

**Voter Friendly Campus Strategic Plan  
for  
South Mountain Community College  
Phoenix, Arizona**

**Submitted by:**

**Dr. Cate McNamara, Project Manager**

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## **Executive Summary:**

The following action plan was developed in conjunction with Dr. Osaro Ighodaro, Buddy Cheeks, and myself, Dr. Cate McNamara. Together we have served on the team that was assembled in 2016 to address civic learning and democratic engagement at South Mountain Community College. Since that time, we have moved through the democratic governance process established at our college to bring together the formalized establishment of a civic engagement committee that addresses a long-term strategic plan, gathers data and provides analysis in support of the plan and its objectives and to bring together resources that support faculty development and efforts to foster civic learning and democratic engagement into the core fabric within the organizational culture at South Mountain. This action plan begins during the start of Fall term (2018) and runs throughout the academic year. Once our civic engagement committee convenes, it will begin the needed dialogue to develop a more sustained long term plan that brings faculty on board in supporting these efforts and its integration into the general education curriculum.

This action plan was developed as a guidance for the civic engagement committee, but also because we want to continue the positive efforts put forth over the last few years. The data from our NSLVE report reflect positive changes to the student voter registration rate and voting rate. Obviously, this is something we should feel proud of. Yet, we know we have an obligation to improve upon those numbers.

## **Leadership:**

Dr. Cate McNamara will continue to serve as the project manager in coordinating and overseeing South Mountain Community College's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement. Dr. McNamara serves as library faculty and continues to serve as the principal investigator for The Democracy Wall Project.

Dr. Osaro Ighodaro, Vice-President of Student Development will provide executive level leadership, support and oversight to the project.

Dr. Clyne Namuo, Vice-President of Learning will provide executive level leadership and support to the project.

Mr. Buddy Cheeks, Director of Student life will help coordinate the activities set forth within the strategic plan. Mr. Cheeks is an advocate of student involvement in our college's activities and provides leadership for our Student Government and various student councils.

In April 2018, Dr. McNamara began the process to initiate a campus-wide committee open to all employees and students to become more formally engaged in the process of carrying out the activities set forth within the strategic plan. The initial proposal received full support and has now moved forward to be reviewed by the full shared governance committee. Once this measure passes, the formalized civic engagement committee will be open to all employee groups to join. I expect that once this is formalized the campus leadership will continue to grow.

Lastly, faculty advisors for campus clubs have confirmed their intent to be involved. These additional stakeholders include MEChA, Phi Theta Kappa, Women Rising, and the Sustainability Club.

### **Commitment:**

Our institution, Maricopa Community College District (MCCD) strongly supports civic learning and democratic engagement. Support for civic learning and democratic engagement is embedded in South Mountain Community College's mission statement.

“ South Mountain Community College provides quality higher education for our diverse community. We create a caring teaching and learning environment that fosters student development and supports productive citizenship in an increasingly global and technological society.”

These words are not just espoused values, but are values in use and are actualized in several different ways. One, each year the Chancellor awards student leaders with the Chancellor's Civic Leadership Medallion. This award recognizes student leaders who have unwavering commitment to civic engagement and demonstrate effective civic participation and leadership. Two, throughout MCCD and here at South Mountain Community College, we continue to support Student Public Policy Forums. These forums educate and inform students on a particular public policy matter, and then asks students feedback to create possible solutions to policy matter discussed. Dr. McNamara has facilitated the student discussions at South Mountain and has provided the student feedback and policy suggestions to the Arizona Town Hall representatives. This type of civic learning and democratic engagement is a co-curricular activity that utilizes our educational partnerships with external stakeholders. Three, South Mountain Community College continues to provide open discussion to public policy matters via *The Democracy Wall Project*. This project will enter its 5th year serving our students and community. It continues to ask provocative questions that impact the South Mountain Community and invites participants to provide responses in a safe and open environment. Participation can include writing responses, but also just reading, evaluating and giving thought to the responses posted. This inclusive project continues to grow in its popularity and teaches the value of civil discourse. Four, South Mountain continues to invite organizations to promote and encourage student voter registration.

## **Landscape:**

Using the NSLVE August 2017 Report for South Mountain Community College, we are able to review the data to see noticeable changes within the landscape at the college. While we do not have the NSLVE data available to us for the other Maricopa Community Colleges, the data reviewed here does project positive results for the increased efforts in the college's civic learning and democratic engagement activities set forth in 2016 and continued to date.

While the college's enrollment figures declined between 2012 and 2016, the voting rate of registered students increased by 6.8%. Across the board on all age ranges, the voting rate showed increases as well, the highest within the age group of 25-29 year olds -- a 6.9% increase. A review of gender also yields positive increases in voting rates. Females saw a 9.9% increase and males saw a 10.3% increase. Students who have identified a field of study versus 'undeclared' all saw increases in their respective voter rates.

The data within the NSLVE report does not provide us with an opportunity to establish a statistical correlation to the college's activities related to civic learning and democratic engagement, therefore we cannot say with any statistical certainty that our activities in 2016 and beyond had an impact on the improvements in voter turnout from our students. Nevertheless, this does not in any means detract from the positive momentum the college has established in strengthening our organizational commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement. If anything, the data tells us that we are doing something right given the positive changes within the data. The data also provides us with a lens to explore opportunities when we look at South Mountain Community College compared to other institutions by Carnegie Classification. We know that we have room to improve!

Our college has recently hired a new Vice-President of Learning. For nearly two years, this position has been filled with an interim. That being said, there is an opportunity to better integrate civic learning and democratic engagement into the curriculum here at South Mountain. As with many organizations, given South Mountain's small size, resources tend to be stretched very thin. Over the past year, our Chancellor has engaged the Maricopa Community Colleges in an overall "Transformation" overhaul. This includes creating structured mapping of courses for degree and certificate completion and implemented universally throughout our entire system. As you know, an organizational change of this magnitude requires most, if not all resources pointed toward this major change.

The establishment of a permanent civic engagement committee will be a big step forward toward South Mountain's practices in supporting this project. The infusion of more staff from diverse areas of the colleges, as well as more faculty and student groups will revive the project with needed resources and fresh eyes.

## **Goals:**

Once the Civic Engagement commitment is formalized in the fall and there are members contributing from all areas of the college, a more systemized strategic plan that identifies long-term goals and assessment strategies will become more clear. That said, certainly a continued increase in both student voter registration and student voting rates will remain a long-term goal. Increasing the overall faculty buy-in and support of the project will also be an identified long-term goal. While Maricopa will still be undergoing and making forward strides in its curriculum transformation, including civic engagement and democratic engagement into the general education curriculum taught at South Mountain will also be a long-term goal that will need to align with our overall institutional changes.

Short-term goals may be more identifiable at this time. It is clear that the new Civic Engagement committee will need to gain a better picture into what faculty, and general education classes presently are incorporating civic learning and democratic practices. This data will provide a baseline for the college to move forward with and identify more concrete long-term goals with respect to curriculum. Established civic engagement opportunities to engage students will continue. This includes *The Democracy Wall Project* support by Dr. McNamara, and our participation in the Arizona Town Hall discussions. In the short-term, increased student participation in both of these activities would be prudent. Lastly, the continuation of our celebration of Constitution Day along with the integration of our student clubs to help with student voter registration is included in our short term goals.

## **Strategy:**

*The Democracy Wall Project:* Dr. McNamara will continue to provide provocative and timely questions related to the midterm elections and ballot initiatives within Arizona during the Fall 2018 term. Faculty will be asked to encourage their students to participate in the project and express their views related to the respective questions. Where appropriate, faculty can integrate these conversations into their classrooms to further develop and explore.

Arizona Town Hall: South Mountain will continue their participation in this and ask students to develop public policy responses. Typically, the fall conversation takes place in October. Faculty will be asked to encourage their students to participate.

Constitution Day: South Mountain will continue its traditional celebration of Constitution Day. This will include Student Club (MEChA, Phi Theta Kappa, Women Rising, and other constituency groups) involvement along with organizations that will provide student voter registration for students.

Faculty Survey: This survey will be administered to the full-time and adjunct faculty to determine what courses being taught are integrating civic learning and democratic engagement. This is tentatively scheduled for the Fall 2018 semester. Survey results will be reviewed by the civic engagement committee and brought up to the Vice-President of Learning and Shared Governance council to determine strategies to better support faculty and the incorporation of civic learning and democratic engagement into the general curriculum taught at South Mountain.

Creation of civic engagement learning instruments: Over the course of the 2018/2019 academic year, several reusable learning objects will be developed. This includes the development of a civics quiz that faculty can integrate into their courses. The results of this instrument will be used to determine a baseline of civics knowledge of South Mountain Students. This data will yield other pathways for development.

**Evaluation:**

Evaluation of the project will be performed by the Civic Engagement committee. Various evaluations will be used per activity. Overall evaluation of combined efforts will also need to be taken into consideration. Review and evaluation will consist of qualitative and quantitative measures. Results of the evaluation will be shared with the executive leadership of the college and disseminated accordingly. We expect the continuation in our participation in NSLVE to move forward and will use this data in our evaluation efforts as well. NSLVE data will remain important in our evaluation because it provides for us a litmus test with respect to student voter registration and voting rates. While voting is a facet of civic learning and democratic engagement, this metric is a key indicator of our efforts actualized. We would anticipate that efforts be reviewed on a semester basis.



