Fitchburg State University 2026 Nonpartisan Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Developed by: The Fitchburg State Civic Engagement Coalition

Duration: October 1, 2026 – December 15, 2027

Executive Summary

When Fitchburg State University (FSU / Fitchburg, Massachusetts) President Dr. Donna Hodge signed the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment in April 2026 and became part of the ALL IN President's Council, she committed FSU to implement its first ALL IN nonpartisan and civic engagement action plan. The following FSU All-In Action Plan establishes the university's ALL IN coalition, particularly its leadership team – its stakeholders – who will mobilize the campus community for the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. Moreover, this coalition's establishment integrates crucial leadership positions across FSU which continue, particularly as those leaderships may change.

This first FSU ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan, submitted for October 1, 2026, focuses on voting in local and statewide elections, as well as the November 3, 2026 midterm elections. FSU's plan encourages higher student voter participation for such local,

state, and federal elections by those student voters registered in Massachusetts and those at our university from other US states.

To advance voter participation across FSU's community during the fall 2026 timeframe, this first Action Plan aims to: expand nonpartisan civic learning, broaden voter education, increase voter registration, and enlarge voter turnout – all intended to strengthen civic engagement and greater democratization.

Thus, this first FSU ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan creates the essential baseline through December 31, 2026 to mobilize FSU's campus community and provide the lessons to learn – and implement, appropriately – for the 2028 national elections. FSU envisions crafting its 2027-2028 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan by: integrating key lessons learned across FSU's community from the 2026 midterm election cycle; fostering larger nonpartisan and democracy-based university participation; and updating FSU's ALL IN action plan more extensively for the 2027-2028 timeframe (that FSU Action Plan due by December 2027).

Fitchburg State University intends to achieve the following goals prior to and immediately after the November 2026 mid-term national election cycle:

- Update nonpartisan voter registration and election resources on FSU's newly designed "voter" webpage and build from scheduled on-campus events by early October 2026.
- Increase voter registration among eligible enrolled students throughout October 2026.
- Expand student voter turnout for the November 3, 2026 midterm national elections.
- Integrate lessons learned from the university's student voter turnout efforts and their results to determine FSU's next phase for updating its next ALL IN Action Plan – likely, more extensively for 2027-2028 timeframe.

Fitchburg State University exemplifies its democratic engagement and civic learning by instilling and advancing knowledge, skills, and values underpinning active participation in democracy-based teachings that solidify a democratic society. We view nonpartisan civic engagement as an institutional responsibility that spans curricular learning, co-curricular involvement, and community partnerships, ensuring students graduate from Fitchburg State equipped to participate more meaningfully in civic life.

Leadership

The Fitchburg State University coalition for its ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge's "civic engagement" involves the following stakeholders:

- **"ALL IN" Campus Democracy Challenge Contacts to President Dr. Donna Hodge:**
    - Co-Supervisor, Chief of Staff, Matt Bruun
    - Co-Supervisor, Director of Communications, Chad Garner

- Special Advisor to the President / ALL IN Presidential Liaison Dr. Josh Spero

- **Presidential Cabinet-Level Coordinators for FSU's ALL IN Civic Engagement Coalition:**
  - Acting Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Franca Barricelli, and Acting Associate Provost, Dr. Jannette McMenamy
  - Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success, Pamela McCafferty
  - Dean of Student Life & Chief Student Affairs Officer, Tim St. John

- **Co-Chairs of FSU's ALL IN Civic Engagement Coalition:**
  - This Faculty/Librarian team would coordinate with the Acting Associate Provost:
    - Professor of Education, Dr. Danette Day and Librarian / Strategic Projects, Connie Strittmatter, who coordinate and collaborate with additional faculty and librarians.
  - This Assistant Dean would coordinate with the Dean of Student Life & Chief Student Affairs Officer:
    - Assistant Dean for Student Engagement, Ben Kadamus, who, in turn, would coordinate for support with, among others:
      - **Student Leadership:**
        - Student Government Association Executive Board (SGA E-Board) and Fitchburg Activities Board (FAB) / Coordinate with the key student-led Club, Sorority, Fraternity, and Orientation Leaderships.
        - Presidential Ambassadors for the 2026-2027 year, in coordination with Special Assistant to the President, Dr. Christine Dee, in conjunction with SGA.
      - **Administrative Leads in cooperation with the Co-Chairs of the Civic Engagement Coalition:**
        - Director of Residence Life, Reilly Schaefer in coordination with the student dormitory Resident Assistants.
        - Director of Student Belonging, Krysta López-Acevedo.
        - Associate Director of Athletics, Bettiann Peura.
        - Director, Military and Veterans Services, Nolan Buck.

External Partners, with whom the Co-Chairs of FSU's ALL IN Civic Engagement Coalition will coordinate:

- City Clerk's Office / Local Election Officials, City of Fitchburg.
- The university remains committed to leveraging collaborative relationships both locally and broadly to support ongoing initiatives and facilitate long-term strategic success.

Nonpartisan Student Voting Group:

Fitchburg State is also establishing the *Falcon Civic Engagement Ambassadors*, a nonpartisan student-led coalition supported by the SGA. This group will lead peer-to-peer registration drives, digital mobilization campaigns, and educational panel discussions across campus, particularly coordinating with FSU's Presidential Ambassadors, Resident Assistants, Orientation Leaders, and key club and sorority/fraternity leaderships.

Collaborations with Local Election Officials & Residence Life:

The Coalition will engage in active dialogue with the Fitchburg City Clerk's office to clarify local precinct boundaries, confirm early voting options, and verify student residency guidelines. In partnership with the Office of Residence Life, Commuter Affairs Program, and, especially, the student Resident Assistants across the dormitories, crucial voter engagement toolkits provide the baseline, in addition to training needed, to assist residential and commuter students with registering. The objective centers on students legally using their campus address to register and to vote, or requesting mail-in ballots for off-campus or out-of-state students.

Leadership Succession Plan:

To ensure continuity, coalition co-chair roles are held by institutional positions rather than specific individuals. If a primary contact leaves the university, the interim or incoming department head assumes the role immediately. Outgoing leaders complete an exit debrief and hand off operational documentation. Incoming student leaders undergo onboarding (typically, each April, and adaptable – led by the co-chairs using resources from the ALL IN Transition Management Guide).

Commitment

Fitchburg State University's commitment to nonpartisan democratic engagement stems from our institutional mission to foster leadership, social responsibility, and lifelong learning. We promote nonpartisan civic participation through co-curricular programming, campus-wide dialogue events, and community-based service learning modules.

Institutional leadership regularly underscores the value of civic participation through campus communications during National Voter Registration Day and major civic holidays.

After our President Dr. Donna Hodge became part of the ALL IN President's Council in April 2026, she pledged for Fitchburg State University to become a signatory to the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. Our university's goal now focuses on President Hodge approving this FSU ALL IN Action Plan by late September 2026, as she and the university submit this first ALL IN Action Plan by October 1, 2026.

Our institution has not previously submitted an action plan to ALL IN. This is our first action plan submission.

Landscape

Fitchburg State University is a public 4-year institution and joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2026.

Demographic Landscape:

- **Enrollment Mix:**
- Annual: 9,000 students, 41% undergraduate, 59% graduate
- **Student Body Composition:** Fall 2026, 46% of our full-time undergraduates live on campus and 54% commute.
- **In-State vs. Out-of-State:** The vast majority of undergraduate students (Fall 2026) are Massachusetts residents (in-state), with out-of-state students primarily originating from nearby New England states. Our undergraduate out-of-state students reside in: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin. Our out-of-state graduate students reside in a total of 45 states.
- **Academic Areas:** School of Arts and Sciences, School of Business and Technology, School of Education, School of Health and Natural Sciences, School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education.

Electoral Landscape & Legal Framework: Voting rules and registration procedures vary depending on where students reside, register, and vote.

For full details on voter registration, mail-in ballots, and election logistics, this official portal from the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts helps prospective voters identify their essential electoral information.

For out-of-state Fitchburg State University students, this ALL IN to Vote portal provides their essential information to register and vote, as well as this important ALL IN to Vote's link: Rules in Your State.

Key Upcoming Voting Dates:

- **Voter Registration Deadlines:** Oct. 24, 2026 (in Massachusetts; deadlines vary by state)
- **General Election Day:** First Tuesday after the first Monday in November 2026
- **Local Municipal Elections:** Fall 2027

Civic Engagement Affiliations:

Fitchburg State maintains active involvement with state civic learning networks and regional higher education partnerships, utilizing resources from **Campus Compact** to support faculty integration of civic outcomes into coursework.

Goals

Our institution's nonpartisan democratic engagement goals, representative of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, delineate the following ("Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, Time-bound, Inclusive, & Equitable" = "S.M.A.R.T.I.E."):

Short-Term S.M.A.R.T.I.E. Goals (Fall 2026):

1. **Presidents' Commitment:** Secure President Donna Hodge's signature on the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation by October 1, 2026.
2. **Orientation Integration:** Incorporate nonpartisan voter registration resources and digital tools into New Student Orientation (NSO) updates by October 15, 2026.
3. **Student Registration Rate:** Mobilize the campus community significantly to increase overall eligible student voter registration rate prior to US state registration deadlines in the October 2026 timeframe.

Long-Term S.M.A.R.T.I.E. Goals (2026–2027):

1. **NSLVE Benchmarking:** Institutionalize participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) to track historical turnout data through 2027.
2. **Curricular Integration:** Establish a formal civic learning set of outcomes within the general education curriculum review process by Spring 2027.

Strategy

Fitchburg State University will implement these strategies to increase nonpartisan civic learning and commitment, student voter involvement and participation, and engagement in and responsibility to our democracy.

1. Voter Registration Strategies:

- **Digital Mobilization:** Promote ALL IN to Vote across a comprehensive and constant campus communication effort to help and aid students in checking registration, registering online, or requesting absentee ballots (online / in-person venues: FSU website, Falcon Hub, canvas outreach, and official university social media channels).

- **Orientation & Move-In Drives:** Deploy student ambassadors and orientation leaders during fall residential move-in and orientation fairs to offer QR-code registration access.

2. Civic Education & Holiday Programming:

- **Rock The Block (September 8):** Hosted faculty/librarian-led voter registration information table as part of the university's annual clubs and organizations fair, led by Professor of Education, Dr. Danette Day, and Librarian, Ms. Connie Strittmatter.
- **Constitution Day Events (September 15, 17):** Hosted a faculty-led panel discussion on constitutional rights and voter participation:
    - September 15 / 3:30PM, CTL in Library CTL Teaching and Learning Hour Topic: Balancing Pedagogy, Privacy, and Copyright in Public Facing Student Assignments / Presenter: Connie Strittmatter / Modality: Hybrid - CTL or Google Meet.
    - September 17 / 12:30PM, Hammond Main Lounge: We've Done This Before: The Constitution from the Camera to the Chatbot Constitution Day 2026 / Dr. J.J. Sylvia IV (Associate Professor of Communications Media at Fitchburg State University; co-founder of the Digital Media Innovation major; recipient of the Fulbright Global Challenges Teaching Award).
    - September 17 / Presentation and publication, respectively, by Dr. Ben Railton, Professor of English Studies in Ashburnham, MA for a Constitution Day public talk on: "Three Things that Are (Importantly) in the Constitution and one that's (Importantly) Not" and this piece in the *Saturday Evening Post*, titled: "Considering History: This Constitution Day, Let's Celebrate State Constitutions".
- **Fitchburg State 2nd Annual Abolitionist Park Teach-In / You FIT Here: FITchburg Your Story!:** September 28-29 / Organized by Dr. Danette Day and Dr. Kisha Tracy, with students and faculty presenting and participating (see next page):

YOU FITchburg HERE! Your Story

2026 Second Annual Abolitionist Park Teach-In



Everyone is welcome to attend the Teach-In classes in the Park!

Address:
50 Snow St., Fitchburg
(.4 mile from campus)



For more resources on the Park and the abolitionist history of Fitchburg, check out the Fitchburg Abolitionist Park digital exhibit!
https://fitchburgabolitionistpark.omeka.net/

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Monday, Sept. 28th (Rain Date: Sept. 30th)

AAST 1000 Intro to African-American Studies - 9:30AM
Dr. DeMisty Bellinger-Delfeld (Professor, English Studies)
Discuss Abolitionist songs and poetry.

FYE 1014 Is Everyone Equal? - 9:30AM & 12:30PM
Dr. Will Cortezia (Associate Professor, Education)
Discuss the origin of the abolitionist movement and how it relates to social justice in the present day.

EDUC 2011 Diversity in Education (5-12) - 9:30AM
Dr. Wendy Keyser (Professor, English Studies)
Learn about the Supreme Court case that could have brought equity to public school funding.

ENGL 2110 American Lit I: Slavery & Freedom - 9:30AM
Dr. Michael Hoberman (Professor, English Studies)
Discuss a path-breaking abolitionist text from 1789: *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano.*

FYE 1011 Making Political Change - 11AM
Dr. Eric Budd (Professor, Economics, History, & Political Science)
Discuss the origins of abolitionism and other social movements.

HON 1020 Current Events & Service Learning - 11AM
Dr. Wafa Unus (Associate Professor, English Studies)
Discuss the Press as a public service, from Abolitionist Newspapers to local journalism today.

SPED 3800 Inclusive Instruction (5-12) - 11AM
Dr. Wendy Keyser (Professor, English Studies)
Discuss teaching students with learning disabilities with rigor and challenge.

Tuesday, Sept. 29th (Rain Date: Oct. 1st)

FYE 1014 How to Build Community - 9:30AM
Dr. Danette Day (Professor, Education)
Explore Abolitionist Park—a 'hot' pocket park in The Burg—to experience a local community building effort and to examine its impact.

ENGL 3560 Global Middle Ages - 9:30AM
Dr. Kisha Tracy (Professor, English Studies)
What was Africa like before the transatlantic slave trade? Learn about medieval African empires; discuss issues reading post-colonial translations.

EDUC 1005 Culturally Proficient Educator - 11AM
Dr. Danette Day (Professor, Education)
Learning beyond the classroom: discover Fitchburg's broader community culture through its Abolitionist history.

ENGL 1100 Writing I: Communicating Disability - 11AM
Dr. Kisha Tracy (Professor, English Studies)
How are civil and disability rights connected? What does it mean to be multiply marginalized? Discuss these questions and more!

IDIS 4000 Capstone Seminar: Education - 12:30PM
Dr. Danette Day (Professor, Education)
Who were the Fitchburg Abolitionists, and what can they teach us about the future?

"Commemorating the abolitionists who lived in or had close ties to Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the Fitchburg Abolitionist Park educates visitors about the anti-slavery Abolitionist Movement and honors equality, diversity, and the fundamental human right: FREEDOM."

- Freedom's Way National Heritage Area

- **Presidential and leadership Video/s on FSU's ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge:** Mobilize the greater FSU community to build on and increase our university's civic education and engagement to increase democratization, voter registration, and voter turnout for November midterm elections:
    - Do so across all FSU media, especially FSU social media.
    - Consider how other leaders across FSU might also record short videos to reinforce the President's message and baseline.
- **National Voter Education Week:** October 5-9 / Distribute nonpartisan ballot research tools and candidate guide portals. Throughout October, Student, faculty/librarian, and staff leadership (offices) also organize voter registration drives and get-out-the vote efforts, such as:
    - **Co-Chairs of the FSU ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge (Dean Kadamus, Dr. Day, and Ms. Strittmatter) and the SGA President (Mr. Elliot Olynciw-olkuski)** coordinated to:
        - Increase voter registration and information with the "tables" strategy.
        - Schedule dates for both Co-Chairs, SGA President, and SGA members to make laptops available for students to register to vote, information provided on the upcoming election, as well as sign ups for transportation needs on election day.
    - Cross-campus mobilization to strategize how best to initiate "Voter Palooza" efforts, including dorm room "vote" door tags, inclusive of coordination between SGA and FAB, with support from Resident Assistants.
    - SGA / Presidential Ambassadors / Clubs / Sororities/Fraternities / Resident Assistants / Staff Offices mobilize together to galvanize campus walks or school van rides to early voting locations / polling precincts, or local ballot drop sites, including consideration of contracting a bus company for transportation.
    - Center for Diversity and Inclusiveness, in conjunction with SGA, coordinate with African Student Association (ASA), Black Student Union (BSU), Caribbean Student Association (CASA), and the Latin American Student Organization (LASO) work with bilingual students in LASO and CASA to assist with both with any interpreting needed and ensure voter registration, early voting and/or voting day turnout. We had one student assistant during the primary elections on September 1st at Crocker Elementary School.
    - Continue coordination with FSU students in volunteering (or working, as possible) on Election Day with Joanna Bilotta at the Fitchburg City Clerk's Office. (Point of contact: Krysta Lopez-Acevedo).
    - Determine how nonpartisan-based efforts to help voter registration and early/ same-day voting turnout might improve via Fitchburg-based organizations with whom FSU might coordinate.

- **Vote Early Days:** Starting October 24 (in Massachusetts).

- **Election Night Watch Party:** Traditional SGA-Political Science Professors coordinated party in the campus Hub area – open to anyone across the university's community to gather informally, discuss the elections unfolding on big screens, eat, talk, and enjoy this informal evening together.

3. Commemorative & Campus Initiatives:

- Fitchburg State University gained national recognition in 2026 as the prestigious recipient of the National Council of Teachers of English / NCTE National Intellectual Freedom Award:
    - Awarded by NCTE: "To an individual, group, or institution that merits recognition for advancing the cause of intellectual freedom."
    - FSU's recognition received by the NCTE Committee Against Censorship.
    - President Hodge's quote on the NCTE website: "Intellectual freedom is not just an abstract principle at Fitchburg State; it is a core value woven into our classrooms, our archives, and our engagement with the community. At a time when access to diverse stories and vital information faces unprecedented challenges, we are deeply honored to receive this recognition from NCTE. It reflects the courageous work of our faculty, librarians, students, and community partners who stand up every day for open inquiry and the freedom to read."
    - "From Student to Colleague: A Shared Fight Against Censorship" / 12 March 2026 -- "The Impacts of Censorship - Volume 2: The Voices and Experiences of Classroom Teachers" // published research representative of the "…four-year professional evolution" between English Studies Associate Professor Katie Covino and Honors Student / Honors Thesis writer / First Year Experience Teaching Intern, Caitlin Moriarty, 2025 FSU Graduate in English for Secondary Education Major.

- **Semiquincentennial Integration (2026):** Incorporate themes surrounding the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence into campus debates and library exhibits, examining the evolution of voting rights in the United States.

Reporting

University Leadership: Share the presidential-approved final FSU ALL IN Action Plan with the President's Cabinet and student leadership.

Campus Community: Post the presidential-approved final FSU ALL IN Action Plan on the dedicated Fitchburg State Civic Engagement webpage for public access; promote with short videos on FSU social media.

Post-Election Results: Publish a brief summary of available campus voting data and turnout on the university's ALL IN website. Build such lessons learned for expanding FSU's 2027-2028 ALL IN Action Plan – aimed to broaden and reinforce more comprehensive campus civic education and engagement, more expansive democratization efforts, and larger voter registration and turnout drives.

Campus webpage:

Falcons Vote. Make Your Voice Heard!
(fitchburgstate.edu/about/leadership/presidents-office/falcons-vote-make-your-voice-heard)

Evaluation

We will evaluate our action plan in the following ways:

Event Headcounts:

- Track student attendance at signature civic events, including Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day, and campus election tabling sessions.

Post-Election Discussions:

- Hold a post-election meeting with All In Coalition members to discuss election results and turnout efforts.

Campus Election Climate Survey:

- Review responses to existing campus survey tools to assess whether students feel the university supports democratic participation.

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge