Campus Democracy Challenge
The University of Texas at Arlington
Arlington, TX

Overview

At the University of Texas at Arlington, our democracy challenge has the following focuses:

1. **Knowledge** - Educating students on the importance and logistics of voter registration, electoral process, and candidates' viewpoints on issues during each election. Education helps explain the "why" voting is important.
2. **Distributing Resources** - To better educate the student population, Student Government, faculty, and staff will be encouraged to share online resources and integrating information in the classroom setting.
3. **Civic Engagement** - With a more educated student population, we hope to see an increase in voter turnout, early voters, attendees at city council meetings, letters sent to our representatives, etc.

The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to working towards a civically engaged student body. This commitment will be upheld by Student Governance. The Legislative Relations Committee, Chief of Staff, and Graduate Student Assistant will take responsibility for the implementation of this Action Plan.

Besides Student Governance, we hope to create a working relationship with College Constituency Councils, Division of Student Affairs, Mavs 1000, and Freshmen Interest Groups.

Climate

Currently, our campus has a voting rate of 50.7% of the eligible voting population. This is slightly above the national average, but still only half of the eligible voters. There are weaknesses in the areas of first year students, male students, Liberal Arts Students, and Computer Science students. The campus goals will target some of these weak turnout populations. Furthermore, students will be encouraged to be civically engaged throughout the year- not just during elections.

The Team

The Office of Student Governance, within the Division of Student Affairs, will be overseeing the institution's efforts to increase civic learning and democratic engagement. Niveen Joulani, Chief of Staff, will be overseeing committee activity and encouraging the implementation of this action plan. The Student Body Vice President will oversee the efforts of the College Constituency Councils. The Graduate Student Assistant will work with other on-campus entities.

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Goals

- **Create a Campus Culture focused on voting.**
  - **S**- Begin changing the culture of the campus, normalizing voting.
  - **M**- Focus on the age brackets between 18-22. If people begin voting at a younger age, they are more likely to continue voting throughout their life.
  - **A**- Begin talking to students about voting their freshmen year, using platforms including, but not limited to: Mavs 1000, Freshmen Interest Groups, Freshmen Orientation, and Activity Fairs. Include informative advertising in the school's newspaper, the Shorthorn.
  - **R**- It is never a bad time to begin informing eligible voters about how to register and how to vote.This goal will be achieved best by using multiple platforms including social media, fliers, and interpersonal communication.
  - **T**- Over the next year, we will be working on finding the best way to integrate voter education into programs. We have prepared a lesson for our University Introduction Course, and have tested it on two classes so far. By taking feedback from these classes we are improving. As we move forward with this initiative, we will keep taking feedback. By Fall 2018, we hope to have a solid lesson plan for freshmen. By Spring 2019, we hope to have a strong partnership with Residence Life and be working with RA's to encourage programs such as Voter Registration and walking to Early Voting with Residents. By Fall 2019, we hope to have a more knowledgeable student population overall.

- **Increase voter participation in our male population by 2% in the next election.**
  - **S**- Our active male voting population is substantially lower than our female active voting population. We would like to close this gap, in the short run, by 2%.

- ○ **M**- Since we are able to obtain the demographic data for our campus, we can view how many more males have participated.
- ○ **A**- We will work on this goal by having RA's reach out specifically to male students, and make sure we are engaging male students during outreach events. In colleges with high male enrollment, including Engineering, we will hold focus groups led by the Constituency council, to figure out the reason why males are voting at such a lower rate.
- ○ **R** - The first step in this process is to make sure males are registering when they have change of address. One thing most voters don't know is that registration must happen 30 days before the election to be eligible to vote in that election.
- ○ **T** - We will be able to check if the number has increased in the local elections occurring in November 2018. A less formal way of measuring is to take simple hand-raising polls in classrooms at the beginning of the semester. This allows time for a professor or deputized individual to assist students in registering before the deadline. If a professor would not want to take time out of class, they could promote National Voter Registration Day events by making an announcement or posting on Blackboard.

- **Increase voter participation in Liberal Arts and Philosophy students.**
  - ○ **S** - We are targeting/focusing on Liberal Arts and Philosophy students because we saw the largest decline in voter participation from 2012 to 2016 in this population.
  - ○ **M** - This information is also included in NSLVE Reports. The College Constituency councils for these schools will be held responsible to make sure these students are becoming engaged in the voting process.
  - ○ **A** - By concentrating our marketing and tabling efforts in areas where these students take classes, we will be able to inform these students of how to vote and register. Further, a newsletter or some sort of advertisement in an already established campus information distributor, may hit different audiences we have not previously reached.
  - ○ **R** - Most of our efforts are focused in the main areas on campus including the UC and Library mall, these implementations will allow us to reach students who don't come around the main areas on campus during peak times.
  - ○ **T** - We will see if this goal has been achieved by the next city election in November 2018.

- **Encouraging civic engagement through Social Media.**

- ○ **S**- Civic engagement includes writing letters to public officials, staying informed on political issues that impact our community, paying taxes, signing petitions, attending city council meetings, registering to vote, voting, etc.
- ○ **M**- Student Government leads these efforts by sending students to city council meetings. By informing constituents of these meetings and encouraging attendance, they can be informed on local issues. Further, we will share websites and other informational resources students can use to educate themselves. Social media clicks and metrics can be seen on Facebook and other sites.
- ○ **A**- By working to improve our social media and user interaction, students will be more likely to click links and use the resources we will be sharing. **R**- Our efforts will be focused on social media and using tabling events to inform people about not only voter registration but also ways to become more civically engaged.
- ○ **T**- At the end of each semester, we will evaluate the increase in interaction with our social sites, and based off of our results, will target our audience to increase interaction by the end of the semester. Beginning in Spring 2018, our Student Governance department is working on posting more consistently. Instead of being strictly events, we will be posting other things such as "Two-Poll Tuesdays" or other things that encourage active participation.

- ● **To increase overall voter participation by 3% for the 2020 election.**
  - ○ **S**- Our voter participation is higher than the national average for campuses across the nation, but it is not where it could be. We will continue our efforts through tabling, registering new students, advertising early voting, civically engaging students, etc.
  - ○ **M**- This is a goal that we will be able to see once the next NSLVE Report comes out in 2021.
  - ○ **A**- All of the smaller goals include increasing voter participation and education. More educated voters are more likely to vote, and therefore are contributing to our big goal. Further, by making efforts to reach out to distance learners, we hope to see an increase in our numbers.
  - ○ **R**- With continuous efforts from Student Government and other campus entities, we hope to have a larger reach on students across the campus.
  - ○ **T**- This goal will be measured in four years after the national election.

Resources

A large part of our plan is to use social media to engage students. Students spend large amounts of time online due to school and social media. Our Student Government has a Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. With Facebook, administrators of the page are able to see the page activity including total views, likes, and engagements. Using this data we will find the most effective way to market to users. Promotions will include websites with important information including current registration status in Tarrant County, who is on the ballot for each election, their stances on important issues, and other ways to become civically engaged. For Instagram, we will try a series of graphics that explain what issues are being voted on. This graphic will be made by a member of the legislative relations committee and approved by the University before posting. We will have organization members share these graphics from the page to attract more traffic. For Twitter, we will use the same graphics as Instagram, along with short snippets about our events.Once the social media has an increase in traffic, we will begin more regular civic engagement activities including polls on current issues within the University, City of Arlington,state and nationwide.

Since our Legislative Relations committee attends City Council Meetings, we will ask them to upload their meeting notes onto Mav Orgs. This will allow students access to these notes and be able to find out what is discussed at city council meetings if they cannot attend themselves. To make sure students are engaging with these notes, we will conduct polls about topics covered in the meetings. The polls could strike interest within the students if they see a topic they are passionate about. Conducting polls based off City Council meetings helps accomplish our overall goal of interacting with students through Social Media.

The websites we plan to promote include:
  https://gisit.tarrantcounty.com/VoterLookup/ -Allows students to search their name, view current voter registration address, and view their representatives with links to their websites.
http://access.tarrantcounty.com/content/dam/main/elections/2017/1117/1117_Precinct_by_Precinct.pdf - Shows all potential locations someone in Tarrant County could vote.

https://www.allsides.com/ - Allows students to view news stories from "all sides" meaning articles from each perspective (left, right, middle).

https://icitizen.com/ - Encourages students to voice opinions on different issues. Can be used by the university to put out their own questions as well.

https://mavorgs.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/student-government - Student Government Mav Orgs page so students can access city council meeting notes.

Events

National Voter Registration Day- September 25th, 2018
- Student Government will hold an event similar to "Meet Your Senator" but instead focus on registering students to vote before the November elections.

Tabling - At least 6 times per semester. For Spring 2018: 1/18, 1/25, 1/29, 1/30, 2/2, 2/5
- Will choose dates at the beginning of each semester.
- Student Government will man tables and encourage students to register to vote.
- In the upcoming year, we will encourage Constituency Councils to hold their own voter registration tables as well to gain a wider reach.

Social Media Challenges
- Allowing students to give their opinions on polls on University and local issues.
- "I voted because.." allowing students to share their "why"
- Paragraphs about issues students find important. The best written one would be featured in the school newspaper.

College Challenges
- Hold a competitive challenge between colleges leading up to National Voter Registration day.
- Flash Social Media Challenges that allow colleges to earn points until National Voter Registration day. Overall college winner gets recognition.
- One of these challenges will include distance learners, to get our wide campus demographic represented.

Data Collection

- Data collection for voter registration numbers will be counted each time there is a tabling or other voter registration event.
- The Division of Student Affairs releases a survey every two years, we will work together for the possibility of adding things about civic engagement on the next survey in 2018.
- The University of Texas at Arlington has received our 2016 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report. This report was able to assist us in identifying areas for improvement on our campus. We will continue to work towards a campus with greater voter participation.

Timeline

Fall 2017:
- Develop Action Plan and begin partnerships with on-campus entities.

Spring 2018:
- Being developing and getting feedback on lesson plans.
- Develop training for Resident Assistants and programs for their residents.
- Distributing posters to Residence Halls and tabling in Residence Halls.
- Partner with select professors from each college to encourage civic engagement.

Fall 2018:
- Work with Mavs 1000 on implementing Voter Education Lesson Plan
- Implement a lesson on Voter Registration for RA Training
- Tabling events beginning with Freshmen and Transfer Orientations and continuing throughout the semester leading up to National Voter Registration Day.
- Host large event on National Voter Registration Day (Sept. 25, 2018)
- Social Media push for students to read City Council Meeting notes.

Spring 2019:
- Focus on Distance Learners.
- Continue Social Media efforts.
- College Constituency Councils host educational event about what civic engagement means.
- Re-evaluate Mavs 1000 Lesson and make any necessary changes before the Fall semester.

Fall 2019:
- Host educational events about Republican vs. Democratic views and candidates.
- Re-evaluate Social media. What is the most popular form students are using? How can we reach the most students?
- Continuing the encouragement of interaction with Mav Orgs and City Council meetings.

Spring 2020:
- Begin shifting focus towards national elections in November.
- Educating the student body about the different candidates.
- Open discussions about the leadership of the current president.
- Pop-up media: buttons, t-shirts, yard signs, posters, etc.

Fall 2020:
- Voter registration tables
- Early Voting On-campus
- Increased social media resource push
- Analyze efforts once NSLVE Report is published

Team

Lastly, none of our plan can work without the participation of key people in the University of Texas at Arlington. These people include:

Student Advisor for Student Governance, TBD
Niveen Joulani, Chief of Staff
Peter Pimolsri, Student Body Vice President
Molly Albart, Director of Assessment, and Student Success and Freshmen Experience
Chris Martin, Freshman Interest Groups Coordinator
 Delcenia Collins, Apartment and Residence Life
David Duvall, Director of New Maverick Orientation
Jordan Eromonsele, Business Constituency Council
Araminta Kessellie, Health Innovation Constituency Council
Atraya Mukherjee, Engineering Student Council President
Jordan Joiner, Liberal Arts Constituency Council
Kayla Parkins, Science Constituency Council
Lawrence Stewart, Social Work Constituency Council
Shiva Dheer, Honors College Council President

When student officers transition, the action plan will be made more specific to the upcoming school year.

Each year, the College Constituency Councils will reach out to professors to encourage students to vote close to election days. Sometimes on our campus, students only come to class and then leave so this will be a vital step in reaching more students.