

University of Mount Union Voter Friendly Campus Final Report

January 2021

Coalition

Our campus plan indicated leadership from Dr. Lori Kumler, professor of political science and international studies and faculty liaison to the Regula Center and Abby Schroeder, Director of the Regula Center. The plan identified 6 faculty/staff and 6 students who would serve on the campus working group. Going into the semester the coalition started with that group and grew to more than 30 individuals representing student affairs, faculty, religious life, campus administration, athletics, and students. A full list of members can be found [here](#).

This coalition communicated frequently with weekly email updates coming from the Regula Center. Additionally, many of the faculty in the group had integrated the election into their curriculum for the semester (see blog entry on their work [here](#)) and used the group as a place to share updates about their work and details about events their students were hosting.

Partnerships that had been previously in place on campus were maintained throughout this election cycle, and we expanded our work with students through Because I Care, the Campus Election Engagement Project, and the Campus Vote project with each organization assisting with funding, training, and resources for student fellows on Mount Union's Campus. These fellowships mobilized student leaders and made an impact on the peer-to-peer efforts we executed including debate watches, voter registration drives, and meetings with athletic teams.

As a member of the ALL IN Challenge, we launched and took on the leadership of a competition among our athletic conference, the Ohio Athletic Conference (OAC). This allowed for regular information sharing, friendly competition, and increased connections to leadership among the conference. We found idea sharing among schools invaluable.

All of these on and off campus partners made the efforts at Mount Union more cohesive and well thought out than in years past. We plan to continue using the campus coalition as we strive to institutionalize voter registration, civic engagement activities, and a continued commitment to developing responsible citizens.

Going forward the members of the coalition may change but leadership will remain with the Regula Center. Additional students will be added to the group based on their roles on campus and the continuation of fellowships.

While effective, we believe that our coalition would be even more effective under non-COVID conditions so that we could host in-person events on campus, many of which would have included community members in a typical year.

Overview

Our executive summary stated, “We seek to increase student civic engagement on campus, measured by student voter registration, student voting, student contact with government officials, and student attendance at civic focused events both on and off campus. We also seek to enhance civic engagement in the larger Alliance community through resource collaboration, including campus/ community events and connecting with local community groups.”

Further, our action plan defined 10 short term goals (see page 12), all of which were met this year. We continued to expand on programming including Constitution Day and debate watch parties, increased awareness on campus, updated the website, expanded our working group, connected with the new college deans, and were involved in training for first year seminar and capstone course instructors. We were able to partner with campuses across our athletic conference and throughout the country through ALL IN and secured resources through multiple state and national organizations.

We worked to create specific action items to help us achieve these goals throughout the semester. These action items included hosting pop up events that featured cardboard cutouts of the candidates, custom cutout cookies, snacks, and other giveaways to promote campus events, voter registration, and absentee ballot requests. The events also included distribution of bi-partisan voter guides and encouraging use of our voting website, www.mountunion.edu/umuvotes.

Another new outreach to work towards these goals was a campus-wide competition among student organizations, fraternity and sorority life, and athletic teams. Points were awarded for participation in campus events, hosting a pop-up event as a group, decorating the sidewalks and windows on campus, writing articles, and recording public service announcements.

Our use of Civic Corner kiosks expanded with increased usage on campus. Through this effort we provided the forms, envelopes, and postage for more than 20 voter registrations, 65 absentee ballot requests, and multiple letters to elected officials in 2020. Civic Corners were also purchased from the Regula Center for use on multiple campuses across the country. The Regula Center provided one the to the local municipal public library at no cost.

Faculty incorporated this work into their courses spanning multiple departments including Business, English, Political Science and International Studies, and the integrative core. Through our work with ALL IN, we hosted a virtual summit in August featuring a panel of faculty, staff, and athletic department leadership as well a panel of students. This work was continued throughout the semester with monthly meetings.

Overall, the goals we defined over a year ago were achievable even with COVID and other unexpected situations. We would have welcomed the opportunity to host additional guest speakers and community on campus, but we found ways to make virtual opportunities work. We had also hoped to feature the first presidential debate on a large outdoor screen but had to change plans at the last minute due to changing COVID regulations and weather concerns. Our students and coalition proved to be nimble, creative, and willing to pivot as changes were made and that ensured our success as a campus.

Analysis of your work

Voter registration took multiple forms on our campus. We relied heavily on our Civic Corner kiosks which are permanent fixtures in our library and campus café. These kiosks held all the necessary forms and a drop box for mailing. Additionally, a third Civic Corner was portable in nature and was available at all of our pop-up events, debate watches, and during student organization outreach. Throughout 2020, 25 students used this tool to register, 8 of those were this fall. The Civic Corners processed 65 absentee ballot requests in 2020 with 24 of those being submitted this fall.

While Civic Corners enable us to track paper voter registration and absentee ballot requests, we were unable to track how many students registered either online or on their own by using the links on our learning management system, learning about registration in class, or following links included in daily “UMU today” e-newsletters. We suspect a great many students registered via these other avenues.

Voter education outreach focused on first-year students through integrating a civic engagement module into the exceptional beginnings program (within our required First Year Seminar courses). This online module was required for all first-year students. Of 490 participants, 470 took part in a quiz covering the material, 340 visited the vote.org webpage to check their voter registration status, and 290 went on to turn in the Civic Engagement Plan they were asked to fill out.

We also provided voter education resources to coalition members, to faculty via the fall faculty professional development module, and via our UMU votes website. The UMU Votes section of our website included the tools students needed to register regardless of location and assisted them with online options for registration and absentee ballot requests. This page was linked to the top of our online learning platform, D2L for all students.

This website also linked to nonpartisan voter guides. Printed copies of bipartisan information about the presidential candidates were also available at all events related to voting. In partnering with the chapel on our campus, students held a panel discussion about the intersection of religion and politics with each sharing a different perspective and representing different political parties.

Voter turnout work took place in an effort to register voters and then encourage them to request an absentee ballot, vote early in person, or vote on election day. The events included handouts with dates and deadlines about options for voting, as well as locations/directions for early voting. In addition to our originally planned activities, we partnered with a marketing class that developed plans we could implement, we worked with athletics to visit team meetings, and we shared information through Student Senate.

Prior to the beginning of the semester, we encouraged faculty to include voter registration deadlines and information on their semester syllabi.

The Office of Marketing was a vital partner including voter information on the COVID portion of our website and using University social media pages to share information and

updates. Voter information was highlighted in our daily email more than two dozen times and could be found on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. They assisted with encouraging students to take the [allintovote.org](https://www.allintovote.org) pledge.

With a majority of our students being residential, we partnered with residence life to get posters in residence halls. The Director of Residence Life was also a valuable partner when communicating with students in quarantine. All students received information from her when needed to move off campus for quarantine or isolation and those memos included voter information.

Many students were unaware of early voting, postmark deadlines, and varying rules depending on where they were from. This information is hard for students to keep track of under normal circumstances but the added confusion of COVID guidelines, quarantine procedures, and travel to polls were the hurdles we encountered most frequently. In some cases, students we did not know emailed us directly for guidance, suggesting that others on campus were able to connect them to us as resources.

While we will not know how close we came to full voter participation until the NSLVE data is available, this year we met all of our goals including those written prior to the onset of the pandemic. This was also the most comprehensive voter engagement outreach Mount Union has ever had. There has not been another cause on our campus that brought together athletics, student affairs, marketing, service-learning, fellowships, religious life leadership, student senate, the Green Raiders, academic affairs, and residence life for one purpose. All students on our campus had to have noticed information in at least one form.

Student voting rights: While we did less on this topic specifically, many of our linked resources integrated voting rights information (i.e. CEEP, Campus Vote Project, Ask Every Student). In late October, we sent a targeted email to our coalition members to directly address the issue of student voting rights and of difficulties that might arise around/following election day. We put together a short slide show using SLSV resources related to voting rights and getting good information; we also sent out the Civic Alliance Election Day and post-election guide. Following the election, we held three virtual debriefing sessions led by faculty and staff and open to the campus community.

Successes

Reaching out to all incoming students via first year programs:

For the first time, we were able to directly reach all first-year students through the University's "Exceptional Beginnings" program. Each first-year student was required to complete our Responsible Citizenship module. The module included a 16-minute video/slide presentation where students checked to see if they were registered to vote, learned about registration and absentee ballot deadlines, learned how to register using campus resources such as the Civic Corners, how to vote early in person, where to find out about candidates and issues, how to contact their representatives, and how/where/when to vote for spring primaries. All students were required to take a quiz on the material at the end of the module as well as complete a voting and civic engagement plan. In total, 470 students watched the video and took the quiz, and while 340 linked to the vote.org website where they could check their voter registration. Students were able to take a voting pledge and sign up for community service projects as well.

We have not yet had time to quantify the data in the civic engagement plans to track how many students were already registered and how many registered because of this program.

Creating one website as a clearinghouse for all political engagement information:

Also, for the first time, we created [one website](#) to host all information for students, including links to voter guides, registration forms, absentee ballot request forms, links to poll worker applications, and early voting information. Furthermore, we were able to put a link at the top of the home page of our online learning platform visible to all students. Other outreach took place through the University's social media platforms. From September 1, 2020 through January 1, 2021 the website had 2,317 views with users spending an average of 3 minutes, 37 seconds on the page. The 7 Facebook posts during this time reached 14,216 individuals with 477 engagements and 74 link clicks. The 6 Twitter posts had a reach of 1,067 individuals and 22 clicks.

Engaging students, faculty, and staff across campus:

We were able to harness student leaders and financially support their efforts due to funds from the Campus Vote Project (sponsoring two students), the Campus Election Engagement Project (sponsoring two students, one paid and one unpaid), and Because I Care (sponsoring one student). We also received a mini grant from Ask Every Student. Our student led events were a highlight of our efforts. Students led presidential debate screenings for the three fall debates. Despite Covid, they did a fantastic job of engaging virtual viewers with trivia questions and polls during each viewing. Students were able to view the events in small groups in classrooms or virtually. Our students also led a Constitution Day screening of excerpts from the PBS documentary on the women's suffrage movement, "The Vote." Here again, students determined which clips to view, put together trivia questions, and led discussion on the clips.

Students also undertook outreach for voter registration on campus in various places throughout the fall. With large cardboard cut outs of the candidates and politically themed food, students set up tables in high traffic areas both indoors and outdoors.

Beginning in August, we created a stakeholder group of staff, faculty, and students to coordinate and share information regarding campus political engagement events. We also provided civic engagement assignment templates for faculty via the Center for Faculty Development and our Integrative Core program.

Measuring our efforts is trickier, but through our Civic Corner and student table efforts, we directly registered more than 30 students and mailed absentee ballot requests for 65 students. As previously mentioned, we were unable to track online registration by students and those who completed and mailed forms on their own. In early January 2021, two faculty members sent out surveys to all students that will give us a better idea of the extent to which students registered, voted, attended events, and the like. We found that faculty did utilize the assignment templates, and several faculty members included assignments or course content related to the election. We have not undertaken a comprehensive accounting of faculty yet, however.

Our efforts were widely supported, from the President's office on down. Marketing helped with the website updates; the Integrative Core director and the Director of First Year programs supported our efforts to reach faculty and first year students.

We will report our successes in several ways. First, we will include our successes in the Regula Center Annual Report. Additionally, we will make our VFC report available on our website. Finally, we will send a copy of both reports and NSLVE data to our area Dean and to our Coalition group.

Barriers

The most significant barrier we had this year was COVID. Restrictions on campus events made it impossible to replicate the group activities and group momentum that we undertook and achieved in 2016. We fully planned for an outdoor, large screen viewing of the first presidential debate, but the plan was tabled due to administration concerns. The uncertainty associated with COVID made it hard to start our student activity/team engagement plan as early as we would have liked. Participation by student groups and athletic teams was not nearly what we hoped it would be. Team and coach participation in particular was low, and we had a hard time engaging coaches.

We were excited to bring our athletic conference, the Ohio Athletic Conference (OAC) together to share ideas and to kick off a competition. Our planned OAC summit at our university in August became a virtual event rather than in-person. While we still met virtually with other campuses and shared ideas, the competition among athletic teams was not taken up widely among teams and campuses as we hoped it would be.

Of the goals listed in our campus plan, these last two, engagement of student groups and the OAC challenge, had much lower outcomes than others. Nonetheless, we did help build community among civic engagement professionals across the OAC and we did engage some student groups.

Beyond 2020

We plan to continue our work and communication with our campus coalition group going forward. We also plan to replicate many of our planned activities planned for fall 2020 for fall 2022.

We are working to figure out a plan to continue the dialog about voting in primary elections this spring based on the local ballot. We have a new, funded Democracy Fellow for spring and fall of 2021, and we are excited to work with her to engage students in elections this spring.

On campus partners such as the Office of Marketing and Residence Life will continue to be vital for communication across campus. We will continue to work with current partners including Ohio Campus Compact, the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Campus Election Engagement Project, and the Ohio Athletic Conference while continually looking for additional partners. The website we have created will be updated with timely information as will the information at the Civic Corners.

NSLVE Data

In the past, we have not received gender/race/ethnicity data from NSLVE. We are unsure how this can happen and need to connect with our Office of Institutional Assessment to see how it can be done.

We plan to share the data with all our stakeholders upon receipt. Ideally, we will include our goals for registration/voting for this past year and write up an evaluation of how well we met those goals and how they will inform future initiatives. We will triangulate the NSVLE data with data from our First Year Initiative as well as research data from an all-student survey focused on fall 2020 student political behavior (a research study by two of our faculty members, mentioned above).