

UW-Madison: ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge honors UW students voting success

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MADISON — The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, a national, nonpartisan initiative, recognized UW-Madison with several awards on Monday for student voting in the 2020 presidential election.

ALL IN honored UW-Madison for having the highest student voter registration and voter turnout among four-year colleges in Wisconsin as well as the most improved voter turnout. Tamia Fowlkes, a senior who served as the Big Ten Voting Challenge intern for the Morgridge Center for Public Service, was named to ALL IN's national Honor Roll for student voting advocates.

“This election was incredibly special because it encouraged students to invest in democracy in a wide variety of ways — whether that was through their vote, volunteering in their community or initiating critical conversations about changes that need to be made in our community,” Fowlkes says.

“It was so uplifting to serve as the Big Ten Voting Challenge Intern over the course of the past two years because UW-Madison students demonstrated excitement and determination to make positive change by showing up and investing their time and energy in this democracy. In addition to having a high turnout, students showed up to work the polls, participated in tabling events to encourage their peers to vote and sought opportunities to engage with candidates through nonpartisan conversations. It is really fulfilling to see such a positive result from all of that work.”

Voter turnout among UW-Madison students increased 7.4 percentage points in last year's presidential election, rising from 65.4 percent of eligible students in 2016 to

72.8 percent of eligible students in 2020. That's higher than the national voting rate of college students in 2020, which was 66 percent, according to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement.

Student voting turnout efforts on campus were coordinated by BadgersVote, a partnership between the Morgridge Center for Public Service, the Madison City Clerk's Office, Associated Students of Madison, University Communications and a number of other campus units. Dozens of students put in hundreds of hours running voter registration drives and educating peers through podcasts, discussion panels, social media and, on Election Day, chalking messages across campus.

"One of the reasons the people of Wisconsin created their state university 173 years ago was to teach people how to govern themselves. It is awesome to see that tradition not only persist but thrive," says Kathy Cramer, a political science professor who served as faculty chair of BadgersVote in 2020. "This award just goes to show that this campus and surrounding community are committed to putting in the hard work necessary to keep our democracy alive. I am so proud to be a part of it."

ALL IN organized voting challenges in 19 states, encompassing more than 426 institutions enrolling 4.3 million students.

"The rise in voter participation and engagement for college students in last year's presidential election was record-setting," says Jen Domagal-Goldman, executive director of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. "Partners in our nonpartisan state voting challenges worked collaboratively and diligently ... to ensure that college students — many of whom are first-time voters — had the information and access necessary to register and cast informed ballots."