

Texas A&M University-Central Texas

Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement Campus Plan

“Warriors in Democracy”

2019-2020



Introduction

Texas A&M University-Central Texas places a high priority on civic and community engagement, core values that serve as the foundation of the university. From the very beginning, the very creation of this institution relied upon the commitment of civic leaders like Lieutenant General Pete Taylor (United States Army, Retired) and the tenacity of the Central Texas region's community leaders and citizens. As we celebrate our tenth anniversary serving this region, this plan provides a roadmap for ensuring the region's students are engaging with resources and tools to make positive change in their communities.

The A&M-Central Texas "Warriors in Democracy" plan, developed by members of the Institutionalization Working Group, has been drafted by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. The action plan is a coordinated effort to reengage the entire campus community in current practices while identifying avenues for improvement.

This action plan begins at the start of the 2019 fall semester and ends in the 2021 spring semester. It is designed to be a flexible guidepost for our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts, implemented through events, voter registration and education initiatives, critical dialogues, panels, and more.

Key Terms

In order for our community to have focused and intentional conversations and dialogue about civic and democratic engagement, it is important for us to have a shared understanding of the fundamental terms related to our work. To achieve greater alignment with collaborative organizations and associations, we have relied upon the definitions provided by the [Association of American Colleges & Universities](#), [Students Learn Students Vote Coalition \(SLSV\)](#), and [All-In Campus Democracy Challenge](#).

Civic learning and democratic engagement means promoting the education of students for engaged citizenship through democratic participation in their communities, respect and appreciation of diversity, applied learning, and social responsibility.

Civic engagement is any act intended to improve or influence a community through deliberation, collaboration, and reciprocal relationships and community-building.

Democratic participation is civic engagement that involves democratic processes (e.g., when an organization puts a matter to a vote and there is democratic participation).

Political engagement or political participation is civic engagement that emphasizes governmental institutions and/or power (e.g., voting in a local, state, or federal election).

Voter registration is the process of successfully completing the application to be able to cast a ballot in an election.

Voter education is the curricular and co-curricular activities offered to students and designed to facilitate civic learning and increase participation in elections.

Voter turnout is the act of casting a ballot, in any manner (e.g., early, in person, absentee).

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Executive Summary

The following comprehensive action plan was designed to maximize our participation in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. Written by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Paul York, it was developed by the CT Votes team, community leaders, students, and Student Affairs staff to be more comprehensive than previous plans in order to better address shortcomings found in the goals, strategies, reporting mechanisms, and evaluation sections. Envisioned as a roadmap for the A&M-Central Texas community to create more opportunities for engagement in and support of this important work, implementation of the plan will begin in September 2019 and will continue through fall 2020 and beyond.

Leadership

Prior to 2019, Texas A&M University-Central Texas' (A&M-Central Texas) civic learning and democratic engagement efforts were largely distributed between various offices at the university without a central location or unified understanding of the institution's goals and priorities related to civic learning and democratic engagement. In the fall of 2019, A&M-Central Texas formed a working group consisting of university faculty, staff, students, and community members to gain a greater centralized perspective of the civic learning and democratic engagement efforts currently underway and those planned.

The working group was primarily led by the associate dean of Student Affairs, who has direct supervision of student and civic engagement efforts within the Division of Student Affairs.

Institutionalization Working Group

Paul York, Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Deputy Title IX Coordinator

Garrett Smith, Assistant Director of Student & Civic Engagement

Josephine Davis, Student Body President, 2019-20

Student Body Representative (Currently Vacant)

League of Women Voters Representative

LULAC Representative

Institutionalization Working Group Membership

The working group is comprised of individuals who were directly involved with the university's SACSCOC accreditation process of evaluating institutionalization of community engagement. Additionally, members from organizations outside of the institution were invited to provide insight and expertise.

Institutionalization Working Group Meetings

This special institutional working group meets twice each long semester and twice during the summer months.

CT Votes Working Group

Paul York, Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Deputy Title IX Coordinator

Garrett Smith, Assistant Director of Student & Civic Engagement

Josephine Davis, Student Body President, 2019-20

Student Representative

Community Member

Role of the CT Votes Working Group

CT Votes is a campus coalition of students, faculty, and staff organizing voter registration and voter education activities to increase campus civic engagement and electoral awareness. CT Votes invites students campus-wide to increase their participation in the democratic process, and to become more educated voters and engaged citizens. Throughout each electoral cycle, CT Votes collaborates with other university offices to organize and coordinate awareness and information-sharing opportunities and events. CT Votes works closely with the League of Women Voters (LWV) of Texas, Bell County; Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV); the Elections Department of Bell County, Texas; and the Bell County Elections Administrator.

CT Votes Working Group Meetings

This working group meets once a month to discuss planning, evaluation, and initiatives.

Office of Student & Civic Engagement

The Office of Student & Civic Engagement “supports an active community of student-leaders acting as catalysts for positive change.” The office was established in 2010 to support the development of students through activities, community and civic engagement, and co-curricular experiential learning opportunities. The office engages in nonpartisan and non-advocacy focused voter education and awareness.

Commitment

In 2012, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) released the National Task Force on Civic Learning & Engagement report, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future*. In this influential report, AAC&U challenges colleges and universities to renew their commitment to civic learning and engagement, foster a civic ethos across all components of the institution and its culture, make civic literacy a core expectation for all students, engage in civic inquiry across the curriculum, and advance civic action as a lifelong practice.

The SLSV coalition asserts “a public institutional commitment is critical for improvement across campus; it signals to all stakeholders that these efforts are significant and long-term.”¹

In 2019, the Institutionalization Working Group was established to centralize, intensify, and focus our efforts towards ensuring civic learning and democratic engagement are a pervasive aspect of the Warrior spirit, culture, and identity. Further, the formation of the working group demonstrates our increased commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement, which is essential to our identity as a public, upper-level university and is a cornerstone of our [mission](#) and [strategic plan](#).

¹*Strengthening American Democracy: A Guide for Developing an Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates Among College Students* (Washington, DC: Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, 2019).

A&M-Central Texas Mission

A&M-Central Texas “is committed to high quality, rigorous, and innovative educational programs delivered in a variety of instructional modes to a diverse student population through exceptional teaching, service, and applied scholarship. With an emphasis on community engagement, the university employs emerging technology to enhance student learning and to nurture its partnerships with regional community colleges, the military presence in its region, and the community at large.”²

A&M-Central Texas Strategic Plan

[A&M-Central Texas’ 2018-2022 strategic plan](#), developed by the university’s [University Council](#) serving as a steering committee with feedback from Faculty Senate, Staff Council, the Student Government Association, the A&M-Central Texas Alumni Association, the President’s Regional Advisory Council, the University Foundation Board, the Killeen Economic Development Council, and the Off-Campus Development Committee, identifies *a pathway toward excellence* with five imperatives: academic excellence, student success, community engagement, access & pathway to higher education, and diversity & inclusion.

The plan’s third imperative, Community Engagement, is central to the work in this plan and identifies two primary strategic goals:

1. (3.1) Prepare educated and engaged citizens that contribute to their communities and enhance the vitality of the region.
2. (3.2) Serve as a central hub for building regional partnerships and supporting community-based research to advance defined social and economic initiatives.

In order to meet these strategic goals, A&M-Central Texas identifies several strategies to guide the work of the institution:

Goal 3.1

Provide resources to support faculty in community engagement and to develop service-learning courses.

Develop a recognition program for faculty, staff, and students participating in community and civic engagement initiatives.

Engage with the community to develop programs that complement students’ curricular and co-curricular activities

Expand and strengthen the relationships between the Office of Career and Professional Development with business and industry in the outlying areas of our Central Texas region.

² *Strategic Plan: 2018-2022*. (Killeen, TX: Texas A&M University-Central Texas, 2018).

Prepare to apply for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

Establish an Office of Civic and Community Engagement to coordinate and support community engagement activities on campus and in the community

Goal 3.2

Develop active community advisory boards for each college and professional program

Develop a regional, national, and global advisory board for online programs

Establish a strong infrastructure for the University Center for Applied Research and Engagement (UCARE)

Increase the number of faculty and staff serving on local, state, and national boards or professional organizations by 20% by 2022

Division of Student Affairs Mission

The [Division of Student Affairs](#) provides foundational support for the civic and democratic work of the institution. Student Affairs' [mission](#) reaffirms the university's mission to community engagement by enriching "the quality of campus life through innovative student-centered programs that foster service, diversity, and integrity" and by providing opportunities "to engage socially, professionally, and academically to enhance lifelong learning."

Division of Student Affairs Strategic Plan

The [strategic plan](#) for the Division of Student Affairs "employed the University Five-Year Strategic Plan as a foundation, and to ensure stakeholder buy-in the strategic plan was further enhanced through student recommendations and a Student Affairs Leadership Team" consisting of representatives from each office within the division. The plan establishes three imperatives: enhance student success and career connectedness, strengthen a sense of community, and provide leadership for civic and community engagement.

Two of the division's strategic imperatives—strengthen a sense of community and provide leadership for civic and community engagement—are central to the work done by those in the Institutionalization and CT Votes working groups.

Imperative Two: Strengthen a Sense of Community

Students have consistently assigned a high ranking to the need for an enhanced sense of community at A&M-Central Texas. Two themes that have consistently emerged in the feedback provided to the division and the strategic plan development group are the need for greater student

voice in institutional decision-making and the desire for increased partnerships with the regional community to achieve common goals.

Goal 2d. Emphasize a students' sense of community

- Create opportunities for regular dialogue between students and the senior leadership of the university
- Ensure partnerships are created that propel civic and community engagement initiatives across the division

Imperative Three: Provide Leadership in Civic and Community Engagement

Law professor Thomas Ehrlich states, “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 nonpolitical processes.”³ Institutions of higher education are called to engage students in civic responsibility to create future leaders in communities. The division is committed to creating opportunities for students to engage their communities fully as partners in the learning process.

Goal 3a. Prepare for the 2020 application for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

- Develop institutional capacity for monitoring and measuring community engagement activities and perceptions of community engagement
- Ensure community engagement initiatives within student research are implemented and present in the continuous improvement process
- Ensure community engagement initiatives within the study abroad program are implemented and present in the continuous improvement process
- Ensure community engagement initiatives within student organizations and volunteer efforts are implemented and present in the continuous improvement process
- Embed the Civic Engagement AAC&U VALUE rubric and associated learning outcomes across the division to assess and demonstrate civic learning

Goal 3b. Continue to develop students as ethical leaders and positive change agents who feel empowered to positively contribute to their local and global community

- Implement a university “day of service” led by students
- Leverage student involvement software to provide co-curricular transcripts documenting leadership, service, internships, and engagement of students
- Develop leadership development training and certificate opportunities
- Create a student-led service proposal initiative in which students accomplish large-scale community service projects
- Provide opportunities within study abroad programs in which students can better understand their strengths to promote greater positive cognitive and interpersonal growth

³ Thomas Ehrlich, *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Oryx Press, 2000), iv.

Goal 3c. Leverage external partnerships to enhance Student Affairs' initiatives

- Include community partners in the biennial alcohol and other drug review and implementation of future programming
- Establish a community engagement advisory board that provides input to the institution's efforts and areas of focus in regards to service-learning and civic engagement
- Have each functional area within Student Affairs develop key strategies in enhancing partnerships within the community in the continuous improvement process

Though A&M-Central Texas does have a significant commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement, we do experience challenges to our commitment. As an upper-division institution, many of our students are older than the typical 18-to-24-year-old university population and experience barriers that prevent them from being fully engaged related to family, finances, and employment. Additionally, the unique context of public universities in the State of Texas does cause the institution some trepidation surrounding voter education and engagement.

Across the Curriculum & Co-Curriculum

A&M-Central Texas, with the Texas A&M University System, share a commitment to student learning. As such, the Texas A&M University System has established a common set of student learning outcomes and demonstrates a commitment to ensuring sustained measurement of those outcomes. Two of those outcomes, ethical & social responsibility and globalization & diversity, have direct connections to engaged pedagogy. Each year, A&M-Central Texas reports our evaluation of the learning outcomes requested for the specific cycle.

Ethical & Social Responsibility

"Students will articulate multiple cultural perspectives in local, national and global communities. Students will identify and analyze social and ethical challenges, including possible resolutions.

"Outcome: Upon completion of their degree program, students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of and use ethical reasoning for responsible personal and professional decision making in a culturally and ethnically diverse world."⁴

2018 Report & Results

Assessments utilized for measurement:

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- Individual Development of Educational Assessment (IDEA)

⁴ Texas A&M University Central Texas: Ethical & Social Responsibility (College Station, TX: The Texas A&M University System, 2016.) Retrieved from <https://empoweru.tamus.edu/student-learning-outcomes/texas-am-university-central-texas-social-responsibility/>

- Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Rubrics
- ETS HEIghten®

Results:

- Overall - Sufficient
- NSSE Personal Code - Proficient
- NSSE Informed and Active Citizen - Proficient
- IDEA Personal Values - Sufficient
- VALUE Rubric Civic Engagement - Emerging
- VALUE Rubric Ethical Reasoning - Proficient
- HEIghten® Civic Competency and Engagement - Sufficient

Analysis:

The university employs a wide array of instruments to assess this critical outcome with results ranging from Proficient to Emerging. Overall, these assessments indicate students proficiently achieve the ethical and social responsibility skills of their academic programs upon completing the degree programs at the university.

Action: The university continues to find ways to include effective components in existing program outcomes with the belief the attainment of ethics is best accomplished when integrated into our educational programs. In 2016, the university established a Service-Learning Advisory Board (SLAB) charged with reviewing existing proposed course for designation as service-learning courses. Once designated, sections of these courses may include service learning components. These sections include social responsibility objectives.

Comments: We strive to ensure our students are exposed to ethical decision-making opportunities and attain a strong sense of social responsibility while enrolled in their undergraduate programs. A&M-Central Texas was selected as one of the 20 universities to be a part of the AAC&U's American Democracy Project's Economic Inequality Initiative. The university continues its lecture series as part of this initiative on inequality and youth homelessness. In 2018, the College of Business gained approval to offer its Master of Science in One Planet Leadership in cooperation with the global OPEN initiative. The degree includes outcomes for sustainability, social responsibility, and ethics. The college is working to include these types of outcomes into undergraduate feeder programs. These initiatives are anticipated to further the attainment of the ethical and social responsibility outcome.

Globalization & Diversity

“Students will utilize multidisciplinary perspectives to evaluate initiatives that have been employed to address global issues. Students will describe the nature of global interdependence and its impacts.

“Upon completion of their degree program, students will be able to analyze the impact of multiple factors on the interconnectedness of diverse peoples in the global environment.”⁵

2018 Report & Results

Assessments utilized for measurement:

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- ETS HEIghten®

Results:

- Overall - Proficient
- NSSE People of Other Backgrounds - Proficient
- NSSE Diverse Perspectives - Sufficient
- NSSE Diverse Race - Proficient
- NSSE Diverse Economic - Proficient
- NSSE Diverse Religion - Proficient
- NSSE Diverse Political - Proficient
- HEIghten® Intercultural Competency & Diversity - Sufficient

Analysis:

Students proficiently achieve this outcome upon completion of our baccalaureate degrees as demonstrated by the two assessment instruments, both indirect, employed to evaluate program effectiveness.

In 2018, the university established a Council on Diversity & Inclusion charged with recommending initiatives to increase campus diversity and globalization. Central Texas is a region of diverse cultures and the university’s student, faculty, and staff populations mostly mirror that diversity. Despite the results of these assessments, the campus community believes we have room for improvement.

The assessment could be enhanced by adding a direct measure that will provide a more objective analysis of the outcome. However, the rich nature of the NSSE instrument on this subject should be adequate in the assessment of the diversity perspectives of our students.

Action: The university should employ a direct measure for this outcome by asking faculty to identify assignments applicable to the AAC&U VALUE rubric for “Intercultural Knowledge and Competence” and “Global Learning” and rate student work to directly assess student’s achievement of this outcome.

⁵Texas A&M University Central Texas: Globalization & Diversity (College Station, TX: The Texas A&M University System, 2016). Retrieved from <https://empoweru.tamus.edu/student-learning-outcomes/texas-am-university-central-texas-globalization-diversity/>

Comments: Attaining and maintaining awareness of the diverse cultures and backgrounds of our stakeholders enriches our campus environment and is at the heart of our core values and essential to achieving our university's mission.

Landscape

A&M-Central Texas joined the Texas A&M University System in 2009. Since then, democratic engagement efforts have been somewhat periodic and decentralized. Additionally, many of the activities and initiatives currently understood to be part of our civic learning and democratic engagement plan were not originally perceived as supporting the community and democratic engagement portion of our mission. For instance, since 2015, the Division of Student Affairs has supported the BECOME Poverty Simulation. This simulation provides A&M-Central Texas students with an experiential learning opportunity wherein they experience homelessness in downtown Austin, Texas for a night while engaging the homeless community and learning about resources and ways they can make a difference locally. Now, thanks to the collaborative efforts of the working groups and staff identified in this report, A&M-Central Texas will have a more focused and accurate picture of its civic learning and democratic engagement landscape.

[National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement](#)

In 2016, the institution partnered with the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) operated by Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life to measure student voting rates. Of the 2,528 eligible A&M-Central Texas students, 1,331 voted in the 2016 elections. Our overall 2016 voting rate of 52.7% of eligible voters was 2.3% above the average for all participating institutions. When compared with other public institutions in the study, we experienced an even higher comparison, with 52.7% for A&M-Central Texas and 49.8% for other participating public institutions. Our students' primary voting method is through early voting, with 61.5% of student voters voting prior to the general election. This is very helpful information as we plan our efforts, suggesting we should focus on supportive messages encouraging early voting. There is not a clear distinction between men and women when comparing voting rates. A&M-Central Texas men voted at a rate of 61.9% rate and women voted at a rate of 61.5%.

There are some clear opportunities for improvement in our NSLVE data. For instance, when comparing age groups, NSLVE data separates individuals into the following age groups: 18-21, 22-24, 25-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50+. Students in groups 18-21, 22-21, and 25-29 all realized under 50% of eligible votes actually cast. Age groups 30-39, 40-49, and 50+ all realized above 50%. In fact, the 50+ age group realized a 74.6% voting rate.

Examining rates within different fields of study offers additional areas of improvement. English literature and language (and equivalents), criminal justice and protective services, and multi/interdisciplinary studies saw voting rates below 50%.

This initial study of student voting rates at A&M-Central Texas provides the institution with a baseline by which to judge our future endeavors.

[National Survey of Student Engagement](#)

Every odd-numbered year A&M-Central Texas participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) operated by Indiana University. The NSSE collects information from first-year and senior students regarding their experiences and perceptions of their undergraduate experience. A&M-Central Texas is unique in that we do not have first-year students and our students transfer into the institution once the student has completed their lower-division academic coursework; therefore, we rely solely on the senior-level benchmark data for comparison and evaluation.

For online reports related to 2015 and 2017, please visit:

<https://www.tamuct.edu/Institutional%20Research%20and%20Assessment/Surveys.html>

NSSE identifies four primary themes within student engagement: *academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and campus environment*. In order to evaluate these themes, students respond to questions designed to reveal behaviors and perceptions they have about their experiences within the institution. There are specific key questions identified in the NSSE data that A&M-Central Texas can evaluate to understand the landscape for civic learning and democratic engagement work at the institution and determine how students are leaving the institution educated and prepared for responsible citizenship.

While most of the responses were largely similar, we can learn from a few key areas in which there were noticeable differences between the data collected from the first time the NSSE was administered in 2015 to its administration in 2017. Specifically, the percentage of students engaging very often or often in “discussions with diverse others” (people from different race, ethnicity, economic, religious beliefs, or political views) slightly decreased from 2015 to 2017. On the other hand, one significant area of growth between 2015 and 2017 was the attempt by students to understand another’s viewpoint by imagining themselves in that person’s shoes. This creates an opportunity for us to engage our students in more inclusivity-focused civic learning and democratic engagement efforts.

2015

Academic Challenge: Higher-Order Learning

Percentage responding “*Very much*” or “*Quite a bit*” about how much coursework emphasized...

	A&M-Central Texas	Southwest Public	Carnegie Class
Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts	77	77	78
Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source	77	71	74
Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information	72	73	74

Academic Challenge: Reflective & Integrative Learning

Percentage responding “*Very often*” or “*Often*” about how much coursework emphasized...

	A&M-Central Texas	Southwest Public	Carnegie Class
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	60	60	66
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	51	50	57
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	64	64	67
Tried to better understand someone else’s views by	62	69	72

imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective			
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	64	69	71

Learning with Peers: Discussions with Diverse Others

Percentage responding they “*Very often*” or “*Often*” had discussions with...

	A&M-Central Texas	Southwest Public	Carnegie Class
People from a race or ethnicity other than your own	80	76	74
People from an economic background other than your own	78	75	74
People with religious beliefs other than your own	71	72	70
People with political views other than your own	74	72	70

Campus Environment: Supportive Environment

Percentage responding they “*Very much*” or “*Quite a bit*” about how much the institution emphasized...

	A&M-Central Texas	Southwest Public	Carnegie Class
Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues	39	44	46

2017

(with comparison to 2015)

Academic Challenge: Higher-Order Learning

Percentage responding “*Very much*” or “*Quite a bit*” about how much coursework emphasized...

	A&M-Central Texas	Southwest Public	Carnegie Class
Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts	78 (↑1%)	75	76
Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source	77 (No change)	70	70
Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information	72 (No change)	73	72

Academic Challenge: Reflective & Integrative Learning

Percentage responding “*Very often*” or “*Often*” about how much coursework emphasized...

	A&M-Central Texas	Southwest Public	Carnegie Class
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	62 (↑2%)	60	66
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	51 (No change)	50	57
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	65 (↑1%)	64	67
Tried to better	71	69	72

understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	(↑9%)		
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	70 (↑6%)	69	71

Learning with Peers: Discussions with Diverse Others

Percentage responding they "Very often" or "Often" had discussions with...

	A&M-Central Texas	Southwest Public	Carnegie Class
People from a race or ethnicity other than your own	81 (↑1%)	76	74
People from an economic background other than your own	76 (↓2%)	75	74
People with religious beliefs other than your own	74 (↑3%)	72	70
People with political views other than your own	73 (↓1%)	72	70

Campus Environment: Supportive Environment

Percentage responding they "Very much" or "Quite a bit" about how much the institution emphasized...

	A&M-Central Texas	Southwest Public	Carnegie Class
Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues	38 (↓1%)	44	46

Service-Learning

Through our service-learning opportunities, which are course-based, credit-bearing, educational experiences in which students learn to relate theory to practice, students participate in service or other engagement activity at diverse organizations throughout the community. These service-learning courses span the curriculum and include the following course titles: Business Ethics, Marriage & Family Therapy Ethics, Community Health Nursing, Environmental Sociology, Introduction to Social Work, Child Welfare, Methods & Practices in Counseling, and Stress & Social Work.

Co-Curricular Transcript

In 2019, A&M-Central Texas began offering a co-curricular transcript to students as part of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) submitted to SACSCOC, our accrediting body. The transcript lays out four pathways students may engage in to achieve badging levels on the transcript. Two of the four pathways have civic learning and democratic engagement embedded into the pathway: Engaged Citizen and Engaged Learner. In order for students to gain credit for their completion, they must submit a written reflection describing the lessons learned as well as how they have made a difference through their experiences in the community.

Barriers to Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Work at A&M-Central Texas

Internal Barriers

University Leadership

A&M-Central Texas has significant support from university leadership. Specifically, Dr. Gray-Vickrey, Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, is a significant supporter and champion for civic learning and democratic engagement efforts at the institution. Dr. Nigliazzo's support and championship for community engagement efforts across the institution serves as a guiding light and source of encouragement for our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts.

Funding

One of the most significant barriers we face, simultaneously internal and external, is the availability of funding for civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. As a young institution, we do not have the alumni and philanthropic base enjoyed by other established institutions. Further, like many state institutions, we have experienced significant changes in state appropriations which resulted in colleges within the university reducing the number of course offerings. Subsequently, the total headcount supported by the institution has been impacted, resulting in a reduction in the total number of students paying mandatory fees to support civic and democratic programs.

The Division of Student Affairs is funded almost exclusively through student fees (e.g. student service fee and campus recreation fee). The division is the body through which co-curricular civic learning and democratic engagement efforts are coordinated and managed. The decrease in student fees has meant no new funding is available for increased civic learning and democratic engagement efforts beyond that which the Office of Student & Civic Engagement already planned and funded.

Increased outreach to campus and community stakeholders, in conjunction with the pursuit of grant and other funding opportunities, could create inroads to overcome this funding barrier.

Student Involvement

Another significant internal barrier to A&M-Central Texas' success in civic learning and democratic engagement is the lack of involvement by students. A&M-Central Texas is an upper-division institution and many of our students are considered "nontraditional" in part because they are older than the typical 18-to-24-year-old age range, have spouses and dependents, and/or work. These factors, along with the lack of residence life on campus, create significant barriers for student involvement. We do not currently have any student organizations aligned with political parties or ideological concepts. Our Student Association for Social Workers (SASW) are engaged in advocacy work and annually host a legislative day at the Texas State Capitol. We are currently working through additional ways to incentivize student involvement across campus.

External Barriers

Unlike internal barriers, there are perceived external barriers to civic learning and democratic engagement work at universities and colleges – chiefly, increasing the participation of college students in the political process. There are two external barriers, detailed below, we are aware of that may impact our students' participation rates: the 2011 voter ID law and HB 1888 (2019).

2011 Voter ID Law

A significant election law passed during the 82nd legislative session, a voter identification law requiring not just a government-issued photo ID to vote, but also requiring poll workers to compare the voter-supplied ID against voter registry data to determine if the name is "substantially similar to but does not match exactly with the name on the list" and then require the voter to submit an affidavit stating the voter is the person on the registry (Texas election code: <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/EL/htm/EL.63.htm>).

HB 1888

Effective September 1, 2019, HB 1888 pertains to the days and hours for voting at a temporary or mobile polling place. In Texas, many elections administrators set up temporary locations that would periodically move throughout early voting to increase turnout and lower barriers for citizens, especially beneficial for students and rural voters. HB 1888 requires November uniform elections polling locations to remain open throughout early voting and eliminates the concept of

“mobile voting” by now requiring all temporary branch polling places to remain open at the same fixed location for the duration of the early voting period.

Important Texas Election Dates: 2019-2020

2019

January 1, 2019: First day to apply for a ballot by mail

October 7, 2019: Last day to register to vote

October 21, 2019: First day of early voting

October 25, 2019: Last day to apply for ballot by mail Received

November 1, 2019: Last day of early voting

November 5, 2019: Last day to receive ballot by mail

November 5, 2019: Election day

2020

October 5, 2020: Last day to register to vote

October 16, 2020: First day of early voting

October 30, 2020: Last day of early voting

November 3, 2020: Last day to receive ballot by mail

November 3, 2020: Election Day

Goals

Goal 1: Registration

We will raise our registration rate from 75.2% in 2016 to 80% in 2020.

Goal 2: Information and Education

We will educate students on topics ranging from issues and candidates on the ballot to elections reform, voter suppression, democratic processes, and ways to actively engage in American political life. We will give at least 10 classroom presentations in AY 2019-2020 and 10 classroom presentations in Fall 2020 prior to the 2020 election.

Goal 3: Institutionalization

We will evaluate the institution’s current engagement practices and develop a plan to collaborate with the Coalition and CT Votes to address growth and improvement efforts for greater institutionalization and cultural change by December 2020.

Goal 4: Turnout

We will raise our institutional student voting rate from 52.7% in 2016 to 55% in 2018 and 60% in 2020.

Strategy

A&M-Central Texas is committed to working with students in intentional ways to promote civic learning and democratic engagement. As an institution, we embrace the guiding principles adopted by the Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV) Coalition and believe any plan “designed to increase civic learning and democratic engagement among college students” should have the following characteristics: comprehensive, continuous, integrated, intentional, pervasive, deep, and innovative. This section will provide a summary of how A&M-Central Texas will work toward the goals identified in the previous section.

University Governance

A&M-Central Texas is committed to shared governance. To that end, A&M-Central Texas ensures students will have representation on vital university committees.⁶ Not only do these opportunities empower students to take ownership of their student experience, but participation in a university committee exposes students to skills necessary to engage in discussion and dialogue.

Volunteer Deputy Registrar Training

The Office of Student and Civic Engagement will identify two student leaders to complement the current task team—which consists of three staff and one graduate assistant—who will be trained to serve as deputy registrars for Bell County voter registration to generate greater accessibility to the student registration process. This process will be complete by the end of July 2019, enabling us to set up tables in Warrior Hall and Heritage Hall, providing easy access for students. There will be a campus deadline of 72 hours before the county’s deadline to close and deliver registration forms to the Bell County Registrar.

“How Quickly Can You Register?”

This activity-based event challenges students to complete voter registration for three fictional individuals in three different states in under five minutes. The goal of this project is to help students understand the varying complexity and challenges involved in voter registration in various locations. The Student Government Association will be one of the first student groups to engage in this event, which includes a post-activity discussion about the barriers and complexities that impact citizens’ ability to engage in voting.

⁶Texas A&M University Shared Governance: <https://www.tamuct.edu/provost/governance.html>

Service-Learning

As an institution, we have a commitment to continuing our efforts in service-learning courses. At the beginning of each semester, Student & Civic Engagement staff will collaborate with faculty in these specialized courses to deliver a presentation on the co-curricular/experiential transcript and the ways in which students can engage in civic learning and democratic engagement efforts while in the course.

Constitution Day

A&M-Central Texas will capitalize on our nation's Constitution Day by highlighting student and civic engagement on campus. We will have multiple information tables set up in Warrior Hall, including one for our deputy registrars, one for participating student organizations, and one for handing out pocket Constitutions and Constitution trivia. We will display the Bill of Rights, featuring upbeat music and patriotic decor to generate a welcoming and aesthetic atmosphere.

We will recruit faculty to challenge their students by demonstrating the impact and profound effect that voting and democratic engagement has on and within their academic disciplines. This is something we can incentivize by turning it into a competition between departments.

We will focus on a different amendment each day leading up to Constitution Day. Our tabling efforts will also feature interactive games to educate students about constitutional powers, including:

- a. Games
 - i. United States vs. State Power <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/constitution-usa-peter-sagal/constitution-games/power-play/>
 - ii. You're your Rights –You're your Own Law Firm <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/constitution-usa-peter-sagal/constitution-games/do-i-have-right/>
 - iii. Could You Pass a U.S. Citizen Test? <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/constitution-usa-peter-sagal/constitution-games/citizenship-quiz/>

Community First Fridays

In 2015, the Division of Student Affairs created a new initiative focused on how we engage with our community and encourage students to do the same. Civic engagement, as identified by the SLSV Coalition, is “any act intended to improve or influence a community through deliberation, collaboration, and reciprocal relationships and community-building.”⁷ Community First Fridays are organized by the Office of Student & Civic Engagement through established relationships with area community organizations needing volunteers. Each first Friday of every month, the

⁷*Strengthening American Democracy: A Guide for Developing an Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates Among College Students* (Washington, DC: Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, 2019), p.9.

Office of Student & Civic Engagement selects a volunteer organization that will host students and staff from the Division of Student Affairs to engage in a joint community service project.

The Big Event

A&M-Central Texas is partnering with another area institution, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, to organize a large community service and community-building project. We are modeling our Big Event after the extremely successful Big Event at Texas A&M University in College Station, the largest one-day, student-run service project in the nation, that provides students with an opportunity to show their appreciation for and commitment to the surrounding community through the completion of service projects.

National Voter Registration Day & CT Votes Kickoff

CT Votes is the coalition and initiative created to generate greater civic and democratic engagement among our students. National Voter Registration Day 2019 will be the official kickoff of these efforts. We will be tabling with voter registration forms and will present the film [Rigged](#), a documentary on voter suppression efforts in Texas. The viewing of [Rigged](#) will be accompanied by a guided discussion with two faculty facilitators. We will host a similar discussion on the census in Spring 2020 and an additional one on voter suppression in Fall 2020.

Last Day of Voter Registration

On the last day to register to vote in state and federal elections, the Office of Student & Civic Engagement staff will hold a celebration and provide students with one last push to register to vote by the end of the day.

Democracy Wall

Our Democracy Wall will be an interactive showcase that invites our students to participate in a constructive discussion about the importance of various elements of the Constitution. We will feature the wall in Founder's Hall, where students may participate while passing through. The process is simple: participants pick up a marker and write their answers to a prompt on the decorative wall (stipulations warn against being disrespectful to fellow participants, tampering with or making direct responses to previous replies, or usage of profanity or other degrading language).

Examples of predetermined prompts:

“Why is the Constitution important?”

“Is it ok to break away from the Constitution to implement desirable laws? Why? Why not?”

“What is your favorite Amendment? Why?”

“What amendment would you add to the Constitution?”

“Can a human being be *illegal*?”

This is Who We Are... Census 101

The Census has a significant impact on institutions of higher education and the communities in which our students live. One way we will work to assist students in understanding the importance of the Census is to regularly (e.g. monthly prior to the release of the census, bi-weekly throughout the census period) communicate to students:

- Facts about the Census
- Impacts of the Census
- How to support vulnerable communities' response to the Census

Classroom Presentation

Staff from the Office of Student & Civic Engagement will work with members of CT Votes and faculty to enter at least 10 classrooms each semester and deliver a brief presentation about ways in which students can engage, register to vote, and become knowledgeable about issues.

Orientation Registration

A&M-Central Texas has mandatory online orientation for all new students. At the conclusion of the online orientation module, students will be asked if they are registered to vote in the upcoming elections. Included in the question is a link to the [Texas Secretary of State's website](#) where students have the opportunity to enter identifying information and discover whether or not they are registered, change incorrect information contained in their voter registration, as well as learn about upcoming elections and ballots. We will be adding TurboVote into our orientation process so students can engage with TurboVote's services while they are completing their orientation processes.

Pick Your Politician Contest

Utilizing iSideWith.com, students will be able to gain a greater understanding about how their views match with those of the candidates running for office. For the upcoming presidential election, the Office of Student & Civic Engagement will host a "Pick Your Politician" Penny(Contest). Students will place a penny into the jar for the candidate of their choice. All proceeds will support the Campus Cupboard, the campus' on-site food bank.

Social Media Campaign

The Division of Student Affairs will utilize the below accounts for all messages:

Instagram: @tamuct_studentaffairs

Facebook: @TAMUCTStudentAffairs

The below hashtags (#) are the prescribed tags for all posts by the Division of Student Affairs. Included with each # is a description of the requirements for the use of each #.

#CTVotes

#CTVotes is the official # for all posts associated with voting, voter awareness, and education. #CTVotes should be the first # applied to such posts.

#ADP_TAMUCT

Assigned to all posts related to the American Democracy Project @ TAMUCT (ADP). This # should only be used by Student & Civic Engagement when partnering with ADP for a specific project, event, or program.

#EngageTAMUCT

Only applied when referencing an event, program, etc. where a student organization also appears.

#TAMUCT

Assigned to all posts regarding events, programs, etc. taking place on campus.

The following image will be used with all posts related to CT Votes:



My Reason Why (Voting)

We will have dry erase boards and markers in Founder's Hall, Warrior Hall, and Beck Family Heritage Hall inviting people to write down their reason(s) for voting and to take a photo. Individuals will get a "CT Votes" sticker and their posts will be featured on the appropriate social media. Students will gain a greater understanding of the issues and topics impacting the everyday lives of their peers.

Election Day Celebration

Thanks to a significant relationship between the Office of Student & Civic Engagement, CT Votes, the University Registrar, and the Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, we have developed methods to understand where the most significant polling locations are for our students. We have developed a heat map of polling locations and will utilize this information to ensure we have staff at the polling location on election day to increase the positive environment at that polling location. We are partnering with the Bell County Elections Administrator to ensure all interactions comply with posted elections regulations.

Polling Location Heat Map

The heat map of polling locations described above allows us to work with area rideshare drivers, cabs, public transportation, etc. to provide A&M-Central Texas students with a ride waiver to get to their polling location and then back home/work.

American Democracy Project - Provost Lecture Series

A&M-Central Texas' American Democracy Project is taking the 2019 academic year to reevaluate necessary areas of growth. The Office of Student & Civic Engagement will work alongside the ADP.

Meet the Student Government Candidates

The past couple of years have seen a marked drop in students participating in political actions on campus. To combat the decrease, we will work with the Student Government Association to encourage more students to run for office and to promote interactions with Student Government Association candidates.

Student Association for Social Workers Legislative Day

Each year A&M-Central Texas' social work program and SASW take approximately 20 social work students to the Texas State Capitol to give them an opportunity to learn more about advocacy and the legislative processes, and to encourage them to interact with lawmakers.

Do You Know What's On the Ballot?

Voters will be confronted with 10 proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution on November 5, 2019. Over the course of 10 weeks prior to the fall 2019 election, we will provide information to students regarding the proposed amendments. For each election, we will work with stakeholders to ensure students are aware of the various proposals that may affect them.

Reporting

This section outlines how we will share this plan with stakeholders. The full plan, along with the campus' NSLVE reports and NASPA LEAD application and information, will be shared on Student & Civic Engagement's institutional public-facing webpage (<https://www.tamuct.edu/student-affairs/sce.html>). We will work with institutional actors to ensure greater availability of this data and our collected data. This plan will inevitably change as we progress through each semester and encounter new and different challenges than those we currently predict. As we encounter challenges and determine the plan needs to be updated, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs will be primarily responsible for making, documenting, and communicating those updates to the appropriate stakeholders.

In addition to being posted on the website, this plan will be electronically sent to all faculty, staff, and students.

The same procedure will apply to the results of this plan and all evaluation done to indicate efforts on goals.

Evaluation

Goal 1: Registration

We will raise our registration rate from 75.2% in 2016 to 80% in 2020.

The primary evaluation method for this will be our NSLVE 2020 data; however, we will utilize our partnership with TurboVote and the number of total individuals registered by volunteer deputy registrars. Each event where registration forms are present will contain the tally of how many students are newly registered during each event to determine those most effective venue.

Goal 2: Information and Education

We will educate students on topics ranging from issues and candidates on the ballot to elections reform, voter suppression, democratic processes, and ways to actively and engage in the American political life.

We will address each topic at least once a month with students and will regularly tally attendance in events and presentations. Further, analytics provided by Facebook and Instagram will assist the institution in evaluating its social media efforts related to this plan.

Goal 3: Institutionalization

The institution will evaluate its current engagement practices and collaborate with the Coalition and CT Votes to address growth and improvement efforts for greater institutionalization and cultural change.

The success of this goal will be evaluated by the completion of an institutionalization report indicating successes and opportunities for growth. This evaluation and recommended areas of growth will be completed by January 2021.

Goal 4: Turnout

The primary evaluation method for this will be our NSLVE 2020 data; however, we will also encourage students to take “selfies” outside of their polling locations and/or with “I Voted” stickers.

The results of the evaluation of our efforts will be shared electronically with students, faculty, and staff. Further, the results will be shared online at tamuct.edu/student-affairs/sce.html.