



EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



All In Campus Democracy Challenge

ACTION PLAN **2019**

About The EMU Voter Registration Team

Eastern Michigan University was founded in 1849, and is one of the oldest colleges in the state. EMU has a student body of about 19,000 students and is an accredited R3 research institution. Eastern Michigan has a diverse student body and is located in a low-income area, meaning that students would benefit greatly from being represented in elections and census polls.

For this initiative, engage@emu, a department responsible for creating an entryway to enhance, navigate and cultivate collaboration and partnerships between the university and business and community entities will be working to enhance civic engagement on campus and in the EMU community.

engage@emu will be partnering with EMU Student Government. Student Government is a student-run organization responsible for making the voice of the students heard and represented to campus staff, faculty and administration in professional settings. The team will expand their reach by partnering with a professor in the Political Science department here at EMU to engage those most passionate about the subject of civic engagement, future politicians and policymakers. Lastly, we have been working with the Ypsilanti City Clerk's office to train students to register voters and teach students the importance of civic engagement at a local level.

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Executive Summary

This action plan was created by leaders in the Student Government including the Director of Internal Relations, Jordyn Lijewski and student body senator Colton Ray. Along with Student Government leadership, engage@emu also participated in the creation of this action plan, including the engage@emu Director, Jessica Alexander, and Communications and Operations Coordinator, Kristen Klochko.

The goal of the action plan is to outline and define how to increase civic engagement with regards to voter registration and census participation both on campus and in our local community. In 2018, the voting rate at EMU was 45.3%, up 22.4% from 2014 when the voting rate was 22.9%. The campus was a considerable percentage more successful than the national average of 39.1%.

This plan will be implemented by both engage@emu who has a strong connection to faculty, staff and community relations and Student Government who has a strong relationship with students. This partnership will ensure that all sectors of the university are covered, creating the potential for the most impact possible. Student Government is located in the Student Center, creating an opportunity to interact with hundreds of students every day.

EMU is one of the only campuses in Michigan with an on-campus polling location, which is likely the cause of the dramatic increase in voter turnout from 2014 to 2018. This action plan was created with the intention of getting this number to rise even more, as this political and economic climate demands engaged students and citizens. Our action plan will begin taking effect at the open of Winter Semester 2020 and will continue through until the 2020 election in November, focusing on the democratic primary election and the 2020 census, both taking place in March.

The action plan will be implemented through a series of events beginning with the training of a student voter registration task force to train these students on how to register others to vote. Students will run and attend events, debates, community service events, and lobby tables in our student center to register voters and give them more information. Through the hard work and dedication of Student Government leadership, engage@emu

leadership and students on the voter registration task force, EMU will see an increase in voter engagement and census participation.

Leadership

Efforts to increase student voter registration and voter engagement through non-partisan events and workshops will be co-managed by EMU Student Government Director of Internal Relations, Jordyn Lijewski and the Department of engage@emu, Jessica Alexander and Kristen Klochko. Faculty support and guidance from the Department of Political Science Professor Jeffrey Bernstein will also be utilized. The leadership team will meet monthly to connect and coordinate upcoming events. The Voter Taskforce, when established, may meet bi-weekly with EMU Student Government and engage@emu.

EMU Student Government provides a secure, powerful and focused voice to the administration regarding student concerns. The organization represents the voice of students on and off-campus, to the University's Administration, Faculty, and Board of Regents. They also represent students' interests across the state of Michigan, at the State Capital, and across the Country. Student registration and voter engagement fall underneath such an interest on all local, state, and national levels. With Jordyn Lijewski as the point of contact, her team will spearhead recruitment for events and the Student Taskforce, as well as marketing, promotion, and student engagement.

The primary focus of engage@emu is to enhance, navigate and cultivate collaboration and partnerships between the University and business and community entities. Connecting students with resources and knowledge regarding voting falls to this department due to the nature of the community partnerships. Engage, with Kristen Klochko, as the point of contact will manage event planning and facilitate the speaker series inviting local officials and organizations.

The Department of Political Science, specifically Professor Jeffrey Bernstein, will support this initiative by sharing events with the student body and acting as a resource of knowledge on the nuances of voting in the state of Michigan.

Other organizations to participate in educational events and promotional resources are the City of Ypsilanti, The League of Women Voters, EMU College Democrats, EMU College Republicans, and other related organizations both on campus and in the community. Events are free to attend for all students and are Learning Beyond the

Classroom approved. For students interested in participating in initiatives throughout the Winter 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, they will receive full LBC group 2 credit (15 contact hours).

Commitment

EMU has a dedicated team of students, faculty, staff, and administration that work tirelessly to make the university a supportive, intellectually dynamic and diverse community. EMU has five core principles; excellence, respect, inclusiveness, responsibility, and integrity. The administration is devoted to helping students learn not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom too, bettering and learning from our community as we expand our knowledge through courses.

One way EMU strives to do this is with Learning Beyond the Classroom requirements for graduation. EMU students have a variety of options to complete these requirements that allow them hands-on experiences in addition to their classroom experiences. Studies have shown that students involved in activities outside of the classroom have higher retention rates and more positive educational experiences.

One group of LBC credit that students may obtain is called “Community service, citizenship, and leadership”. Students who wish to participate in the voter registration task force will be awarded the fulfillment of this LBC credit requirement, contingent on them completing 15 hours of community and campus voter registration. At EMU, we are dedicated to developing productive, engaged members of society, through classroom and hands-on experiences.

EMU offers over 200 undergraduate majors, most if not all of which stress the importance of civic engagement in one way or another. By knowing the importance of increasing civic engagement in all students, each faculty and staff members make this a theme in their teaching and make a conscious effort to apply it to their classrooms. Students have seen firsthand the importance of civic engagement, through field trips, professional presentations, or classwork assigned by professors in all fields. Many EMU professors offer their students unofficial days off on Election Day, and Student Government is beginning work to encourage the administration to close campus on election day.

Along with faculty, we also have dedicated administrators who want to see higher rates of civic engagement in students, because it is beneficial to all involved in university operations. The Provost's office sets goals of academic quality, institutional accreditation, and accountability, to ensure a positive learning environment. The Provost's office examines curriculum before it becomes available to students, this ensures the inclusion of civic learning and democratic engagement as part of all curriculums. EMU will use their devoted student, staff, faculty, and administration to continue increasing civic engagement in the community and on campus. The goal is to get students involved and interested now and to keep them involved in the future to create a generation of civically minded citizens.

Landscape

EMU has five essential learning outcomes outlined in our general education requirements, broken down into smaller subcategories. The first being effective communication including oral communication and written composition. The second being quantitative reasoning. The third is perspectives on a diverse world including global awareness and U.S. diversity. Fourth is knowledge of the disciplines including arts, humanities, foreign languages, social sciences, and natural sciences.

EMU also focuses on learning beyond the classroom opportunities which include self and well-being, community service, citizenship and leadership, cultural and academic activities and events, career and professional development, and international and multicultural experiences.

EMU received data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), which offers colleges and universities the opportunity to learn their voting registration and turnout rates and compare them with previous years. The feedback has given our team an insight into what the trends have shown, and how we can improve upon our civic engagement rates.

This report included data from 2014 and 2018, measuring student engagement in democracy. In 2018, the voting rate for all students across the nation was 39.1%. It is worth noting that this number is considerably lower than we would see in a presidential election year. EMU saw a sharp spike in its voter turnout in 2018, at 45.3% up a whopping 22.4% from 2014, and up 6.2% from the national average.

EMU also saw a change in percentage of registered voters, from 63.3% in 2014 to 69% in 2018. The voting rate of registered students nearly doubled from 2014 to 2018, going from only 36.2% to 65.7%.

An outlier in comparison to many other universities, is how EMU students cast their votes. In 2018, 85.6% of EMU students cast their votes in person, likely because the university's honors college building became a polling location, walking distance from campus. This number may also be so high because roughly 79% of students live off campus, and a large number of these students are commuter students. An astoundingly

low number of students voted by mail-in an early vote in 2018, 1.2% and 0.4% respectively.

When you breakdown voters by age group from 2014 to 2018, every single age group increased voting rates. The biggest change was seen in those ages 18 to 21, with a 25.6% change from 12.7% to 38.3%. This data is encouraging, as this is the makeup of most undergraduate students, implying that educating students about the need for civic engagement is taking effect.

The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement also informed us that slightly more graduate students voted than undergraduate students, at 51% and 42.4% respectively. The study found that as students got further in their undergraduate careers, they were more likely to vote with first-year students in 2018 at 32.8%, sophomores at 35.8% and upper-level students at 46.8%. These numbers all increased from the 2014 data collected.

Part-time students were recorded to vote more than full-time students at 51.9% and 40% respectively, both enrollment statuses showed an increase from 2014 data. Lastly, data found that slightly more women than men voted, at 44.9% for women and 42.6% for men.

It is imperative to know that there was only one decrease seen in the whole NSLVE study when comparing data from 2014 to 2018, and that was the percentage of voters who utilized the in-person Election Day voting method.

The top area of study for voting law enforcement, firefighting, and protective services at 63.2%. Next was History at 62.4% and the third was English Language and Literature at 60.3%.

The data provided by NSLVE offered many insights for our team to use in future planning. The first was that we need to inform voters on their Election Day options, such as early voting, in person voting, absentee ballot voting, and mail in voting. Students often think that if they are not near home on Election Day they have no way to vote. The next insight that will greatly influence our planning is the field of study area of the NSLVE. We want to focus on getting students of all areas of studies civically engaged, focusing on the social sciences such as political science, sociology, and economics and

healthcare-related majors. It is crucial to get those who will one day be involved in politics to see the importance of civic engagement early in their careers.

The student body at EMU has a significant influence on administration and students essentially form the majority of the campus climate. EMU has an advantage in that it is located near a larger, very liberal city, Ann Arbor, Michigan where the University of Michigan is located. EMU is located in a smaller, more rural community of Ypsilanti, Michigan. EMU being located here is beneficial for students as they have various political opportunities.

The university has many professional affiliations and internship opportunities available for students and only located an hour away from the State Capital. EMU participates in a day called “EMU day in Lansing” where students can travel to the capital to speak with political officials and advocate for funding to benefit EMU. Along with internships, co-op programs, in class experiences and campus run events, students also become involved in student organizations regarding political involvement. EMU currently has a college republicans, college democrats, an organization called “Eagles united for the separation of church and state” and the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA).

The biggest hurdle to overcome when considering increasing civic engagement is getting students who commute to stay on campus and come to events after their classes are over. To overcome this issue, we will use our large network of students and faculty to spread the word of events and opportunities set up by our team.

Lastly, using additional resources from a local level, such as the Ypsilanti City Clerk’s office will provide more opportunities for students to see different sides and find ways to become involved with politics that they are passionate about at a local level.

Goals

Our main goal is to increase student voter registration to 75%

- In 2018, student registration was 69%. For 2020, the goal is to increase registration by 6% to 75%.

Increase student voter participation to 55%

- EMU has successfully increased student voting from the past two elections from 22.9% in 2014 to 45.3% in 2018. For 2020, the goal is to increase voting by 10% to a 55% overall voter turnout rate.

Educate students on ballot initiatives

- For the following two semesters (Winter 2020 and Fall 2020), EMU will host educational events about the following issues: How to register to vote. What is an absentee ballot? What are the local proposals, and who are the candidates? How are the Census Completion and Voter Participation linked? For each of these events, the goal will be to have an average attendance of 30 students.

The university will know which goals were met by the NSLVE data when released. It is the leadership's hope that these efforts will increase civic engagement and educate students on the relevant matters of voting in the state of Michigan.

Strategy

Our team has developed a series of events, both politically minded, and leisure-oriented to attract a diverse population of students to attend these events. The events will take place all throughout the winter 2020 semester and will continue in the fall 2020 semester. For our voter registration task force to be successful and for students to be able to fulfill their LBC credit, we will need to hold weekly lobby tables in our Student Center to register voters in addition to events where we will also register voters. Below are ideas for events and discussion topics to center the events around.

Bagels and ballots: Bagels, coffee and donuts to be served and the team will have an open question and answer discussion with attendees on how ballots work and how to fill them out correctly to avoid them being discarded and their vote not counting. We will also have a speaker to discuss ballot initiatives. (winter)

Pancakes and primary elections: Pancakes will be served as students watch the results come in on the day of the Democratic primary election. (winter)

Puppies at the polls: a group of emotional support animals that commonly come to campus will be available for students to pet and play with on the day of the election, before or after they cast their votes. (winter and fall)

Donuts and debates: Debate event where college republicans and college democrats will debate, topics will be similar to those asked of the republican and democratic candidates during their debate. (fall)

Eaglefest: Event taking place at the beginning of the semester, in which all registered student organizations attend to showcase their organization and get members to join. Our team will have a table at the entrance of the event to encourage students to join the voter registration task force, and previously trained members will be able to register voters as they walk in. (fall)

City kickoff event: Action plan and Ypsilanti city kickoff event to be held in the beginning of the semester. Representatives from the city will be in attendance as speakers. (winter)

Other strategies: Advertising the option to register to vote by coming into the Student Government office and fill out a voter registration form with the help of a trained member of the voter registration task force. We will also give away stickers to those who

have registered to vote that say “I registered” and “I voted absentee” stickers on Election Day.

Lastly, the Student Government will attend events with giveaways such as tee shirts, pens, pop sockets, notebooks, phone wallets, hats, and water bottles to encourage students to attend events and bring their friends.

The purpose of the work done by our team is to increase understanding of the importance of civic engagement, increase civic engagement itself and increase census participation. Each activity is implemented to engage an array of students around campus. The goal for these activities is to engage students in democratic practices and encourage civic engagement on and off campus.

Reporting

For the leadership team, communications on efforts will come from the Student Government and Engage points of contact (Jordyn Lijewski and Kristen Klochko). The team will have monthly meetings and will share reports and notes to the relevant members across campus following each meeting.

- Students will receive event announcements and resources through combined marketing efforts of EMU Student Government, the University marketing department, and the Political Science department. These notifications will come in forms of university-wide emails, social media posts, flyers, lobby tables, and campus announcement posts.
- While the final external data will come from the NSLVE report, internally, event leads will track how many students are registered and attend educational events. This data will be reported following the 2020 Presidential Election. All information will be made public through a
- Webpage on myemich.edu/engage and through the NSLVE report.

Evaluation

Evaluation of our action plan is necessary to ensure that our team is following guidelines set by the law, the university and the Campus Democracy Challenge while interacting with and engaging as many students as possible. Ideally, we want to continue to raise the rates of voter registration and voter participation in our community, as done in previous years.

Evaluation of the action plan will be carried out by the leading members of our team, Jordyn Lijewski from Student Government, Kristen Klochko and Jessica Alexander from engage@emu and Jeffrey Bernstein from the EMU Political Science department. Our team will evaluate and plan for the following years based on the data collected from the NSLVE from the 2020 election season.

The evaluation will be completed over the summer of each year. Unlike this year, we will begin planning in the summer and begin the campaign in the fall and hold events all throughout the school year. Summer months can be used for planning and adjusting the action plan, while the fall and spring can be used for students to host events and lobby tables.

Our team will also reach out to the student newspaper, “The Eastern Echo” to get coverage on the success of the voter registration task force and report notable changes found in the NSLVE report. We will also share these results on Student Government’s social media pages. We will also create a google form after the semester is over to get feedback from members of the voter registration task force on how to improve this program and the events we held. Feedback and evaluation of data and events are the keys to improving civic engagement and voter registration rates in colleges and universities.