Huskies Vote!

Northern Illinois University (NIU) is committed to developing active, engaged, informed citizens who “become global leaders who work to build a better society.”\(^1\) As such, the university is proud to participate for the first time in the All In Campus Democracy Challenge. The following action plan was developed by a steering committee comprised of faculty, staff, students, administrators and community members who worked in conjunction with dozens of additional members of the university and community. Additionally, four subcommittees have been charged with implementing various aspects of the plan.

The action plan focuses on four areas: general voter information; registration; education; and mobilization.

NIU has the following goals:

- Increase the percentage of students who registered from 72.6% in 2018 to 80% in 2020.
- Increase the percentage of students who voted in the general election from 50.1% in 2016 to 55% in 2020.\(^2\)
- Surpass the mean voter turnout rate for all institutions. NIU did not meet this goal in 2016 or 2018.

All In Campus Democracy Challenge Steering Committee
Chad Glover, Director, Jobs PLUS
Michaela Holtz, Director, Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning
Doug Johnson, DeKalb County Clerk
Meg Junk, Coordinator for Signature Programs and Event Administrator, Student Affairs
Sandy Lopez, Coordinator for Undocumented Student Support, Academic Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
Julie Ann O’Connell, Assistant Director, Center for Nonprofit and NGO Studies
Victor Owoeye, Journalism undergraduate
John Patten, Accounting and Political Science undergraduate
Ian Pearson, Speaker of the Student Senate, Nonprofit and NGO Studies and Political Science undergraduate
Andy Pemberton, Internal Communications, Web and Internal Communications
Matt Streb, Chief of Staff to the President, Professor, Department of Political Science (chair)
Laura Vazquez, Professor, Department of Communication

Subcommittee Membership

Communication
Taylor Hayden, Associate Director of Digital Content, Institutional Communications

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\(^2\) A comparison to the 2016 turnout rate is more accurate because participation patterns in presidential election years are different than those during midterm elections.
Meg Junk, Coordinator for Signature Programs and Event Administrator, Student Affairs
Oliver Korioth, Information Technology Lead, Marketing and Creative Services
Andy Pemberton, Internal Communications, Web and Internal Communications (chair)
Mariano Spizzirri, Brand Expression Manager, Marketing and Creative Services
Matt Streb, Chief of Staff to the President, Professor, Department of Political Science
Sophia Vacardos, Graphic Design Manager, Marketing and Creative Services
Rachel Xidis, Associate Director, Web and Internal Communications

Curriculum
Ellen Franklin, Associate Director, First-Year Composition
Chad Glover, Director, Jobs PLUS
Courtney Gallaher, Associate Professor, Department of Geography
Janet Hathaway, Associate Dean, College of Visual and Performing Arts
Michaela Holtz, Director, Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning (co-chair)
Julie Langer, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration
Christine Mooney, Barsema Professor of Social Entrepreneurship, Department of Management
Shanthi Muthusamy, Associate Professor, Department of Engineering Technology
Andrea Radasanu, Director, University Honors, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science
Laura Vazquez, Professor, Department of Communication (co-chair)
Ralph Wheeler, Chair, Department of Chemistry

Events
Ashley Hines, Nonprofit and NGO Studies and Political Science undergraduate
Meg Junk, Coordinator for Signature Programs and Event Administrator, Student Affairs (chair)
Matthew Medwecky, Events Coordinator, Holmes Student Center
John Patten, Accounting and Political Science undergraduate
Julie Ann O’Connell, Assistant Director, Center for Nonprofit and NGO Studies

Voter Registration
Blanca Barreda, Nursing undergraduate
Doug Johnson, DeKalb County Clerk
Lynne Kunde, DeKalb County Clerk’s Office, Election Judge Supervisor
Kira Lavizzo, Health and Human Sciences undergraduate
Sandy Lopez, Coordinator for Undocumented Student Support, Academic Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (chair)
Victor Owoeye, Journalism undergraduate
Ian Pearson, Speaker of the Student Senate, Nonprofit and NGO Studies and Political Science undergraduate
Adriana Aguilar Perez, Sociology undergraduate
Mark Pietrowski, Associate Director, Continuing Professional Education, DeKalb County Board, Chair
Luz Rodriquez, Counseling and Higher Education graduate student
Diana Sanchez, Biology undergraduate
Stephanie Salazar, Health and Human Sciences undergraduate
Rubi Salgado, Nonprofit and NGO Studies undergraduate
The following actions already have been implemented or will take place during in anticipation of the March Illinois Democratic and Republican primaries and the November general election. This action plan is considered a living, breathing document. Although this is the final plan that will be submitted in advance of the All In Campus Democracy Challenge December 2019 deadline, the plan will continually be updated and adapted to help NIU meet its goals.

**General Voter Information**

- Launched a new Huskies Vote website ([https://www.niu.edu/huskies-vote/index.shtml](https://www.niu.edu/huskies-vote/index.shtml)) that provides a link to allow students to register to vote and answers frequently asked questions. It also includes information on registration, links to Illinois Board of Elections and DeKalb County Clerk websites, links to candidate websites and a calendar of voter information/registration events.
  - The website will be linked to various university websites, including those for our voter registration partners (see below).
- Develop a communication and marketing plan to be implemented in January/February 2020
Media interviews (e.g., *Northern Star, Daily Chronicle*, WNII, on the Democracy Challenge).
- [https://northernstar.info/news/administration-encourages-political-engagement-at-luncheon/article_8707acae-04e4-11ea-a5f2-7b3bb8647c1c.html](https://northernstar.info/news/administration-encourages-political-engagement-at-luncheon/article_8707acae-04e4-11ea-a5f2-7b3bb8647c1c.html)

NIU Today story.

Use of campus digital signage.

Presentations on the plan:
- University Council
- Student Senate
- Presidential Commission on the Status of Women
- Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)
- Management team from the Division of Student Affairs
- Student Experience Team
- College communications professionals

Use of #HuskiesVote on social media.

- Discussion with 65 English 103 and English 203 instructors about incorporating the Challenge into the classes’ curricula.
- Discussion with 29 Communications 100 instructors and teaching assistants about incorporating the Challenge into the classes’ curricula.
- Created and implemented a survey to help the university capture all civic engagement initiatives and document student participation ([https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0wkrl2yr09GFWG9](https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0wkrl2yr09GFWG9)).
  - Faculty were asked to what kinds of activities they do in courses that are a part of an effort to increase students’ awareness and their social responsibility regarding civic engagement and to highlight modules, activities, lectures and videos that are used to achieve these goals.
  - This information will be made available on the Huskies Vote website and via a Blackboard Module to help other faculty develop ideas about promoting civic engagement effectively in their classrooms.

**Voter Registration**

- Developed voter registration information materials, specifically aimed at students (see Appendix A).
- Established Campus Voter Registration Partners. The following units are Campus Voter Registration Partners:
  - Academic Advising Center
  - Bursar
To be a Campus Voter Registration Partner, the unit must have done the following:

- Voter registration information brochures need to be made accessible to students in a central location (e.g., lobby, main office). If units have digital signage, the information will be added to the slide rotation.
- Placed a “I can help you register to vote” sign in a visible location.
- At least one staff member from the unit must be trained as a deputy registrar (most had multiple staff members trained).
- Developed a deputy registrar training program.
  - Four training sessions took place in November and December of 2019. More than 40 new deputy registrars were trained.
- Developing voter registration workshops.
  - Several of our academic colleges will hold voter registration workshops where students can ask questions regarding voter registration and register to vote. The workshops will be led by campus employees who were trained as deputy registrars.
  - The Division of Intercollegiate Athletics will hold a voter registration workshop where students can ask questions regarding voter registration and register to vote. The workshops will be led by campus employees who were trained as deputy registrars.
- Events to distribute voter registration information and have online voter registration:
  - Resource Center Open Houses (Fall 2019 and Fall 2020)
  - Campus Meets Community Events (Fall 2019 and Fall 2020)
  - President’s Welcome Picnic (Fall 2020)
  - Open House and Admitted Student Days (throughout 2019 and 2020)
  - Campus Unity Walk (Fall 2019 and Fall 2020)
  - New Student Orientation (Summer 2020)
  - Student Involvement Fair (Fall 2020)
Undergraduate Research and Artistry Day (Spring 2020)
Business Passport Program events (all year)
Academic cultural centers signature events (all year)
STEM Fest (Fall 2019 and Fall 2020)
NIU Cares Day (Spring 2020)
Heritage Month events (all year)
Diversity Dialogue events (all year)
Greek 50+1 events (all year)
NAACP and Soul-Fully Fridays at the Center for Black Studies (all year)
Academic Diversity Center Open House (Fall 2019 and Fall 2020)
POWER Retreat (Spring 2020)
Breaking Barriers Workshops (all year)
Hungry Huskies (all year)
CODE trainings (all year)
Coming Out of the Shadows (Spring 2020)

Mission Mondays.
• Mission is our popular live Husky mascot who visits various places on campus each Monday. During the fall and spring semesters, several Mission Mondays will be devoted to voter registration. Mission will have deputy registrars with him who will assist students in registering, and we will promote and document the event on Mission’s popular Twitter and Instagram accounts.

• Permanent voter registration kiosk will be placed in the Holmes Student Center and Founders Memorial Library.
• Short videos regarding how to register, why voting matters and other civic engagement topics.
  • The videos will be shared on various university social media accounts and placed on the Huskies Vote! website.
• Table tents with voter registration information placed at residence hall and other campus dining venues.
• Letter from SGA President and Speaker of the Senate to students encouraging voter registration will be sent in January 2020.
• Letter from the Dean of Students in her weekly message to students encouraging voter registration will be sent in January 2020.
• Letter from Provost encouraging faculty to mention voter registration deadlines and importance of voting in their classes will be sent in January 2020.
  • The letter will also include a link for the civic engagement survey referenced above and encourage faculty to complete it.
• Huskies Vote popup banners in various campus locations.

Voter Education
• 2020 Election Lecture and Debate Series.
Lecture topics are still being planned, but possible topics include aligning political beliefs with candidates, the importance of voting and the history of political activism at NIU.

Debate topics are still being planned, but possibilities include local candidate debates (e.g., state representative, county board) and a debate on the graduated income tax.

- Debate watch parties.
  - Watch parties will be held for one Democratic presidential primary debate before the March primary and one general election debate.
  - Faculty will give brief comments before the debate to set the context and lead students in a discussion after the debate.

- Donuts and Discussion or Coffee and Conversations.
  - Donuts and Discussion (or Coffee and Conversations, name TBD) will occur on a regular basis, possibly monthly. The events will be set up “tent-style” in a different location each month and focus on one “hot topic.” Students will be invited to come into the space, enjoy the coffee or donuts and engage in civil discourse with other students about their views.
  - This event also will serve as an opportunity to talk with students about NIU’s policies and procedures around Freedom of Expression.
  - Topics are still being identified, but possible topics include immigration, abortion, gay marriage, gun control laws and First Amendment rights.

- Funding for undergraduate research through the Student Engagement Fund.
  - Undergraduate students and faculty will be able to apply for funding supporting undergraduate research that has a clear connection to civic life. Funding will be able to support compensation for student (up $1,200 per semester) and expenses related to the project (up to $2,500). Projects will be highlighted during Undergraduate Research and Artistry Day in spring semester.

- Created a one-page document for faculty of do’s and don’ts when talking about the importance of voting in class (see Appendix B).

- Information on the importance of voting and how to do so will be added to the curriculum in UNIV 101 and UNIV 201, classes designed to help students adjust to NIU and develop the skills necessary to succeed in college and beyond.

- A book on the importance of voting (or a related topic) will be considered for the Common Read in the future.
  - All first-year composition courses and, moving forward, all Communications 100 sections will use the Common Read as a required part of the curriculum.

- JobsPLUS event in the spring with current elected officials and candidates for office where students applied interviewing and active listening skills to learn more about what the officials/candidates did in their roles, what issues the offices/boards were engaged in

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3 2020 is NIU’s 125th Anniversary. This event will be held in conjunction with the 125th Anniversary celebration.

4 Illinois voters will decide in November 2020 on whether to implement a graduated income tax.
and more information about the background of the officials/candidates and what they did outside of elected office.

• Work with *Northern Star* to encourage local candidates to interview.

**Mobilization (March and November)**

• Huskies Vote! buttons will be handed out at all Democracy Challenge events.
• Special “I Voted” Huskie stickers for student voters in campus polling precincts.
• Students sign “I Pledge to Vote” posters in the Holmes Student Center, Founders Memorial Library and other places around campus.
• Planning a Rock the Vote event for the general election.
• November early voting initiative:
  o Social media campaign
  o Tabling in Holmes Student Center and Founders Memorial Library
• Voter information center in the Barsema Alumni and Visitors Center and the Holmes Student Center on election day
  o Huskie Service Scholars will help students determine their appropriate voter location and answer questions
Appendix A: Voter Registration Materials

Your voice. Your vote.
Are you registered to vote in DeKalb County?
You'll need the following information to check your voter registration status:

- Five digit ZIP code for where you believe you are registered to vote (DeKalb’s ZIP code is 60115).
- Street name and number.
- Your date of birth.

You’ll need the following information to complete online voter registration:

- Your Illinois driver’s license or state ID.
- Issue date of your identification.
- Last four digits of your Social Security number.
- Your date of birth.

Check your status and register to vote online by visiting:
go.niu.edu/Huskies-Vote
Your voice. Your vote.

I can help you register to vote.

Visit go.niu.edu/Huskies-Vote for information about voter registration, the candidates running for office in the 2020 election and civic engagement opportunities on campus.
Appendix B: All IN Democracy Challenge - Faculty/Staff Information Sheet

NIU is engaged in the All In Democracy Challenge program that seeks to enhance student involvement in voter education, registration and mobilization. This is a nonpartisan effort and all discussion with students should be framed in terms of civic responsibility. Students should not be encouraged to vote for any particular candidate nor join any party.

**Here are some suggestions for promoting civil discourse on these emotionally laden issues — most of which, unsurprisingly, echo good general classroom practice:**

- Don’t feel you need to be a political expert, knowing all the answers with perfect responses.
- Remember that your role is to get students talking and thinking, not to lead them toward a particular political viewpoint or electoral outcome.
- Consider having a couple of students facilitate the conversation with you.
- You may supply information, context and sources for further inquiry, but you are mainly providing an environment where all in the classroom are respected. Let the students take the lead as much as possible. Encourage them to listen, hear each other’s perspectives and work to understand the experience that generates these perspectives. These resources might be helpful with incorporating these conversations in your classes: [CEEP Faculty Guide](https://www.ceep.org), [Living Room Conversations](https://livingroomconversations.org), [Allsides](https://allsides.com).
- When discussing where candidates stand on key issues of interest to students, be accurate and fair, whatever your personal views. Feel free to use the following [nonpartisan candidate and issues guides](https://www.bipartisanvoting.org).

If students wish to register to vote, they can contact:

- Deputy Registrars at NIU listed on Huskies Vote website ([https://www.niu.edu/huskies-vote/index.shtml](https://www.niu.edu/huskies-vote/index.shtml))
- DeKalb County Registrar: 815-895-7147 or email elections@dekalbcounty.org

If they have a valid Illinois DL or State ID, they can visit the state’s website and register to vote online ([https://ova.elections.il.gov/](https://ova.elections.il.gov/))

The registration period for the online voter registration system will close at 11:59 p.m. March 1, 2020, and will reopen March 19, 2020.

**TO VOTE IN ILLINOIS**

- You must be a United States citizen.
- You must be 17 on or before the date of the Primary Election and turn 18 on or before the date of the General or Consolidated Election.
- You must live in your election precinct at least 30 days prior to Election Day.
- You must not be serving a sentence of confinement in any penal institution as a result of a conviction.
- You may not claim the right to vote anywhere else.