

FEBRUARY 2019

DAY ON DEMOCRACY

A Proposal for the University of Mary
Washington

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James Farmer statue on Campus Walk. Photo by Eduardo Montes-Bradley

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Polarization is threatening the health and future of American democracy. Divisiveness abounds on college campuses and in communities across the nation. Our democracy needs our undivided attention at this critical moment in our nation's history. Democracy is not an abstract concept restricted to textbooks; it should not be treated as such. It is for all of us—but we must invest in it.

The Day on Democracy proposal seeks to increase civic engagement at the University of Mary Washington through a series of activities leading up to Election Day, when classes would be cancelled to facilitate student involvement in the democratic process and with various community partners. Mary Washington's responsibilities extend far past 1301 College Avenue. The individuals who live, work, and study on its campuses represent only one, albeit a significant one, of the populations Mary Washington intends to serve. The proposal therefore aims to improve town-gown relations through student engagement with community groups. It strengthens ties between the University and those community partners of many or few years. The Day on Democracy also establishes partnerships with new community groups, and thus aids in the fulfillment of the University's mission as a force for good in the world. Beyond that, this proposal is an opportunity for the University to rebrand around a civic identity. Mary Washington can carve out a leadership role among institutions of higher education by adopting the proposal in full.

This proposal analyzes each step of the voting process from the perspective of a Mary Washington student, and provides recommendations to enhance voter registration, education, and turnout. On voter registration, it underscores that Mary Washington is not in compliance with two federal mandates surrounding its registration responsibilities. It then takes a detailed look at Mary Washington's data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), finding that students would benefit from institutional support surrounding their participation in the democratic process—particularly during midterm and off-year elections. A key finding of this proposal is that responsibility for increasing student participation in our democracy lies with the institution. Students have an essential role to play in this process, but senior administrators and faculty are ultimately responsible for ensuring that students' first election experiences—which occur during their time at Mary Washington, for most students—are positive and consistent.

For individuals short on time, the Proposal, External Partners, and Frequently Asked Questions sections should prove most helpful.

On This Proposal

This proposal is a labor of love for the University of Mary Washington, its students, and American democracy. Each aspect of the Day on Democracy was designed with the best interests of all parties in mind. I spent the fall of 2018 listening and asking questions to assess the state of civic engagement at Mary Wash. These conversations with students, faculty, administrators, and community leaders informed my research-based conclusions. I am grateful to everyone who took the time to speak with me—many on multiple occasions—about the idea discussed herein. Additionally, the proposal is an invitation to imagine a more engaged citizenry. I believe wholeheartedly that young people want to participate in our democracy, but often do not know how. Our participation is essential to the health of our Commonwealth and country. And with the help of a school like Mary Wash, it is ever possible.

I thank Professor Rob Barr, Molly Garthwaite ('17, M.Ed. '18), and Ashley Utz ('20) for their support.

Marina Castro-Meirelles
Class of 2018
February 27, 2019

INTRODUCTION

A successful Election Day requires preparation. Any proposal for the cancellation of classes on Election Day must address this reality. The proposal therefore considers every step leading up to the casting of a ballot from the perspective of a Mary Washington student. It highlights present difficulties associated with voter registration, education, and mobilization. Given that the proposal is a solution-driven effort, each section concludes with a series of recommendations to correct the problems of the status quo.

Background

Turnout rates among the 18-29 year old voting bloc are notoriously low in the United States. A Census Bureau analysis of young-adult voting rates in presidential elections (1964-2012) found that young adults consistently vote at rates lower than any other age group (File 2014, 10). In addition, only 19.9% of the youth demographic voted in the 2014 midterm elections (CIRCLE 2014). The Commonwealth of Virginia significantly complicates this worrisome trend with its restrictive voting deadlines and requirements. Li et al. (2018) created a Cost of Voting Index for each American state, where the highest ranked states have the most accessible participation systems in the country. The authors considered all deadlines and requirements needed to vote in each state. Virginia ranks 49 out of 50 in their index, ahead only of Mississippi (240). Virginia institutions of higher education, therefore, face an even greater obstacle than their peer institutions at other states regarding the increasing of student participation rates: Virginia institutions are in some ways bound by state laws and procedures that are not voter friendly.

The majority of students are eligible to participate in the American electoral process once they begin their undergraduate careers. When institutions choose not to engage their students in matters concerning this process, they leave students to navigate difficult voting laws alone in their first-ever elections. The University of Mary Washington has thus far adopted this hands-off approach to its student voters, contributing to the odds stacked against young voters in the form of a lack of institutional support. Through the 2018 midterm elections, there have been no organized efforts on the part of the University to assist with voter registration, education, or turnout. Students receive no communication regarding elections and the importance of their participation therein. Unless individual professors reach out to students about voting deadlines or cancel class themselves on Election Day, students receive no support surrounding their participation in our democracy. Episodic efforts from individual professor cannot reach the entire student body.

The Petition

Toward the end of the 2018 spring semester, Mary Washington students created a petition for a Day on Democracy at Mary Washington. The idea adopts a three-part approach to increase civic engagement on campus, culminating in the cancellation of classes on Election Day to allow students the time to vote AND engage with community groups. Each of the three aspects will be staunchly nonpartisan: the Day on Democracy aims to be civic, not partisan. 625 members of the UMW community (548 students, 40 faculty, 7 staff, 30 alums) signed the petition, which read as follows:

"To encourage civic engagement on campus and in the broader Fredericksburg community, I support a Day on Democracy at the University of Mary Washington, which would entail—among other things—the cancellation of all classes to allow for involvement in our democratic process throughout the day."

Readers can visit the petition by clicking on the blue text above.

Defining Civic Engagement

Although a thorough conceptual exploration of civic engagement is beyond the scope of this proposal, there is a clear need to define the term. A complex and often all-encompassing concept, educators tend to interchange civic engagement with a myriad of terms, such as citizenship, community engagement, political engagement, democratic participation, and social justice (Jacoby 2009, 6). They operationalize—but rarely define—the concept, creating programs, curriculums, and centers around a floating set of indicators. The definitional task before these well-meaning individuals is indeed difficult and not without controversy; it is nevertheless an essential endeavor for the sustainability and efficacy of the educator's goals.

At its core, civic engagement concerns one's understanding of what constitutes a good society, and the prescriptions necessary to realize that notion. The vast array of such understandings makes precision a scarce commodity among definitions of the term (Jacoby 2009, 7). There is "near consensus" among practitioners, however, that a core aspect of civic engagement includes feelings of belongingness and responsibility to something outside of one's individual interests (Lawry et al. 2006, 23). Civically engaged individuals concern themselves with external matters divorced from individual gain.



UMW seal that reads "For God, home, and country."

The present proposal requires a definition that is useful and appropriate for the University of Mary Washington. Ehrlich's definition of civic engagement best meets these standards. According to Ehrlich, "civic engagement means *working* to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and *developing* the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means *promoting* the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes" (2000, vi; emphasis added). This definition is fitting for a variety of reasons.

First, the definition is inclusive as it does not restrict civic engagement to a particular group based on citizenship. The DACA recipient and the American citizen alike have the potential to serve as civic agents under Ehrlich's definition. Second, the definition best aligns with the University's vision and mission through its emphasis on action. President Paino stressed the need for an action-oriented education at the University Opening Assembly in August 2018: "Here at Mary Washington, I want to promote a liberal arts education that is active in the world; that is responding to the issues of our day; that is preparing young people to go out and be civic agents to effect change...What I want to do is empower these young people with the tools and with the intellectual skills but also the wherewithal to get out and participate in an effective way in our democracy" (33:34). Education plays a necessary but not sufficient role in the formation of a civically engaged individual: one must have the knowledge to make a difference, the ability to make it, the value system to engage the community in an appropriate manner and, lastly, one must actively work toward the goal of making said difference. Ehrlich's definition also recognizes that civic engagement can occur through political and nonpolitical means. It is thus suited for the college population, which is rejecting formal channels of political participation and promoting a more expansive definition of civic engagement. I elaborate on this final point in the Voter Education section.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Students who register to vote in Fredericksburg face a number of challenges. Director of Elections and General Registrar for the City of Fredericksburg, Marc Hoffman, plainly states that registering to vote in this area is "uniquely difficult for students." First, the postal service address associated with the University area cannot be used for proper voter assignment. University students are then, in many respects, similar to the homeless in that they lack a residential address serviced by the postal service (See Figure 1). For students, there is a distinction between their residential and mailing addresses. While each student has an individual residential address, all students share the same mailing address. Figure 2 provides some examples for further clarification.

- ☐ I am an active-duty uniformed services member, spouse or dependent; or an overseas citizen.
- ☒ I am providing a mailing address (*below*) because my residence address is not serviced by the U.S. Postal Service or I am homeless.
- ▶ I am providing a Virginia P.O. Box (*below*) to protect my residence address from public disclosure because:
- ☐ I am an active or retired law enforcement officer, judge, U.S. or Virginia Attorney General attorney
 - ☐ I have a court issued protective order for my benefit
 - ☐ I have evidence of filing a complaint with law enforcement that either I or a household member is in fear for personal safety from another person who has threatened or stalked either me or a household member
 - ☐ I am a participant in the Virginia Attorney General's Address Confidentiality Program

Figure 1. An excerpt of a voter registration application, indicating the additional step unique to UMW students.

Sammy D. Eagle

Residential address:
1105 or 1101 Jefferson Davis
Hwy + Apt. number

Mailing address:
1701 College Ave. UMW, Box #
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Polling location:
Hugh Mercer Elementary
School (2100 Cowan Blvd.)

Mary B. Washington

Residential address:
1301 College Ave + Dorm number

Mailing address:
1701 College Ave. UMW, Box #
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Polling location:
Dorothy Hart Community Center
(408 Canal St.)

James L. Farmer Jr.

Residential address:
1010, 1014, 1016, 1020, 1022,
1100, 1102, 1104, 1106, or
1108 William St. + Apt. number

Mailing address:
1701 College Ave. UMW, Box #
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Polling location:
Walker-Grant Middle School
(1 Learning Ln., Home
Economics Room)

Figure 2. Examples depicting differences in address, and corresponding polling locations, for three students residing in on campus housing.

DAY ON DEMOCRACY

To make matters worse, our campus is split into three precincts, which significantly complicates all address related concerns. Figure 3 shows that the Eagle apartments are part of Precinct 101, the University's main campus falls under Precinct 201, and the UMW apartments belong to Precinct 301. These many dividing lines pose two main, interconnected issues for students: not knowing their address for registration purposes and ambiguity regarding their polling location come Election Day. Students living in rented housing may not reside in any of the three University precincts, and must register at their house or apartment address. The three-precinct split does not appear to be the result of intentional design; instead, the University failed to consider the impact of its geographic expansion on student voters.

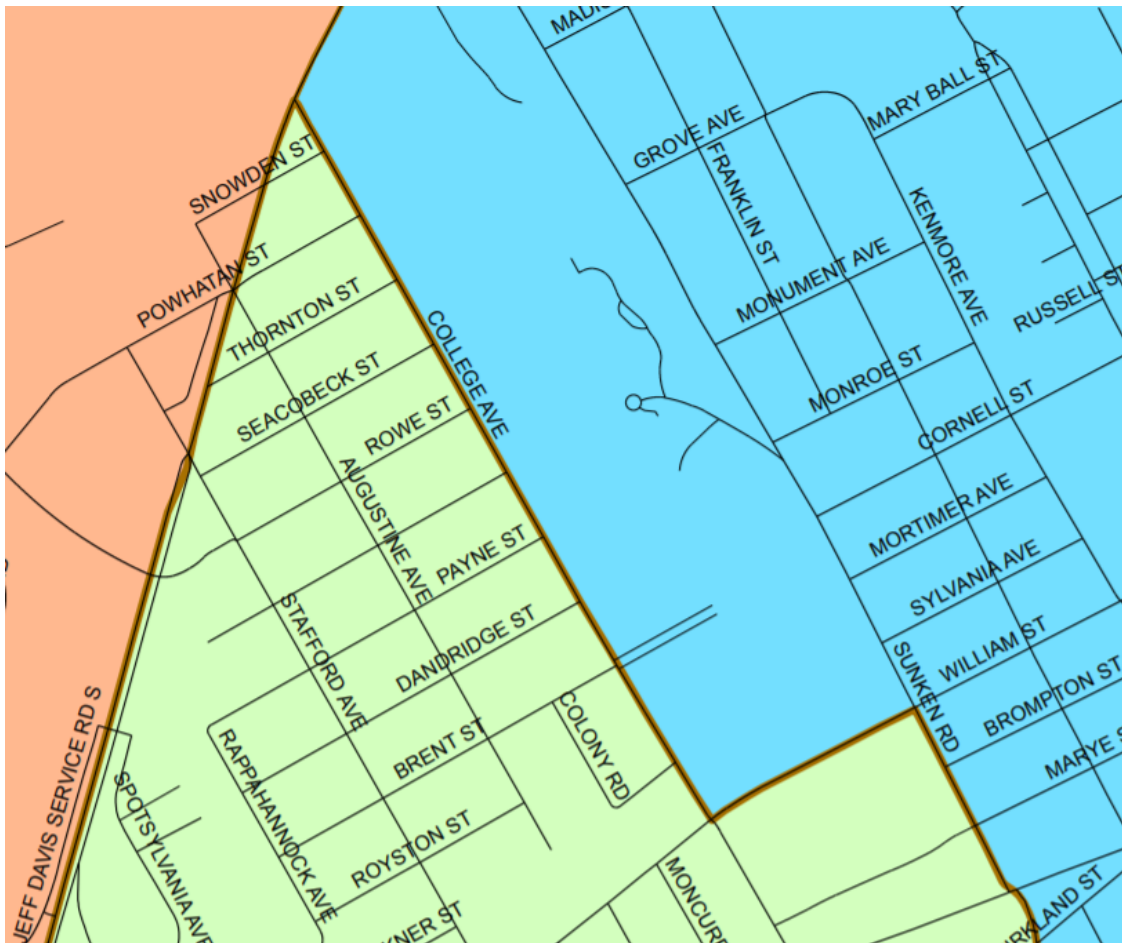


Figure 3. A close-up of the UMW campus from Fredericksburg City's Map of Wards. Each color represents a different precinct.

Driver's license renewals further complicate matters, and are commonplace among the college student population. Junior Caitlin Exum, for instance, renewed her license in August of 2018 and, consequently, had to cast a provisional ballot in the November midterm elections. A consistent voter in Precinct 201, Exum was surprised on Election Day when Officers of Election (i.e. poll workers) at the Dorothy Hart Community Center told her she was actually registered in Precinct 301.

Upon arrival at Lafayette Upper Elementary School, where she hoped to cast her ballot, she learned that she was no longer registered to vote in Fredericksburg. Exum called the Registrar, who informed her that the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) had updated her address back home to Chesapeake when she renewed her license. To be clear, the DMV does not act on a voter's application in any capacity (i.e. it does not change or accept applications). It does, however, host voter applications and communicate changes in address to the Department of Elections. Toward the end of Exum's license renewal application, she was asked: "May the Department of Elections use this address to determine where you will vote in Virginia? You must give a Virginia address. An out-of-state address may cancel or deny your ability to vote." Exum answered "yes" and the Chesapeake Voter Registrar received her valid voter application. Since the General Registrar must act upon receipt of a valid application, they registered Exum in Chesapeake at her home address. The wording of the question above is unfortunately vague and does not explicitly reference a change to voter registration. As such, students may unknowingly update their registration address. Since a voter must vote where they are registered, students who vote at their University address—while still registered at their home address—will receive a provisional ballot (if that). And that provisional ballot will not be counted (Virginia State Board 2018).

There are a series of measures the University can take to assist with voter registration. Namely, Mary Washington needs to increase registration opportunities and establish a channel of communication with students for voting needs (e.g., specification of address and associated polling location, notification of registration and absentee deadlines).

Recommendations

- Include a voter registration component in new student (first-year and transfer) orientations to educate students on how to complete a registration application and give them a chance to do so.
- Make voter registration opportunities available at widely attended student events, such as Club Carnival.
- Communicate the importance of voting and being an active participant in our democracy, especially to new students (Neri et al. 2016, 16).
- Do NOT pressure out-of-state students to register locally. Instead, provide both options: registering locally or in their home state. Be sure to discuss absentee voting with those who select the latter (Voter Friendly Campus Report 2017, 10).

FEDERAL MANDATES ON VOTER REG

Higher Education Act

The provision of voter registration applications to students is much more than a feel good enterprise: the Higher Education Act (HEA) requires it of nearly all institutions. Failure to comply with these mandates may result in a \$25,000 fine for every year the Department of Education deems an institution is not in compliance with the mandate (Legal Information Institute n.d.). Section 487(a)(23) of the HEA states that all covered institutions must: a) request voter registration forms from the State 120 days before the voter registration deadline in that State; b) distribute a mail voter application to each student, and make the forms easily accessible at the institution; and c) complete (a) and (b) for all federal elections, as well as gubernatorial elections within the State. Since the Commonwealth requires that voter registration occur prior to Election Day, the University of Mary Washington is a covered institution. The exact language from the Code of Federal Regulations appears in Appendix A.

The U.S. Department of Education published a “Dear Colleague” letter in July of 2013 concerning the HEA’s voter registration requirement. The letter reiterated that institutions must provide voter registration forms to their students: “If your institution is a covered institution, you must make the voter registration forms widely available to your students and distribute the forms individually to your degree or certificate program students who are physically in attendance at your institution.” It also amended Section 487(a)(23), to allow for the distribution of forms by electronic mail, provided that the message contains a voter registration form (via attachment or link) and voter registration is the sole subject of the message.



In my four years (2014-2018) at Mary Washington, I never received a physical or electronic copy of a voter registration form. Numerous conversations with other students revealed that my experience is not unique. When asked, students could not cite a single instance of receiving communication from the University regarding any voting related matters. My on-campus inquiries of UMW’s compliance with this mandate lead me to conclude that no individual or office is aware of its existence. By extension, then, the University must not comply with the HEA’s voter registration requirement. A conversation with Garry Ellis, NVRA and Voter Registration

Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Elections, confirmed this suspicion. Ellis has no record of the University ever requesting voter registration forms from the Commonwealth's elections office. By failing to provide physical or electronic copies of voter registration forms to its students in 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018, the University of Mary Washington is not in compliance with federal mandates surrounding voter registration.

National Voter Registration Act

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993 specifies voter registration requirements by which states must abide for federal elections. Also known as the motor-voter bill, NVRA requires that eligible citizens be given the option to register to vote, or update their registration information, when applying for their driver's license or other identification document through a state department of motor vehicles (Eckman 2019, 1). The Act also designates additional agencies as voter registration sites. More specifically, all offices that service individuals with disabilities must provide in-person voter registration services. All NVRA covered agencies and offices must distribute mail voter registration forms to clients; offer assistance to applicants completing the form; and return completed forms to the proper election official within a specified amount of time (5).

With UMW's Office of Disability Resources (ODR) in mind, I asked Ellis whether this NVRA requirement applies to disability offices at public universities. He was unequivocal in his response: offices such as UMW's ODR can be held liable for not meeting NVRA requirements. Yet ODR staff stated on two separate occasions that they have no involvement in voter registration.

"Any office in a state that provides public assistance or administers state-funded programs primarily designed to provide services to persons with disabilities must be designated as voter registration agencies."

-Eckman 2019, 5

Recommendations

- **Follow the law.**
- The University could send an email to students with a voter registration application each year on National Voter Registration Day, thereby complying with Section 487(a)(23) of the HEA.
- At least one member of an NVRA liable agency must attend an NVRA training session prior to each General Election. The next closest sessions are in Fairfax (April 24) and Richmond (May 9).

The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) provides universities with reports detailing their voter registration and turnout rates for federal elections. The study is housed at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life and began in 2012. 1,142 institutions participate in this free initiative, with UMW being one such participant (Thomas and Benenson 2017). Table 1 displays UMW's registration and turnout rates for the last three federal elections, as well as the associated national averages for NSLVE institutions. I spoke with Dr. Nancy Thomas, director of NSLVE, who noted that our numbers were “fascinating” and that we had “one of the top fifteen voting rates in the country for 2016.” She made two main recommendations: 1) that we take steps to maintain this momentum, and 2) that our enrollment office release race/ethnicity figures to the National Student Clearinghouse for inclusion in our future NSLVE reports.

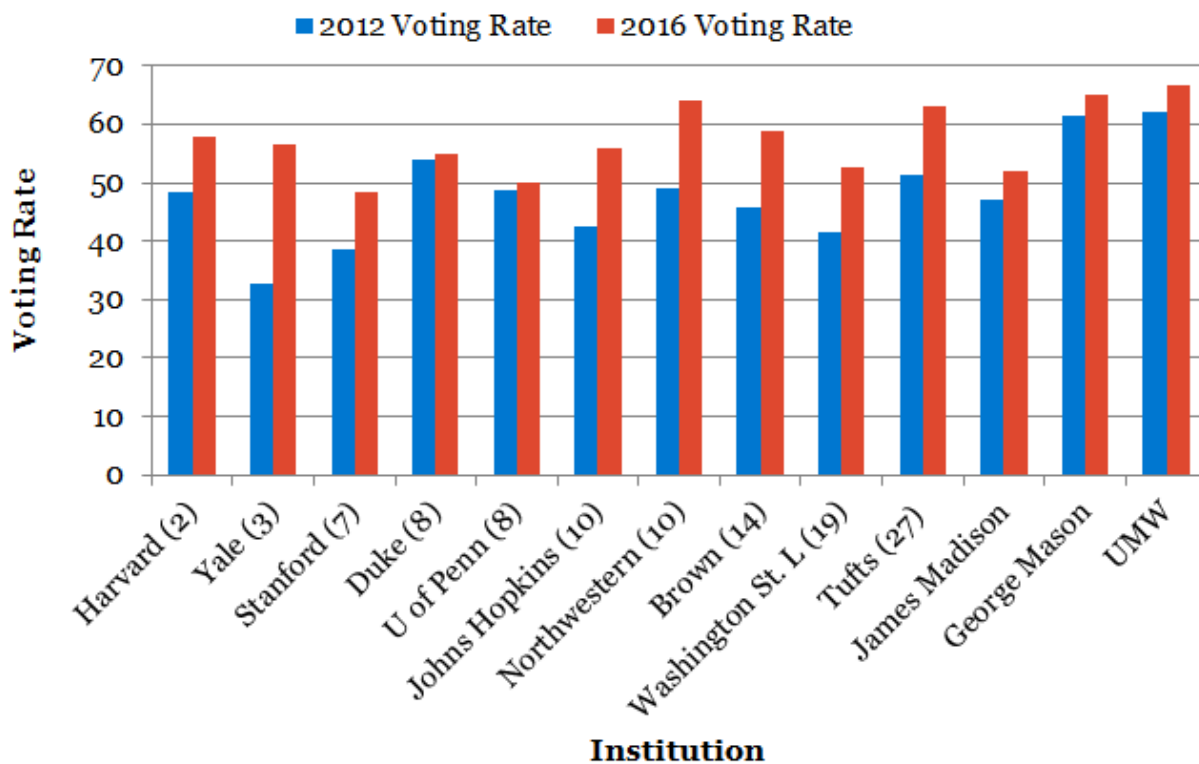
UMW's NSLVE Data

	2012	2014	2016
Registration rate	82%	72.1%	86.7%
Voting rate of registered students	75.8%	26.6%	76.8%
Voting rate	62.1%	19.2%	66.6%
Voting rate for all institutions	46.9%	19.1%	50.4%
Difference from all institutions	+15.2	+0.1	+16.2

Table 1. Source: NSLVE Reports for the University of Mary Washington 2012, 2014, and 2016

Our numbers are arguably most interesting when compared to those of other universities. I therefore used the U.S. News and World Report 2019 ranking of the best national universities to compare our voting rates. I made an arbitrary decision to select a total of ten cases—with the idea that ten might start to give us an idea of where UMW stands—by going through the highest ranked schools and seeing whether they posted their report(s). (Schools must elect to make their reports public, and few universities publish all [presidential and midterm] of their reports.) I continued this process until I had ten cases. I also included the numbers from each Virginia institution that has published reports. UMW leads the list with a voting rate of 66.6% in 2016, followed by Northwestern University at 65%, and George Mason University at 64.9%. Graph 1 contextualizes our high voting rates.

Presidential Voting Rates by Institution



Graph 1. UMW's presidential voting rates as compared to the highest ranked national and Virginia universities for which data is available. The number in parentheses following the name of the first ten universities references each institution's national ranking.

Source: Students Learn Students Vote, NSLVE Reports

Research shows that education majors vote at the highest rates, while STEM majors vote at the lowest (Thomas et al. 2017, 10). The first finding holds true at UMW, where education majors have a voting rate near 80%. Most other schools, too, turn in high voting rates for their education majors. Our data, though, are not in line with the national trend for STEM majors, even when compared to schools like Mason with high voting rates. Table 2 lists STEM voting rates from 2016 for Mary Wash and Mason, along with the rates of change between the two for each field of study. I included education, showing a smaller rate of change, to convey the unusual nature of UMW's STEM numbers. UMW's voting rates for its STEM students are much higher than those of other institutions. It is this second finding that truly sets UMW apart. Although only Mason's STEM rates are displayed here, the differences between Mary Wash and other schools are even more pronounced, as I conducted the same comparison with Harvard University, Swarthmore College, and James Madison University (See Appendix B). Dr. Thomas pointed out that our STEM voting rates are incredible.

UMW v GMU on 2016 STEM Voting Rates

Field of Study	UMW Voting Rate	GMU Voting Rate	Rate of change
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	65.6	57.1	8.5
Computer and Information Sciences	67.4	54.1	13.3
Health Professions	76.4	62.8	13.6
Mathematics and Statistics	67.7	58	9.7
Physical Sciences	67.8	56.3	11.5
Education	77.2	73	4.2

Table 2. A comparison of voting rates among STEM majors in 2016 for the University of Mary Washington and George Mason University. Numbers in blue signify a rate of change favorable to UMW.

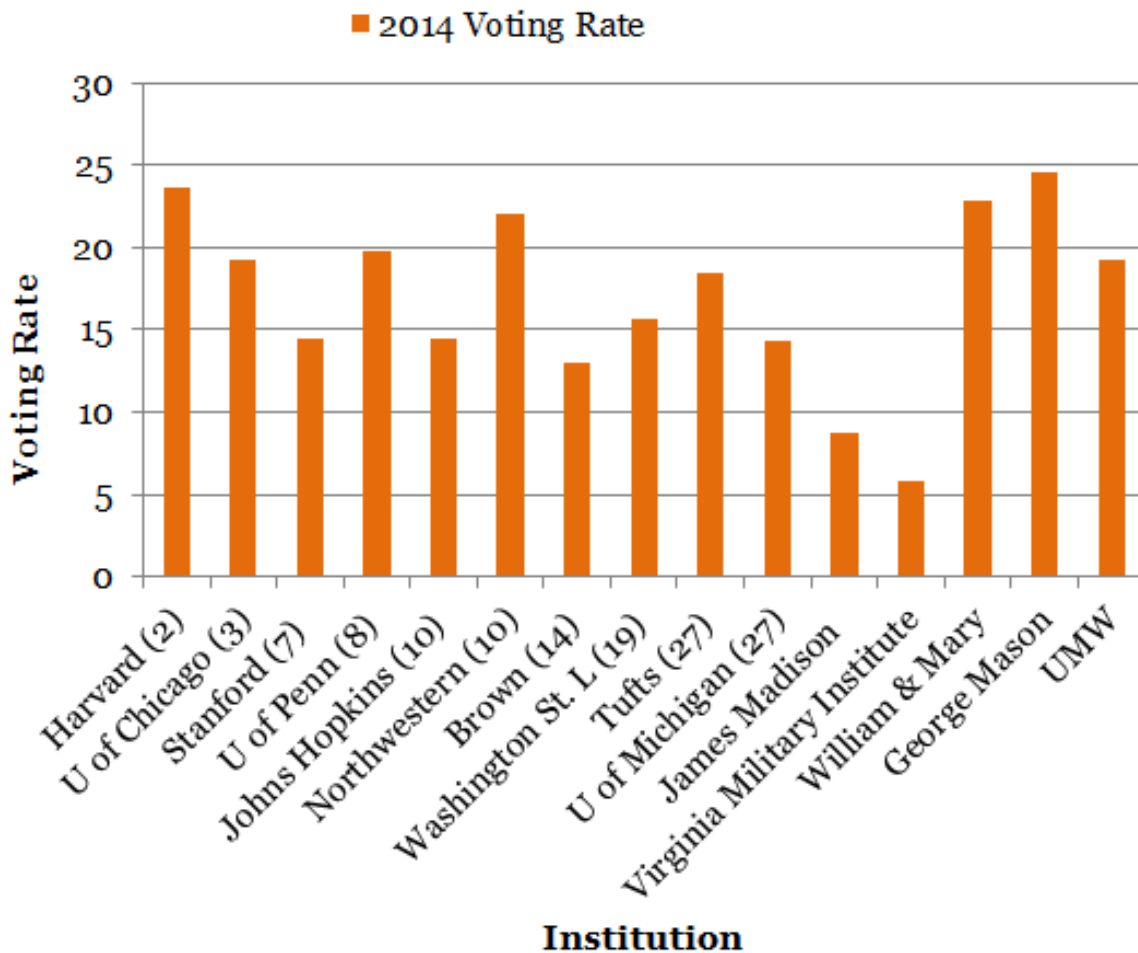
Indeed, she said that her team could not explain our rates, and that there is “clearly something in the water at your school.” She asked enthusiastically about our campus climate, student-run honor system, and ranking as a top Peace Corps producer. It is clear that our high voting rates in presidential years—and among STEM majors in particular—reflect well on the University and its students.

Nevertheless, Dr. Thomas also emphasized that our overall 2014 voting rate of 19.2% is “nothing to write home about.” Mason takes the lead in Graph 2 with a 24.6% rate for 2014. I followed the same methodology for the 2014 midterms to understand UMW's rates in relation to other institutions: of schools that publish their NSLVE reports, I selected the ten highest ranked universities along with every Virginia institution. UMW students clearly did not express as much interest in the midterms. And we do not have data on student voting rates for the off-year elections.

There is an apparent need for greater institutional support outside of presidential elections. These data, however, show the *potential* of Mary Wash students when it comes to voting. UMW student voters are already national leaders in many respects, independent of institutional assistance. Mason has had a robust program to encourage student involvement for several years. Scholars and media outlets

frequently cite Northwestern's effective methods to increase registration and turnout. To date, Mary Wash has not had any comparable institutional commitment regarding direct engagement in our democracy. Yet, students have voted. Official support is likely to result in positive publicity for the University and benefit American democracy.

Midterm Voting Rates by Institution



Graph 2. UMW's 2014 voting rate is far less impressive than its rates in presidential elections.

Recommendations

- Use NSLVE reports to drive political learning. The reports should land in each professor's inbox as they become available, and inform debates regarding the University's civic engagement efforts.
- Publish each of our reports through the Students Learn, Students Vote coalition and the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. Publication would result in terrific press for the University and assist researchers in understanding what drives high voting rates—especially rates that upset national trends.
- Release race/ethnicity figures to the National Student Clearinghouse. The race/ethnicity figures are one of the most important data points that NSLVE provides, specifying which students turnout. Unfortunately, these figures do not appear in our reports because UMW does not share them with the National Student Clearinghouse. Such numbers are crucial as there is a need to make our democracy more equitable; we are perpetuating inequality by not evening out voting rates. Simply put, we have to measure the things we care about. Releasing these numbers would be in line with other steps UMW has taken in recent years to promote diversity and inclusion.
- Leverage friendly competition among fields of study to increase registration and turnout rates. Business Administration and Marketing majors, for example, have some of the lowest voting rates at UMW. Faculty in the College of Business might consider including voting deadlines (e.g. registration, absentee, Election Day) in course syllabi.

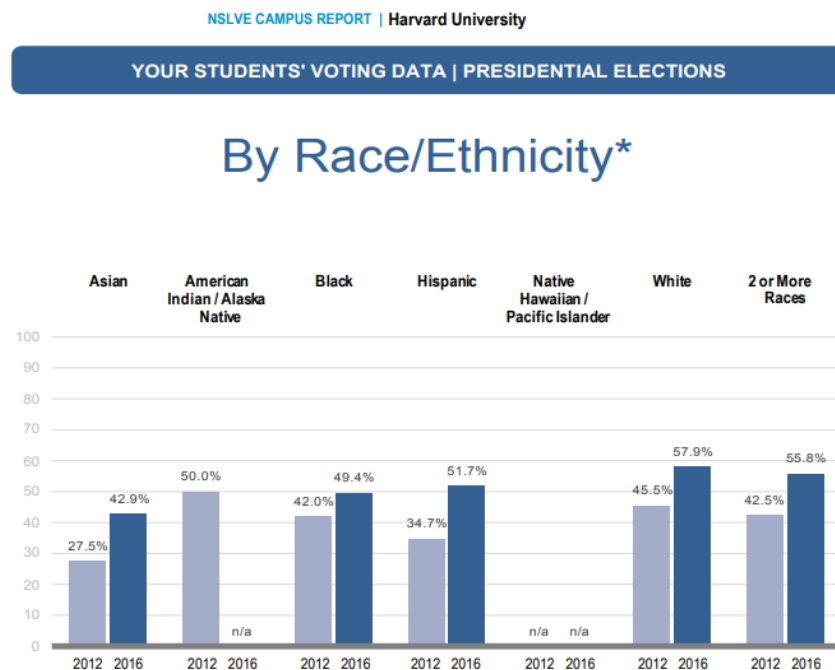


Figure 4. The relevant race/ethnicity section from Harvard's 2016 report

VOTER EDUCATION

While attention to voter registration and turnout rates is important, there is a crucial, more intangible variable that NSLVE does not study: voter education. UMW should assist its students in the casting of informed ballots. Turnout alone is insufficient; our democracy needs an informed electorate.

When the University takes a hands-off approach to voter education, students who do not take the initiative to conduct independent research may not receive any information on candidates, issues, or the process of voting. I spent the weeks leading up to Election Day (November 6, 2018) working to get out the vote on campus and spoke with countless students who did not know the candidates or measures on the ballot. One student stated plainly on Election Day: "I'm not going to vote because I feel like I don't know what's going on and I don't want to do more harm than good." The University would assist many students by playing a role in voter education.

Students who receive information from partisan outside groups are also at a disadvantage. NextGen, Tom Steyer's environmental advocacy nonprofit, was by far the most active third party on the UMW campus this past election cycle. Although the liberal organization was highly effective in its voter registration efforts, its student voter guides were problematic for various reasons (Jett 2018). A portion of NextGen's blatantly biased guide appears in Figure 5. These guides are an insult to the intellect of UMW students. They do not encourage thought on the part of students or provide helpful information—the sort of information that would allow students to cast an educated vote. Instead, the guides fuel division along party lines, contributing to the polarization of American society. An analysis of results from the November 2018 U.S. Senate and governor races found that split-ticket voting has reached its lowest recorded levels in U.S. politics (Skelley 2018). A reinforcement of this negative trend among college students is not the way to move forward. NextGen's model prioritizes high turnout for Democratic candidates. Its objective and methods are not synonymous with the University's educational mission or the long-term health of American democracy.

Moreover, the use of party-driven partisan guides reflects a poor understanding of college students' preferences. Miller (2018) found that college students are more likely to join issue-based organizations over traditional party-based student groups. Using data from Campus Labs, the student engagement platform responsible for OrgSync, he coded the club constitutions of 93,920 student organizations over five academic years (Fall 2013 to Spring 2018). Miller selected 397 representative

US Senator

WHAT THEY DO

A US Senator represents your state in Washington D.C. for a six year term, writing laws, deciding how tax dollars are spent, and holding the President accountable (or not).

TIM KAINE, *Democratic Party*



About the candidate:

- Current US Senator
- From Richmond, VA

COREY STEWART, *Republican Party*



About the candidate:

- Chair, Prince William County Board of Supervisors
- From Woodbridge, VA

THE ISSUES



KAINE



STEWART

Will stand up to Trump



Wants to protect the Affordable Care Act



Supports rapid transition to clean energy



Supports the fight for racial justice, including removing confederate monuments



Supports universal background checks for firearms



Supports equal rights for LGBTQ Americans



Supports access to safe and legal abortion



Figure 5. A page from NextGen's 2018 Student Voter Guide for Virginia.

institutions from 46 states. Four-year institutions accounted for the majority of cases, though there was a range in institution type, including career schools, private liberal arts colleges, and state flagship institutions. The data identified 3,184 party-based student organizations compared to 13,741 issue-based student organizations. Students are organizing on campuses by issue, not party. Furthermore, interest in issue-based organizations was higher and remained steady across the five years of study (20-21). Students are certainly engaged, but in different forms: although they may be less likely to vote or align with a political party, they seek to "join with like-minded individuals to pursue gains in an area of personal interest" (7-8). The latter usually manifest as nonelectoral activities, thereby advocating for a more expansive understanding of civic engagement. The lesson here is that students vote when they care about something (See Figure 6). Faculty and administrators need to help students understand that the ballot box is the mechanism of change for issues of importance to them.

None of the above is to argue that outside groups such as NextGen have no place on campus, especially since UMW values openness and diverse perspectives. The goal, rather, is to highlight the consequences of a lack of University leadership in terms of

voter education. The problem is not that students receive biased materials intended to sway their vote, but that they *only* receive such materials. The University should accept a certain level of responsibility for the educating of its student voters.

What over Who

Expected Student Thought Process



Actual Student Thought Process

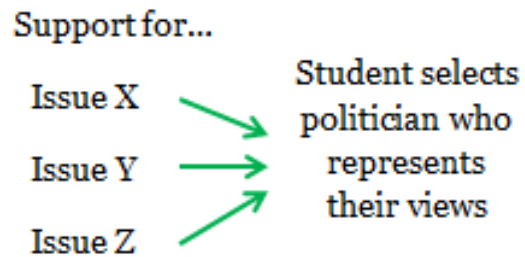


Figure 6. A graphic representation of one of the main findings from Miller's (2018) study using Campus Labs' data of 93,920 student organizations across 397 institutions. Faculty and administrators are responsible for helping students make the connection in green arrows under "Actual Student Thought Process."

Recommendations

- Host a voter education fair for students and community members every October. The set-up for this event would resemble that of Club Carnival. Each table would provide factual, nonpartisan information on an issue of interest to students and community members. Attendees would walk through, visiting the different tables, to discover and learn about issues that resonate with them. The voter education fair would also set aside a table for voter registration and another with information on how to cast a ballot. While the University should make voter registration available at the education fair, the event's emphasis should be on the providing of facts. Individuals can engage the registration table as they wish.
- Partner with nonpartisan organizations like the League of Women Voters of the Fredericksburg Area to provide students with physical copies of detailed, nonpartisan voter guides. I discuss such a partnership later in the External Partners section.
- Direct students to unbiased electronic resources. Vote411 and BallotReady have interactive tools that show students the candidates and measures on their ballots. These tools include candidate platforms and explanations of the relevant ballot measures. Campus Vote Project creates college student guides for each state to help students understand their voting rights.

VOTER TURNOUT

As these pages have demonstrated, students must overcome multiple hurdles before Election Day. Then, on the Day, the University itself presents one of the most difficult challenges in the form of classes. The status quo punishes students who wish to participate in our democratic process by requiring they miss instructional time to do so. The University is sending the wrong message to these students, whose first election experiences occur while at Mary Wash.

Students' Election Day Experiences

A commuter's perspective

A statement by Jasmine Smith '19

As a commuter student at the University of Mary Washington, I feel that Election Day should be a holiday because I fit all of my classes into Tuesdays and Thursdays so I do not travel an hour both ways every day. I work two jobs, one of them being a peer tutor in the Writing Center. I have classes (currently this Spring 2019 semester) from 8:00 AM-1:45PM and go to the Writing Center until 6:00PM. I leave my house before 7:00AM to beat traffic and do not get home until after 7:00PM because of traffic. I like to vote in my home district because I believe my home district laws affect me more than Fredericksburg city. While my case is different than other UMW students, I believe that it is my right to be able to vote in my home district. As we learned in numerous elections, some absentee votes are not counted. In Stafford County, dozens of absentee ballots were not counted in an election due to the neglect of USPS workers. My voice, like other UMW students (and the rest of the country), counts.

I have many disadvantages as a commuter student, but I also have the privilege to have a vehicle, a license, and the ability to operate a vehicle. Election Day as a holiday could be used not only to vote, but to shuttle others in the UMW community and surrounding areas to their polling places. Students could receive volunteer hours while having others voices heard.

**"My voice,
like other
UMW
students,
counts."**

-Jasmine
Smith '19

Missed class

Sarah Giuseppe ('19), a political science and geography double major, missed class this past Election Day to vote. A Springfield native, it took Giuseppe just under three hours to drive up to Springfield, vote, and return to campus. She missed her political science seminar, Democracy in Decline, to cast her ballot. Although Giuseppe's professor was understanding of her situation, the choice before Giuseppe frustrated her: miss class or vote. Participation accounted for a majority of her seminar grade. And, again, even though the professor sympathized with Giuseppe, she could not earn participation points without actually contributing to the day's course discussion. She answered the following questions about her experience with the 2018 Midterm Elections:

Why didn't you request an absentee ballot?

Giuseppe: "I forgot to get an absentee ballot, and didn't know when the cut off was because I am always thinking of other things."

How did missing class impact you?

Giuseppe: "[I was] annoyed to be honest, because participation was so much of my grade and also because I learned a lot in that class. I also thought it reflected poorly on me as a student and particularly a poly sci student as I had forgotten to get an absentee ballot."

Polling place mix-up

Seniors and housemates Jordan Pamlyne and Alannah Miller registered to vote in Fredericksburg at their rental home address located in Precinct 301. They arrived at their polling location of Lafayette Upper Elementary School on Election Day to cast their ballots but soon encountered difficulties. After providing their names, address, and photo IDs, Pamlyne was given a ballot while Officers of Election told Miller she was at the wrong polling location and needed to vote at the Dorothy Hart Community Center instead. The stated difference in polling location confused Pamlyne and Miller, given that they both registered with the same address. The Officers made some phone calls and guaranteed that Miller would be able to vote at Dorothy Hart. Upon their arrival at Dorothy Hart, Miller spoke with a coordinator for 15 minutes and was then allowed to vote. Pamlyne elaborated: "The whole process took about an hour. It took me about 10 mins at the first location, and Alannah about 5 mins at the other location, but the communication, phone calls, and confusion added up to be about 45 minute of extra time." In total, the entire process took the UMW housemates four times longer than they anticipated.

Recommendations

- Cancel classes for every November General Election to remove a significant participation barrier.
- Accommodate student wishes to vote as they please. Students may want to vote back home in-person on Election Day. Within reason, the University should respect these wishes and help facilitate them through the cancellation of classes. It is understandable that a physics major would defer to their highly-qualified professor on physics-related matters. Once students are eighteen, however, they are equal to their professors in that they, too, are enfranchised citizens. In terms of exercising their right to vote as they wish, faculty members have no more power than students—all are equal in a democracy. As such, faculty do not have the authority to tell students to vote absentee so they do not miss class. The same holds for faculty members. If a faculty member who lives in Richmond wishes to vote in-person on Election Day, UMW should not prevent or alter their wish. Many faculty commute and work long hours on Election Day. They, too, should not have to jeopardize completion of their civic duty for work obligations.
- Assist with transportation needs on Election Day. The University could provide UMW vans for rides to the polls.

DAY ON DEMOCRACY: THE PROPOSAL

What

The Day on Democracy requires the cancellation of all classes on Election Day every year, for each November General Election. (Note: the University itself would be open, but classes would not be held.) The projected date of the first Day on Democracy is November 3, 2020.

Why

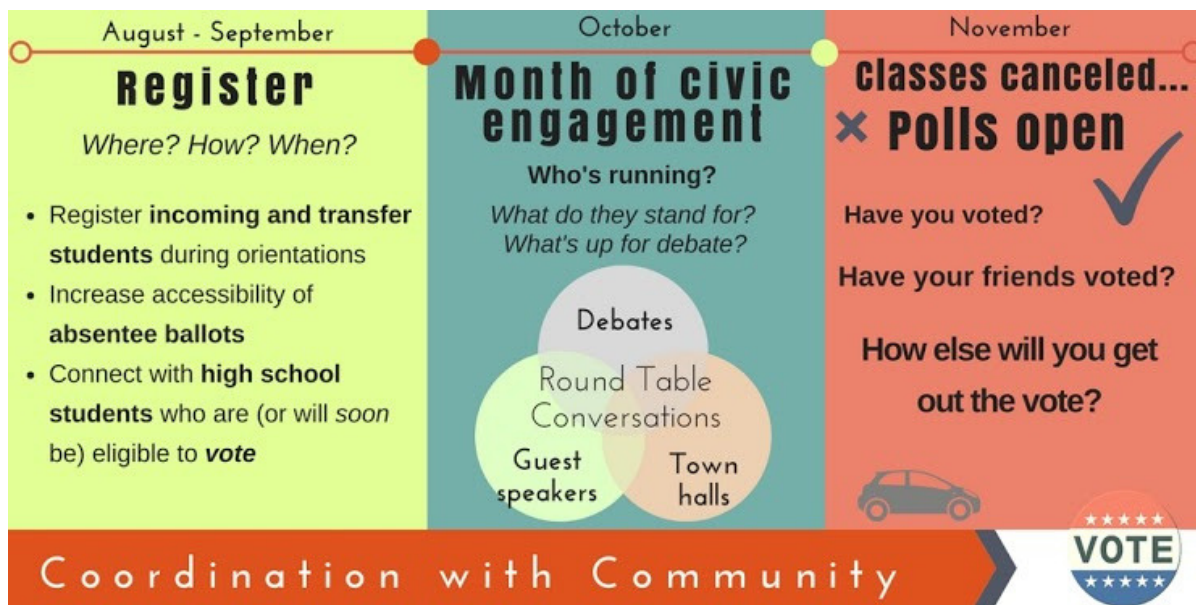
- To facilitate involvement in the democratic process for our students AND community members, particularly those not currently involved.
- To fulfill our public mission. The Day on Democracy has a public service component and envisions students as voter advocates on Election Day, going into the community and helping community members vote and/or complete service projects. Those students who wish to work on political campaigns may do so without the penalty they incur in the status quo (missing classes). In addition, the University will coordinate projects with other organizations (e.g. Tree Fredericksburg, Fredericksburg Food Bank, Fredericksburg SPCA, etc.) for students who wish to engage the community in a nonpolitical manner. By adopting the Day on Democracy, UMW can give its students the opportunity to participate meaningfully in our democracy.
- To communicate to students and community members that every election matters. Virginia presents its residents the opportunity to participate in our democracy each November. The University should celebrate that opportunity with its students. Moreover, the off-year elections affect the UMW community far more than federal elections.

Benefits to Fredericksburg and Surrounding Areas

UMW students can make Fredericksburg the little city that votes by assisting with Get Out the Vote efforts on Election Day. Students can also provide free assistance in the form of volunteer hours to a great number of community organizations. Of course, students would need the day off from classes to engage the Fredericksburg community at that level. While some students may only volunteer for the Day itself, others may have more profound experiences through their interactions with their community organization of choice on Election Day—potentially leading to long-term involvement in the form of internships or further volunteer work.

Three-part approach

Programming leading up to Election Day will be essential to ensuring the success of the Day on Democracy. The necessary steps are depicted in the graphic below and will concentrate on voter registration and education. This commitment on behalf of the University has manifested itself in a proposal for the Month of Civic Engagement, beginning in October 2019. The Day would be the culmination of a series of investments on the part of the University, from the Social Justice summit in March to voter registration and education efforts prior to the elections. Class cancellation would help the University (and the broader Fredericksburg community) receive a return on its many investments.



Graphic designed by Molly Garthwaite ('17, M.Ed. '18)

Progress to date

All University stakeholders are familiar with the idea. On January 30, 2019, SGA passed a resolution expressing its full support for a Day on Democracy at the University of Mary Washington, starting November 3, 2020. Ten community organizations have expressed a willingness to partner with the University on this initiative (See External Partners section). The Center for Community Engagement, in partnership with the James Farmer Multicultural Center and the Office of Student Activities and Engagement, is laying the infrastructure for the registration and education phases of this proposal through the creation of a Voter Engagement Plan.

"Voting is the Foundation Stone for Political Action."

Martin Luther King Jr., Selma



Alignment with University Values & Strategic Vision

The Day on Democracy is entirely consistent with UMW community values, which call for "engaged members of our community who actively participate in the community through responsible leadership and service" (2018). Engagement includes participation in our democratic process.

This proposal also aligns with three of the four goals in President Paino's Strategic Vision for the University (2017, 1-3 and 5) .

Promoting the values of service and community and civic engagement

UMW's James Farmer Multicultural Center, Center for Community Engagement, and Office of Student Activities and Engagement will collaborate to create civic engagement opportunities for students. Their efforts will include increased coordination with community partners and organizations.

Immersing our students in applied, impactful learning experiences

The proposal provides a variety of high-impact learning opportunities anchored in civic engagement. Students will benefit from informed participation in the American political process and interactions with community groups.

Creating a diverse and inclusive community as an essential requirement for academic excellence and academic success

Through the Day on Democracy, Mary Washington can champion a politics that is civil, inclusive, and evidence-based. Educating for democracy requires a recognition that political and partisan are not interchangeable. It is possible and necessary for the University to foster constructive dialogue across ideologies and identities in a nonpartisan manner.

The Vision for Election Day

The University would apply Devil-Goat Day energy to Election Day to celebrate our democracy and participation therein. A portion of Ball Circle would be designated as an engagement station, or a hub of activity throughout the day where students request and provide transportation.

Volunteer assignments, too, could be arranged at the station. Circle. Photo by Joemmel Tendilla.



Photo by Norm Shafer.

Since many Virginia public schools are closed on Election Day, Admissions could host a civic engagement-themed open house to show off the University. Students could tour UMW for the first half of the day and then join current UMW students in civic or community service activities.

UMW's Office of Student Activities and Engagement could sponsor a watch party in Chandler Ballroom after the polls close. Arrangements could also be made to decorate the University Center in red, white, and blue colors.



The University Center decorated for PRISM Prom in October 2018. Photo by Professor Rob Barr.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

The following offices and organizations have agreed to partner with UMW for the Day on Democracy. Partnerships would begin with the November General Election of 2020, and continue for every General Election cycle thereafter. Each community organization has written a letter of support to Provost Mikhalevsky, expressing a willingness to partner with the University for this initiative. Partnerships address different aspects of the aforementioned three-part approach. In their letters, Election Day or volunteer partners specified the number of students they wish to sponsor on Election Day as well as what those students would do.

Campus Vote Project and Inspire U.S. are the only organizations that have not written letters of support for the Day on Democracy, as they seek to sign formal agreements with the University. Both organizations have nevertheless committed to what I specify below and are eager to work with Mary Wash.

	Organization Name	Point of Contact	Type of Partnership	# of Students
	City of Fredericksburg	Mary Katherine Greenlaw Mayor mkgreenlaw@fredericksburgva.gov	Education	n/a
	Fredericksburg Registrar	Marc Hoffman Registrar mchoffman@fredericksburgva.gov	Volunteer	30
	Stafford County Registrar	Greg Riddlemoser Registrar registrar@staffordcountyva.gov	Education & Volunteer	Multiples of 27 (27, 54, 81), not to exceed 81
	King George Registrar	Lorrie Gump Registrar lgump@co.kinggeorge.state.va.us	Volunteer	20
	Spotsylvania Registrar	Kellie Acors Registrar kacors@spotsylvania.va.us	Volunteer	52

DAY ON DEMOCRACY

The registrars of Fredericksburg, Stafford, King George, and Spotsylvania would be delighted to have UMW students serve as Officers of Election on Election Day. Although poll workers are the "gatekeepers to democracy," jurisdictions across the country have a difficult time recruiting these individuals (Vasilogambros 2018). Students have the energy and technological skills necessary to serve as effective Officers. Individuals must be available the entire day, but are also compensated for their service. In Fredericksburg, for example, an Officer receives a minimum of \$150 for Election Day work. Other options exist for students who wish to volunteer in a less political form.

	Organization Name	Point of Contact	Type of Partnership	# of Students
	Tree Fredericksburg	Anne Little President treefred@cox.net	Volunteer	25-30
	The Thurman Brisben Center	Dave Cooper Executive Director dcooper@brisbencenterv.org	Volunteer	10
	Rappahannock Area Community Services Board	Jane Yaun Executive Director jyaun@rappahanockareacsb.org	Volunteer	20
	Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank	Carey Sealy Volunteer & Event Coordinator csealy@fredfood.org	Volunteer	35
	Fredericksburg Regional SPCA	Allie Names Volunteer Coordinator anames@fredspca.org	Registration & Volunteer	50

The Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank would like students to help with the packing of Food for Life boxes, which the Food Bank distributes to the disabled in our community on a monthly basis. The Rappahannock Area Community Services Board would benefit from student assistance to complete yard work at its group homes. In addition, the Fredericksburg Regional SPCA is willing to assist with voter registration and host UMW student volunteers come Election Day. On the former, the SPCA has agreed to bring puppies on campus to attract students to voter registration tables. Students could register to vote and sign up to volunteer with the organization on Election Day, when they would clean and walk the dogs.

Using the Stafford Registrar's highest figure, these organizations alone present **328 volunteer opportunities** for UMW students on Election Day.

	Organization Name	Point of Contact	Type of Partnership	Type of Assistance
	League of Women Voters of the Fredericksburg Area	Tina Norkus President tnorkus@hotmail.com	Registration & Education	Creation and distribution of nonpartisan voter guides for students
	Campus Vote Project	Sarah Mitchell Virginia State Coordinator smitchell@campusvoteproject.org	Registration	2 Democracy Fellow Positions
	Inspire U.S.	Morgan O'Toole Regional Manager morgan.otoole@inspire-usa.org	Registration	Tracking of voter registration and turnout rates in off-years

Three organizations have agreed to provide services that will make the Day on Democracy possible. The League of Women Voters of the Fredericksburg Area is willing to visit campus in September to register voters. Members will return in October to distribute nonpartisan voter guides to students.

Affiliated with the Fair Elections Center, Campus Vote Project (CVP) is a national nonpartisan organization, which works to reduce barriers to student voting. It aims to institutionalize reforms to increase student participation in our democracy by working closely with universities, faculty, students, and elected officials. CVP trains select students, known as Democracy Fellows, in its four pillars of voter engagement, empowering these students to serve as voter advocates on their campuses. Democracy fellows receive a \$1,200 stipend for their yearlong efforts. CVP has offered UMW two Democracy Fellow positions for 2019, with the possibility of renewing that offer in subsequent years.

Inspire U.S. is a nonpartisan high school voter registration organization. They partner with high schools, including James Monroe, to register as many eligible students as possible. A fruitful relationship between UMW and Inspire U.S. would see UMW students assist with voter registration efforts at James Monroe High School. The Office of the Governor recognizes high schools that register at least

65 percent of their eligible senior class during the school year. UMW could serve its community by helping James Monroe, and eventually other area high schools, earn the Governor's Award for Voter Registration. As an authorized third party, the Virginia Department of Elections allows Inspire U.S. to create personalized URLs for the tracking of participation and, if desired, turnout rates. Inspire creates a URL for each high school with which it partners and agreed to do the same for UMW (See below). The link takes users directly to the Department of Elections website but provides Inspire with data on which individuals successfully complete an application. Figure 8 is an example of the data column on the CSV file from the Department of Elections. Inspire receives each applicant's full name, email, mobile phone number, address, county, and process status. An application's status indicates whether the individual has a signature on file with the DMV. Upon receipt of these data, UMW can personally follow up with those students who do not have a signature to assist them in providing the Department of Elections with a proof of signature. Inspire will provide UMW its voter registration information at no cost every year but charges \$5,000 for turnout data, as the organization must individually match each student in the voter database—a time-consuming enterprise. By partnering with Inspire, UMW can track student registration and turnout rates every year, thereby largely resolving the issue of only receiving NSLVE data for federal elections. The organization's official relationship with the Department of Elections ensures a smoother registration process for users; therefore, it is preferable to other third party registration groups, such as Turbovote. (Most universities and colleges have partnered with TurboVote—which would charge UMW \$2,000 each year for our registration data—in recent years.)

<https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/thirdparty/InspireVA/marywashington>

UMW's Unique Voter Registration URL via Inspire U.S. Mary Wash can use this active link at any point. To retrieve our data, a designated representative from the University would reach out to Morgan O' Toole, who would send it as received from the Department of Elections.

APP_SUBMISSION_RECEIVED	APP_STATUS_
9/9/2016 4:22:31 PM	PROCESSED
9/13/2016 10:23:40 PM	PROCESSED
9/26/2016 11:51:28 PM	PROCESSED
9/29/2016 8:29:30 AM	PROCESSED
9/29/2016 8:39:55 AM	PROCESSED
10/5/2016 8:25:10 AM	PROCESSED
10/5/2016 8:28:07 AM	PROCESSED
10/5/2016 8:30:30 AM	NO SIGNATURE
10/20/2016 9:22:17 PM	PROCESSED
11/29/2016 8:50:48 PM	PROCESSED
12/26/2016 4:31:15 PM	PROCESSED
1/17/2017 5:35:46 PM	PROCESSED
1/25/2017 10:52:44 AM	PROCESSED

Figure 8. Data from users who completed a voter registration application online through a unique URL from Inspire.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will students vote?

Our NSLVE numbers suggest that an expectation of participation on Election Day is not a heavy lift for UMW students. We are clearly different—uniquely, wonderfully, different. Institutional support in the form of nonpartisan voter registration and education, along with the cancellation of all classes on Election Day, could help students build strong voting habits.

Will students volunteer?

Voting is really the bare minimum: Mary Wash can do better than the bare minimum. Students are likely to volunteer if the institution encourages and communicates the available volunteer opportunities. Each FSEM, for instance, could select and volunteer at a community organization for Election Day. Furthermore, certain opportunities provide financial incentives for participation. The Fredericksburg Registrar has identified 30 open positions for UMW students to serve as Election Officers on Election Day. Officers receive \$150 for their services, aligning an invaluable service to our democracy with a financial reward. Similar opportunities exist in Stafford, Spotsylvania, and King George (See External Partners). Institutional support and patience will lead to increases in student participation. In Hamilton County, Ohio, election officials partner with county high schools for a student poll worker competition. The school which contributes the most poll workers wins a pizza party. In 2012, when the challenge began, Hamilton County had only four high school poll workers. That number rose to 367 by 2016, comprising fourteen percent of the county's poll workers (Vasilogambros 2018).

How will the University track student participation?

Our NSLVE reports will continue to serve as the best measure of our registration and turnout rates. Since NSLVE only collects student data for federal elections, the University will have to work with other offices and organizations to track participation in the off-year elections. The Fredericksburg Registrar and Director of Elections can assist in the off-years. Inspire U.S.—a nonpartisan, national organization that seeks to increase student voting rates—can also provide the University with registration information for free but charges \$5,000 per year for turnout information, as matching voter records is a laborious process. Students volunteering in activities (on and off-campus) can swipe their EagleOne cards, giving the Office of Student Activities and Engagement a record of which students participated in particular activities. Additionally, all community partners have agreed to complete a "Day on Democracy Community Partner Participation Report" as part of their partnership with the University (See Appendix C).

How will the University incentivize student participation?

Lead-up to Election Day: Dorms or majors can hold friendly competitions to achieve the highest voter registration rate.

Election Day: The celebratory aspect will be essential to ensuring participation. Addonizio et al. (2007) found that participation celebrations increased voter turnout by four to six percent. Students who show their "I voted" sticker could receive a free t-shirt, meal, or admission to an Election night watch party (Rychter 2018). The University could vary these incentives for federal elections to comply with election law (Garcia 2018). High-profile administrators could offer to drive students to the polls, volunteer at a community organization, or attend the participation celebration(s) on campus.

Why not close the University entirely on Election Day?

The intent is not to let Election Day serve as a blanket day off for students. Instead, it would be a day on the polls...a day ON democracy. The high level of engagement envisioned for the Day requires that facilities operate at normal levels. Admittedly, this proposal suffers from a lack of staff input. It is hoped that staff could use some of their yearly paid community service hours on Election Day to join faculty and students in Election Day festivities.

How does this proposal benefit faculty?

In the status quo, faculty have discretion over class meetings on Election Day. Some faculty may need to cancel class to vote themselves. Others might want to cancel but fear appearing partisan. Official University policy on the matter would resolve these ambiguities of the status quo.

Will the public perceive UMW's cancellation of classes as partisan?

There is nothing partisan about making it easier to cast a ballot. Research shows that people are more likely to vote when the entire process is made easier. Why not move in that direction and involve more people in our democracy? The nonpartisan Students Learn, Students Vote Coalition works to institutionalize voting on college campuses. It states succinctly that "In order to create a democracy that is truly 'of the people, by the people, and for the people,' we need to have elections that include all the people" (2019). UMW could publish an official statement of nonpartisanship to accompany the class cancellation motion.

The polls are open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Students really can't find the time to vote in that 13-hour time span?

The Day on Democracy proposal calls for the cancellation of classes to allow students the time to vote AND engage with community organizations. In the status quo, students cannot do both. Indeed, some student populations, such as commuters, have difficulty finding time simply to vote because their classes fall only, or mostly, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Isn't the responsibility on students to coordinate with their professors ahead of time and make their Election Day plans?

Many students arrive at Mary Wash without the knowledge necessary to participate in our democracy. It is not the fault of these students that their K-12 civics curriculum failed them. The University should take responsibility and meet students where they are in their civic engagement journeys. The Responsibility section addresses this matter in greater detail.

The Day on Democracy targets two main groups: UMW students and community members currently not engaged (for whatever reason) in the political process. A student who feels apathetic is not going to take the initiative to participate and overcome multiple hurdles (e.g., registering, becoming informed, making a plan for Election Day) independent of institutional support. And, of utmost importance, the status quo punishes those who do take responsibility by holding class in their absence. One should not underestimate the impact of missing even a single college class. Students can miss notes, the explanation of key concepts, and the ability to earn participation points. Moreover, the anecdotes in the Voter Turnout section highlight that finding time to vote is difficult for even the University's more conscientious students.

Do other colleges and universities cancel classes for Election Day?

Yes, though not very many. State law requires that public universities in South Carolina, Montana, and Hawaii observe Election Day. Columbia University holds its fall break the Monday and Tuesday of election week, and has done so since 1968. Liberty University is the only institution in Virginia that cancels classes, albeit intermittently. Liberty first canceled in 2008 and again in 2016 (Liberty University News 2016). I found no public institutions in the Commonwealth or country that observe Election Day independent of state requirements. The next section, however, explores reasons for one institution's success with the cancellation of classes to honor Martin Luther King Jr. I measure success by student participation rates, fulfillment of the institution's mission, and the existence of positive press associated with the institution's efforts.

Shouldn't Election Day be a federal holiday?

Absolutely! Ideally the federal government would move in this direction. We are not the federal government, but that does not mean we are powerless. While debates continue in Washington, UMW can act in the best interest of our democracy and take a leadership role among institutions of higher education.

What are the University's options for implementation?

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Change to Academic Calendar	Swap Labor Day for Election Day	Shorten fall break by one day (Tuesday) and apply that day to Election Day	Push back fall break so it coincides with Election Day
Rationale	Labor on Labor Day to elect on Election Day Labor Day closely follows the summer break; no need for a break so soon into the academic year	Allows laboratory courses to hold labs the week of fall break (change from status quo)	Largely maintains current academic calendar; switch only in dates of fall break
Advantage	Minor modification to calendar	Preserves most lab time for courses in the hard sciences	Out-of-state students could vote at home
Disadvantage	UMW only recently began observing Labor Day; progressive history behind observation of the Day	Shortening of fall break may not be popular among faculty	Would be more difficult to encourage student participation; less students on campus

I recommend Option 2 because it achieves the objective of setting aside Election Day and prioritizes the concerns of faculty in Jepson. Labs may still suffer as a result of option 2, but significantly less so. And, at a certain point, the University of Mary Washington must prioritize the things it cares about—nothing is without cost. If Mary Wash truly wants to support the involvement of its community members in our democracy, it should take Election Day into consideration when planning the academic calendar. Faculty spend countless hours instructing students every academic year. This proposal gives faculty the opportunity to empower their students by allowing that knowledge to inform policy and civic engagement activities.

"The Day on Democracy is a marginally disruptive proposal. But every once in a while things need to change—and our democracy is worth it."

Marc Hoffman
Director of Elections and General
Registrar for the City of Fredericksburg

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT: BATES COLLEGE



About Martin Luther King Jr. Day at Bates College: Martin Luther King Jr. Day is an intense, community-wide opportunity to discuss, teach, and reflect on King's legacy. The day is a time to examine contemporary human issues through the lens of King's work and ideas, broadly defined. It is a day of thought, reflection, and aspiration for the entire community. Source: Bates College MLK Day webpage

To the best of my knowledge, no institution approaches Election Day in the manner that captures all aspects of the Day on Democracy. There are institutions, however, who cancel classes in recognition of a deeply held institutional value. Bates College is one such institution, known for its unique observance of MLK Day. Bates is a selective, private liberal arts college in Lewiston, Maine. Its mission resembles our own and it has successfully ensured student participation on a day classes are not in session. It is thus an appropriate case study for the proposal under review. I spoke with Dr. Darby Ray, Professor of Civic Engagement and Director of the Harward Center for Community Engagement at Bates, about their approach to MLK Day and how it successfully engages students. Highlights from our conversation appear below.

Explaining Bates' Success

1. High profile support from Bates' administration

- renowned keynote speaker (i.e. resources)
- clearing of schedules to make it possible (i.e. no classes on Monday)
- President encourages campus community to participate and does so herself

2. MLK Day planning committee established as official committee of the college

- comprised of 3-4 faculty members, along with some student and staff representatives
- faculty members receive credit for serving on committee
- committee prepares for MLK celebration year-round

3. Involvement of faculty and students

- faculty on committee feel ownership of MLK Day festivities and encourage fellow faculty members to attend
- students attend events organized by their friends; seek to support

4. Communication of expectations

- emails from President, faculty encourage participation in class
- some faculty offer extra credit to students who attend programming on MLK Day

5. Coordination with off-campus community

- K-12 students, teachers, and staff also observe the day (i.e. do not have classes) and participate in events at Bates

Advice for Mary Wash

1. Start small and be patient

- takes time for new ideas to gain traction and become part of the campus culture
- may not be able to set aside many resources in the first years of the Day on Democracy, and that is fine
- limited resources can inform, but should not dictate, conversations

2. Include a celebratory component

- key to generating excitement among students in particular

3. Consider identity

- decide whether our goals are inward or outward-oriented, education or contribution focused
- What makes sense for us? Who are we?

ON RESPONSIBILITY

Administrators and faculty may wonder why students need institutional support to participate meaningfully in our democratic process. Some members of the UMW community argue that students should make arrangements with their professors ahead of time if they wish to miss class to vote and volunteer. They place responsibility for participation on students—but experts have reached a different conclusion. To assist institutions with enhancing student engagement in American democracy, the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education compiled a set of ten election imperatives ahead of the 2018 midterms. Each imperative specifies who should act, and the full list of recommendations appears in Appendix D. The report assigns responsibility in part to student leaders for the generation of excitement around the election. The implementation of most recommendations, however, falls to senior institutional leaders. “Election-related activities are often, and often appropriately, delegated to students or employees such as community engagement staff. But some actions call for financial support, inspiration, and accountability at the senior level” (Thomas et al. 2018, 4). The Day on Democracy, too, would require support from the administration to succeed.

The voter turnout literature also provides interesting insights on how to institutionalize civic engagement, albeit from a different perspective: that of habit formation. Plutzer (2002) and Gerber et al. (2003) demonstrate through different methods that voting creates inertia toward future participation. In other words, individuals who vote in one election are more likely to vote in future elections. Aldrich et al. (2011) contribute to the turnout literature by applying a prominent psychological theory of habit to the act of voting. They find that a voting habit emerges from the interaction between repetition and context (554). Simply put, repetition of behavior alone does not produce habit; instead, repetition must occur in a stable context to form habit. Some aspects of context change every election as new candidates appear on the ballot and certain issues become more salient. Nevertheless, the physical and social context in which voting occurs is most important.

The research thus leads one to conclude that the college years provide an exciting opportunity to form a voting habit. One study even found that “habitual voting is activated by the time individuals participate in their fourth election, and the sooner they cast their first vote” (Alfaro-Redondo 2014, 188). Most students spend four years at Mary Washington, providing a relatively stable physical and social context. This context aligns with students’ first election experiences, as the

majority of students are eligible to vote for the first time in their freshman year at Mary Wash. By ensuring, then, that students have consistent interactions with the American political process while at UMW, the University is making a long-term investment in the health of our democracy. The combination of participation (voting) and service (volunteering) has the potential to create memorable Election Day experiences that can lead to a lifetime of civic engagement, fulfilling UMW's mission to graduate individuals who exemplify "responsible leadership, service to others, and engaged citizenship in a global and diverse society" (n.d.).

Final Reflections

The Day on Democracy will require dedicated effort and institutional support to succeed. Bates made a decision to invest boldly in its mission twenty years ago, redesigning its MLK programming to include the cancellation of classes. Every institution must start somewhere; Mary Wash should start here and now.

“If we’re really going to empower these young people, to create agency to make the world they want to live in, we better focus on civic agency and democratic participation first and foremost. And the great thing is we already have the education that does that, we have a mission that does it. And I want Mary Washington to be an example that at this point in time in our history when our country needs it the most...I want to look back, and I’m sure all of you [faculty] do, and feel proud of the way we responded to this moment in our country’s history.”

President Troy Paino
All University Opening Assembly
August 2018, Minute 44

LEADERSHIP

The UMW community members who signed the petition for a Day on Democracy are not alone in their desire for a clearing of schedules on Election Day. In fact, calls for the observance of the day are emerging nationwide. Stanford professors wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post* last fall arguing that schools and universities should cancel classes on Election Day: “On this one day, instead of preparing for the future, students should be taking part in designing it.” They add that businesses would do well to give their employees at least four hours of paid time to fulfill their civic duty (Bonica and McFaul 2018). 300 companies across the country went even further on November 6, 2018 and granted employees the entire day off to participate in the midterms (Take Off 2018). The Ohio city of Sandusky recently approved a change along these lines and traded Columbus Day for Election Day. Sandusky's government employees will now have a paid Election Day holiday (Phillips 2019). Discussions at the national level are more heated, with Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell referring to similar efforts in Washington as a “power grab” by congressional Democrats (Haag 2019). Richmond, too, has yet to agree on the benefits of observing Election Day. Bills to designate Election Day as a state holiday in Virginia failed in the 2016 and 2019 legislative sessions (Capital News Service 2019). Nevertheless, the data on the matter are clear: voter turnout is highest in countries whose elections are held on national holidays (Haag 2019).

Students at the University of Virginia have advocated for a proposal with elements similar to the Day on Democracy. Virginia students created a petition asking that faculty refrain from scheduling exams on Election Day, with the eventual goal of a University-wide cancellation of classes. Notably, however, the students make no mention of community engagement. President Jim Ryan stated publicly in an article for the *Cavalier Daily* (Edmonds 2018) that he does not support the student proposal: “I totally appreciate the interest in the election and voting. I can’t say that I’m in favor of cancelling classes. I think if students can work out with faculty arrangements, especially around exams, that would be fine. But I think it needs to remain in the faculty’s discretion.” President Ryan supports the status quo—which is fundamentally flawed. Furthermore, his statements are not in line with the research on this topic. UVA professors also commented on the idea, with Prof. Sally Hudson, a petition signee, noting that “We can all wish they'd budget time for voting in advance, but we know many won't. Since we also have good evidence that lifelong voting is a habit, I'm willing to flex a little to encourage students to groove that habit while they're young.”

Associate History Professor Andrew Kahrl, also a petition signatory, argues for a different approach:

Yes, President Ryan is absolutely right — most college students have ample time during the day to vote. The problem is that there are many working people here in Charlottesville who don't have a lot of time during the day on Election Day to vote and it's a real struggle for them to get to the polls ... So I support the idea of students using that day to help others get to the polls and ensuring a fair election.

Professor Kahrl's position most resembles the Day on Democracy proposal in that it envisions students voting and getting involved in the community.

To the best of my knowledge, the University of Mary Washington would be the first public institution of higher education to observe Election Day independent of state requirements. If one considers the aforementioned local, state, and national calls to set aside Election Day, it is only a matter of time before an institution decides to follow suit. Some university will move in this direction: Mary Washington has the opportunity to be the first to do so.

The University's strategic plan through 2020 includes a goal to "establish and promote areas of distinction." This proposal provides an opportunity to do just that. By providing this high-impact learning and engagement experience in a challenging market, UMW can "creatively enhance its strong traditions of leadership, community engagement, and personal integrity" (2016, 2). We cannot look to Washington or Richmond for leadership here. Instead, we must consider our mission and the evidence. At Mary Washington, civic engagement can be more than a "prominent catchphrase," as is often the case at many universities (Lawry et al. 2006, 14). Civic engagement can be who we are. The University should not concern itself with the temporary, and ultimately detrimental, comfort of sameness. Now is the time to act boldly to support American democracy.

Why can't
UMW be the
first school to
do something?

CONTACT INFO

The following students are the leadership team behind Citizens for Democracy, a nonpartisan student group which will advocate for the Day on Democracy throughout the spring 2019 semester. All students have agreed to the listing of their contact information for inquiries related to this proposal.



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Appendix A

34 CFR 668.14(d)

(1) The institution, if located in a State to which section 4(b) of the National Voter Registration Act (42 U.S.C. 1973gg-2(b)) does not apply, will make a good faith effort to distribute a mail voter registration form, requested and received from the State, to each student enrolled in a degree or certificate program and physically in attendance at the institution, and to make those forms widely available to students at the institution.

(2) The institution must request the forms from the State 120 days prior to the deadline for registering to vote within the State. If an institution has not received a sufficient quantity of forms to fulfill this section from the State within 60 days prior to the deadline for registering to vote in the State, the institution is not liable for not meeting the requirements of this section during that election year.

(3) This paragraph applies to elections as defined in section 301(1) of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (2 U.S.C. 431(1)), and includes the election for Governor or other chief executive within such State.

Appendix B

Below are tables comparing our 2016 STEM voting rates to those of Harvard University, Swarthmore College, and James Madison University. 2012 rates are not represented as the quality of some institution's 2012 data, the first year of the NSLVE study, did not meet a standard that would allow for comparison. (That is not the case with UMW's data, which was carefully recorded: Dr. Thomas spoke highly of UMW's data collection and reporting process during our conversation.) On comparison choices: I selected Harvard because it is the highest ranked national university (2 on rankings) that publishes its reports; Swarthmore as it is the highest ranked liberal arts college (3 on rankings); and James Madison because it has carved out a space for itself as a leader in the civic engagement space in higher education and is a Virginia institution. My research shows that Christopher Newport University is either still in the process of joining NSLVE, or joined just this year. The rates of change in voter turnout for STEM majors between UMW and these other institutions indicate that our STEM students are more involved in the democratic process.

UMW v Harvard on 2016 STEM Voting Rates

Field of Study	UMW Voting Rate	Harvard Voting Rate	Rate of change
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	65.6	44.3	21.3
Computer and Information Sciences	67.4	41.3	26.1
Health Professions	76.4	40.1	36.3
Mathematics and Statistics	67.7	35.4	32.3
Physical Sciences	67.8	36.2	31.6
Education	77.2	57	20.2

Source: 2016 NSLVE Reports for the University of Mary Washington and Harvard University

UMW v Swarthmore on 2016 STEM Voting Rates

Field of Study	UMW Voting Rate	Swarthmore Voting Rate	Rate of change
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	65.6	48	17.6
Computer and Information Sciences	67.4	31.9	35.5
Health Professions	76.4	n/a	n/a
Mathematics and Statistics	67.7	n/a	n/a
Physical Sciences	67.8	42.6	25.2
Education	77.2	47.2	30

Source: 2016 NSLVE Reports for the University of Mary Washington and Swarthmore College

UMW v JMU on 2016 STEM Voting Rates

Field of Study	UMW Voting Rate	JMU Voting Rate	Rate of change
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	65.6	49.4	16.2
Computer and Information Sciences	67.4	43.4	24
Health Professions	76.4	51.4	25
Mathematics and Statistics	67.7	52.8	14.9
Physical Sciences	67.8	53.3	14.5
Education	77.2	68.8	8.4

Source: 2016 NSLVE Reports for the University of Mary Washington and James Madison University

Appendix C



Day on Democracy Community Partner Participation Report

Organization name: _____ Date: _____

Number of students who assisted your organization or office: _____

Amount of volunteer time students contributed: _____

Please provide a description of the activities or projects completed:

Additional comments and suggestions for program improvement:

Appendix D

Below are the recommendations and corresponding responsible parties from the "Election Imperatives" report by the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (2018).

Recommendation	Who has primary responsibility
1. Reflect on past elections and reimagine 2018.	1. Senior institutional leaders (e.g., president, provost, VP of student affairs)
2. Remove barriers to student voting.	2. Senior institutional leaders
3. Develop informed voters.	3. Chief academic affairs officer/provost, deans, department chairs
4. Establish a permanent and inclusive coalition to improve the climate for learning and participation.	4. President/Chancellor or chief academic affairs officer/provost
5. Invest in the right kind of training.	5. Coalition chairs
6. Talk politics across campus.	6. Coalition chairs
7. Involve faculty across disciplines in elections.	7. Chief academic affairs officer/provost, department chairs
8. Increase and improve classroom issue discussions across disciplines.	8. Chief academic affairs officer/provost, department chairs, coalition chairs
9. Support student activism and leadership.	9. Administrators and faculty
10. Empower students to create a buzz around the election.	10. Administrators, faculty, and student leaders

Endnotes

1. **“uniquely difficult for students”**: In-person meeting with Marc Hoffman, Director of Elections and General Registrar for the City of Fredericksburg, November 14, 2018.
2. **Caitlin Exum anecdote**: Email correspondence with Caitlin Exum, November 30, 2018.
3. **“May the Department of Elections”**: Email correspondence with Marc Hoffman, February 5, 2019.
4. **students may unknowingly update**: Ibid.
5. I thank Mike Burns for explaining the voter registration requirements in the Higher Education Act. Telephone conversation with Mike Burns, National Director, Campus Vote Project, November 14, 2018.
6. **Ellis has no record**: Telephone conversation with Garry Ellis, NVRA and Voter Registration Coordinator, Virginia Department of Elections, December 19, 2018.
7. **He was unequivocal**: Ibid.
8. **Yet ODR staff stated on two separate occasions**: Telephone conversation with ODR staff person, February 5, 2019; In-person conversation with ODR staff person, February 6, 2019.
9. **“fascinating”**: Telephone conversation with Dr. Nancy Thomas, Director of NSLVE, November 15, 2018.
10. **“one of the top fifteen voting rates in the country”**: Ibid.
11. **“clearly something in the water at your school”**: Ibid.
12. **“nothing to write home about”**: Ibid.
13. **“I’m not going to vote”**: Conversation with UMW student, UMW apartments, November 6, 2018.
14. **Statement by Jasmine Smith**: Email correspondence with Jasmine Smith, February 7, 2019.
15. **Sarah Guiseppe anecdote**: Conversation with Sarah Guiseppe, December 6, 2018; Email correspondence with Sarah Guiseppe, February 7, 2019.
16. **Jordan Pamlyne and Alannah Miller anecdote**: Email correspondence with Jordan Pamlyne, November 16, 2018.
17. **CVP has offered UMW two Democracy Fellow positions**: Telephone conversation with Rachel Clay, Southeast Regional Coordinator, February 4, 2019.
18. **Inspire will provide UMW its voter registration information at no cost**: Telephone conversation with Chelsea Costello, Communications and Development Director, Inspire U.S., December 13, 2018.
19. **Most universities and colleges have partnered with TurboVote**: Telephone conversation with Angelica Smith, TurboVote Campus Outreach Lead, September 7, 2018.
20. **Best practices at Bates College**: Telephone conversation with Dr. Darby Ray, Professor of Civic Engagement and Director of the Harvard Center for Community Engagement, Bates College, February 7, 2019.

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