



ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

University of Mary Washington

2019 Voter & Civic Engagement Action Plan

June 2019

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I. Executive Summary

This **Voter Engagement Action Plan** was developed by staff at the Center for Community Engagement and the Advisory Committee for the **Civic Engagement Initiative** at the University of Mary Washington (UMW). This plan is being submitted as part of the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#). The Advisory Committee for the **Civic Engagement Initiative** includes five members, including staff from the James Farmer Multicultural Center (Student Affairs), staff from the Center for Community Engagement (Academic Affairs), staff from Student Activities and Engagement (Student Affairs), faculty in the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, and a member of the UMW Alumni. This committee has been designing a program to build a culture of civic engagement on the UMW campus, with several components approved for the 2019/2020 academic year:

1. Start a **Voting Ambassador** program in the fall of 2019 that provides internship credit to 2 students to run a voter registration, education, and mobilization program.
2. Collaborate effectively with other voter engagement partners, including the [Campus Vote Project](#), the Fredericksburg City Registrar, the Fredericksburg League of Women Voters, and [NextGen America](#).

3. Start a **UMW Votes** program that will unify the efforts of the Voting Ambassadors, Fellows from Campus Vote Project, and other students working on voter engagement on the UMW campus.
4. Work to raise awareness of and participation in civic education programs on campus during September and October 2019.
5. Prepare for the UMW Day on Democracy in 2020, when UMW will cancel most classes on Election Day and will provide on-campus programming designed to educate UMW students and community members about the importance of civic engagement.
6. Develop a **Voter Engagement Plan** and register for the [All IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#).

II. Leadership/Institutional Context

Current Democratic Engagement at UMW

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. Research shows that, nationally, education majors vote at the highest rates, while STEM majors vote at the lowest. The first finding holds true at UMW, where history and education majors have a voting rate near 80%. However, UMW's voting rates for its STEM students in 2016 were also very high, above 60%, much higher than those of most other institutions. 59.6% of the students voted in person in 2016, and 39% voted absentee; .4% voted by mail. In fall 2019 and into the future, we plan to build upon these strong voting rates on our campus and continue to support students in their civic engagement goals.

As a public liberal arts and sciences institution, UMW seeks to realize the democratic purpose of our mission. Drawing inspiration from our 1908 founding as a public teacher's college, we will instill the value of service across the university, equipping students to address society's demands, to challenge injustices, and to embrace the world's possibilities. By supporting the full participation of all students in their University experience, we will respond to higher education's imperative to provide an increasingly diverse population with the opportunity to improve their lives, their communities, and the world around them. Our graduates will be prepared to engage in issues of the day with rigor, curiosity, and empathy.

– UMW President Paino

Leadership

The Advisory Committee for the **Civic Engagement Initiative** at University of March Washington includes leadership from Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, faculty, and alumni. The Advisory Committee for the **Civic Engagement Initiative** includes the following members:

- Sarah Dewees, Associate Director of the Center for Community Engagement (Academic Affairs)
- Chris Williams, Assistant Director of the James Farmer Multicultural Center (Student Affairs)

- Crystal Rawls, Assistant Director of Student Activities and Engagement (Student Affairs)
- Ranjit Singh, faculty in the Department of Political Science and International Affairs
- Marina Castro-Meirelles, UMW Alumna

This nonpartisan **UMW Voter Engagement Action Plan** was developed by staff at the Center for Community Engagement, working in partnership with the James Famer Multicultural Center and the Advisory Committee for the *Civic Engagement Initiative* at UMW. The **James Farmer Multicultural Center** 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.

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.

The Center for Community Engagement and the James Famer Multicultural Center have been working together to carry out the **UMW Strategic Vision** (approved by the UMW Board of Visitors on November 17, 2017) 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.

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.”

IV. Landscape

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). 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](#) to register voters on campus. In early 2019, the national organization [Campus Vote Project](#) decided to award two Democracy Fellow positions to UMW students, which come with training and a \$1,200 stipend. These Democracy Fellows will partner with the UMW Voting Ambassadors (who are supported by the Center for Community Engagement) to support voter registration, education, and mobilization on campus. In addition, NextGen America will also be hiring staff to work on campus in fall 2019. Because Virginia is one of only a few states to have off-year elections, most Virginia campuses have been receiving a lot of attention and resources from national organizations, and UMW is no exception. Many organizations are eager to establish relationships this year in anticipation of a significant national election in 2020. The Center for Community Engagement has been working to coordinate with both these new and existing efforts to build civic engagement on campus.

In early 2019, we met 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 training for the UMW Voting Ambassadors.

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 2020. This proposal was passed by the University Faculty Council in March. Such a program will require a significant amount of student programming leading up to and on the day of the 2020 election, providing voter registration efforts beforehand, and voter education and engagement efforts in the weeks leading to the election. The **UMW Civic Engagement Initiative** provides an institutional mechanism to coordinate programming efforts.

In addition, UMW historically has had civic engagement programming on our campus supported through the [UMW Center for Leadership and Media Studies](#). 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 18 months, UMW is poised to build a positive culture of civic engagement on the UMW campus.

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 5 goals:

1. To create and consolidate a culture of civic engagement on campus supported by co-curricular programming.
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 Advisory Committee for the *Civic Engagement Initiative* at UMW has identified the following strategy:

1. COORDINATE VOTER ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS ON THE UMW CAMPUS

The Center for Community Engagement has been working to coordinate both new and existing efforts to build civic engagement on campus. Working in partnership with the James Farmer Multicultural Center

and the **UMW Civic Engagement Initiative** Advisory Committee, the Center has hired two Voting Ambassadors to work during fall 2019 and had started to coordinate efforts with other voter education groups on campus. In fall 2019, the Center will continue to work with campus partners to identify opportunities for student programming and outreach. As planning for the 2020 UMW “Day on for Democracy” continues, the Center and the **UMW Civic Engagement Initiative** provide an institutional mechanism to coordinate programming efforts.

2. **WORK TO CREATE A CULTURE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ON THE UMW CAMPUS**

The Center for Community Engagement will work with partners on campus to promote existing programming and create new programming to create a culture of civic engagement on the UMW campus. This will include work to raise awareness of and participation in civic education programs on campus during September and October of 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 important of civic engagement.

3. **VOTING AMBASSADORS**

The Center for Community Engagement, in partnership with the Advisory Committee, has started a **Voting Ambassador** program in the fall of 2019 that provides internship credit to 2 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

- a. 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.
- b. Interns will provide rides to polls on Election Day using campus resources (such as campus vans).

VOTING AMBASSADOR INTERNSHIP CALENDAR:

| <u>Month</u> | <u>Tasks</u> |
|-----------------|---|
| May-Aug | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign internship agreement by early May, identify tasks and timeline • Meeting with Fredericksburg registrar Marc Hoffman for training • Develop voter registration materials • Prepare voter education materials • Voter education/registration/engagement during campus orientation • Refine voter education/registration materials • Plan communications campaign |
| Aug-Sept | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tabling and communications campaign regarding voter registration and civic engagement (for example, Club Carnival) • Voter education and outreach • Attend campus events related to civic engagement • Participate in National Voter Registration Day |
| Oct | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tabling and communications campaign regarding voter registration and civic engagement • Voter education and outreach |
| Nov | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter education and outreach • Rides to the polls on Election Day |
| Dec | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief and identify lessons learned • Reflection paper • Write advisory memo for 2020 UMW voting ambassadors |

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 of activities and outcomes. 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.