

CAL U

CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

2020 ALL IN CAMPUS DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE

STRENGTHENING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY:
VOTER EDUCATION, REGISTRATION, AND MOBILIZATION



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INTRODUCTION

California University of Pennsylvania's core values are integrity, civility, and responsibility. Its commitment to imbuing students with a sense of civic obligation and developing tomorrow's leaders is reflected in Objective 5.2 of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan: ***Enhance and integrate programs in leadership, career preparedness, civic engagement and other critical life skills.*** It is only natural that Cal U was among the initial group of colleges and universities to pilot the American Democracy Project, a collaborative effort of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and *The New York Times*, as a means to engage students in issue awareness, electoral politics, and community matters.

American Democracy Project: Overview

California University of Pennsylvania is one of the first institutions of higher education to pilot the American Democracy Project. With the passage of the Byrd Amendment, in 2004, Cal U honors Constitution Day by holding university-wide events featuring talks on issues ranging from civil liberties at time of war to ethics in government. Voter registration tables are a staple at the events. Early programming consisted of panel discussion on topics, such as protest movements and health care reform. During election years, there were and still are CampaignWatch roundtable discussions where students, faculty, and staff discuss issues, candidates, and parties.

In 2008, Cal U was selected to participate in the Deliberative Polling® Initiative. George Mehaffy, vice president of Academic Leadership and Change at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and James Fishkin, director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University, were on

campus for the day-long event that included more than 200 Cal U students. The next day, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. spoke on regional environmental issues.

The same year, students across campus were involved in election activities. College Democrats and College Republicans debated presidential candidates' issue positions in a standing room only auditorium. Cal U was the first campus to host four DebateWatch events, where the university community viewed the three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate. Students and faculty facilitated post-debate discussions, all from a strictly nonpartisan perspective. Most impressive, Cal U made national news (*Roll Call*) because more than 2,000 students registered to vote and turnout in the four borough precincts quadrupled. The University held its first Election Analysis Forum just one week after the election, which has since become a biennial event that features nationally acclaimed political scientists and a leading journalist. Inauguration Day capped the election-year activities, where the campus community watched President Barack Obama take the Oath of Office.

Since then, Cal U continues to provide extensive programming to the university community and area residents. Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day are mainstays. Highlights included "Kids Talk Democracy," where fourth-grade students from an area elementary school shared their views on several constitutional topics, and "Leadership and Public Service," where a nationally recognized juvenile court judge discussed the "right" reason for seeking public office. "Passion or Pension" drew a capacity crowd as did a former Ohio secretary of state and Kennedy Profile in Courage awardee who discussed voting rights. "Help for Haiti" raised funds for the earthquake-ravaged country.

Spring 2016, the American Democracy Project partnered with the League of Women Voters of Washington County to host the Pennsylvania 49th Legislative District debate. Cal U students hosted Penn State-New Kensington students who were interested to learn of the university's programming. A nationally recognized elections forecaster spoke at the annual spring event, which again drew a capacity crowd.

Cal U sent two students to the national conventions as part of The Washington Center Seminar Series. Another student was one of three in the Commonwealth to be selected to participate in CollegeDebate16 (<http://collegedebate16.org/>). Of particular note, Cal Campaign Consultants, a nonpartisan student organization, provided volunteers for statewide and national races. Students in Campaign

Management, an upper division course, were required to register voters and work on campaigns of their choosing.

In 2016, more than 88 percent of the 3,979 Cal U students who were registered to vote did so in person. In 2017, Cal U was one of just 83 campuses nationwide to be recognized by the Campus Vote Project for practices encouraging students to register and vote. It was twice designated as a Voter Friendly Campus. Cal U won the ALL IN Democracy Challenge Award for most improved student voting rate among all four-year, medium sized public universities nationwide. In 2018, its voter turnout rate increased 21 percent, and it was awarded a Silver Seal the next year.

The pace continued in 2017, Dr. Patrick G. Coy, interim director of Kent State University's School of Peace and Conflict Studies, was the Constitution Day keynote speaker. Professors Loring Prest and Bill Meloy conducted two interactive workshops on distinguishing factual information from fake news. In October, Judge Theresa Dellick, plus several court officials from Mahoning County, Ohio, conducted a panel discussion on "Bullying Has No Borders." Judge Dellick's innovative programming for at-risk students has been recognized by the Obama White House, U. S. Department of Justice, and U. S. Department of Education. Cal U alumnus Stephen Russell discussed "American Presidents: Celebrating Red, White and Blue." His personal collection of political memorabilia was displayed in the art gallery on the third floor of Manderino Library. In the spring, Dr. Alan Abramowitz, Alben W. Barkley professor of political science at Emory University, discussed the 2018 midterm election outlook. A spokesperson from Fair Elections PA, which is affiliated with the League of Women Voters, discussed redistricting reform.

In 2018, Cal U held approximately 20 voter registration education, and mobilization events, capped by the biennial Election Analysis Forum. The American Democracy Project, in Spring 2019, co-sponsored a program featuring Sabrina Fulton, Trevon Martin's mother, and Chuck D.

Cal U seeks to imbue students with a sense of community that will last a lifetime. Voting is an important part of the equation as are being educated on candidates and issues, volunteering on campaigns, performing community service, and more. Cal U is proud of its students, alumni, and faculty who hold elective office and work in the public sector.

BY THE NUMBERS

Voter mobilization is a challenge for political parties for several reasons, ranging from feelings of political alienation or political inefficacy to restrictive voting times or inconvenient polling locations. Mobilizing the youth vote is particularly difficult, as many young adults fail to perceive themselves as stakeholders or they get more gratification from volunteering than they do from voting.

Registering students to vote is the first part of the equation. Educating them about the issues, convincing them their vote matters, and getting them to vote take an almost herculean effort.

In 2012, 41.9 percent of Cal U students voted as compared to 46.9 percent nationally. Its registration rate was 66.6 percent. The voting method numbers are telling: 85 percent voted in-person on Election Day with the remainder voting absentee (9.1 percent), voting early (1.4 percent), voting by mail (0.6 percent), and other (3.9 percent). In the 2014 midterm election, when turnout is precipitously lower than it is in presidential election years, Cal U's numbers lagged 3.1 percent behind the national college vote (15.7 percent to 18.8 percent). Similar to 2012, 88.5 percent voted in-person on Election Day (NSLVE 2012, 2014). Voter turnout increased from 60.6 percent in 2012 to 72.3 percent in 2016. Cal U bested the national college student turnout by 4.2 percent (NSLVE, 2014, 2016).

Similar to the majority of colleges and universities across the country, Cal U had a healthy turnout for the 2018 midterm election. It increased from 15.7 percent, in 2014, to 36.7 percent, which was just 2.4 lower than the national rate (NSLVE, 2019).

2020 ACTION PLAN

The dates for most programming will be set once the university calendar of events is available. The following voter registration, education, and mobilization initiatives are mainstays.

VOTER EDUCATION

- **Constitution Day**, on September 17, 2020, will feature students who attended the national political conventions. For the past three presidential

elections, Cal U has covered the cost for students to participate in The Washington Center Academic Seminar Series. In 2020, it plans to send six students to “Campaign 2020.” In addition, there will be two interactive sessions on distinguishing fake news from factual information. Due to its resounding success for the past three years, Professors Loring Prest and Bill Meloy will be conducting the workshops.

- **CampaignWatch** events are planned, where students discuss the candidates, issues, polling, and the election outlook. Faculty will act as facilitators, and will guide the dialog so it remains on point and respectful. Nonpartisan voting guides will be distributed.
- There will be a series of **Issue Expos**, which cover topics of most concern to students. Plans are being made to conduct another online poll to determine issues most important to students. Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., is Common Hour when no classes are scheduled. It is an optimal time to attract large student audiences.
- Nonpartisan candidate guides will also be available at the Library Circulation Desk, Natalie Student Center Information Desk, and online.
- **College Democrats and College Republicans** will debate central issues in the presidential race.
- **“Bring It to the Table”** will be shown during a common hour and made available to any professors who want to use it as a basis for a dialog on civility in politics.
- There will be an evening screening of **“One Vote.”** It is hoped that Christine Woodhouse, the director, or Chloe Woodhouse, her daughter, will be available to discuss the documentary and voting issues with the campus community. In 2018, the program generated among the positive feedback of any initiative.
- Plans are to have four **DebateWatch** parties, the three presidential and the one vice presidential. Faculty and students will facilitate discussions following each debate.

- There will be an all-day celebration on Election Day, November 3, 2020, which includes music, food, and giveaways. There will be a voter information table in case students have last minute questions ranging from when the polls close to what is on the ballot. Student Government Association will lead walks to the polls and the American Democracy Project will arrange the rides. **ElectionWatch** will start at 9:00 p.m., where the campus community and local residents will gather to watch the election returns.
- The **2020 Election Analysis Forum** will follow one week after the election on November 10, 2020. Jon Delano, KDKA-TV “Money & Politics” editor, will moderate a panel of nationally acclaimed parties and elections experts: Alan Abramowitz, Emory University, William Binning, Youngstown State University, Lou Jacobson, *Almanac of American Politics*, Larry Sabato’s *Crystal Ball* and *The Cook Report*, and Costas Panagopoulos, Northeastern University. They make sense of the election results for the campus community and local residents.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Cal U is partnering with several student organizations, institutes, and programs across campus to mount an aggressive voter registration drive, for example: Student Association, Inc. (SAI), Student Government Association, the Frederick Douglass Institute, and the Honors Program. It will continue its collaboration with the Campus Election Engagement Project.

- On **National Voter Registration Day**, September 22, 2020, multiple voter registration tables will be staffed by students, faculty, and staff in high-traffic locations. A voter registration tent with music and food will be in a central campus location. Students may register either online or by completing the paper form. Similar to last year, the Provost will send an email to all faculty, requesting they set aside the first five minutes of class on National Voter Registration Day so students can sign-up on their smart phones, iPads, or laptops. Faculty who teach online will be encouraged to post registration information under course announcements.
- Volunteers will staff voter registration tables at all American Democracy Project events, starting with Move-in Day. Forms will be placed at the

Manderino Library Circulation Desk and Natali Student Center Information Desk. Postcards with QR codes will be available, as well.

- “Information for Student Voters” will be available via a link on the Cal U News drop down menu. The homepage will be updated with reminders about approaching deadlines.
- University-wide announcements will remind the campus community about the registration deadline and where people can register to vote. Information will also be distributed via Facebook and Twitter.

BALLOT ACCESS

- Announcements for rides to the polls will be distributed one week prior to the election. Student Government Association will organize walks to the polling place where students who reside in campus dormitories vote. The American Democracy Project will run a shuttle service from campus and off-campus locations to the two borough polling locations where most students vote. Faculty will be stationed outside both polling locations in case students have difficulty navigating the system.
- First-time voters, in Pennsylvania, must show identification at the polls. A list with acceptable forms will be distributed well ahead of Election Day. It also will be available at the voter information table.
- Information for absentee ballots will be available for students who want to vote based on their primary residence address.

VOTER MOBILIZATION

- Campus-wide announcements with information about in-person and absentee voting will be posted.
- Election Day reminders will be distributed via university-wide announcements, social media, and flyers.

- Faculty will be encouraged to remind their classes to vote. Election FAQs and talking points will be provided to all faculty.
- The Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows, Campus Election Engagement Project Fellows, and American Democracy Project Advisory Board student representatives, will keep their peers informed about election-year activities and mobilize them on Election Day.
- Marquees on the Convocation Center, Steele Theatre, and Manderino Library, as well as the digital sign outside the Performance Center, will remind students about it being Election Day.