



SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE

Action Plan for Southwestern Michigan College (SMC)

To Increase Civic and Political Engagement and Voting Rates for the 2020 General election.

The Definition of Civic Engagement

“Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate.”

Excerpts from *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000. http://www.nytimes.com/ref/college/collegespecial2/coll_aascu_defi.html

Proposal

Obviously, an important topic and concern. What are we teaching our students? Math, Psychology, English, Welding, Accounting; yes, indeed, all of these but what do you do with it? Each one of the definitions presented discusses involvement in our communities. We are a community college so by definition we should be involved in Civic Engagement. Southwestern Michigan College should be involved in the process. I would like to “get to know” The Democracy Commitment” better before we consider a commitment to this organization.

At SMC we are small but mighty.... I believe this initiative should be cross campus involving all parts of our community. I can already think of the Honors Program (and PTK) students having programs in their areas of interest. Accounting students working with the laws that affect their professions. STEM students being involved with the agencies that affect the environment, "get out the vote" programs, bringing (more) local and state legislators on campus, Social Work students working in their policy areas, re-enforcing and acknowledging some of the already great things our students, faculty and staff are already doing, just to name a few off the top of my head.

Michigan changed its voting registration laws by Proposal in 2018 which changes, how to register (they hope to have online registration soon) deadlines and more. Michigan Primary was March 10, 2020(<https://mVIC.sos.state.mi.us/>)

Executive Summary

This plan was created by Mary D Young-Marcks (faculty) and Branden Pompey (Student Life) with the support of the Office of the President who has signed and submitted the President's Commitment.

We, at SMC, hope to foster a community of civic engagement in all areas of the college community; including community awareness and involvement, voting registration and engagement.

This plan is written for the calendar year 2020. The plan has the support of all levels of the college; financial resources will come from Student Life, the Office of the VP for Instruction and the Office of the President. We hope to continue and foster a campus where being Civically Engaged is part of our culture.

SMC is a locally governed community college with a commitment to providing knowledge for all through access to high quality higher education and postsecondary training that dates to our founding more than 55 years ago. Our campuses in Dowagiac and Niles, which is Cass County, MI. We are a rural college with enrollment of 2150 (Fall 2018) 41% full time. 84% is traditional age students.

SMC is unique among two-year colleges. We offer a full residential life experience on our Dowagiac campus and student leadership development opportunities for students living on campus or commuting.

This plan is meant to include all members of the SMC community; staff, all faculty and students who attend either one of our campuses (Dowagiac and Niles) and those students attending remotely.

Leadership

Staff and Faculty Coordinators

Mr. Branden Pompey; Assistant Manager of the Student Activities Center (SAC) and this will be part of the job description of the person holding this position.

Dr Mary D Young-Marcks; Professor Social Sciences

Coalition:

Dr Joe Odenwald; President (as of January 1)

Dr David Fleming; Vice President for Instruction

Dr Keith Howell Dean of Arts and Sciences

Brent Brewer- Chief of Staff

Jeff Hooks-Director of Student Life

Katie Hannah- Dean of Students

John Eby Coordinator of Media Relations

Michael O'Brien Vice President of Enrollment and Student Development

Dr. Angela Evans Office of Institutional Research

Faculty Members from various departments and schools (hopefully)

Representative(s) from The Council of Clubs; which is to provide organization, opportunities for collaboration, leadership development, continuity and governance to officially recognized SMC student clubs and organizations.

Commitment

SMC being small does not have a dedicated office or staff for this project. As mentioned earlier it is part of the job description under our student life area. Faculty involvement is voluntary – SMC only has one faculty member teaching any Political Science courses and one adjunct who teaching in other areas as well. We have the support of administration and financial support but to date other human resources have been limited.

We rewrote our EDUC 120 (our introduction to college course) course objectives to include civic engagement

- *Increase understanding of Civic Engagement by defining what it and being aware of the opportunities on campus and community to be involved.*

Part of commitment does require clubs in order to be approved and seek funding to be civically engaged as well.

We are working to include this topic as part of student orientation.

Landscape

NSLVE Report and Input

We went down slightly (-0.1 %) from 2012 to 2016 for voting rates. We just started out planned involvement campus wide in 2017. We saw an increase in participation from 2014 to 2018 but midterm and general elections are not comparable.

We would like to bring all those numbers up. We believe Michigan's change in law will help with registration numbers. We are hoping more educational opportunities and visibility will increase voting turn out as well.

The report show that traditional age student follows the pattern of low voter turnout; by involving our Student Activity Center, we hope to change that National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Since 2017, SMC has received campus-specific voter registration and turnout data through the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement.

Using the "The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)" for SMC. This a case where it appears great progress was made but the true story is the political climate of the times. I would like to think our increased involved in this area helped and will continue to encourage more involvement as we go forward.

| Year | Registration Rate | Voting Rate of Registered Students | Overall Voting Rate of Student Body |
|------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2014 | 52.6 | 22.5 | 11.9 |
| 2018 | 59.4 | 54.4 | 32.3 |

(Campus)

One of the critical areas of concerning is the demographics by age. While voter turnout over all in 2014 was the lowest since World War II our demographics show

Nationwide voter turnout was 36.4%, down from 40.9% in the 2010 midterms and the lowest since the 1942 elections, when just 33.9% of voters turned out, though that election came during the middle of World War II , Michigan voter out was 17.4%(Primary). 2018 was very different. Michigan's turnout was 28.2%. (Primary) Overall, turnout was higher as well. SMC increased as well. We did become involved actively in 2017- so hopefully our efforts were part of the change

"The November 2018 election is widely recognized for its high voter turnout. Census Bureau data released today show who is behind the historic 11 percentage point increase from the last midterm election in 2014.

Voter turnout went up among all voting age and major racial and ethnic groups. Fifty-three percent of the citizen voting-age population voted in 2018, the highest midterm turnout in four decades, while the 2014 election had the lowest.” (Misra)

Goal to increase registration a participation for 2020 across all demographics

| By | 2014 | 2018 |
|-------|------|------|
| 18-21 | 8.8 | 27.9 |
| 22-24 | 12.7 | 39.3 |
| 25-29 | 10.6 | 40.5 |
| 30-39 | 18.5 | 40.9 |
| 40-49 | 29.2 | 47.8 |
| 50 + | 56.3 | 60.7 |

(Campus)

"Campus Report 2014 and 2018 Student Voting Rates for Southwestern Michigan College." *The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)*, edited by Jonathan Tisch, Tufts University, Sept. 2019, idhe.tufts.edu/nslve.

Primary Voter Registration/Turnout Statistics, The Office of Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, www.michigan.gov/sos/0,4670,7-127-1633_8722-195479--,00.html. Accessed 27 May 2020.

Misra, Jordan. *Voter Turnout Rates Among All Voting Age and Major Racial and Ethnic Groups Were Higher Than in 2014*, Census.gov, 23 Apr. 2019, www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/04/behind-2018-united-states-midterm-election-turnout.html. Accessed 27 May 2020.

Specific Goals

1.) Obtain background information and baseline information to start process.

Plan: Attend Michigan Voting Summit, virtual conference sponsored by Oakland University – May 29, 2020

Attend the Conference, Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement Meeting in June 2020. <https://www.aascu.org/meetings/CLDE20/> (attended the virtual conference)

This we will be our fourth year of participation; we will have our faculty member and Student Life representative attending from our campus.

2.) We have been using the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) report and will use 2016 and 2018 data to help us formulate our goals here.

3.) Increase information and access to all on campus about voter registration.

Plan: Embedding voter registration information in the SMC's homepage, Moodle (our course management systems), and/or Wired (our online portal operated by SMC).

4.) Increase Voter Registration

Plan: Voter registration available during freshman orientation, in residential areas, during Campus Bash and other related events

Participation in National Voter Registration Day- September 22nd, 2020.

(<https://nationalvoterregistrationday.org/about/>)

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Increase by 5%

We plan to coordinate with faculty members to encourage their students to register to vote in the first weeks of classes during both our Spring (January-May) and Fall (September- December) semester. There will be work being done during the summer, but the number of students is small.

5.) Voter Education ~ #SMCVotes

Plan

Completed activities

Spring Semester 2020

January 28th, 2020: Why should I Vote? Breakdown of the importance of voting and the effect that it can have on a community.

February 4th, 2020: Running for Office: Afternoon/Evening with City Council Members Pat Bakeman and Danielle Lucas – asking questions about why they decided to run, the ins and outs of running a political campaign

February 18th, 2020: The Art of Politics: Deep dive into posters, buttons, shirts, and other various forms of propaganda candidates have used during campaigns in the past. We have pizza (maybe provided by Propaganda Pizza).

All these activities were attended by both students, staff and faculty. Numbers of participants was low but we- had the motto-“ if we didn't have it, no one would have come”

March 17th, 2020: Primary Results Handout: breakdown of voting percentages and what it all means for the General Election. Cancelled due to campus closed down -COVID 19

Summer 2020- No plans due classes mainly online and limited access to campus.

Fall 2020

Civic Engagement (#SMCVotes)

General Plan- created with hopes of some face to face involvement but being able to transition to wholly online if necessary

August 2020

- Michigan Voter Registration Info Video- create video to show what activities are available, how to register and how to be involved.

• **September 2020**

- 17th – Outdoor Engagement Pop-Up: “What’s Important to You?”
- 22nd – Virtual Townhall Presentation/National Voter Registration Day/Absentee Ballot Information/” Why We Vote”

• **October 2020**

- 6th – Virtual Townhall Presentation: “Art of Politics 2.0”
- 15th – Outdoor Engagement Pop-Up: “Importance of Local Politics”
- 20th – Virtual Townhall Presentation: “Maybe Dan Vandenhede v. Brad Paquette”
- 22nd – Virtual Townhall Presentation: “Michigan Voter Info Night”
- 29th – Outdoor Engagement Pop-Up: “Exit Polling”

• **November 2020**

- 3rd – Election Day Watch Along
- 10th – Handout Detailing Election Results

Plan: We include Civic Engagement component in our EDUC 120 which is an introduction to college course required by most incoming students.

We plan to work on including a Civic Engagement component in our orientation for incoming students.

Plan: Host Constitution Day September 17, 2020

Use of Social Media to organize social media campaigns to get students active and voting on campus. This would involve sending regular updates through various social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to remind students of important deadlines and other pertinent information regarding the elections, deadlines, and the candidates.

Use of Wired to have reminders posted once students and faculty members sign in to remind them Primary and Election Day voting.

6.) Increased Voter Turnout

Plan: Information provided in classes, social media use to “remember to vote”, information in Wired.

Participation in National Voter registration day, September 22, 2020

7.) Increase participation across campus.

Plan: Engage faculty and staff in process.

January 20th, 2020: SMC Votes Kick-off Party: Presentation of SMC’s voting history, voter participation goal setting for the 2020 General Election. Leads into pizza a movie night in the SAC Theater

March 3rd, 2020: Michigan Primary Info Night: Do an afternoon/evening of going through the primary ballot, maybe invite local candidates to campus.

Similar activities during fall semester leading up to General Election

Identify and engage student groups in process

Reporting

This Action Plan will be shared with the Office of the President and the others mentioned under leadership. It will be made available to all those whose work will contribute to putting these initiatives into action so they can see how their efforts fit into the bigger picture of the goals for this endeavor.

Additionally, the plan and activities are covered by will be shared with the Marketing office and us with the hope that it would be available on the college’s website. It will also be sent to community partners who are coming alongside the college to support civic goals for its students. The college has already made its NSLVE data available publicly, through the website and press releases sent to local media.

Evaluation

The work described in this plan will be evaluated annually and as we go. Since we are relatively new to the process- we need to adjust as we try new things. For example, turning this plan in early asking for help and now dealing with revisions. Evaluations and changes will need to be made based on the current environment for campus; including return to campus for classes I Fall, the possibly of needing to return to online later in fall semester etc

Conclusion

As we started The Definition of Civic Engagement

“Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

Point of Contact for Designation Process

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