



# ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge **Action Plan 2020**

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## **Executive Summary**

Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) is a selective admission Hispanic Serving Institution located on the border between Mexico and the United States, with an enrollment of over 8,000 students. We are, in fact, the four-year institution with the highest percentage Hispanic enrollment (92.5%) in the United States. The 2019-2020 student body includes 54.2% first-generation students, 61% female, and 81% of our students are Pell-Grant Recipients. While our TAMIU four-year graduation is 25% and our 6-year graduation rate is 47%, our first-year persistence rate is 79%: the highest of the regional institutions in the Texas A&M System. The University delivers over 80 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs.

This Campus Plan outlines our university's voter education, registration and turnout efforts. It is also meant to serve as a guide that provides structure for our campus partners and helps track our progress as an institution. With TAMIU's third year in participation of democratic engagement opportunities, campus plans such as this one offer an opportunity to track yearly progress and add revisions to established strategies. It covers all of the democratic engagement opportunities that will be hosted on campus for students and members of the community. TAMIU's plan initiates action during the first week of classes (August 24-28) and provides a list of necessary steps that must be taken until Elections (November 3) to ensure its success. Weekly meetings will be held to ensure execution of campus plan is timely and fruitful.

TAMIU's Mission aligns extremely well with the Campus Votes Project, as our institution aims to "prepare students for leadership roles in an increasingly complex, culturally diverse state, national, and global society," as we strive to improve "the quality of lives for citizens of the border region, the State of Texas, and national and international communities." A collaboration between universities and organizations like the Campus Vote Project is vital for the removal of barriers that deter our young adults to participate in our democracy. Clearly, a hosting and promotion of democratic engagement opportunities through this plan is essential for the sustainment of an informed citizenry who engages in political action, specifically for young Hispanics, who have been historically underrepresented at the national level.

# Leadership

**Lead:** Dr. Nicholas Hudson, Director of the Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement, [nicholashudson@tamiu.edu](mailto:nicholashudson@tamiu.edu), (956) 326-2283, Dr. Daniel de La Miyar, Assistant Professional, University College

**Engage:** Initial ALL IN Task Force was assembled and should convene in the week of August 24-28, 2020 (must work around 1<sup>st</sup> class day and the potential SGA retreat)

1. Faculty: Dr. Daniel de La Miyar (first-year experience/communication)
2. Students: Mariana Rodriguez (Student Body President), Samantha Rivera (Vice-president, SGA) Emilia Trevino (Political Action Committee, SGA), Jorge Espinoza (Political Action Committee, SGA), Isabela Barrientos (Senator-at-Large, SGA), Ivette Soto (COAS Senator, SGA), Eduardo Martinez (COAS Senator, SGA), and Alyssa Wallace (president- Mobilize, Organize, Vote, and Empower (MOVE) at TAMIU). Other student leaders from diverse student organizations will join once our academic year begins and democratic engagement efforts are promoted.
3. Administration and staff: Gina Gonzalez (associate vice president for student life, division of student success), Dr. Thomas Mitchell (provost and vice president-academic affairs), Dr. Kevin Lindberg (associate provost-community engagement), Dr. Catheryn Weitman (dean-university college), Scheiby Fisher (Executive Director, Special Programs), Marcela Uribe (Learning Resources Coordinator, University College), Mika Akikuni (associate director-marketing), Christine Rojas (publications coordinator), Hilda Dennis (executive administrative assistant), Abigail Fernandez (manager-event services), Enrique Botello (director-event services), Manuel Vela (Housing) and Jake Hudspeth (Athletics), Pedro Rivera (Engagement Program Aid, Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement)

Dr. Nicholas Hudson and Dr. Daniel De La Miyar will be in charge of coordinating and overseeing the institution's and task force's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement. An adherence to this plan and tracking of said adherence is expected. This working group has diverse members with diverse resources that can be used to achieve this plan's goals. Thus, the role of this group is to ensure that this plan is followed and that it proves to be as successful as possible in terms of organization, promotion, execution, manpower, and reflection. Potential members for this taskforce will be reached out via email. This taskforce/working group is set to meet every week, starting on the first week of classes (August 24-28). Meetings will be held at the Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement or the Zaffirini Success Center. In every weekly meeting, diverse goals and responsibilities will be discussed and assigned to individual members. Fulfillment of these goals and responsibilities will be tracked in following meetings.

## Commitment

Our University's administration has always been committed to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. Constant communication of voter engagement opportunities and initiatives has been displayed among our faculty and staff. This communication also extends to outside our campus as outside organizations have been notified about our initiatives in the past. As a matter of fact, there is a census awareness coalition that has been recently created at our campus, as accurate representation is something our University also believes in. There is a growing interest in the promotion of civic learning and democratic engagement among our students, faculty and staff. There is, however, room for improvement and growth.

### **Strategic Plan:**

One of the ways this taskforce believes this growth will happen is through the implementation of this plan. This plan's events create enough attention that attracts students, professors, and community members and motivates them to be politically engaged. This can actually be seen in our university's social media pages and internet page, with different articles congratulating the successes of the democratic engagement efforts on our campus. The campus has also agreed to participate in the NSLVE's collection of data for a couple of years now. This is useful in tracking the progress and the success of different initiatives. Through the collaboration with professors, students are motivated to vote and remain informed of the voting process in the State of Texas. As a matter of fact, one of the components of this plan is to ask professors to dismiss classes early to give students enough time to vote.

## Landscape

### **Students:**

Our University recently surpassed the 8,000 students enrolled mark this past Fall semester. Texas A&M International University is the nation's largest Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with over 93% of the student population identifying as Hispanic/LatinX. A substantial amount of TAMIU's student population is first-generation and a percentage of our students are Pell-eligible. A very small percentage of our student population lives on campus (7.8%) which poses different problems for our democratic engagement efforts.

### **Current Campus Efforts**

**Voter registration:** Our institution's voter registration efforts have been significantly successful and popular among our students. It must be noted, however, that voter registration efforts have only been recently incorporated into our University's events in Fall 2018, after an invitation to our students to participate in the Texas Voting Summit. The attendance to this Summit encouraged our students, faculty, and staff to come together and create a task force (which has been in existence ever since) in charge of promoting voter registration on campus. This taskforce hosts voter registration drives around diverse locations on campus during National Voter Registration Day, different days throughout the Fall semester, and on the last day for voter registration in the State of Texas. Moreover, the Office of Student Orientation, Leadership,

and Engagement has incorporated voter registration into TAMIU's New Student Orientation, effectively exposing the incoming freshmen class to our democratic engagement efforts.

**Voter education**: The Political Action Committee of the Student Government Association hosts a variety of forums and debates during the election cycle so that our students are informed and educated on diverse local, state, and national candidates' platforms. The PAC also hosts a Constitution Day celebration open to all students. Some of our campus partners also host informational tables during the semester that our students can visit to remain informed of different political issues. A Volunteer Deputy Registrar training session is also hosted by this task force on campus. The majority of our trainees are students, but these training sessions are also open to members of the community. The Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement will be hosting numerous voter education forums, debates, and events of political nature throughout the academic year.

**Voter access**: Our institution is incredibly fortunate to have a polling site at our campus. By far, our early voting site on campus is the most popular when it comes to the amount of individuals that vote at it. Our regular polling site could definitely be benefitted by social media and grassroots promotion.

**Campus climate**: The student body at TAMIU is definitely becoming more interested in the bipartisan nature of politics. While our campus currently does not house organizations like Young Democrats or Young Republicans, it does house organizations such as the Political Science Association, SGA's Political Action Committee, MOVE TX, and Turning Point USA. These organizations have been responsible for hosting educational tables, hosting debates, and other events of political nature. Activism events, such as protests, are extremely rare. However, there has definitely been a growth in political discourse and debate among students. The Office of Student Orientation, Leadership, and Engagement has also been instrumental in TAMIU's democratic engagement efforts – hosting classes and programs revolving around democratic engagement and political participation in our campus and community.

## Goals

### Long-term goals

TAMIU's overall long-term goal is to provide students with the tools necessary in becoming lifelong active citizens and community leaders. While it would be unwise to put a timetable for long term goals, to move toward our goal of providing our students with said tools, TAMIU hopes to:

- Conduct voter registration for 100% of eligible students
- Institutionalize our democratic engagement initiatives, engraining them in our university's traditions and culture
  - Incorporating democratic engagement in faculty syllabi through the Student Government Association and Faculty Senate
- Institutionalize our task force
- Consistently strive towards obtaining designations from diverse organizations that establish our campus as a democratic campus
- Ensure TAMIU's democratic engagement efforts are student-led and incorporate our student organizations (in the past, representatives from MOVE, the League of Empowered Women, and the Political Science Association have led some of our

- democratic engagement efforts)
- Developing lost-lasting connections with outside organizations to increase voter engagement outside of campus and in the community. Best known as “town and gown” relations, our institution strives to register non-college students (members of the community) and make TAMIU a symbol of democratic engagement in our community

### **Short term goals**

TAMIU’s short term goals are to take advantage of the established momentum our civic engagement efforts have garnered and to build on what we have learned. TAMIU’s hopes to:

- Increase our 2016 voting rate by 6 percentage points, achieving a 50%
- Increase our 2016 registration rate by 5 percentage points, achieving an 82%
- Increase our 2016 voting rate of registered students by 10 percentage points, achieving a 67%

## **Our Strategy for 2020**

### **A. Voter education:**

1. Provide a presentation highlighting TAMIU’s multiple democratic engagement efforts to all new Freshmen Students during our New Student Orientation Sessions throughout summer.
2. First-Year Seminar (UNIV 1101) – introduces students to key concepts and foundational knowledge regarding democratic engagement, such as voter registration and turnout.
3. First-Year Seminar Signature Course (UNIV 1402) – partnership with faculty to create signature courses that build on the key concepts introduced in UNIV 1101.
4. Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Courses (UNIC 2310, 3320, and others) – teaches students to think critically about democratic engagement and ushers democratic engagement on campus and their communities.
5. Student Government Association – provides a direct line of communication with students that promotes democratic engagement through peer-to-peer encouragement and provides accurate information on diverse issues
6. Greek Council – in alignment with the organizational founding missions of its individual members, the Greek Council hosts events related to democratic engagement and educates and encourages its members to be democratically engaged. Greek Council will also host various events related to democratic engagement during Hazing Prevention Week.
7. Encourage connections between civic-based campus events and voting.
8. Coordinate and host debates/forums for local elections.
9. Host Presidential and Senatorial debate watching parties.
10. Incorporate democratic engagement and education to TAMIU’s Signature Programs of Welcome Week, Welcome Back Week, and Spirit Week.
11. Provide unique opportunities to learn about democratic engagement – seminars, informational sessions, programs, speaker series, and other engagement opportunities.
12. Coordinate and host a Volunteer Deputy Registrar Class at TAMIU for students that will be registering others to vote. Set up of this class/session

must be arranged with the Webb County Elections Office by the first week of school to give enough time to make any accommodations necessary. Class should be held one day during the week of September 7-11. This will give enough time for students to make any accommodations necessary.

13. Special attention will be paid to the use of absentee ballots on campus and education on the processes revolving around absentee ballots will be provided to our students.

#### **B. Voter registration:**

1. Provide a presentation highlighting TAMIU's multiple democratic engagement efforts to all new Freshmen Students during our New Student Orientation Sessions throughout summer. This presentation will also serve as means of registering all of our incoming freshmen class.
2. Celebrate National Voter Registration Day (Sept. 22, 2020):
  - Register 250+ students during TAMIU's NVRD campus takeover.
3. Host voter registration deadline tabling (Oct. 2 and Oct. 5):
  - Voter Registration deadline is Monday, October 5, 2020. An event should be hosted this day to attract any students who have not yet registered
  - Host (in partnership with MOVE and other TAMIU student organizations) multiple voter registration events during TAMIU's Signature Programs
  - Another event on Friday, October 2, 2020 should also be attempted, but this will be up to the discretion of the person in charge of Voter Engagement Efforts, as Fridays usually have very little student traffic
  - Social Media Efforts – our campus, student organization partners, and students utilize social media to inform students and community members of democratic engagement opportunities
  - Register 390+ students

#### **C. Voter turnout:**

1. Host Early Voting events (Early Voting 10/19-10/30, on-campus sites: Student Center Rotunda, Zaffirini Success Center Lobby, Rec Center Entrance, Academic Innovation Center Lobby, Killam Library Lobby):
  - a. Whiteboard Storms (all around campus)
  - b. Parades to the Polls
  - c. Party at the Polls
  - d. DormStorms
  - e. Social media blitz
  - f. digital media advertising
2. Host Election Day events (Nov. 3)
  - a. Reminder and information tables at dorms
  - b. Conduct social media blitz
  - c. Dorm storms
  - d. Blackboard and whiteboard storms
  - e. Digital media advertising
3. Request and distribution of absentee ballots
4. Increase student voter turnout by 785+ students
5. Increase voting percentage by 465+ individuals

## **Reporting**

TAMIU's taskforce will use several options for reporting our results and for attracting participants to our democratic engagement efforts:

- Utilizing our Campus Labs/Trailblazers platform program page to promote democratic engagement opportunities
- Promote democratic engagement opportunities reminders via our University's newspaper (The Globe)
- Use of digital signage on campus' desktops, computers, television screens, etc.
- Updates via University's and taskforce members social media pages (Facebook is by far the most popular among our students)
- Publishing of informational articles regarding our results on our University's internet page
- Use of mass email that can reach all students and all professors
- Use of mass text messaging system that reaches all students

## **Evaluation**

The evaluation of our efforts is vital for progress and the implementation of new concepts.

TAMIU's taskforce will use several methods to evaluate our progress:

- TAMIU will continue to use NSLVE data to develop voting goals and evaluate voter participation progress. NSLVE's comprehensiveness is incredibly useful in the identification of areas needing improvement. A student-led taskforce, in our opinion, helps in the addressing of these areas.
- Data collection for voter registration numbers are to be collected each time there is tabling event or drive.
- Participation rates and program evaluations will be collected at each individual event
- All of this data will be discussed and addressed during our taskforce weekly meetings.