

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

University of Mary Washington

Voter & Civic Engagement Action Plan

May 12, 2020

I. Executive Summary

This **Voter Engagement Action Plan** was developed by students and staff at the Center for Community Engagement at the University of Mary Washington (UMW). This plan is being submitted as part of the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge.](https://www.allinchallenge.org/)

This action plan will guide the civic engagement work of students, staff and faculty at UMW over the next 2 years. This action plan will be spearheaded by the Center for Community Engagement, in partnership with students, staff and faculty from across the university. This plan will be re-evaluated every spring to assess how well we accomplished our goals and areas for modification or adjustment. This plan is in alignment with the **UMW Strategic Vision** (which was approved by the UMW Board of Visitors on November 17, 2017) that includes promoting the values of community and civic engagement for the UMW community.

**II. Leadership/Institutional Context**

**Leadership**

A team of students, staff and faculty have been working on civic engagement at UMW, including the following individuals:

* Sarah Dewees, Associate Director of the Center for Community Engagement (Staff, Academic Affairs)
* Stephanie Turcios (Student)
* Callie Jordan (Student)
* Sadaf Marzi (Student)
* Ranjit Singh, faculty in the Department of Political Science and International Affairs
* Chris Williams, Assistant Director of the James Farmer Multicultural Center (Student Affairs)
* Crystal Rawls, Assistant Director of Student Activities and Engagement (Student Affairs)

The **UMW Votes** program, hosted by the UMW Center for Community Engagement, has worked with students for the last 12 months to design and implement our civic engagement work.

This nonpartisan **UMW Voter Engagement Action Plan** was developed by staff and students at the Center for Community Engagement. The **Center for Community Engagement** is located in the student center and has a mission to serve as a catalyst for community engagement between UMW and our greater communities, building bridges between students, faculty, staff, and community partners through effective relationships that bring about student learning and positive social change.

We have been working to carry out the **UMW Strategic Vision** that includes promoting the values of community and civic engagement with the belief that this will “provide an increasingly diverse population with the opportunity to improve their lives, their communities, and the world around them” and to equip students to “address society’s demands, to challenge injustices, and to embrace the world’s possibilities.” The goal is to prepare students for intellectual, professional, and public leadership. The strategic plan calls for developing academic and co-curricular programs on civic engagement and community-engaged learning and the strengthening of relationships with community partners and organizations.

In 2019, the UMW Votes program worked with several community and national organizations to host National Voter Registration Day on campus. We worked with Campus Vote Project, the national NVRD program, Fredericksburg League of Women Voters, NextGen, the Fredericksburg City Registrar, and other organizations. In addition, we reached out to and worked collaboratively with several student clubs including Citizens for Democracy, Young Democrats, Campus Republicans, and others. Other groups on campus, including the James Farmer Multicultural Center and the student clubs Women of Color and NAACP created programming in fall 2019 and spring 2020 to educate students and the broader UMW community about issues related to elections, policy issues, and broader civic engagement.

III. Commitment

University of Mary Washington’s commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is reflected in the university’s 2017 strategic vision titled *“An Investment of Hope for the Future: A Strategic Vision for the University of Mary Washington.”*  The first goal of this vision is to promote “the values of service and community and civic engagement.” UMW currently supports several co-curricular programs that complement the rigorous academic experience offered at the university. UMW supports a variety of different programs that provide students with the opportunities for leadership development, volunteerism, service learning, and various other forms of community engagement.

In fall of 2018, the University created the Center for Community Engagement to be a hub for community and civic engagement activities on campus, working in partnership with other existing programs. The Center for Community Engagement builds upon a long tradition of, and commitment to, service and community engagement at UMW which can be traced to the institution’s founding in 1908 as a state normal school for the education of teachers, as well as to the well-entrenched student-run volunteer programs operated through the Community Outreach and Resources (COAR) office. The University also has a tradition of commitment to social change, through the work of our alumna Jean Donovan, and faculty emeritus James Farmer. UMW’s mission is to provide a “superior education that inspires and enables our students to make positive changes in the world.”

UMW is a member of Campus Compact and works with this national organization to support faculty and staff as they think about ways to include civic learning in curricular and co-curricular experiences. UMW offers several classes that are designated “Community Engaged” and also requires that students complete at least one across-the-curriculum course focusing on diverse and/or global communities.

UMW is going through a rebranding effort but is considering community engagement as one of the themes it will use to describe UMW’s identity. Staff at the Center for Community Engagement work closely with the University Relations department to share stories about community and civic engagement on the University’s media outlets.

As mentioned earlier, the **UMW Votes** program, hosted by the UMW Center for Community Engagement, has worked with students for the last 12 months to design and implement our civic engagement work. The Center for Community Engagement has hosted 4 student interns over that 12 month period who have learned about civic engagement and voting on the UMW campus, and helped students vote during our fall 2019 state elections. One of these students is now a Fellow with Campus Vote Project and is also a Newman Civic Fellow for the 2020-2021 school year, with support from the Center for Community Engagement.

**IV.** **Landscape**

The University of Mary Washington (UMW) is a small public liberal arts university located in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The enrollment at UMW is approximately 4,400 students and it is a residential campus. Our 2016 NSLVE reported a 66.6% voting rate, up 4.5 points from 2012. The student registration rate (86.7%), voting rate of registered students (76.8%), and overall voting rate (66.6%) were all higher than the national average in 2016. In 2018, UMW had a very high voter turnout rate compared to national averages. UMW won a Platinum Seal for high voter turnout in 2018, with 53% of our students voting.

Staff from the Center for Community Engagement have been reaching out to faculty, staff, and students on campus to gather input on this action plan to increase civic learning, political engagement, and voting rates among UMW community members (including students, staff, faculty, and also members of our broader Fredericksburg community). Our strongest area of programming involves working with students on co-curricular activities.

**Co-curricular Activities:**

The Center for Community Engagement supports the **UMW Votes** program and hires 1-4 interns each semester (called Voting Ambassadors) to help with voter registration, education, and mobilization.

Over the past few years, there have been many different civic engagement activities and programs on the UMW campus. In 2018, students on campus worked with the national organization [NextGen America](https://nextgenamerica.org/) to register voters on campus. In early 2019, the national organization [Campus Vote Project](http://campusvoteproject.org/) awarded a Democracy Fellow to a UMW student, which comes with training and a $1,200 stipend. These Democracy Fellows partnered with the UMW Voting Ambassadors to support voter registration, education, and mobilization on campus. In 2019, students worked together to celebrate National Voter Registration Day and to provide information about elections and voting. On Election Day, we helped provide rides to the polls for over 160 students in fall 2019. That fall, the UMW Student Affairs division sent an email to all students encouraging participation in National Voter Registration Day and also reminding people about Election Day. Student interns at UMW Votes distributed a significant number of media messages across many different platforms to encourage awareness about voter registration and the upcoming elections. UMW Votes interns also visited classes to help register voters. In spring of 2020, the Voting Ambassadors helped raise awareness of the Census and also worked to create a “civic engagement packet” that includes voter registration forms and takeaway information about voting on campus.

We have been working with the Registrar for the City of Fredericksburg, who has been very helpful regarding information for student voters. The office of the Registrar has set up a webpage with information specific to student voters on the UMW campus:<https://www.fredericksburgva.gov/1534/University-of-Mary-Washington-Students>. In addition, the Registrar will be providing voter registration training for UMW students.

In spring 2019, a group of UMW students and alumni worked with faculty governance and UMW administration to design and propose a plan for a “Day on Democracy,” which would allow UMW to cancel most classes on Election Day in November, 2020. This proposal was passed by the University Faculty Council in March 2019. A team of students, staff, and faculty have been meeting to design the programming leading up to and on the day of the 2020 election.

The James Farmer Multicultural Center has been working on civic engagement issues for several years and frequently hosts workshops, teach-ins, and speakers to help students learn more about civic engagement and civic issues. In addition, the James Farmer Multicultural Center is working closely with UMW’s local NAACP chapter which has a strong focus on civic engagement. The James Farmer Multicultural Center (JFMC) is located in the student center and has a mission to create an educational environment that broadens our understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice; to build relationships to establish a broader community network, within and external to the university, that is committed to improving the recognition and acceptance of the dignity and worth of every individual; and to provide a warm, welcoming, supportive, and vibrant environment for all underrepresented students that will engage and enhance their social, intellectual, interpersonal, and leadership development and skills.

In addition, UMW historically has had civic engagement programming on our campus supported through the [UMW Center for Leadership and Media Studies.](https://www.umw.edu/clms/) The UMW Center for Leadership and Media Studies supports the study of political leadership and of the mass media’s roles in international, national and Virginia politics. In conjunction with the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, the Center’s programs are designed to give students a wide range of academic experiences and professional opportunities by conducting public opinion research and by bringing members of the university community into contact with political figures and media practitioners at the international, national, state, and local levels. The Center for Leadership and Media Studies hosts candidate debates on campus and Dr. Stephen Farnsworth, the director of the Center, is a frequent speaker at campus events. In fall 2018, the James Farmer Multicultural Center organized a panel of speakers that included local and state-level political leaders, the Fredericksburg Registrar, and Professor of Political Science Dr. Farnsworth. Titled “The Importance of Political and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century,” the panel provided lectures on the importance of voting and being an active participant in the American democratic process.

Through these existing efforts, and new programming to be put in place over the next 24 months, UMW is poised to continue to nurture a culture of civic engagement on the UMW campus.

**Curricular:**

The UMW faculty recently completed a revision of the general education requirements, and added a focus on ***Diverse and Global Perspectives*** and ***Beyond the Classroom***. In addition, a faculty Community Engagement committee has been meeting for over 3 years and has been supporting faculty as they work to integrate many different forms of community engagement in their classes. Finally, a small cohort of faculty have been participating in a learning community related to civil discourse in the classroom, which has been providing support for instructors as they integrate public speaking, debate skills, and civil discourse into their classes. In addition, the First Year Experience committee is considering creating a working group for teachers of the First Year Seminar (FSEM) to incorporate civic learning into their classes.

***Barriers:***

UMW has a few internal and external barriers to successful student voting. Externally, our campus is divided into 3 different voting districts and there is a lot of confusion about which polling place a student should use, how to change your address when you move from year to year, and how to find a list of candidates. In addition, this year Virginia may be going to “Early Voting” which means that Election Day may not be as important as it has been in the past. However, it may provide more opportunities for students to vote successfully. We are considering participating in the national Vote Early Day campaign to help students take care of voting before Election Day.

A few internal barriers include budget challenges related to the recent economic slowdown and a lack of broad support from faculty on campus. While most faculty, staff, and administrators are very supportive of civic engagement and supporting students as they learn civic engagement skills, as of yet there is no uniform strategy for accomplishing this beyond the work of the Center for Community Engagement, James Farmer Multicultural Center, and the UMW Center for Leadership and Media Studies. There are several faculty who teach classes on elections and electoral politics, but there is no unified, organized approach to discussing civic learning and democratic engagement in the curriculum. This is due to a variety of factors including a lack of current leadership from within the faculty on this particular topic.

**V. Goals**

We believe our action plan will increase civic engagement on the part of UMW students, staff, and faculty, as well as members of our broader Fredericksburg community. We believe this plan will help students form the habits of active and engaged citizenship, civil communication, and voting. This Plan has 4 goals:

1. To create a culture of civic engagement on campus supported by co-curricular programming.

1. Celebrating National Voter Registration Day
2. Celebrating Vote Early Day
3. Providing information, education, and programming about voting, policy issues, and elections each year (through coordination among clubs and programs)
4. Helping provide rides to the polls on election days.

2. To support civic learning for UMW students

1. Provide 1-4 academic internships each semester in the UMW Votes program.
2. Provide support for faculty who are seeking civic learning opportunities for their students.

2. To prepare UMW students and our broader community members with the knowledge, skills, and disposition to be active participants in a representative democracy and to work for positive change in our communities.

a. To provide multiple opportunities for students and others to register to vote so they can participate in the democratic process.

b. To support student and UMW community voter turnout by providing education and awareness of civic engagement opportunities and removing barriers to participation.

c. To provide multiple opportunities for our UMW community members to learn more about civic engagement and democratic participation.

3. To continue to participate in the NSLVE.

4. To increase UMW student voter turnout in national elections by 10% over the next 5 years.

VI. Strategy

The Center for Community Engagement (CCE) has been working to coordinate both new and existing efforts to support and build civic engagement on campus. Working in partnership with the James Farmer Multicultural Center and other student clubs and organizations on campus, the CCE has begun to implement programs and activities that will continue over the next two years. These programs and opportunities are outlined below.

1. **Create a Culture of Civic Engagement on the UMW Campus**

The Center for Community Engagement will work with partners on and off campus to promote existing programming and create new programming to create a culture of civic engagement at UMW. This will include work to raise awareness of and participation in civic education programs on campus each year.The Center for Community Engagement will work with the James Farmer Multicultural Center and others to advertise, publicize, and promote lectures, social justice teach-ins, and other co-curricular events that raise students’ awareness of the importance of civic engagement.

1. **Collaboration with others**

The CCE plans to partner with other organizations and programs at UMW to support a culture of civic engagement. Potential partners include:

1. NAACP student chapter
2. James Farmer Multicultural Center
3. Day on Democracy working group
4. The Center for Leadership and Media Studies
5. Various student clubs that support civic engagement: Campus Republicans, Young Democrats, Women of Color, etc.

We will also work with off-campus partners such as:

1. The Fredericksburg City Registrar
2. League of Women Voters
3. NextGen
4. Campus Vote Project
5. **Supporting Campus-wide events**

We will plan, market, and execute the following activities:

* 1. Celebrating National Voter Registration Day
  2. Celebrating Vote Early Day
  3. Helping provide rides to the polls on election days.

**2. Support Opportunities for Student Civic Learning**

1. **UMW Voting Ambassadors**

The Center for Community Engagement started a **Voting Ambassador**program in the fall of 2019 and spring of 2020 that provides academic internship credit to 2-4 students to run a voter registration, education, and mobilization program. Interns will be hired each semester going forward.

Voting Ambassadors will carry out the following activities:

**A.** **Voter registration:**

a. Interns will learn how to register new and existing UMW students for both local and absentee voting. Interns will also learn how to register all other community members as needed.

b. Interns will meet with Fredericksburg registrar to receive training and make sure they are aware of local and other voter registration requirements.

c. Interns will table throughout student orientation and the months of September and October to increase voter registration among UMW students.

d. Interns will serve as resources for any students or UMW community members that are interested in registering to vote.

**B.** **Voter education:**

a. Interns will produce educational materials related to both local and absentee voting (directions to polling places, maps, deadlines related to absentee and local voting, etc.)

b. Interns will table and provide educational materials throughout student orientation and the months of September and October to educate voters regarding voting options and the value of registering to vote.

c. Interns will build relationships among campus student groups regarding civic engagement.

**C.** **Voter mobilization**

1. Interns will implement a communications campaign using campus media/communications platforms the month leading up to Election Day reminding students about the importance of civic engagement and voting.
2. Interns will work with CCE staff to implement National Voter Registration Day, Vote Early Day.
3. Interns will provide rides to polls on Election Day using campus resources (such as campus vans).
4. **Supporting Other Learning Opportunities for Students**
5. We will work with local and national organizations such as Campus Vote Project, Campus Compact, and NextGen to identify opportunities for UMW students to participate in internships and fellowships that support civic learning.
6. We will work to support UMW faculty as they support student civic learning through classroom visits (for voter registration and information about elections, etc.)

VII. Evaluation and Reporting

To evaluate our goals and strategy, we will use a variety of tools and methods. We will use the NSLVE data for our campus to assess changes in voter registration and engagement over time. We will also assess the success of our Voting Ambassador program and other efforts using internal rubrics that assess progress along a continuum. In general, we will assess the number of civic engagement events and participation in these events, the student and supervisor assessment of the Voting Ambassador program, and changes in student voter turnout over time.

In terms of reporting, we have a website dedicated to UMW Votes and provide a great deal of information on this website about events, activities, and programs. We also work with University Relations to share civic engagement information through UMW media channels.