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Civic and voter Engagement

Action Plan

2020

**Antelope Valley College**

**Voter Action Plan**

**Introduction**

Antelope Valley College (AVC) is dedicated to encouraging students to exercise their right to participate in the democratic process. AVC has always been active in voter registration. The Dean of Student Life and Service has been registered with the State of California as the Voter Registration Liaison and has been engaged in voter registration through our Student Government Association for the past 20 years. Activities to register voters have been sponsored on campus each semester as well as there are links on numerous pages of our website for students to register to vote. We also hand out voter registration forms to students when they pick up their college diploma. Although we are active as a campus on this and other civic engagement activities, it was not until AB963 passed that brought together the team to work on a more comprehensive approach to voter and civic engagement.

With the success of the team, we created a voting campaign, “AVC Votes.” Our goal is to encourage, support, and educate our campus community about civic engagement. We created a four point approach to encourage civic engagement.

1. Encourage voter registration
   1. By providing easy access to voter registration links and materials on various media platforms, we sought to increase voter registration in our community and across campus.
2. Understand the issues and candidates on the ballot
   1. Candidate forums and workshops regarding applicable issues and ballot propositions were produced to bring about awareness of the issues and candidate platforms that would impact voter decisions.
3. Comprehend the need to vote - creating voter excitement
   1. Included in the awareness events and activities was the connectivity of voters to the issues at hand and the impact their voting could have on their home, community, region and nation.
4. On-going civic engagement, beyond the election
   1. What does it all mean once we cast our votes, count and certify the votes and reveal the results? Post election candid conversations were held to debrief the outcomes and the potential impact.
   2. Collaborate on the work that still needs to be done, identifying areas of greatest need and potential impact as well as circles of influence related to civic engagement.

***The “AVC Votes” Campus Team***

A committee was created to include faculty, staff, students and community members who are committed to the democratic process and have a passion for people exercising their right to vote. The team included the following:

* Dr. Jill Zimmerman, Dean of Student Life and Services (Chair)
* Kamryn Williams, Administrative Assistant to the Dean
* Djata Nyaawie, Basic Needs Clerical Assistant
* Kenya Johnson, Director of Student Activities and Community Outreach
* Michelle Hernandez, Director of First Year Experience
* Cameron Zappetta, AVC Student and ASO President
* Dana LaMon,Community Member and “GirlsBuild” Advisor
* Tina Leisner McDermott, Communication Studies Faculty Member
* Johnation Saxton, Political Science Faculty Member
* Rocio Rivera, SOAR and AVC Student, “GirlsBuild” President

**Campus Team Mission**

The team at AVC gathered data and conducted a number of events and activities aimed at increasing voter awareness and participation. Not only was it a successful campaign to get students registered to vote, information was distributed related to the US census and we collaborated with census workers who attended our events. The goal was to educate and inform as many students and community members as possible about the power of their vote and the history of suffrage movements throughout our country's history. This was largely because our student population is composed of more than 75% who identify as from historically marginalized or underrepresented populations.

The Antelope Valley is represented by Los Angeles County’s 5th Supervisorial District. The results from L.A. County voting for the 2016 and 2020 General Election are summarized below. In 2016, 69.4% of registered voters voted. In the 2020 election, 75.9% of registered voters turned out to vote.

**2016 Election:**

* Registered: 5,103,353
* Voted: 3,544,115

**2020 Election:**

* Registered: 5,709,853
* Voted: 4,338,191

Source (<https://results.lavote.net/election-list>)

**2020 Census Population Demographics:**

* Asian - 3.6%
* Hispanic - 44/7%
* White (Non-Hispanic) - 34.8%
* Black (Non-Hispanic) - 13.7%
* Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander - 0.21%
* Native American or Alaska Native - 0.31%

Source (<https://census.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AV-Census-Profile8-15-18.pdf>)

**Population age 18-24:** 11.3%

**Summary of Action Completed**

As a team we accomplished the follow activities:

* Established a Voter and Civic Engagement Committee
* Officially changed the college academic calendar to include the required dates to be posted, as of October 16, 2020.
* Distributed a number of information flyers to students.
* Faculty and staff put a logo “AVC Votes” in their signature block for student’s to click on to take them to the page to register to vote.
* Faculty member Tina Leisner McDermott’s Honors class assignment focused on different aspects of voting and the speeches were shared publicly via a ZOOM link.
* Service learning projects were created where students could participate in activities that supported civic engagement.
* September 22nd during “National Voter Registration Day,” a strong social media presence was made to encourage student participation.
* A dedicated webpage was created - “Voter and Civic Engagement” encouraging voter registration and was shared on social media and with faculty to share with their classes.
* Campus emails were sent to the AVC community making them aware of “National Voter Day”. Links to register to vote and the AVC’s “Civic Engagement and Voter” page were provided for more information.
* Presentations were made to the Academic Senate about AB963 and voter registration and civic engagement responsibility of the campus community.
* AVC’s “Umoja” Program, a retention program directed at the increased success of African American students produced two specific events to educate and encourage students to register to vote and to get involved in the voting process. Additionally, a Porch Talk program was also created called: Your Voice Matters: Our History and Voting.
* SOAR High School created a “GirlsBuild” chapter. GirlsBuild, an initiative of LA Promise Fund, challenges young women from public middle and high schools across the country to make an impact in their community and ensure that their voices are heard. We believe young women will define the vision for what our schools, communities, and country can be, and that work starts now. Their focus was on voter registration and pre-registration of students 16 and17 years of age. The goal of all the local Girl Build chapters was to have 10,000 new registrants.
* ASO focused on the local Board of Trustees for AVC and hosted a Candidates Forum that was shown live on YouTube.
* Dates and links to the Presidential Debates were listed on the “Voter and Civic Engagement” webpage.

**Encourage voter registration**

The first phase of our voter engagement effort was a mass information distribution beginning in September. Over 150 flyers were passed out at our September 10th campus food distribution event on voter information. These flyers contained all pertinent California voter information and deadlines per the California Secretary of State website. Information regarding census procedures, deadlines, and a link to complete the census were also provided on the flyers.

To engage the campus community through a distanced learning environment our campus team executed several strategies. First, we encouraged all faculty and staff to change their email signature to include important voter registration information. Second, we carried out a hashtag campaign on social media using the hashtag #AVCVotes. Next, we modified our website to include an entire page dedicated to voter information and civic engagement. This page made heavy reference to the California Secretary of State’s voter information page in order to properly inform our community. We provided access to accurate election information about less well known aspects of voting like state-wide propositions or county level judges who may be up for election. Debate coverage was also provided to help students make the most informed decisions possible.

Three important dates related to civic engagement crossed our calendar this semester: “Patriot Day” (September, 11), “Constitution Day” (September, 17) , and “National Voter Registration Day” (September, 22). For “Patriot Day” we had a social media campaign recognizing the day and a countdown to the last day to register to vote. For “Constitution Day”, September 17, our Political Science faculty held the annual essay competition. This year’s contest had an increase in the number of student essays submitted and the winner was awarded at the Board of Trustee meeting. On “National Voter Registration Day”, September 22, we did a large social media campaign to get the word out to register to vote. Specific efforts were aimed at our minority student population and the seniors at our on campus Early College High School, SOAR since this would be their first time voting.

Our high school team has been part of a program called GirlsBuild, and our team name is specifically Girls SOAR High. The GirlsBuild program is dedicated to empowering young women to make a positive impact in their communities through civic engagement, health and wellness, and STEM and college access.

For the Fall 2020 semester, our team took part in the GirlsBuild Voter Mobilization Challenge, and presented to four high school classes to encourage students to register and pre-register to vote. These were Junior U.S. History Honors classes, where students were given time in class to register or pre-register to vote, and Senior AVID classes. We also sent information about registering and pre-registering to vote to teachers whose classes we were unable to present to, so teachers could share this information with their students. We also posted information about the time and date of presidential debates, with the goal of keeping others informed.

Overall, 41 students pre-registered to vote, and one student registered to vote. In addition, we also recorded videos showing both sides of proposition 15, 16, 18, 19, 23, and 24. These videos were viewed by the GirlsBuild program and we sent them to be used for a news article as well. We also made posters encouraging others to vote and posted these photos on social media, and they were also sent to be used for the news article. We attended the GirlsBuild Summit '20 as well, which was a virtual event with guest speakers to motivate young women and leaders and to encourage voting and civic engagement, as well as to celebrate our efforts.

A major highlight occurred, Tina Leisner McDermott’s, Public Speaking courses. This semester, her students researched topics related to voting, and any issue impacted by voting, for their informative speech assignment. For example, students spoke about LGBTQ rights, California ballot propositions, issues in the prison system, the Electoral College, Supreme Court cases, amendments to the Constitution, DACA, immigration issues, mail in ballots, women's fight for suffrage, age requirements for voting, etc. By researching their individual topics, and educating each other about them, students learned the importance of voting and the impact of it on their lives from local, state, to federal policies. Throughout the semester, Professor McDermott continuously encouraged students to register to vote, and permanently posted the link to the organization “Rock the Vote” for them to do so. For her Honor's public speaking class, she hosted a Zoom event, open to the public, on October 13 and 15 where the students gave their speeches in an event called "Speak Out, Reach Out, Vote." The “Rock the Vote” link was provided throughout the event for participants to access and register. This was the third semester for this event. Past semesters were held on campus with an open invitation to the campus and the larger community to listen to the speeches. During these events, people were able to register to vote on the spot through “Rock the Vote”, which was successful in registering approximately 80 new voters. Students in her classes consistently stated that they gained a greater awareness and appreciation for the importance of voting through this assignment.

Our special population, UMOJA, Student Equity, Dreamer Center, First Year Experience and Second Year Experience all held events that focused on voter registration and propositions. Special activities such as the history of voting in the US, the right to vote for blacks and women, the need to vote based on the elders who paved the way for us to vote today, the 100th year anniversary of the Women Right to vote were shared with the campus community.

Understanding the issues and candidates on the ballot

The SOAR GirlsBuild team discussed the propositions on the ballot as did the Associated Student Organization (ASO). Each ballot initiative was discussed and the pros and cons were shared. ASO hosted an AVC Board of Trustee candidates forum that was streamed live on YouTube to help the community understand the positions of the candidates.

The need to vote - voter excitement

Since voting was via mail we ran a #AVCVOTES social media campaign to encourage students to get out the vote. Faculty, staff and students posted pictures of themselves with voter stickers and encouraged others to vote and post their pictures with their stickers once they had cast their votes. Locations of voting boxes and polling places were listed on our website so students could find the ballots boxes easily. The college’s front page banner and corner LED marquee sign in the front of the campus was updated with messaging and logos that encouraged voting.

On-going civic engagement

One week after the election the team hosted a “talk back” regarding the results titled “The Election is Over, Now What?” The discussion planned to talk about the election outcome but most of the race announcement had not yet been made. Each program did check-ins with students to see how they were feeling after the election.

The committee will continue to meet to discuss other civic engagement activities in the Spring 2021 semester as well as to work with faculty in finding ways to embed voter and civic engagement activities within the classroom.

**Impact of the work**

Ultimately the AVC Campus Team was able to successfully inform the community about voting and the 2020 election. Whether it was an online voting rights seminar, a list of important voting dates and deadlines, or even presidential debate coverage, the team has worked tirelessly to spread awareness throughout the campus. We held over 10 outreach events to students informing them how to access voting information and helped them to register. Through “GirlsBuild” and the help of our SOAR team we were also able to successfully help pre-register **juniors and seniors** of future California voters.

The success of the team supports our mission and we were able to bring awareness to vote registration, issues and candidates and need to get out the vote.

**Challenges- Voting and COVID**

COVID-19 has undoubtedly been a factor in this year’s election cycle:

* Needed multiple modalities of disseminating information-print, digital, videos
* Zoom fatigue was a factor in event production and student participation
* Adequate timing due to competing priorities on online course/remote learning
* Learning curve for committee/team members in presenting the information
* Competing priorities for information dissemination voting vs health vs education vs work vs family, etc

With in-person gatherings limited, we have had to find unique solutions to the problem of increasing voting competency and engagement. Virtual events have been a beneficial tool for our purposes. We have learned a great deal about how to connect in the virtual world with our students and we will continue to find more ways to enhance this in the future.