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Feather River College

Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates Among College Students

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I. Executive Summary

This plan was developed by the Liberal Arts and Sciences Division Chair, and full-time faculty member in the political science and sociology programs at Feather River College. This is a general action plan for the 2018-2019 academic year and is based on staffing and budget resources. The goal is to increase voter registration amongst FRC students, and more specifically, increase voter turnout in the November general election. The second goal is to provide voter education programs and increase students' sense of political efficacy. The plan will be implemented on the FRC campus in Quincy, CA. This plan was developed as part of the overall civic engagement efforts of campus. The faculty member and Liberal Arts and Sciences Chair will oversee the implementation of any action items in this plan.

II. Leadership

As stated, there is only one faculty member overseeing civic engagement activities on this small campus. This faculty will integrate some of these activities into courses, such as the introductory U.S. government and other political science courses. Students in these classes will be participants in implementing some of these activities. This instructor will also work closely with the Student Services Programs, specifically with the plans, programming, and staff working on Guided Pathways implementation, and with the Office of Instruction. Additionally, the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society has sponsored "get out the vote" efforts, and this group will be brought in to continue these efforts in Fall 2018. Most campus activities involve coordination and support across programs – most of which are one-person (faculty) directed programs.

Because of the size of Quincy and Plumas County, working with the County Clerk is easy. The campus also has good working relationships with the County Board of Supervisors, as well as the county political parties. Members of these entities are guest speakers in various classes in an academic year. For example, the local parties supported efforts to bring District 1

congressional candidates to meet with FRC students. The campus has historically been a place where candidates prefer to come when visiting Plumas County.

III. Commitment

Civic engagement and responsible citizenship are amongst FRC's college-wide learning outcomes. Civic and community engagement, citizenship, ethical behavior, etc. are all evident in FRCs mission statements, its education plan, and statement of values. FRC faculty and staff are leaders in the community, serving on boards, councils, etc. Faculty also bring speakers to campus and community, and host cultural events. FRC students are also active in the community through volunteer efforts such as working with local elementary schools in everything from teaching kids about horses (Equine Program), rafting and hiking (Outdoor Recreational Leadership), community cleanup projects, etc. Not only are such service learning opportunities part of many FRC programs (including athletics), civic engagement is central to the political science curriculum and program learning outcomes. While there are only one or two political science majors annually, most students will take a political science course during their two years on campus. These courses emphasize the importance of citizen action in a democracy, and students are assessed on their appreciation of this participation. Every spring, FRC students are given a survey and one of the questions is on their growth in civic understanding. Results consistently show that students have learned in this area, and students report their growth in the area of civic engagement.

IV. Landscape

The FRC student demographic is diverse, and it changes every year. This is not unlike most community colleges who see their population turnover frequently, making this unlike four-year institutions where students stay longer and are more involved/present in the campus community. In other words, as soon as we think we have reached civic engagement goals, we get a whole new group of students and need to start again. It's important to note that most FRC students are from out of state or out of the county. Many do not choose to register to vote in Plumas County and choose instead to register in their home state or county. It is not easy to track their voting behavior. Additionally, many students turn 18 during their two years here and become eligible to register to vote. They also become more interested in government and policy as they learn more about the democratic process. According to our NSLVE data, FRC voter turnout rates are in line with that of most other two-year colleges. This is not something we expect to maintain without effort and outreach. These efforts include voter registration events, dissemination of election information, hosting speakers and debates, and hosting events that celebrate U.S. democracy.

In 2016 the political science program received a Civic Impact grant to use for civic engagement activities. This money has been used for voter registration efforts, led by students, and for campus-wide election events. The political science program also coordinates with the student

success and equity staff and with the Office of the President, to bring speakers to campus who supplement civic engagement curriculum and efforts. The college's remote access make it very challenging to get to, especially in the winter months. This, plus the campus and community's small size, make it difficult to entice well-known speakers to the area. Taking students to events, often over three hours away, is also a challenge. Most students are athletes and are not allowed to miss practice, training, or sporting events. Hence it is important to continue creating a good relationship with the coaches and athletic department. Funding for such trips, which would require transportation, food, and lodging, is minimal. More than this, it is not possible for one faculty member to plan and oversee such excursions. The benefit of such efforts is problematic.

V. Goals

- Increase voter registration among FRC students.
- Increase voter turnout among FRC students.
- Offer voter education events prior to the June primary and November 2018 general election.

These efforts will continue to be about building citizenship skills and confidence in civic engagement among the community college demographic. A latent result of these activities will continue to be enhancing student connections with their community.

Our strategic approach is to coordinate civic engagement activities in collaboration with other activities and events. This will mean working closely with other offices on campus and with groups in the community, such as the League of Women Voters. For example, we will set up and decorate a voter registration table at events such as the annual cultural fair, student orientation sessions, and offer snacks and perhaps prizes for students who stop by or who answer a survey or trivia quiz. We will do the same during annual Earth week activities and at athletic events. Working closely with the Office of Student Life will also be important for voter education outreach, particularly disseminating candidate and other ballot information. Civic engagement activities are also planned for the new First Year Experience, which will be a multi-faceted program to prepare students for college and professional life.

Voter registration will occur each semester, regardless of budget. For fall 2018, we will have very visible voter registration opportunities at campus events. The political science students will also host at least one ballot education forum. Civic engagement efforts will coordinate with the English Program's annual student debate, as well as with their "Writing Across the Curriculum" and "Book in Common" efforts. The campus is working on implementing activities around Guided Pathways also, and these may include opportunities to create activities to get students interested in the social sciences pathways. Spring 2019 will include setting up voter registration and voter education tables at various events: Earth Day, Cultural Fair, baseball and softball games, speaking events. At these events, we will assist voters with the registration process

(online or on paper). To entice interest we will decorate the table, use signage made previously, and have non-partisan activities. We will make a concerted push for registration prior to the registration deadlines, and educate students about the vote by mail process in Plumas County and other California counties. Essential prior to any primary election in the state is to make sure student voters understand the “top two vote-getting” system. Funds will be used for snacks and for co-sponsoring events that may require rental fees, such as the annual (every fall) Speech class debate event. We will also use the all-student email list to send voter registration links and reminders of registration deadlines. Students really liked the t-shirts we made before, so this might be a strategy used again to encourage voter turnout. Secondary to these efforts will be encouraging students to be involved in student government activities on campus. This has been an ongoing challenge for FRC, and it’s important that students understand the value of serving in leadership capacities.

VI. Reporting

NSLVE data is sorted by the FRC Institutional Researcher and then the faculty member political science shares this information with the campus. Student activities are reported to the Board of Trustees through the monthly president’s report. The local newspaper covers many FRC activities.

Activities and the results of these activities are also reported bi-annually to the civic impact grant sponsor.

VII. Evaluation

The primary tool for evaluation is the NSLVE report. Additionally, efforts will be evaluated in the Political Science Comprehensive Program Review, and in the student learning outcomes annual report. Conversations will occur with various offices and committees about the effectiveness of various events and activities. This will include the student services committee, the Guided Pathways working group, and the diversity committee, among others.