

A photograph of a university campus featuring a prominent clock tower, green lawns, and trees with autumn foliage. The scene is captured during the day with bright sunlight.

CAMPUS PLAN 2024

Weber State University
Weber State Votes



WEBER STATE
UNIVERSITY

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Overview

In 2020, The Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service was restructured to take the lead on voter engagement on campus. As part of that, the WSU Political Engagement Coalition is now housed in The Walker Institute. The Political Engagement Coalition consists of stakeholders from various entities on and off campus who strengthen its political programs and relationships. This campus plan is the result of these efforts and demonstrates the long-term commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement at Weber State University.

Mission

The Weber State University Political Engagement Coalition examines and supports WSU student political learning and participation in democracy.

Vision

The political learning environment of Weber State University fosters an atmosphere of mutual concern, goodwill and respect for this campus community.



Executive Summary

The Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service at Weber State University plans and assesses political engagement on our campus throughout the calendar year. Under its auspices, there is a 40+ member Political Engagement Coalition (PEC) that meets to discuss, assess and plan voter engagement on campus in advance of and during the election cycle. The PEC developed this action plan and is responsible for its implementation and assessment of its work. We identify gaps in our efforts and plan to address them. Generally, the PEC sees itself as working for a politically engaged campus climate, so the bulk of the work is done with students, faculty and staff in mind and is available on campus.

Weber State University promotes inclusivity, which means embracing and valuing the diversity of its campus members.¹ This value aligns with the university's broader mission to encourage freedom of expression and strengthen our diversity. This action plan ties to these broader institutional norms and values by placing a premium on political diversity.

1. weber.edu/equity-diversity-inclusion/about-us.html

Weber State University makes a conscientious effort every year to meet the needs of its community through programming around voter registration, voter education and voter mobilization. We also address more generally civics skills. This action plan covers the 2024 election cycle, which overlaps with Weber State's Spring 2024 and Fall 2024 semesters. Thus, this action plan services long-term goals of creating a welcoming environment for all kinds of political speech and also focuses on specific short-term goals across the campus for the 2024-2025 academic year.

While the PEC is a clearinghouse of political engagement on campus and will engage in assessing the work that is happening across campus, the action plan will be implemented in a relatively decentralized way as we partner with various divisions and programs across our two campuses located in Ogden, Utah and in Layton, Utah. The bulk of the work will be in-person, but underscored by an online registration effort through the portal provided by Civic Nation and an online mobilization effort using Motivate. Through this work, the PEC will focus both on the civic skills around voting and on the broader skills of good citizenship.



Leadership

Weber State University's Political Engagement Coalition Coordinators:

Leah Murray, *Director, Walker Institute of Politics and Public Service*

Becky Stromberg, *Student Engagement Coordinator, Walker Institute of Politics and Public Service*

Akir Rowe, *Administrative Specialist, Walker Institute of Politics and Public Service*

Membership:

Isaac Eck, *Student*

Nancy Collinwood, *Alumni Relations*

Anne Bialowas, *Arts & Humanities*

María del Mar González-González, *Arts & Humanities*

Kayla Morgan, *Athletics*

Will Pridemore, *Athletics*

Eric Smith, *Business and Economics*

Teresa Martinez, *Center for Community Engaged Learning*

Sandy Crosland, *Community Member*

Taylor Knuth, *Community Member*

Silvia Higueros, *Online & Continuing Education*

Brian McKenzie, *Davis County Elections*

Chuck Holland, *Development*

Dan Hubler, *Education*

Luke Fernandez, *Engineering, Applied Science & Technology*

Connie Merrill, *Health Professions*

Meagan Thunell, *Human Resources*

Cindy Reinhard, *Human Resources*

Megan Moulding, *Honors Program*

Lauren Busby, *Housing & Residence Life*

Heather Chapman, *Student Success Analytics*

Jeremy Harvey, *Academic Technology Services*

Scott Wilde, *LDS Institute*

Terri McCulloch, *League of Women Voters*

Diana Meiser, *Stewart Library*

Wendy Holliday, *Stewart Library*

Brad Mortensen, *Office of the President: President*

Ella Mitchell, *Office of the Provost*

Michael Hernandez, *College of Science*

Julie Rich, *Social & Behavioral Sciences*

Dan Bedford, *Social & Behavioral Sciences*

Gary Johnson, *Social & Behavioral Sciences*

Carla Trentelman, *Social & Behavioral Sciences*

Sheldon Cheshire, *Student Involvement & Leadership*

Jennifer Bodine, *Energy & Sustainability Office*

Shelly Jackson, *Utah Elections Office*

Lauren Shafer, *Weber County Elections*

Andrea Hernandez, *Women's Center*

The PEC functions as a microcosm of democracy by making a concerted effort to find kindred spirits who care about the work of making our campus a politically diverse and welcoming place. As we host events, we recruit people to our membership. Using the Ask Every Student's Coalition Building Curriculum, we have made sure we have people who care, but who also represent a wide diversity of stakeholders and political ideologies. Depending on what students we are trying to target, different people's strengths and connections get mobilized. The leadership of the PEC is written into the job expectations for the Director of the Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service, so whoever is in that position will lead out. As members cycle off the PEC, leadership ensures that every College and vital stakeholder for reaching out to students is included.

The PEC meets regularly every other year to analyze the NSLVE data report for our campus. That moment is a deep dive for our membership, along the lines of a summit, allowing us to see what students are underrepresented in our work and adjust our plans accordingly for the next year. We conduct the coalition building curriculum at that meeting to ensure we are the most current we can possibly be for recruiting people to our coalition. As of the writing of this action plan, we have not received our 2022 NSLVE data report, so we are in a holding pattern and this action plan is built on our 2020 data. Once we have the most recent data, we will convene and adjust this plan accordingly. At that point, we will resubmit.

In addition, our University President, Brad Mortensen, actively supports the work. He currently chairs the All In Challenge Presidents Council. One example of his support is when he presented on campus about how the University interacts with the State Legislature: what helps and what hinders the efforts. His doing this himself, not sending a staff member in his office, added legitimacy to the PEC's work and to political engagement more generally on campus.

Commitment



Weber State University is committed to civic engagement, as is evident in its mission statement.² The university understands itself as having three themes, one of which is community. In this regard, the institution and its leadership demonstrate a commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. However, there is no explicit statement of civic learning and democratic engagement. That commitment is demonstrated through the placement of the PEC in the Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service. Educating for community-based learning is a pervasive part of institutional culture. There are courses that are identified as community-engaged learning courses. Many student groups (athletes, honors students, club and organization members) require students to conduct community service as part of their membership and that work can be politically based, as long as it is non-partisan. In the case of general education,³ the institution requires a signature assignment that can include community-based learning outcomes. When civic learning and democratic engagement is conducted on campus, generally it is under the umbrella of community engagement which allows us to connect directly to organizations and to the mission statement.

The institution's civic learning outcomes are reflected from the Center for Community Engaged Learning rubric,⁴ however, our Institutional Effectiveness office reports that no one is reporting it being used. Given this, Institutional Effectiveness is developing a process through which it will measure civic learning outcomes. In 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2023, Weber State University distributed the Civic Engagement module from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to its first-year and senior students. The report informed the university of some gaps to improve civic engagement on campus from the first-year experience through graduation for students. In 2018, IDHE conducted a Politics 365 on our campus and issued us a report demonstrating our challenges as well as our strengths. In 2022, Weber State University participated in the AACU's VALUE rubric study around civic engagement. In 2023, Weber State University participated in Campus Vote Project Student Voting Study and has participated in NSLVE since its inception in 2014. As the University embraces a more thorough civic learning assessment protocol, we will use those results as well to inform our programming.

2. weber.edu/universityplanning/Mission_and_core_themes.html

3 weber.edu/GenEd

4. <https://weber.edu/ccel/cel-outcomes.html>

Landscape

Weber State University's IDHE study in 2018 indicated that our institution has the following challenges to civic learning and democratic engagement:

- No habits of discussion
- Culture of politeness
- Lack of political learning in the curriculum
- Lack of interest in political issues
- External political pressure
- Strong church influence
- Commuter school
- Separated non-Utah students
- Election challenges
- Little student activism

Our voting turnout rate in 2020, according to our NSLVE data, was 50.3% which was up 3.7 points from 2016. While we were happy that we increased our voting rate, we were significantly lower than the national voting rate at 66%. We were able to register 69% of our students in 2020 and their voting rate was 72.8%. We do not have our NSLVE data yet for 2022, but we know from our portal provided by All In that 990 students interacted with it and 264 students registered to vote. These numbers are on par with what we saw in 2020, so we hope our voter turnout will be similar as well.

While our overall voting rate is 50.3%, our voting rate of our registered students is 72.8% so one of our focuses is to ensure every student gets registered to vote, which we will do using Motivate. We know if we can get our students registered, we will increase our voting rate.

Our Campus Vote Project Student Voting Study data show that our students are more influenced by a sense of civic duty or a sense of wanting their voice heard when they decide to vote than they are by on-campus programming. Given that, our focus this year will be on promoting our voter education series that is programmed throughout the month of October. We believe if we can connect our students to the political world around them, they will vote.

Finally, our 2020 NSLVE data show that our BIPOC students vote at a lower rate than our white students. The white students vote at a 53% rate while our Asian students vote at 31%, our American Indian/Alaska Native students vote at 43%, our Black students vote at 44%, our Hispanic students vote at 41% and our Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander vote at 24%. All of these numbers increased from 2016 - 2020 and we closed the gap between the groups. In 2022, we rolled out all of our voter engagement materials in Spanish because we are an aspiring Hispanic Serving Institution and that demographic group voted at 12 points lower than white students in 2020. We have not seen our 2022 data yet, so we are not sure how much we closed the gap, but we will continue these efforts in 2024.

Landscape continued...

In certain regards, Weber State University is unique: we have a strong Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints presence on campus and Utah has a history of, and still retains, a strong one-party system, with the Republican Party dominating. In other regards, Weber State University is similar to other institutions: we have a culture of politeness and no habits of discussion.

We need to use the strengths we have to meet the challenges we uniquely face. One of the strengths we have leveraged is our strong ties to the community. We have a close working relationship with the Weber County Elections office, whose director serves on our PEC, and the Lieutenant Governor's Elections Office. We have connected our students to these offices to do the work of elections. We have built a ballot on campus so that people have voting access. In 2022, our campus declared Election Day a day of service which allowed faculty and staff to take a paid day to volunteer at the Elections Office. This resulted in 73 faculty, staff and students volunteering on Election Day. In 2023, our men's basketball team processed ballots for the Weber County Elections Office.



Weber State University Goals

Weber State University intends to be a place where political discord is handled with respect for the dignity of the people involved.

We will build a campus climate of discussion that allows us to address bigger issues better. The University claims its graduates are “broadly educated, capable and prepared for meaningful careers, graduate and professional schools, and civic engagement.”⁵

We believe the work the PEC is doing contributes to those claims.

We intend, within the next ten years, to create and foster a vibrant political campus culture that has the capacity to meet the demands of our republic. We believe we are moving in that direction because in March, 2023, we hosted an event on campus about diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education that had more than 250 students attending. Fifty students attended protesting one of the speakers, who had run a bill to end DEI on campus. We plan to capitalize on that energy to register, educate and mobilize our student voters. These efforts will be assessed at each touchpoint with students as well as annually through a campus-wide survey, conducted by the Walker Institute.

To meet our long-term goals, the PEC looked closely at our NSLVE data to see where we can make changes to elevate voting on campus. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness facilitated the Campus Vote Project Student Voting Study on our campus and is committed to assist the PEC in assessing this work. Our PEC has involved all the important stakeholders necessary to create and foster a vibrant political campus climate that is inclusive and welcoming.

5. weber.edu/provostsearch/2014/wsuoverview.html

Specific Short-Term Goals Include:

Promote Presence on Campus

- Continue to create opportunities for administration, faculty and staff to understand the value of political dialogue in and outside of the classroom and to utilize effective tools to address political conversations.
- Continue to update our website and keep it live and interactive.

Implement Campus Political Assessment

- We have created an assessment instrument that allows us to flesh out what we learn from NSSE and NSLVE.
- We will implement continuous assessment of campus political engagement to allow us to adjust our methods to meet our needs.

Implement a Dialogue Training Across Campus

- We are a Constructive Dialogue Institute NASPA cohort institution and deployed pilot runs of their Perspectives course fall 2023.
- We will implement the Perspectives coursework more broadly across campus in both curricular and co-curricular spaces.

Track Our Underrepresented Student Voting Rates Closely

- Our work in advance of the 2020 election led to a 20 point increase in Black student voting. We will ensure that we maintain this while closing the gap to white student voting.
- We will pivot to our Hispanic population, rolling out specific initiatives to increase their voting rates for 2024.



NEXT STEPS

Strategy

Reporting

Evaluation



Strategy

Our work is to fully embed civic learning and democratic engagement across campus during this presidential election cycle. Different members of our group will be responsible for different events and initiatives. As our PEC represents various groups on campus, they will do planning that is specific to their area and also be a part of mobilizing students to attend campus events as well. In this way, we ensure we are reaching diverse populations with particular attention to those groups we know are feeling alienated on our campus.

2024 (each area is committed to the following):

The campus will emphasize *voter registration* in **August and September** by doing the following:

1. Incorporation of an ALL IN voting portal that will be available on all websites and in all digital messaging

2. Trusted messenger messaging

- Faculty will craft a message that pertains to the fields of study in their college and invite students specifically to register to vote
- Staff in each area will craft a message that pertains to the work they do and invite students specifically to register to vote

3. The American Democracy Project student team will

- Promote via social media posts
- Deliver donuts to students in return for registering on National Voter Registration Day
- Table at all campus events to promote voter registration

3. The Walker Institute will

- Promote the Utah State Higher Education Campus Cup, which is a competition for campuses across the state for who can get the most students registered
- Promote the Big Sky Votes Challenge, which is a competition for campuses across the Big Sky Athletic Conference for who can get the most students registered
- Award prizes to departments who have the highest turnout rates in the 2022 NSLVE report

The campus will emphasize *voter education* in **September and October** by doing the following:

1. The Walker Institute will

- Host in concert with the Utah Debate Commission a statewide debate (could be governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general or Congressional District 1).
- Host an undergraduate research symposium for Constitution Day
- Conduct the Future Policy Leaders of America scholarship competition, which asks students to write a policy position and then pitch it to state legislators
- Host Voter Education week on campus in October, bringing in speakers to be determined later
- Host a candidate night on campus with a focus on college-specific issues for various colleges
- Host a field trip to the local Elections Office to see the science behind counting ballots

2. The College of Science will

- Host a candidate night on campus with a focus on scientific issues
- Host a field trip to the local Elections Office to see the science behind counting ballots

The campus will emphasize *voter mobilization* in **October and November** by doing the following:

1. The Walker Institute will deploy Motivate Spring of 2024 to gamify voter registration, voter education and voting.

2. The Walker Institute will promote the ARCGIS map with voting locations, both on-site and ballot boxes, created by the College of Science in 20222

- This will include a geocaching feature in which WSU people can upload images of themselves voting

3. The American Democracy Project student team will promote with videos and images on all social media platforms of students voting

The campus will elevate *civic learning and democratic engagement* throughout **the year** by doing the following:

1. The Political Engagement Coalition will

- Promote the use of the civic engagement rubric
- Work with Institutional Effectiveness to capture curricular information
- Deploy an assessment tool to measure our progress
- Work with CCEL to capture co-curricular information
- Collect data on who is hosting what programming for reporting purposes

Strategy continued...

2. The Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service will

- Implement the Constructive Dialogue Institute's Perspective coursework across campus to train students on how to have conversations about controversial topics
- Create a communications mechanism allowing people on campus to know what is happening at the state legislature (January - March 2024)
- Create a bill tracking system allowing our faculty to write scientific impact notes on individual bills (January - March 2024)
- Conduct a Political Leadership Institute (February - April 2024)
 - February 2024:**
 - Advocacy Training conducted in partnership with Save the Children to teach people how to track bills and talk to elected officials with a specific focus on Early Education and Afghan Refugee Resettlement; both issues are of specific interest to people in Utah
 - Training for students who want to run for Weber State University Student Association
 - Caucus training conducted in partnership with local party officials to teach people how to become delegates for the caucuses happening in March 2024
 - March 2024:**
 - Candidate night at which every candidate in Davis and Weber counties are invited to table, recruit volunteers and campaign ahead of the convention

Each area will be responsible for implementing the work and then reporting numbers of attendees as well as qualitative feedback on how events went. If we want to specifically look at a group, the PEC will create a survey instrument to do so. We will also choose a few events around which to survey the entire campus and compare to a specific subgroup we targeted to see the level of impact of the event. Most events will be connected to the presidential election specifically because we would like to leverage the attention the national election gets to draw students in.

Reporting

We shared our 2020 NSLVE data with campus via a number of presentations and have it on our website. Once we have our 2022 NSLVE data, we will do the same. Every college has a representative on the PEC and they will all know how they did with regard to voting in the last election. We awarded the departments that had the highest turnout rates, so we hope that by continuing to report and recognize the work, we foster a competitive spirit around this work and thus mobilize activity on campus. We will also share our plan externally via our website.

Both this action plan and our NSLVE report will be made public, as we have done so since its inception. This allows us to have transparency with our work. It also allows the public to see that we are operating in a non-partisan way.

Evaluation

The Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service will curate information about civic learning and democratic engagement. We will use the University's rubric, NSSE data, internal surveys around events and possible future focus groups to evaluate how our engagement has grown on campus. Generally, we want to know if more of our people feel politically welcome on campus as well as particularly the subgroups identified by our data. We will use as one baseline our NSLVE data from 2014 and 2016, which predate the PEC's existence on campus. We will also use our IDHE Politics 365 report as a second baseline, as it also predates the coordination of efforts through the PEC.

One audience for our evaluation will be internal so that we can be thoughtful about future planning. A second audience will be the President's Council, members of which submit information for other initiatives, such as Carnegie. The evaluation of our work will inform other campus efforts. We will conduct evaluations on every specific programming event as well as using the larger surveys as biannual touchpoints.



WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

The Olene S. Walker Institute of Politics & Public Service