



ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge/Voter Friendly Campus

University of Mary Washington

Civic Engagement Report

Fall 2020

Overview

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." The UMW Votes program was created in 2019 to support the 2017 strategic vision.

UMW Votes is a non-partisan program dedicated to educating the community about all aspects of the voting process. Our mission is to create civically-engaged students passionate about positive social change.

Goals and Accomplishments

The UMW Votes coalition had 5 major goals outlined in their *All In Campus Plan*. These goals, and our activities, are described below. Further detail on each of these topics is provided in other sections of this document.

The UMW Votes coalition accomplished most of our goals and sub-goals. For one goal, it is too soon to tell.

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

- 1) **Celebrating National Voter Registration Day (NVRD)**
- 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.**

UMW Votes coalition members accomplished most of goal 1 and most sub-items (more detail is provided below). We didn't fully accomplish sub-item 4 because we were not allowed to provide rides to the polls due to COVID restrictions. However, although we couldn't provide traditional transportation, we adopted new strategies:

- Walking to the polls with students and providing maps to the early voting center;
- Giving them Lyft & Uber vouchers; and
- Providing information about public bus routes.



Goal 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.**

UMW Votes coalition members accomplished all sub items (more detail is provided below). We had over 14 volunteers and provided three internships during fall 2020. We had three students who received fellowships from Campus Vote Project and one student who received a fellowship from Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP). In addition, one student was a Newman Civic Fellow through Campus Compact. We met with faculty regularly, provided “class raps” for six classes, and worked with one faculty member who both encouraged her students to help with UMW Votes and also personally volunteered on Vote Early Day and Election Day.

Goal 3. 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.

- 1) **To provide multiple opportunities for students and the UMW community to register to vote so they can participate in the democratic process.**

- 2) **To support student and UMW community voter turnout by providing education and awareness of civic engagement opportunities and removing barriers to participation.**
- 3) **To provide multiple opportunities for our UMW community members to learn more about civic engagement and democratic participation.**

UMW Votes coalition members accomplished all sub items (more detail is provided below). We provided UMW community members with information about voting and civic engagement through multiple channels:

- a. Events and tabling (NVRD, Vote Early Day, National Voter Education Week, tabling two days a week in October and on Election Day)
- b. Over 7 presentations to over 200 students and student leaders (class visits, presentations to resident assistants in dorms).
- c. Presentation to college deans and the Vice President for Student Affairs.
- d. Sharing information on social media about early voting, voter registration deadlines, ways to vote (by mail, early, or on Election Day), locations of early voting centers, and more.



We worked to remove barriers to participation:

- a. Walks to early voting centers.
- b. Work to bring a polling place to campus: This work is ongoing and one of our students received a grant to work on this topic during fall 2020. We intend to keep working on this during spring 2021, as redistricting is starting in Virginia.
- c. Educating people about early voting, voting on campus, and voting by mail.

And we provided multiple opportunities for our UMW community members to learn more about civic engagement and democratic participation:

- a. Working with the James Farmer Multicultural Center on civic engagement webinars.
- b. Participation in National Voter Education Week.
- c. Increased use of social media to share information.
 - i. Our social media team consisted of 4 student volunteers who produced 5-6 posts each week and shared information about changing election laws and voting.

- ii. Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) provided a Cameo video of “Jerry” from Parks and Recreation that was viewed over 10,000 times. In the video “Jerry” provides information about how to vote as a UMW student.

Goals 4. To continue to participate in the NSLVE.

We continue to participate in NSLVE.

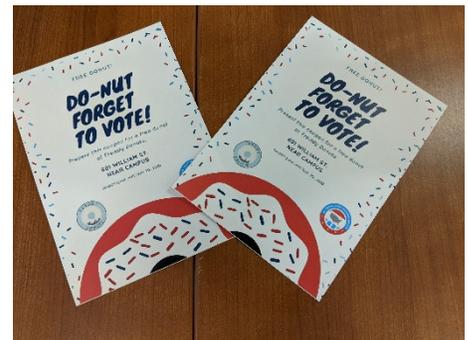
Goal 5. To increase UMW student voter turnout in national elections by 10% over the next 5 years.

It is too soon to tell if we accomplished this goal. When the NSLVE data is released we will be able to tell if voter turnout is increasing on our campus. Turnout continues to be tracked and monitored for progress. We believe this is an achievable goal with our current and continued numbers of engagement.

Analysis of the Work: Fall 2020 Activities

Our fall revolved around 4 major activity areas:

1. **Voter registration:** We provided extensive voter registration information on our website. We also held NVRD, and registered 45 people in person on the day, and the QR code we set up for online registration got 89 hits (we tracked it using a bit.ly link). For NVRD we had “Do-nut Forget to Vote” coupons that we handed out for a free doughnut in partnership with a doughnut shop close to campus. For NVRD we also had a prize wheel people could spin and other activities to create excitement around voting and voter registration. Next Gen provided several giveaway prizes for our prize table, and we also gave away free UMW Votes T-shirts. We created “grab and go” informational packets and extensive infographics to help students decipher the registration and voting process. We tabled on campus walk until the voter registration deadline, and mostly helped people who were registered at home and needed to access and fill out their mail-in ballot. Many, many students were already registered due to the nature of this election. But many needed help figuring out how to vote. We also did six “class raps” reaching over 200 people, and gave a presentation to *all* Resident Assistants in all the dorms. Our Student Affairs division sent out an all-campus email reminding people to register to vote.
2. **Voter turnout:** Virginia had just passed early voting legislation so our first task was educating people about how to vote early, either by mail or in-person. A lot of our class raps, social media, and tabling helped educate people about voting early. We created



and used a variety of infographics to explain early voting and voting by mail. We sponsored walks to the early voting center in town, and we celebrated Vote Early Day. Many, many students were voting absentee by mail for the first time this year and we answered many questions about that. Some of our GOTV activities include sending “voting grams” to people in dorms reminding them to vote on Election Day, handing out “Election Night Care Packages” on Election Day, and sponsoring a “Pumpkins to the Polls” pumpkin decorating contest for Vote Early Day. Our Student Affairs division sent out an all-campus email reminding people to vote on Election Day.

3. **Student voting rights:** Students at UMW face a lot of hurdles when it comes to voting. The campus is split into 3 different precincts for voting on Election Day, which can cause a lot of confusion. In addition, many students don't have transportation to the polls. We couldn't provide rides to the polls due to the pandemic, but we encouraged people to walk to the voting center for early voting. One of our students worked hard to get a polling place located on campus, but we ran out of time to implement that.
4. **Voter education:** We provided nonpartisan voting information mostly over social media. We informed people about what was on the ballot, especially down ballot races and statewide ballot initiatives. We also shared information while tabling. We co-sponsored 2 informational webinars over Zoom as well - webinars were led by the James Farmer Multicultural Center and one featured presentations from candidates and one featured a discussion on the Electoral College. Finally, we also participated in National Voter Education Week.
5. **How close did we get to achieving full voter participation?:** We are not sure how close we got to full participation this year. This was an unusual year, because many students had registered to vote in the summer already. Those that had not were hard to contact; we had a lot of restrictions regarding what types of events we could sponsor, and how we were allowed to reach out to students. However, we believe that every year that the UMW Vote program operates, we reach a larger number of people as our name recognition and trust grows.



Adapting to COVID

Challenges - This year was challenging because when the semester started, we weren't sure if we were able to table and hand out information. We also weren't even sure we were coming back to campus. We definitely weren't able to provide rides for early voting or on Election Day, something we had done in the past. We were not supposed to gather in groups greater than 10 people, and were not supposed to get closer than 6 feet. While we eventually could overcome many of these challenges by having outdoor events, we still could not provide rides to voting locations, which



was not ideal. Last year we gave 165 people rides to the polls. This year we were not allowed to give any rides to the polls. Another challenge was absentee ballots - many students had requested absentee ballots, but they were sent to their parents' home. We had to work with students to help them get their ballot to campus, and then to fill it out correctly. Finally - it was harder to register people to vote - we had to use QR codes and be careful about not getting too close to someone.

Solutions - We ended up being able to meet over Zoom with our UMW Votes coalition, and to receive training from the Voting Registrar over Zoom. We were able to sponsor several outdoor events, including NVRD and Vote Early Day, and being outdoors while wearing masks was very safe and we stayed socially distant. We used QR codes and handouts to help with voter registration. We tabled 2 days a week from the start of early voting to Election Day, and on Election Day itself we handed out “Election Night Care Packages” that contained an



inspirational message, chocolate, and Play-Doh for stress relief. We sponsored “Walking Wednesdays” when people would walk from campus to the Voting Registrar’s office for early voting (not many people showed up, but around 10 did). We also deployed a successful social media strategy and grew our social media presence. We sponsored interactive, safe activities like “Pumpkins to the Polls” to encourage people to think about voting. We had “take and make” kits that people could pick up from tables on Campus Walk. They could take pumpkins home, decorate them, and then enter them in a contest for prizes on Vote Early Day.

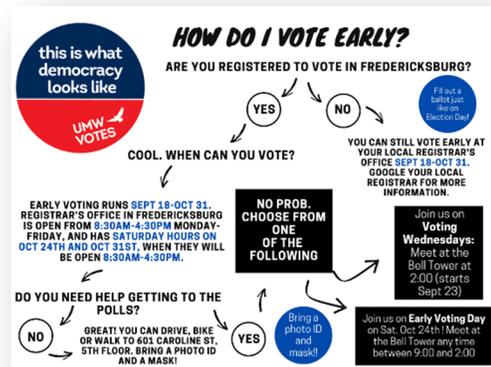
Unexpected opportunities - Some surprising outcomes:

1. The ability to start meeting and planning over Zoom in early August, when we were spread out and not on campus yet. Normally planning doesn’t start until Sept.
2. People craving community and becoming involved in activities more than they might have otherwise.
3. Social media was more important and effective than usual.

Coalition

Internal partners

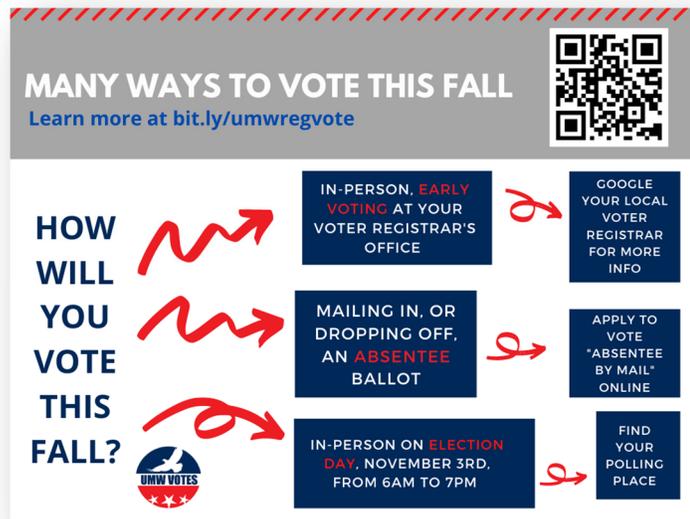
The UMW Votes program recruited student staff from a pool of previous UMW Votes interns (students who had worked with UMW Votes in previous years). In addition, we worked with the Honors Service Learning and Community-Engaged classes to recruit students seeking volunteer hours. We had over 14 regular student volunteers working with us this fall. Three of those students received a fellowship from Campus Vote Project (one as a Poll Defender) and one student was a Fellow with Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP). In addition, one student was a Newman Civic Fellow through Campus Compact. These groups of students met weekly in three teams: Social Media Team; Events Team; and Voter Reg/GOTV Team. There was a separate group of students who worked somewhat independently on a Day on Democracy program for Election Day. More information about that can be found on this [website](#).



We also worked with several programs on campus:

1. **Student Affairs:** We worked with the Student Affairs division leadership to send out an email about National Voter Registration Day and Election Day.
2. **Student Activities and Engagement:** SAE and student government reposted UMW Votes' information on their social media, amplifying its reach. SAE also used voting themed coloring pages that we provided for their "Unwind" programming (mid-terms programming to help students de-stress).
3. **Honors Program:** We had several volunteers from the Honors Program who were in a class called "Honors Service Learning" and each committed to work 20 volunteer hours with UMW Votes.
4. **First Year Experience:** We worked with the First Year Experience program to provide voter registration information in their online modules. We also participated in the "Common Experience" committee (formerly the Common Read) and encouraged first year students to learn about the election and key issues facing society this summer.
5. **James Farmer Multicultural Center:** We worked with JFMC to plan and execute two online lectures related to the Electoral College and civic engagement. JFMC also hosted a Social Justice Leadership Summit in which they talked about voting rights. The UMW NAACP chapter (supported by JFMC) helped celebrate Vote Early Day.
6. **Athletics:** Several athletics teams, including women's volleyball and swim teams, registered all their athletes to vote.

7. **Residence Life:** We got permission to provide an “in-service” training to all Residence Assistants (RAs) and Senior RAs. We provided an overview of new voting laws, and how to register people to vote based on residence hall.
8. **Faculty:** Several faculty invited us to speak to their classes and shared information on Election Day. Dr. Singh sponsors for-credit internships with UMW Votes each semester. Dr. Sumner volunteered at several on-campus events (NVRD and Vote Early Day). A team of faculty, staff and students met throughout the semester to discuss civic engagement on campus for fall 2020.
9. **University Relations:** University Relations posted two different stories about civic engagement on the university homepage and also helped publicize many civic engagement messages.



External Partners

We were fortunate to work with several external partners this fall. As mentioned above, we worked with Campus Vote Project and Campus Election Engagement Project. They both provided a lot of information and resources. We also received grant funding from the Students Learn, Students Vote coalition (a total of \$950) and a grant from MTV's +1 to the Polls. We worked with NextGen, meeting with them bi-monthly, and they were able to provide “swag bags” and some other giveaway items. We also worked closely with the Voting Registrar for the City of Fredericksburg, and he provided multiple voter registration training webinars for our students.

Successes

2020 was a very unusual year in many ways, representing some unique challenges and opportunities. The two biggest issues were the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of several new voting laws in Virginia (that went into effect July 1). The new voting laws were mostly unknown to Virginia voters and we needed to raise awareness of early voting and other new rules. Despite these issues, we had a very successful year. Our top successes were:



1. Increased partnerships among campus offices, programs and groups

- a. We had a large number of steady volunteers this year, due in part to a successful partnership with the Honors Service Learning class and the Honors Program. This is only the second year we are supporting civic engagement through UMW Votes (it is a relatively new program for UMW), and our networks and partnerships keep growing. We appreciate the support and interest from other campus departments and programs and their success in helping students participate in civic engagement activities.

2. Increased student engagement

- a. In our previous years, we have only had about 4 student volunteers each semester. This year, in part due to that fact that this was a high profile presidential election, we had 14 regular volunteers. Four of these students will continue to volunteer in the program in spring 2021, as we plan for the fall 2021 elections in Virginia. We believe that the name recognition of the program on campus is growing and that we will continue to attract more students as active volunteers.



3. New, innovative programming

Faced with limitations to traditional activities, we had to be creative in our programming. We tried out several new successful programs that we will do again in fall 2021:

- a. **Pumpkins to the Polls:** We sponsored interactive, COVID-safe activities like “Pumpkins to the Polls” to encourage people to think about voting. We had “take and make” kits that people could pick up from tables on Campus Walk. They could take pumpkins home, decorate them, and then enter them in a contest for prizes on Vote Early Day.
- b. **Election Night Care Packages:** We provided “Election Night Care Packages” that contained an inspirational message, chocolate, and Play-Doh.
- c. **Walking Wednesdays:** We sponsored “Walking Wednesdays” when people would walk from campus to the Voting Registrar’s office for early voting.
- d. **Cameo video:** Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) provided a Cameo video of “Jerry” from Parks and Recreation that was viewed over 10,000 times. In the video “Jerry” provides information about how to vote as a UMW student.
- e. **Voting Grams:** We dropped off “voting grams” to people in dorms reminding them to vote on Election Day.



4. Successful use social media

- a. Our social media team consisted of 4 student volunteers who produced 5-6 posts each week between September 1 and Election Day, and shared information about changing election laws and voting.
- b. Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) provided a Cameo video of “Jerry” from Parks and Recreation that was viewed over 10,000 times from our IG TV account. In the video “Jerry” provides information about how to vote as a UMW student.

Our campus climate is very supportive of civic engagement and educating students about civic engagement opportunities. In spring of 2021, we plan to give a presentation about our successes to campus stakeholders and share information about our activities during fall 2020.

Barriers

We continue to have several barriers to our goal of full participation. Fall 2020 was very challenging in that we couldn't hold the same type of events we usually do. There was no in-person Club Carnival for recruiting, our events had to be limited in size, and there were few in-person class visits. In addition, we could not provide rides to voting centers or polling locations. Beyond COVID-related barriers, UMW students face many challenges while trying to vote as students. The campus is divided into 3 different polling locations (for those voting on Election Day). There was also confusion about how and when to vote and how and where to register to vote (at home or at campus address) because some students weren't sure if they were coming back to campus. Overall, however, the barriers we faced were not caused by our institution and we still accomplished most of the goals we set out in our campus plan. Our campus climate is very supportive of student civic engagement and the UMW Votes program has the support of the university administration and the partnership of many campus programs.



NSLVE Data

When we receive our campus' NSLVE report, we plan to review the data with our UMW Votes student leaders, and then share the data more broadly with our coalition members. Our data do not contain demographic characteristics such as race and ethnicity, but it does include information about majors and areas of study. A review of the data will help us tailor our efforts in the future so that we reach diverse populations on campus and encourage participation from science and math majors who tend to have slightly lower civic engagement levels.

Moving Forward: Looking Ahead

Our UMW Votes team and coalition functioned very well throughout the semester. Student volunteers met weekly in three teams (Voter Reg; Social Media; and Events) and planned, publicized, and executed several events and activities. Over fourteen students met and planned and carried out “class raps”, in-person events, and other activities. These students worked well with each other and followed through on the campus commitment to democratic engagement. The university administration was very supportive of our work, and there were multiple stories about civic engagement, NVRD, and other activities on the university homepage and on the university social media. We feel confident that we have a good group of students who are evolving into the future leadership for UMW Votes and they will recruit other students going forward. We feel optimistic about having a very successful fall 2021 as well as a successful fall 2022 when the midterm elections take place.



Beyond 2020

Virginia has important elections every year. In fall 2021, we will have statewide elections for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General. In addition, all seats in the House of Delegates will be up for Election. In spring 2021, we have four students who will research voter registration deadlines, information about what races will be on the ballot, and other issues related to the fall election. We will plan our voter engagement activities for fall 2021 and share our successes from 2020. We will continue to do some forms of tabling and information sharing over social media. We have a core of engaged students at UMW who will be prepared to recruit and mentor the next generation of UMW Votes volunteers and interns.

Report reviewed January 2021 by members of the UMW Votes coalition:

- Sarah Dewees, Associate Director UMW Center for Community Engagement
- Crystal Rawls, Assistant Director, Student Activities and Engagement
- Callie Jordan, student volunteer, UMW Votes
- Jaelyn Scott, student volunteer, UMW Votes
- Keegan Frederick, student volunteer, UMW Votes
- Kate McDaid, student volunteer, UMW Votes

Submitted by Sarah Dewees January 2021.