

Cleveland State University

Voter Engagement Action Plan

May 31, 2018

I. Executive Summary

In partnership with the Office of Civic Engagement and Julian Rogers, the Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows, Anthony Simmons and Mary Nazimiec, developed the following action plan to be executed at Cleveland State University (CSU) beginning in Fall 2018 and concluding at the end of the stated semester (with the exception of the implementation of more long-term structures in the University). This action plan is to increase voter participation at the designated university during midterm election season. The plan and those involved with it seek to increase the number of registered voters on campus that actually voted by 11% more than the participation in the 2014 midterm election. Not only does this plan seek to increase voter participation, it also seeks to create a more informed voting body on campus; this goal will be accomplished through various activities that provide information to students regarding the voting process, how to read ballots, and learn the importance of their vote, especially on a local level. Finally, the following plan seeks to increase the number of registered voters on campus in addition to updating other students' registration information. This goal will be accomplished by partnering with organizations on campus, attending university-sponsored events, and implementing this in orientation and *Introduction to University Life* classes.

This action plan was developed because The Office of Civic Engagement received data back from Tufts University's National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement regarding CSU's student voting rates. In the 2012 Presidential Election, 81.9% of students were registered to vote, and 78.3% of those who were registered voted, giving a voting rate of 64%. In the 2014 Midterm Election, 74.8% of students were registered to vote, and 31.6% of those who were registered voted, giving a voting rate of 24%. The percentage of engaged students decreased tremendously between the Presidential and Midterm Elections, signaling that there is a discrepancy between voter engagement on campus and the off-season elections for local and state government officials. Although Tufts reported that Cleveland State has the highest percentage by Carnegie Classification (that is, comparing one's university with other universities in similar contexts), the Office of Civic Engagement and the Democracy Fellows are not satisfied with the results in the Midterm elections.

The Democracy Fellows will spearhead this plan, with the assistance of other interns, volunteers, student organizations, and campus officials/offices. The Fellows will develop, plan, and execute activities before and during the semester to provide students with voting information, the

importance of voting, register students, and creating a non-partisan environment where students feel comfortable asking questions about voting and elections. Additionally, the Fellows will advocate for more permanent and long-term structures within the University to maintain these goals. Through our initiatives and implementation of the action plan, Cleveland State will increase voter participation in the 2018 Midterm Elections.

II. Leadership

Julian Rogers, Director of Community Partnerships in The Office of Civic Engagement, is coordinating and overseeing Cleveland State University's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement, with the assistance of Anthony Simmons and Mary Nazimiec (see below).

Anthony Simmons and Mary Nazimiec, Democracy Fellows through The Campus Vote Project, are chairing the working group, with the assistance of Julian Rogers.

The role of the previously stated working group is to create a coalition of supporters, both on- and off-campus, that will assist in the implementation of this plan by providing resources, materials, data, funds, and other items needed to ensure the success of the action plan.

Working group members are selected directly by Julian Rogers, Anthony Simmons, and Mary Nazimiec, based on their affiliation with the University or other organization and the level of assistance they think members of this group would be able to provide.

Working group members' responsibilities vary depending on the individual/organization and the extent in which they wish to provide assistance. Some members may provide resources and date, while other members help launch activities on campus through funding, providing volunteers, or simply co-sponsoring the events.

The working group includes organizations both on- and off-campus that are concerned with the student as a whole, particularly, their engagement in the community, whether it be at home or the Cleveland State Community. This group will meet when deemed necessary by Julian Rogers or the Democracy Fellows. The following individuals/organizations are involved with the plan:

Susan Alcorn, Representative from Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates

Andrew Kohn, Representative from Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates

Samia Shaheen, President of CSU's Student Government Association

Faculty from the Political Science Department at Cleveland State University

Xavier Rivera, Environmental Science Student at Cleveland State University

Sarah West, Exploratory Advisor in Office of Undergraduate Studies at CSU

Mary Nazimiec, History/Social Studies Student at CSU and Democracy Fellow
Simeon Best, Representative from Cuyahoga County Health and Human Services
Anthony Simmons, History/Black Studies Student at CSU and Democracy Fellow
Julian Rogers, Director of Community Partnerships in The Office of Civic Engagement

III. Commitment

Cleveland State University recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. During this last fifty plus years, the university has developed a strong reputation for its level of engagement and commitment to service to the community in which it exists. This commitment to work with the City of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio region to address its most significant challenges is part of the identity of Cleveland State and is clearly exhibited by the efforts of our faculty, colleges, student organizations and leadership of the university to focus resources and intellectual capital to make Cleveland an ideal place to live, work and play.

Throughout most of this fifty plus year history, however, there was very little effort on the part of the university to measure its impact on the community or catalog the various ways in which the university engages with the different sectors and community organizations within the city and region. That was until 2012, when CSU President Ronald Berkman hired Byron White, Ed.D, as the University's first Vice President of University Engagement, giving the institution for the first time a cabinet-level official whose responsibilities are devoted to engagement. Since the hiring of Dr. White, there has been a targeted effort to provide structure and an accurate counting of the civic engagement activity that occurs in all parts of the university.

Under the direction of Vice President White, the newly established Division of University Engagement has evolved to incorporate three distinct yet interdependent functions that reinforce Cleveland State University's unique contribution to Greater Cleveland:

- Civic engagement — partnerships with organizations and institutions throughout the region that are mutually beneficial to student learning, academic scholarship and community well-being.
- Workplace engagement — reciprocal relationships with employers that ensure student success and regional economic stability, including internships, co-ops and other types of experiential learning.
- Inclusion and multicultural engagement — advances diversity and equity in all CSU affairs, providing opportunities for all students to be successful, and celebrates the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the campus community.

CSU has uniquely brought all three functions together, responding to the critical interdependence that many scholars in civic engagement have determined to exist among efforts around citizen participation, career and diversity. The Office of Civic Engagement provides support to faculty, students, staff and administrators that allows them to develop, expand and sustain collaborative, mutually beneficial partnerships with community residents, organizations and institutions. Rather than serving as a gatekeeper for all engagement activities, the Office is charged with creating an infrastructure with six key objectives:

- 1) Establishing and upholding an institution-wide framework for defining civic engagement;

- 2) Creating a consistent process to comprehensively inventory engagement across campus;
- 3) Developing and tracking metrics that quantify the internal and external impact of engagement activities;
- 4) Communicating engagement efforts consistently to the campus community and broader community;
- 5) Promoting mechanisms to honor and reward faculty, students and staff who successfully advance engagement;
- 6) Setting up structures to develop competency among faculty and students for carrying out best practices in engagement.

The Office has led several efforts to achieve these objectives, including:

- Hiring of the University's first Director for Community Partnerships to assist faculty and students in establishing mutually beneficial collaboration in the community.
- Hosting the Engaged Learning Dialogues, a series of conversations in spring 2013 led by national experts in university-community engagement.
- Launching a Civic Engagement Grant program that awards grants of up to \$5000 to support the work of faculty and student organizations engaged in mutually beneficial projects with the community.
- Managed the development of an innovative, navigable web portal called the Cleveland Engagement Project that interactively highlights partnerships between CSU and the community.
- Creation of the Deckard Family Civic Fellows Scholarship, a fellowship program for rising junior and senior students whereby Deckard Fellows are assigned to civic engagement projects that support or address a recognized regional, community based, or civic organizational need.
- Development of a public sphere pedagogy program where faculty across different disciplines will work collaboratively to support student independent research of a contemporary, local public policy issue. Students then present their findings to the public and policy makers in a public forum.
- Oversight of the CSU-NEOMED Community Champions program, where community residents are partnered with pre-medical students who intend to focus on primary care upon graduation from medical school. The Community Champions serve as resident guides to one of the 8 targeted neighbors where students hopefully will serve upon graduation.
- Development of the Central Neighborhood Alliance, a highly structured partnership with resident leaders and community-based organizations in the neighboring Central community where faculty and students have agreed to practice reciprocity and shared authority as part of their involvement in the neighborhood.

Evidence of the success of these efforts are demonstrated by recent receipt of the Community Engagement Classification from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as well as the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

IV. Landscape

CSU's Engaged Learning agenda includes experiential learning opportunities both on campus (campus-engaged learning) and in the broader community (community-engaged learning). Such

opportunities can be experienced through both curricular and co-curricular activities.

Community-engaged learning, in particular, focuses on CSU's capacity to fully leverage and enhance resources and expertise that exist outside the University as assets in CSU's core mission of educating students and creating knowledge. In this context, CSU is largely focused on the economic, social, and cultural vitality of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio. For the purpose of this paper, we choose a narrow definition of "community" to mean primarily "local community," even though we realize that collaborations exist in localities across Ohio, the United States and the world. We also recognize that other definitions (such as community within a profession or discipline) exist and are equally valuable.

As we inventoried our own efforts and considered the work of our colleagues, we identified numerous expressions of community-engaged learning at CSU, which have greatly benefitted both our campus and the community. For example:

- CSU faculty routinely partner with community organizations to explore policies and institutional practices that address issues of social justice in the community.
- Community partners provide space and opportunities that allow our students to learn professional skills in a context of cultural appreciation and competence.
- Investment by students in community work enhances their sense of belonging to community and strengthens their desire to contribute to Northeast Ohio long-term as active citizens.
- Tangible community benefits are achieved through the energy and creativity of students, who are deployed through academic and co-curricular programs to help address community problems.
- Engagement allows many faculty whose life work has been dedicated to community issues in urban communities to incorporate their passion into their work.
- Deeper engagement uncovers new insights into communities and informs our research in ways that allow it to more effectively address seemingly intractable issues.
- Enlisting the community creates a measure of accountability to it and provides an avenue for community stakeholders to solicit CSU's participation in areas relevant to them.
- Engagement creates the opportunity to mobilize broad participation across disciplines to work on comprehensive projects that require an array of University assets in order to be achieved.

The effectiveness of these benefits depends greatly on mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships with the community that generate trust and respect. Through such engagement, there is genuine appreciation that residents and community members bring unique knowledge and expertise to the partnerships, and there is an imperative that those community partners receive some relevant benefit from the collective work. In fact, the work is most beneficial and impactful when community partners are included in its execution and production every step of the way. CSU is better positioned than other universities in Northeast Ohio to facilitate such interaction because most of our students are from the region, where they have deep ties, affinity, and knowledge, and will likely continue to reside upon graduation. Beyond the benefits to

community, such engagement strengthens the University's enterprise by motivating interest and creativity among faculty, particularly junior faculty whom we seek to recruit and promote; by providing integration of research and practice; by promoting interdisciplinary scholarship; and by broadening the exploration of pedagogical techniques.

Community-engaged learning benefits students through both their curricular and co-curricular activities. This is especially true it seems, for students who have a deep exposure to, or affinity for, the richly diverse urban environment that Cleveland offers. Connecting learning to the surrounding community elevates the self-efficacy of all our students and engages them in familiar environments where, regardless of their backgrounds, they can express their leadership and creativity as knowledge collaborators in the classroom. It increases the perceived relevance and authenticity of coursework by connecting theory to real-world situations and promoting critical thinking through problem-based learning. Connecting learning to the community has the potential to reinforce students' confidence in the classroom and provide them with motivation to persist. Community-engaged learning deepens students' appreciation for diversity beyond their own experiences and world views, and improves cultural competency.

V. Goals

LONG-TERM GOALS

- Add electoral engagement to “Introduction to University Life” class syllabi in 2 years as a learning objective to the course.
- Include “Election Days” as university holidays to give students, staff, and faculty the opportunity to participate in elections without hindrance from classes/work obligations.
- Incorporate at least two civic education and democratic engagement focused events into the list of events the university holds every school year.

SHORT-TERM GOALS

- Increase the voting rate during the 2018 Midterm Election by 11%.
- Add voter registration (local and out-of-state) information to the institution’s website.
- Incorporate at least one civic education and democratic engagement session in the information sessions The Counseling & Academic Success Clinic holds in the Fall.

- Register or verify registration of 40% of students present during “Move-In” day at Cleveland State University in the Fall.
- Register or verify registration 20% of students in attendance during Magnus Fest at Cleveland State University.
- Register or verify registration of students in attendance during orientations at Cleveland State.
- Register verify registration 85% of students involved in student organizations or participate in Greek Life.
- Increase the number of students in STEM majors that are registered to vote and increase their percentage of turnout in the 2018 Midterm Election.

VI. Strategy

The work includes speaking to administration in regard to the long-term goals while planning/executing activities to accomplish the short-term goals, giving more leverage in the conversations regarding the long-term goals. To begin this process, our Fellows and volunteers will establish a presence at all major university events in Fall 2018 semester to register people to vote, collect contact information from students we interact with, and utilize the information later to remind students of the upcoming election in November and give general information. We will also create election cards with general voting guides that will be strategically placed around campus, such as in the dorms, the Campus 411 Office, and the advising offices. We will also attend meetings for various organizations on campus to discuss the importance of voting, being civically engaged, and use these smaller meetings as opportunities to collect more information and register students. Additionally, we will attend move-in day, orientations, and Magnus Fest to register students to vote and collect information as well. We will also set up voter registration/election information tables in key locations on campus; using incentives (i.e. raffle for gifts, prize wheel, etc.), we will pull students in, register them, collect information, and give them useful information.

Furthermore, we will add more events to campus to fully engage students in the political process. This includes the following activities:

- Mock Voting Polls
- Information session(s) regarding voting, ballot issues, and civic engagement
- Mock Voter Registration Day

- Vike the Vote! (major event)
- *Why My Vote Doesn't Matter* (major event)

VII. Reporting

The Office of Civic Engagement will maintain a running tally of registered voters with University Marketing to update the campus on our progress.

VIII. Evaluation (discuss at meeting -- more for Julian?)

Our local partner, the Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates have been doing this work for several years and it is tied to academic research, so they are meticulous when it comes to data collection. They will be providing assistance with evaluation.