

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan Michigan State University

Executive Summary

The MSUvote Committee is a non-partisan committee consisting of staff, faculty, students, and local residents who seek to increase civic engagement and voter turnout at Michigan State University and in the City of East Lansing among MSU students. The Committee is participating in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in hopes of bringing awareness and attention to the importance of voting and participating in the political process.

Michigan State has had low voter turnout in recent elections, perhaps in part due to the restrictions on absentee voting in Michigan that make it difficult for students to vote in their hometowns. In an effort to integrate students into the campus and local communities, and because of these restrictions around absentee ballots for first-time voters in Michigan, we are encouraging students to register and vote in the City of East Lansing.

Throughout the fall, the Committee will work to encourage current and incoming students to register and turn out to vote. We will be present at each of the orientations for incoming students throughout the summer to introduce opportunities for civic engagement at Michigan State from students' very first experiences with the school. The biggest change for our voter mobilization efforts this year is introducing a field experiment in first-year writing classes. Current students will lead short presentations about the importance and process of voting for first-year students.

Finally, for 2018, we are focusing on messaging and investigating what types of messages are most likely to increase engagement among our students. The messages will reflect the non-partisan nature of our committee, and we are building off of previous research about the effects of messaging about norms, efficacy, civic duty, and issues.

By combining with different student groups and academic and administrative departments, we aim to increase our presence on campus for new and returning students, encouraging them to register and vote. In the 2018 election, many issues directly and tangentially important to MSU students will be on the ballot. Through our increased visibility, presence, and messaging, we aim to not only encourage students to participate in politics, but also to demonstrate students' ability to effect change in their communities.

Committee Co-Chairs:

- Renee Brown, Director, MSU Center for Service -Learning and Civic Engagement
- Suchitra Webster, MSU Community Liaison

Committee Membership:

- Eli Pales, ASMSU Vice President for Governmental Affairs
- Justin Baldwin, ASMSU Governmental Affairs Community Liaison
- John Dowell, MSU Technology Literacy Specialist and Lab Aide Coordinator
- Morris Arvoy, Director of Communications, Residential College in the Arts & Humanities
- Daki Ravinder, MSU Graduate Student
- Sarah Reckhow, Faculty, Political Science
- Kjerstin Thorson, Faculty, Communication Arts & Sciences
- Marilyn Wilson, League of Women Voters

Campus Stakeholders:

- College Democrats
- College Republicans
- Council of Racial and Ethnic Students (CORES)
- Council of Progressive Students (COPS)
- Department of Athletics
- Residence Education and Housing Services
- Associated Students of MSU
- Council of Graduate Students
- Registered Student Organizations, including Greek Life and Co-op Housing

City Clerks

- East Lansing City Clerk Jennifer Shuster
- Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum
- Lansing City Clerk Chris Swope

Long-term goals

To increase student voting in midterm elections by 8 percentage points between 2014 and 2022.

14.2 percent of MSU students voted in the 2014 midterm election. The average turnout rate for public research institutions was somewhat higher, at 19.2 percent. Only 8.8 percent of MSU undergraduates voted in the 2014 midterm elections, while graduate students voted at higher rates (23.8 percent).

To add registration and voting information to all course syllabi at MSU by 2020.

Previous research has shown that classroom interventions are highly effective for motivating student electoral engagement. Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Torney-Purta (2006) found that courses designed to increase democratic engagement resulted in a slight increase in political engagement among the already politically interested, and a larger increase among those lower in political interest.

Short-term goals

To register 65 percent of incoming first-year students by September 30, 2018. In 2016 62.8% of all MSU students (all class levels and ages) were registered to vote, which was down nearly nine percentage points from the 2012 election. This year, voter registration will be available at orientation for all incoming first-year students. The 2018 first-year class is the largest incoming cohort of freshman in MSU history.

To increase visibility of election information in the MSU colleges with the lowest voter turnout by September 30, 2018.

Student turnout rates vary by major. At MSU, these majors had the lowest turnout in the 2014 midterm elections: business and marketing, communication and journalism, computer and information sciences, engineering, psychology, mathematics and statistics, and technologies and technicians. Education majors have by far the highest turnout rate (25.7 percent in the 2014 midterm election).

To provide registration and voting information in all residence halls by September 1, 2018.

To institutionalize the practice of the Provost (or another high-level administrator) sending an email to all students including registration information and a link to the Turbovote website.

Action Plan

- The MSU Votes committee, in partnership with the local city clerks and the League of Women Voters of the Lansing Area, will provide incoming first-year students with the opportunity to register to vote throughout the orientation period (June-July 2018) via a table at the organizational fair.

- The ASMSU (MSU student association) will create mailers with registration information and a link to Turbovote and will place in every student mailbox on campus.
- A link to Turbovote will be available on each student's homepage on D2L, the campus-wide system for sharing classroom materials.
- ASMSU will knock on doors in dorms to register students who live on campus. In order to facilitate this process, ASMSU will work closely with the county clerks to train and deputize 20-30 students so that they can register other students on campus.
- The MSU Votes committee will work with faculty and students from the Advertising and Public Relations department to design posters with registration information and, later in the fall, posters with reminders about voting and key issues at stake in the election. These posters will be displayed in all residence halls and in academic buildings, with an emphasis on buildings associated with low-turnout majors.
- The political science department will partner with ASMSU for debate watching parties. ASMSU also plans to invite local candidates for an on-campus candidate forum.
- The MSUVotes committee will partner with faculty in Political Science and Communication to present voter information in first-year writing courses.

Timeline

June-July 2018:

- Tabling at orientation to register incoming first-year students

August 2018:

- Email to Deans soliciting their help to encourage faculty to add information about voter registration and how to vote on their syllabi. Email will include pre-scripted content that faculty can use if they wish.

September 2018:

- Weekly Tabling in the evenings at various alternating dining halls around campus for about 4 hours either during dinner or during "late night" dining. We will be doing this four or five times a week.
- Meeting with RSO's on campus who would like to register their members at their meetings.
- Reaching out to Resident Assistants in the Resident Halls in order to create floor events that include us coming to help their residents get registered.
- Focus groups to test issue messaging strategy and the effectiveness of proposed GOTV posters.
- Have the TurboVote link sent out by the Provost or other high-level administrator to increase ease of registration for students. (Co-signed by city clerks)
- Presentations in first-year writing courses.
- Posters in residence halls and academic buildings (focus on registration).

- ASMSU stuffing residence hall mailboxes with reminders about registration.
- ASMSU to canvas residence halls.

October 2018:

- Continue tabling and canvassing up to the registration deadline of Oct. 9th.
- Start Get Out the Vote campaign with fliers and other informational material. New posters in residence halls and academic buildings (focus on key issues at stake in the election)
- Host candidate forum and debate watch party

November 2018:

- Continue to provide information to students about where to vote on and off campus, through fliers and our social media as well as tabling events.

Evaluation

We have designed a plan to evaluate our efforts to register votes and turnout student votes, in partnership with ASMSU and the city clerks. First, we will track how many students are registered via each of our registration tactics. This includes: Tracking which students are registered during the organization fair at first-year orientation; tracking which students are reached during residence hall canvassing; and the use of customized Turbovote links to identify which digital messages produced registrations. Second, we will conduct a field experiment (in partnership with faculty from Political Science and Communication) to determine the effectiveness of classroom interventions for first-year students. We will select first-year writing courses at random; selected classes will receive a presentation on voting information from a trained student. We will evaluate this intervention by looking at turnout rates for students who received the intervention versus those that did not (we will work with Catalist to validate student turnout). Finally, we will use student focus groups to test our messaging strategy for the issue-focused posters and digital messages used to encourage voter turnout.