

## **2023-2024 Voter Friendly Campus Designation End-of-Year Report**

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

### **Coalition:**

The Panthers Vote coalition meets quarterly to recap events, discuss feedback from prior elections, review ongoing initiatives, and plan for the next quarter/ election cycle. It is made up of administration, various campus departments, faculty, students, partner organizations and more as meetings are open invite and we welcome coalition members to share it out on their networks.

We are thrilled to report that we have many dedicated coalition members and have seen an increase in investment and programs put on by other areas of campus. For instance, our Latinx/a/o serving cultural center hosted a "Let's Taco Bout Voting" program and Residence Life in Campus Housing hosted a Party to the Polls event with the Campus Vote Project fellows and invited a professor to speak about the relationship between media outlets and polling results for their "Smart Panther" initiative. The coalition has also been a successful avenue for collaboration for Panthers Vote and other campus departments. Athletics invited us to table at two of their games last semester and Panthers Vote teamed up with Center for Community-Based Learning, Leadership, and Research on campus to work with students in a service-learning class who then volunteered at our events. We hope this trend continues and even more areas of campus want to incorporate voting into their programming.

This year, Alannah Ray, the Panthers Vote coordinator and a graduate student at UWM, took the lead on writing UWM's campus plan with coalition input. Panthers Vote is increasingly establishing a more student focused coalition. Over the past year, Panthers Vote and the Student Association (SA), UWM's student government, have been establishing a working relationship to increase SA's involvement in student voting on campus. In addition to the President's attendance, after our meetings in 2022, the Student Association Student Voting Committee has been reestablished and will be in the coalition moving forward. Additionally, we have a great working relationship with partner organizations such as Campus Vote Project so we will continue to invite their UWM student fellows. For the remainder of the semester, Alannah will continue to lead the coalition until her graduation. After that we hope to transition the role to another dedicated graduate student.

### **Overview:**

UWM had five main short-term goals for 2022 outlined in our action plan. These were: to have at least 60% of eligible student population participate in the 2022 midterms, target voting efforts in fields of study with low rates of voter turnout to raise rates to 55% or above in those disciplines, integrate voting information into course syllabi, increase student and faculty involvement in the Panthers Vote coalition, and to mail a voting reminder postcard to our students.

While we will have to wait for our next NSLVE report to know the exact impact on voting rates on our campus, we are hopeful that those rates increased during this last election cycle. Nationwide trends indicate impressive rates of youth voter turnout for the midterm election, so we expect similar trends to be showcased on our campus.

While we made great strides towards our other goals, we did have to adapt our plan along the way. Language about voting was finalized for inclusion in syllabi but did not make it to a faculty vote last year. We are going to try again to get that language included in the next round of proposed amendments next year. Since we were unable to get voting information into class syllabi this fall, Panthers Vote implemented a classroom presentation program to get voting integrated into classrooms instead. Utilizing an Ask Every Student Implementation Grant, we were able to recruit and train students to give a 10-minute presentation on voting. Interested faculty could sign up to request a presentation in their classroom or students could find a classroom to present at themselves. Students who completed the program received a \$50 gift card. Over the course of the semester, students presented in 30 classrooms and reached over 1000 students (based on course registration numbers).

While we would love to increase student and faculty participation even further in our coalition, we did have several additional students and faculty/professors join the Panthers Vote coalition over the past year. At the time of writing the action plan, we also had plans underway to mail voting postcards to all UWM students. However, this initiative was dependent on grant funding as the projected cost far exceeded our budget. We had a partnership worked out and ready to pay for the postcards, but the project fell through at the last minute unexpectedly due to a problem the organization was working through.

### **Analysis of Our Work:**

Voter registration:

Panthers Vote hosted a National Voter Registration Day event outside of the library to walk students through the registration process. Students also had the opportunity to play games, enjoy snacks, and make their own buttons at the event! Exact numbers for student registration are difficult to track as we direct students to

use Wisconsin's online registration process rather than providing paper forms, but we estimate impact based on interactions. Approximately twenty students registered at the National Voter Registration Day event plus an additional 300 handouts were distributed on registering to vote for students passing by.

Students were also encouraged to register to vote in our classroom presentations initiative which was seen by over 1000 students. Wisconsin offers same-day registration, so we walked students through how to register at the polls during our get-out-the-vote focused events as well.

Voter education:

Students were trained to give a 10-minute presentation on voting and paired with instructors who requested a presentation in their classroom or a classroom of the student's choosing. The presentations covered registering to vote, valid forms of voter ID, important dates, contact information for Panthers Vote, and other pertinent information. This program was beneficial for both presenters and viewers, as many presenters reported learning more about voting while participating in the program.

Panthers Vote also participated in the *Unstoppable Voters* fellowship program hosted by the Center for Artistic Activism (C4AA). This culminated in creating voting "mystery bags" for voter education. We wanted to demystify the voting process, which can be complex and unapproachable, to make voting more fun and less confusing. The bags worked as toolkits to help walk students through civic processes such as how to register to vote, reminders about important dates, along with other information they might need, as well as fun surprises like stickers and candy. They were then handed out at different events across campus leading up to the election, such as UWM men's soccer games and women's volleyball games, classrooms and club meetings, as well as Panthers Vote events and Cultural and Advocacy Centers. Over 700 bags were distributed during the semester.

Voter turnout:

UWM hosted an early voting site for City of Milwaukee residents in the Student Union October 31<sup>st</sup> – November 4<sup>th</sup>. Because of this, and in keeping with the theme of making voting fun, Panthers Vote hosted a "trick or vote" inspired event. Students had the opportunity to "trick or treat" by stopping by our booth to grab some candy and ask their voting questions. We also handed out reminders for early voting and directed students to the campus polling site. Halloween is scary, elections don't have to be!

Similarly, leading up to election day Panthers Vote hosted "Donut Forget to Vote". To remind students about the upcoming election, we hosted tabling events with free donut holes and coffee to keep everyone energized. The Student Union was also the location of a polling site on Election Day, so we tabled to answer any

last-minute questions about the process. The Panther Card office printed a whopping 179 voter ID cards on Election Day.

Our social media and email campaigns were also exciting this semester. The Student Association President wrote an encouraging message that was sent out to all UWM students. Popular Wisconsinite and comedian Charlie Berens also sent UWM students a message of encouragement, which was particularly popular on Instagram with over 188,000 views.

Student voting rights:

One of the biggest challenges we faced, which also seemed to be a trend among other Wisconsin campuses, was confusion surrounding voter ID. We helped navigate this problem through tabling and are looking at how to provide clearer messaging moving forward.

### **Successes:**

Panthers Vote is incredibly proud of the accomplishments we continue to achieve. In addition to keeping our coalition updated during meetings, our work has also been highlighted across several digital publications on campus which reflects growing institutional support. UWM's Chancellor is also signed on to the All In Challenge's Presidential Commitment for full voter participation. From the number of students we reached to the wide variety of programming we implemented, 2022 was full of many successes.

On a personal note, one of the greatest successes in our eyes was the response from students. While tabling on election day, we witnessed students going to vote with groups with their friends or roommates. Students were helping friends who were too busy or shy to speak with us get the information they needed to ensure they could go to the polls. We even had a few students we helped stop back at the table to thank us and let us know they were able to vote.

Panthers Vote is primarily a grant funded initiative. We would like to thank the Unstoppable Voters initiative from the Center for Artistic Activism, Campus Vote Project, Andrew Goodman Foundation, Ask Every Student, and the Alliance for Youth Organizing Civic Holiday mini grant program for funding Fall 2022 – Spring 2023 Panthers Vote initiatives. Additionally, we would like to thank the Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Studies for their support of Panthers Vote, CCBLRR, Supermarket Legends, the volunteers who were instrumental in implementing Panthers Vote initiatives, the Panthers Vote coalition, and everyone else who has assisted and supported our mission.

**Barriers:**

As noted previously, one of the largest barriers our institution faces (like many Universities) is funding. As noted in the overview section, one of our major initiatives fell through due to lack of funding. Receiving grants from partner organizations has been instrumental in our work and overcoming this barrier. Additionally, a challenge with any large institution is overcoming bureaucratic hurdles. While we would love to further institutionalize voting on campus, these plans must work through extensive procedures and are often contingent on other departments for implementation. For example, we were not able to get voting information into syllabi this year as the decision got caught up in shared governance processes. However, as Panthers Vote becomes increasingly well known throughout campus and as voting is promoted as a part of the campus culture, we anticipate this barrier to lessen. While bureaucracy is unavoidable, we are already seeing strong advocates step up to shepherd along initiatives through these avenues to make sure they make it through the process.

**Beyond 2022:**

In 2023 Panthers Vote is already in full swing preparing for upcoming state and local elections in Wisconsin. As I write this, our student interns are tabling to get folks registered to vote before the February primary. State Supreme Court Justice is the main race on the ballot this election cycle, so we are focusing on educating students on what the state Supreme Court does and why smaller elections matter just as much as big ones. The League of Women Voters is a great partner on this topic. Similarly, feedback from students has indicated that sometimes local elections are simply not known about, so we are implementing marketing reminders through various campus marketing channels.

UWM is currently collaborating with Campus Vote Project to plan their 2023 voting summit on UWM's campus in preparation for the fall. Wisconsin does not have any elections for fall 2023, so we are dedicating that semester to planning and preparing initiatives for the 2024 election cycle.

**NSLVE Data:**

Our NSLVE data is always shared with our coalition partners and posted publicly on UWM's student voting website. Once we receive the next report, it will be discussed at the next quarterly meeting to review the outcomes, shape our plans moving forward and discuss areas of potential growth to focus on. At this time, UW-Milwaukee does not receive all demographic data for our NSLVE reports. However,

it is a future goal to implement receiving that additional data as UWM is committed to increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of campus life.