador Involvement Center*
- *Natale Zappia, Director, Institute of Sustainability & Faculty, Dept. of History*
- *John Kephart, Faculty, Department of Communication Studies*
- *Boris Rickes, Faculty, Department of Political Science*
- *Jessica Baty, Faculty, Department of Communication Studies*
- *Shelly Thompson, Director, Undergraduate Studies*
- *Olivia Lara Herstein, Editor, University Communications*
- *Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, Faculty, Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling*
- *Tovah Sands, Faculty, Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling*

CAMPUS TEAM MISSION

Together, we have coordinated and compiled a summary of many of the events and activities for the CSUN campus community during this election cycle. In addition to a significant campaign for voter registration and voting participation, our events and activities focus on educating and encouraging students (and others) to participate in the democratic process by analyzing the electoral issues, participating in civil discourse and debate, and a respect for different perspectives. Because of the significant number of international and “Dream” students, who are not eligible to vote we encourage ways of participating that build self-efficacy and encourage lifelong civic engagement.

ACTIVITIES

VOTER REGISTRATION: Ongoing

We are working with Academic Affairs, Associated Students, Student Affairs, and Advancement to have a multifaceted approach to encouraging voter registration.

In Academic Affairs, the Office of Community Engagement has reached out to all faculty with voter registration information both online and paper registration forms to encourage voter registration in courses during class but also in the Online Course Management System, Canvas. In addition, we have voter registration tabling events at all campus events.

Oviatt Library will participate in National Voter Registration Day on September 22, 2020 and hosting a voter registration table in their lobby.

Associated Students is bringing awareness to the upcoming elections by holding voter registration tabling events at several gathering places and events on campus. Their Lobby Corps teams will frequently table at our Farmer’s Market.

Student Affairs is doing a voter registration event at all new student orientations for first-time freshman and first-time transfer students. They

talk about civic engagement and the importance of participating in the democratic process as a citizen of the United States. They assist with students registering to vote online or by paper registration forms.

Advancement PUT INFORMATION HERE

VOTER INFORMATION: Ongoing

Through recommended sites including Skimm, Rock the Vote, and iCitizen, students are encouraged to follow political issues and be informed about the local, state and national issues.

Many faculty are including activities and assignments in their classes that encourage voter registration and participation. These vary widely to including assigning students opposing sides of a proposition issue to debate in class, to giving class time to students to register to vote online. The students who are ineligible to vote are given alternate assignments which engage them in the discussion of our democratic processes.

Associated Students have created email reminders, notices in our Learning Management System (Canvas), and flyers on how to register to vote.

FACULTY AND STAFF EVENTS AND RESOURCES

CALIFORNIA VOTER FORUM

This voter literacy initiative first ran during mid-term elections in 2018, funded with an interdisciplinary grant, for Communication Studies and Journalism, from Community Engagement. For 2020, this will be an inter-department initiative within Communication Studies, with multiple instructors and programs involved including the Debate Team and the Performance Ensemble. Journalism will be simultaneously involved in Media Literacy Week.

The purpose of the Forum is:

- 1) *to help students critically think about the candidates and issues on the California ballot and corresponding campaign coverage in political ads, news reports, op-eds, and social media; and*
- 2) *to inspire more civic engagement in the election process.*

The 2018 CA Voter Forum had over 500 student participants over the course of the 2-day event in the Oviatt Library's Ferman Presentation Room. For 2020, we hope to partner with League of Women Voters again, to begin early voter registration around campus, and distribute non-partisan voter and ballot information. The week prior to election day students will lead and facilitate a 4-day event in the Student Union focused on Literacy in order to educate and empower their peers to use critical thinking in the upcoming election.

Over the course of 4 days, students will design, facilitate and present on ballot measures, local and national candidates. The goal will not be to sway voters in a direction, but give as much information as possible to help voters make up their own minds. Students will create teams that focus on one issue. For example, Advanced Public Speaking students will study a designated state proposition and present both sides/perspectives. The Debate Team will study the news coverage across media platforms and present strategies for finding valid and invalid arguments.

For marketing, we will use previous branding/imagery designed by the CSUN Impact Design Hub and work with them again to create new posters on the propositions. We will seek catering bids for refreshments, and collaborate with Community Engagement, Associated Students and various student clubs.

CAMPUS KICK OFF EVENT

Our campus committee is discussing the possibility of a "kick-off" event to bring campus-wide awareness to the work our committee is doing. The hopes for this event is that it will bring awareness to the upcoming

election cycle, inspire the need to get involved, and increase campus and community involvement in our democratic rights and responsibilities.

FACULTY WORKSHOPS TO INCREASE STUDENT INFORMATION EFFICACY

One challenge that we constantly face in trying to get students motivated, interested, and engaged in voting or other forms of civic participation is their belief that they don't know enough about politics to participate. Students feel as though politics is boring, not relevant to their daily lives, or is too overwhelming for them to become informed enough to participate with confidence. Politicians and the decisions they may feel distant and outside their control. This, despite the fact that there are a number of local and immediate places for civic engagement that have a central impact on their communities (local elections like a city council or school board, volunteering, or direct ballot initiatives at the city, county, and state-level).

This difficulty is compounded by the fact that there is often not a centralized place for them to learn and develop these skills. Critical thinking requirements at the lower division level help meet this challenge, as does coursework in some departments. But, as a broad strategy of civic engagement, such instruction is sporadic and spread across the campus. Instructors often feel unequipped to help resolve this issue, either because they don't see their classes as being about politics (in the sense of political science or elections), or don't feel equipped to teach students how to find, evaluate, and use the information on topics of relevance to their lives

As part of the All In Campus Challenge, we plan to create a short video segment and follow up workshop for faculty who are interested in integrating information seeking and evaluating skills in their curricula. This is not designed to have conversations about politics in classes. Rather, the point is to give students a way to see how the subject matter

they are dealing with in their various classes have not only real-world applications, but influence and are influenced by broader civic conversations. The video and workshop would help faculty design assignments, class discussion, and/or lecture units around helping students develop the skills to see how policies, rules, regulations, or other public actions are taken on topics of concern to them, and how to evaluate information on those topics to form their own informed opinion. The workshops would help faculty who were interested in integrating such connections into their classrooms while still being able to teach the content they need to meet their broader learning outcomes. Such a program can help expand the notion of democratic participation beyond merely voting, and to inculcate active civic engagement through making it less distant, less intimidating, and more meaningful to our students.

SKILLS FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION – CHILDREN’S ROLE

The Elementary Education Faculty and their students in teacher education in the Michael D. Eisner College of Education get children involved in civic awareness through art. Painting with patriotic colors, using handprints, drawing pictures and discussing what “freedom” means, and why people should “make good choices.” This project builds awareness of others, draws audiences in and ideally makes people consider the choices they make will influence the world our children inherit.

LAW, ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN COUNSELING

In the graduate program in Educational Psychology, one faculty member gives a detailed and involved assignment requiring students to research and report on all candidate’s positions and propositions concerning youth, education, health-care, welfare and well-being of communities and neighborhoods. In their future positions as school counseling professionals, they will be a greater asset to their communities if they are fully-informed as citizens and can advocate for the needs of their communities.

STUDENT EVENTS AND RESOURCES

DEBATE WATCH PARTIES

The debate watch parties will be held for the general election in November 2020 will be hosted by Communication Studies Professor, John Kephart III.

Since the 1976 election between President Gerald Ford and Governor Jimmy Carter, presidential debates have served as a fixture of American electoral politics. Each presidential election cycle, candidates spar in a series of primary debates before securing their respective party's nomination before advancing to a series of argumentative clashes in the general election. In most years, there are three presidential debates and one vice-presidential debates, and these contests have seen decisive shifts in the fortunes of several candidates.

As part of the All-In Democracy Challenge, CSUN will be hosting debate viewing parties for each of the debates that end up being broadcast. As part of the event, we will begin with a brief lecture to contextualize presidential debates generally and the individual debate specifically, followed by a collective viewing of the debate. After the debate, faculty, researchers, and other experts will debrief the debates with students to unpack what we saw, and discuss potential consequences of the debates.

This is an important piece of our campus plan because research has consistently shown that debates have a tremendous impact on political engagement. The debates reach substantial numbers of voters and are central points of the campaigns (Benoit, McKinney, and Holbert 2001; Carlin 1992; Hollihan 2001; Jamieson and Birdsell 1988; McKinney and Carlin 2004), are a rich resource of information about both candidates and their respective party platforms (Hollihan 2001; Jamieson and Birdsell 1988; Benoit, McKinney, and Holbert 2001; Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003), and provide the candidates an opportunity to expand their positions in direct contrast to their challenger (Benoit, McKinney, and Stephenson 2002). In particular, they are seen as helpful and impactful in early decision making (McKinney and Warner 2013). Perhaps most

importantly for our students, debates have been shown to lead to greater discussion about and engagement with elections, increase conversations about and engagement with elections (Patterson 2002), as well as providing great confidence in the ability to understand and use political information while lessening cynicism in the democratic process. increase information efficacy and reduce cynicism (McKinney and Rill 2009; Warner and McKinney 2013).

We will also include live-tweeting and other forms of social media engagement with the debates as research also suggests that social media can increase engagement with and consideration of issues in the campaign (Craig 2016) and perceptions of debate importance (Houston, Hawthorne, Spialeck, Greenwood, and McKinney 2013).

The Commission on Presidential Debates has announced their debate schedule for 2020. This can potentially change given negotiations between the eventual nominees. But, assuming the current dates hold, we would plan to host events on Tuesday September 29, Wednesday October 7, Thursday October 15, and Thursday October 27 from about 5:30 pm to about 8:00 pm, PST. Debates have tremendous potential to help students make sense of the complex issues in the campaign and motivate greater civic participation, and we look forward to hosting these events in 2020.

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BIG POLITICS

Big Politics is an interactive programming event that incorporates art, culture, and community. The theme of the event is, "Politics isn't a Bad

Word.” The goal of the event is to bring politics to the students and meet them where they are at. The fair will include events such as proposition, Voter registration booths, voter education, census education, engaging contribution boards around political themes, live music, art exhibits, and more. This is an opportunity for students to become informed and get involved in this election cycle. Admission will be free to students.

ASSOCIATED STUDENT’S GUEST SPEAKER

Associated Students have invited the Secretary of State of California to speak about his background, commitment to civic engagement, the census and the upcoming election cycle. This event is confirmed for January 29, 2020.

WE THE PEOPLE FAIR

Associated Students will have a large event with food, guest speakers, campaign parties, tabling, and interactive elements like photo opportunities, and a CSUN “voting poll” competition.

STUDENT HOUSING ACTIVITIES

CSUN Student Housing staff have scheduled debate viewing parties, passive programming on resident floors, housing residents “walk to the voting booth,” resident student debates, and “person on the street” videos that can be posted on social media, websites, and played on the video screens in the residence halls.

EOP FREE SPEECH EVENT

CSUN Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) hosts an annual Free Speech Event which celebrates freedom of speech protected by the First

Amendment. EOP Encourages the entire CSUN community to participate and spectate through speech, spoken word, poetry, music, art, or dance. Student from different clubs and organizations are welcome to participate in this free event.

CAMPUS VOTING CENTER

CSUN student leaders are working closely with the California Election Commission on making the CSUN campus a polling place for the primary and general elections in 2020. Our polling site would be open the four days prior to the election and on election day.

DEPARTMENT OF ATHLETICS

The Athletic Department will be doing various events which could include voter registration tabling events and student athlete Walk to the Polls event. More detailed information will be coming in Spring 2020.

SUNDIAL

The Sundial which is the CSUN student newspaper will participate in by writing several articles on candidates, propositions, and civic engagement with a focus on outcomes that would affect the campus and our students.

THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The Office of International Students will be having events for students who are ineligible to vote in the United States that include debate watches, providing transportation for citizens who would otherwise be unable to come to a polling site, and voter registration drives.

THE DREAM CENTER

The Dream Center is discussing the possible events that they may participate in and host including debate watching parties and voter registration drives.

THE ADVISING HUB

The CSUN freshman advising HUB will provide voter registration cards for our new students.