



All in Challenge Action Plan December 2019

Introduction

Brown University students have often distinguished themselves with a fierce social conscience and an interest in pursuing justice; indeed, our students' passion for social change is one of the University's hallmarks. For more than 30 years, Brown's Swearer Center for Public Service has asked what civic responsibility do we have as scholars, students and community members to tackle the new and long-standing challenges of our changing world? How do we build the democratic practices, between scholars and practitioners, and among all community members, that will be needed to navigate this world? What obligation does higher education have to prepare ethical, effective, and engaged community members? (Swearer Center 2016 Strategic Plan).

This All in Challenge Action Plan builds off of our history, our strategic plan, and the 2017 Higher Education and Democratic Practice (HEDP) initiative to elevate students' understanding of democracy and civic behavior, specifically related to voting. In addition to articulating voter registration and mobilization tactics, the Action Plan emphasizes the value of informed debate among people with different points of view, as well as such principles as the rule of law and ethical governance.

As always, the Swearer Center seeks to promote the role of higher education in cultivating deep democratic values, skills, and behaviors and to establish Brown as a university community that cares about civic engagement. At its core, this plan brings into action our belief that universities — and Brown in particular — are uniquely positioned to emphasize and support the bedrock elements of a successful democracy.

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Executive Summary

This plan was developed by the staff at the Swearer Center for Public Service, with nominal input from our campus partners. Its purpose is to create a clear, actionable, and coordinated set of goals and strategies to increase voter registration, education and turnout for the next election cycle, as well as to embed these strategies within the culture of Brown. The plan seeks methods and tools to make civic learning and democratic engagement a bedrock of the institution, honoring the University's mission to "serve the community, the nation and the world by discovering, communicating and preserving knowledge and understanding in a spirit of free inquiry, and by educating and preparing students to discharge the offices of life with usefulness and reputation." This one year Action Plan will be implemented at Brown University and with the Swearer Center's community partners in Providence, RI, with action from a coalition of students, faculty, staff, academic departments, campus life groups and Providence community members.

The plan articulates specific goals:

Short Term

- Increase Brown undergraduate student voting rates from 59% in 2016 to 63% in 2020
- Provide clear, current, and accurate information to 100% of Brown students on voter registration and absentee ballot processes.
- Advise 100% of students who request help with election materials or voting processes with rapid and informed guidance.
- Provide 100% of faculty in the Swearer Center Engaged Scholarship program with materials to promote voter participation information in their classes (in 2019-20, there are 15 faculty in learning communities, 16 faculty leaders for ESP, and 12 faculty who have spring 2020 engaged courses designated as CBLR. Approximately 250 Brown faculty subscribe to the Swearer faculty newsletter)

Long Term

- By August 2020, develop targeted voter outreach plans with our campus and community partners.
- By August 2020, formalize a decision with Brown's registrar about including Turbovote as part of the Brown course registration or pre-orientation process.
- By October 2020, coordinate at least two Swearer Center workshops with a range of co-sponsors that have the goal of increasing civic learning and voter understanding of the candidates and ballot issues.
- By August 2020, build deeper pathways of beyond the ballot opportunities for non-citizens and those who are ineligible to vote to promote civic engagement.

- Create a website by Fall of 2020 with information that provides clear information about University shared governance processes, as a method of democratic engagement, and create a clear and transparent pathway for student participation in University committees across all levels.

Leadership Coalition

The Swearer Center's Student Development team, led by Assistant Dean Betsy Shimberg, has taken a lead role in voter registration, engagement and education on campus. The Swearer Center is partnering with administrative departments, academic institutes, and student organizations as well as the local election board and Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea's office to promote events and initiatives such as voter registration drives, voter access information and voter education forums. The Swearer Center funds Brown's work with Turbovote and provides students with the tools they need both to be active and informed voters and to go beyond the ballot more deeply into engaged citizenship.

Swearer Center for Public Service

Mathew Johnson, Associate Dean and Executive Director

Betsy Shimberg, Assistant Dean and Director of Student Development

Steve Pokorny, Program Manager

Kate Porter, Assistant Director of Communications

Brown University Partners

Students

Bonner Community Fellows

Brown Center for Students of Color

Brown College Democrats

Brown Republicans

First-Generation College and Low Income Student Center

Greek Council and Program Houses

LGBTQ Center

No Labels at Brown

Sarah Doyle Center for Women

Swearer Center Community Corps

Swearer Center Student Advisory Committee

Faculty

Cogut Center for the Humanities

Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy

The Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs

Robert Blair, the Joukowsky Family Assistant Professor of Political Science and International and Public Affairs

Student Affairs

Campus Life and Student Services

Campus Mail Center

Family Weekend Planning Committee

Office of the Chaplains and Religious Life

Student Activities Office

Other campus offices

Brown University Libraries

Brown University Graduate School

Brown University Medical School

Brown University School of Public Health

Office of the Brown University President

Office of University Event & Conference Services

Community/National Organizations

All in Challenge

Common Cause RI

Generation Citizen

NSLVE

TurboVote

Swearer Center Community Partnership Network

Local elections office coordination

Office of the RI Secretary of State, Nellie Gorbea

RI Director of Elections, Rob Rock

Commitment

Brown University and the Swearer Center's re-commitment to student civic engagement and voter education was launched in 2017, when Brown President Christina Paxson charged the Swearer Center to pilot a new Higher Education and Democratic Practice (HEDP) Initiative. As part of this initiative, the Swearer Center explored the role of higher education in cultivating deep democratic values, skills, and behaviors and established itself as a university entity that

cares about democratic scholarship. Citing Brown’s mission, the University sought to increase student engagement in voting, voting education, civic engagement and university governance.

Brown as an institution has communicated its commitment to improving democratic engagement in multiple ways. In her 2017 Commencement Address, Brown’s President Christina Paxson said,

So what I want to leave you with today is a call to live courageously. It is as essential now as it was in Roger Williams’ time — if only to bridge the divides that separate us.

So what does this mean? This means having the courage to be a civically engaged citizen. After graduation, you will land somewhere — you may not even know where yet — to work, study and launch your post-Brown lives. Wherever you land, register to vote. Volunteer for a local nonprofit. Coach youth sports. Or shoot for the moon, and run for elected office...

It means having the courage of your informed convictions — doing things you believe in, even if you encounter criticism or even if you break social norms... And finally, it means having the courage to be compassionate — to empathize with others, even those whose life experiences are very different from your own...

To close, let me say this: Every historical era can be framed as “extraordinary times.” It’s trite probably to say this is that. But there is no time like the present. So on this remarkable day, at this moment of truth, take everything that Brown University has opened up to you — and live courageously. Go out into the world, fiercely, boldly and thoughtfully. Keep this lively experiment burning brightly. And don’t ever forget that people here at Brown will love you, and honor you, for doing just that.

Civic engagement is tightly woven into the co-curriculum of the Swearer Center and is aligned with several of our learning outcomes and core competencies for students, including:

Civic, Community and Public Engagement

- Understands the roots of inequality and injustice in communities and develops knowledge, skills, values and motivation needed to bring about positive social and political change.
- Understands how to identify the needs and assets of communities.
- Understands benefits and potential challenges of community-campus partnerships.
- Analyzes structural conditions that have resulted in injustice, inequality and other forms of social marginality.
- Identifies and analyzes relevant pathways for social change.

- Works collaboratively with community partners to develop and implement appropriate social change strategies.

Effective Action, Collaboration and Leadership

- Demonstrates ability to operate effectively - individually and collaboratively - in planning, coordinating, implementing and evaluating actions required to advance social change.
- Understands and articulates multiple modes of social change and interconnected systems and structures of power.
- Identifies points of entry for individual and community action to address systemic challenges and develop strategies for change.
- Identifies strengths and resources in oneself and in teams, and builds constructive and meaningful relationships.
- Navigates existing structures to yield sustainable, just and systemic change.
- Communicates clearly and effectively across contexts, in groups and in various media.
- Acts effectively as a participatory, inclusive, purposeful and process-oriented leader.

The Swearer Center’s co-curricular workshop library includes offerings specifically designed to help prepare Brown students to vote. Over 600 students participate in Community Corps, our largest program, and 110 in our Bonner Community Fellows program. As examples, two voter education workshops for these programs are [Elections Cafe](#), which walks students through voting procedures and exposes them to elected officials and [Civic Engagement](#), in which students research their local election candidates and bond issues, register to vote, explore voting practices elsewhere in the US, and consider why they are turning out to vote and the role they play as a leader on campus to encourage others to be civically engaged. We also run panel discussions and guest speakers who focus on “RI Politics 101.” In addition, we have presented about our civic engagement work at the Eastern Region Campus Compact meeting, in conjunction with our community partner, Generation Citizen, with a workshop called [Beyond the Ballot: Activating Deeper Democratic Engagement Within the University](#).

Additionally, the Office of University Communications coordinates with the Swearer Center on the topic of voting, and most recently on National Voter Registration Day, issuing tweets encouraging students to register to vote. Likewise, Brown included the fact that Washington Monthly listed Brown in its “Top Colleges for Student Voting” in their annual article on Brown's position in college rankings. Finally, the Brown Daily Herald runs frequent articles about civic engagement (see [Student Voter Turnout Triples](#) and [University Student Groups, Campus Centers Gear up for Midterm Elections](#) as two examples).

Landscape

Initially and historically, Swearer Center's civic education on campus focused on tabling and voter registration. After lobbying for the University to join the NSLVE, we had access to data that enabled us to finely hone our approach and learned that our real stumbling blocks are increasing voter education and voting awareness as well as helping students navigate and manage the multi-step absentee ballot process. For example, the NSLVE results revealed that nearly 80% of Brown students are already registered to vote. Thus, our focus must be not on voter registration but on voter motivation. Likewise, the NSLVE results demonstrated that the majority of Brown students vote by absentee ballot. Therefore, our previous timing of sending out voter messaging the week of the election was ineffective, as absentee ballot voters must begin a month or two in advance on the process. Students arrive at Brown from all 50 states with 50 separate voting processes, candidates, and ballot issues. As a result, the Swearer Center has tasked a staff member with understanding voting procedures in each state and working individually with students as needed to place their vote.

The Swearer Center believes that a key component of civic engagement is the ability to understand and respect differing viewpoints. Brown is predominantly a campus of Democrats. A 2015 Brown Daily Herald poll found that 58.5% of students identified themselves as somewhat liberal or very liberal, while 30.9% of students identified as very conservative, somewhat conservative or centrist on fiscal issues. According to the David Horowitz Freedom Center, the ratio of Democrats to Republicans among Brown faculty members is 30-to-1, well below that of U.S. colleges overall, in which only about 10 percent of faculty members are Republican. Yet, the University values many voices. President Paxson and Provost Locke initiated a "Reaffirming University Values" speaker series in 2016 to bring speakers with a range of political beliefs to campus. Most recently, Jeb Bush and several conservative speakers have come to campus, and were greeted with respective questions. The student group, No Labels, seeks to promote "bipartisan cooperation on campus to solve local and national problems. We want Democrats, Republicans, Independents, and others to work together to solve the problems we face locally in Providence as well nationally. We understand that there are fundamental differences in how we approach issues and look to solve them, but agreeing to work together is the first fundamental step."

Nearly 18% of Brown University students are international students and another, smaller number fall under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) immigration policy. Members of these population groups are usually unable to vote in the US, yet we are eager to include them in conversations about civic engagement, which apply to everyone. For these students, we have applied a strategy to go Beyond the Ballot. Outreach, which was developed in conjunction with

our community partner Generation Citizen, and which includes information on engaging in a conversation with people who disagree with you, lobbying a decision-maker, writing an op-ed for a local newspaper or blog, attending a community or political board meeting, or hosting a political gathering.

Goals

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National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Since joining the NSLVE in 2016, the Swearer Center has been encouraged by the upwards trajectory of Brown undergraduate students behaviors around civic engagement. The recent

report on the 2018 midterm elections was most gratifying, as it revealed that Brown student voting increased by 31.7% from the 2014 midterm rate. Additionally, Brown's 2018 midterm voting rate of 45.1% was higher than the 2018 voting rate for all institutions (39%). These findings were satisfying, given the outreach by Swearer, and encouraging. And yet, the 2018 NSLVE indicates that we have much more work to do.

Our NSLVE data demonstrates the importance of focusing not just on registration, but also on voter turnout. Our 2018 data showed that 79% of Brown students are registered to vote, similar to the 2016 data that showed that 84% of our campus population is registered (likely higher in presidential election years), but our campus-wide voting rates are not as high. In 2018, 58% of registered students voted, compared to 20% in 2014. Likewise, in 2016, 71% of our registered students voted, up from 57% in 2012. While the upwards growth is promising, the NSLVE data makes clear the need to focus on voter motivation and action. We will continue with voter registration drives starting in January for the Presidential Primaries and again in September as we get closer to the election. But, our focus will be on turnout.

In 2018, 56% of Brown students voted absentee, by mail, or early (another 21% voted in person and 23% were unknown and likely were also absentee). We saw a meaningful 13% decrease at Brown in the number of students voting in person from 2014 to 2018. This reinforces our knowledge that our strategy should focus on supporting absentee ballot processes.

One area that the NSLVE clearly indicates as a place of growth is around graduate student engagement. In 2014 and 2018, fewer than 30% of graduate students voted. While the rate increased 17.7% between those two elections, there is plenty of room for improvement. The Swearer Center's mission is linked to the undergraduate population at Brown, but we look forward to continuing to build off of our partnerships with Brown's Medical School, Graduate School and School of Public Health to improve these numbers.

Similarly, the NSLVE data points us to the need for improvement in specific, mostly STEM-related academic departments. In particular, the concentrations of BEO (Business, Entrepreneurship and Organizations), Engineering, and Liberal Humanities indicate lower rates of voting (it would be quite helpful, actually, if the team at the NSLVE could identify for us what majors are included in this last category). We plan on specific outreach to those departments to educate them about the data and to see how we can work with their faculty and their DUGs (Departmental Undergraduate Groups) to improve the numbers. Similarly, we plan to reach out with congratulations to English, Natural Resources, and Public Administration (again, it would be helpful to have more specificity from NSLVE on what is included here) to congratulate them for their high voter participation. Finally, it is our intent to connect with the faculty and DUGs in

Ethnic Studies, Psychology, and Visual and Performing Arts to note the over 30% improvement in student voting between 2014 and 2018.

Strategy 2020

Our strategy will focus on four main areas:

- Voter registration, access and mobilization of students for the 2020 election
- Voter education to provide students with tools to make informed decisions about candidates and local ballot issues for the 2020 election
- Student education about liberal democracy and civic engagement, specifically using the tool of shared governance as an established part of the institution's co-curriculum
- Student education about ways to go Beyond the Ballot to encourage civic engagement

Short term tactics

- Convene a voter education taskforce with our on-campus All in Challenge partners.
- Provide multiple access points for students to easily access stamps, envelopes and help for absentee balloting through Brown's Mail Services unit, the Libraries, the Watson and Taubman Centers, and the Swearer Center.
- Co-sponsor voter education forums, panels, workshops and films.
- Set up the Swearer Center to serve as a voting resource center, with staff to provide voter registration or absentee ballot assistance; a free Notary; free printing, envelopes and postage. Students can also access materials through inter-campus mail.
- Create an online *BrownVotes* [Library Guide](#) by February 2020 to provide a one-stop shopping site for students to find voter registration, issue and ballot information, and easy access to non-partisan voter guides.
- Regularly promote student registration on TurboVote through all campus mail, multiple social media sites, and in Swearer Center newsletters.
- Provide campus partners with specific text to use to promote TurboVote in their materials.
- Work with the Office of International Students to hold events promoting Beyond the Ballot opportunities and ways to get involved civically.
- TurboVote Registration with Graduate Student Orientation in August
- TurboVote registration with pre-orientations for Bonner Community Fellows, athletics, Third World Transition Program (TWTP), and with First Year Orientation in late August
- Swearer Center voter engagement table at the Swearer Open House
- Mock Voting Booth at Student Center on the Main Green with RI Secretary of State in late September

- Registration and Mobilization messaging on April 28, 2020 (Rhode Island Presidential Preference Primary); September 8, 2020 (RI State Primary) and November 3, 2020 (General Election).
- Campus wide social media outreach encouraging students to register to vote according to their home state guidelines, or on September 22, 2020 (National Voter Registration Day) or October 4, 2020 (Rhode Island General Election registration deadline).
- Election Day special events on Tuesday, November 3rd, driving students to the on-campus polling place in Salomon Hall, where in RI Same Day Voter Registration is possible for presidential candidates.
- By February 2020, reach out to faculty department chairs in departments with the lowest voter turnout according to the NSLVE to share this data and discuss ways to encourage student turnout. Likewise, by February 2020, reach out to the faculty department chairs in departments with the highest voter turnout to share this data and encourage student turnout.
- By February 2020, reach out to all DUGs (Departmental Undergraduate Groups) to talk about voter participation in their specific field of study and brainstorm ways to engage more voters in their DUG.
- Co-sponsor activities with student groups including the Brown Democrats, Brown Republicans and No Labels, which include but are not limited to phone banking, canvassing, co-sponsoring voter registration tables throughout campus and sponsoring debate viewing parties. These organizations also encourage students to participate through TurboVote. Note: while some student political organizations support partisan activities in support of particular candidates or parties, the Swearer Center and the University as a whole support nonpartisan civic engagement efforts.

Long term strategies

As mentioned above, the Swearer Center, with support from President Paxson's office, has been working on a Higher Education and Democratic Practice (HEDP) Initiative. The activities in year one of the HEDP initiative were focused on creating a dialogue across campus and in higher education circles across the country about the importance of the democratic knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for a thriving and deep democracy. We determined that Brown (and any institution of higher education) can most effectively promote democratic knowledge, skills and behaviors by cultivating its own democratic culture. A university with a democratic culture values debate and dialogue while engaging reciprocally with the community where it resides. It offers relevant events, classes, programs, and other avenues for students to acquire democratic knowledge, develop critical thinking, and participate in experiential learning in a relevant context that exposes them to perspectives different than their own.

Over the course of Spring 2019, the Swearer Center supported a project led by undergraduate research assistants and Center fellows to better understand student experiences with shared governance at Brown. Shared governance incorporates diverse community groups into decision-making processes and at the same time empowers specific actors to hold primary responsibility over particular issue areas. It entails a mix of democratic representation and specialization with accountability. At a university, shared governance cultivates participation among key stakeholders: faculty, administrators, staff, alumni, and students. We learned from some of these actors across campus to help inform next steps to develop a more inclusive system with respect to student participation in shared governance at Brown. We asked:

- How do students understand shared governance?
- How do students experience shared governance at Brown University?
- What steps can we take as a community to improve the quality of shared governance at Brown and specifically support student participation in university governance?

In general, students and administrators who are active in university governance appreciate that Brown has more robust shared governance structures relative to peer institutions, with multiple avenues for student participation. Student representatives are attracted to participating in governance because they want to make a positive difference in the experience of their peers and throughout the university as a whole. However, active students perceive a striking lack of understanding among the general student body with respect to what university shared governance is and how it operates at Brown, confirmed by our schoolwide pilot survey results.

The five most salient findings from our study include:

- A general lack of understanding and awareness of shared governance among students.
- Inconsistent application processes for committee work.
- Lack of public dissemination of committee work perceived as lack of transparency.
- Mixed student preparation for committee work.
- Greater institutionalization of student participation in committees at the university level versus the departmental level.

Based on these results, we have identified the following long term strategies to make democratic engagement an established component of Brown, going beyond the ballot. Two Swearer Civic Undergraduate Fellows worked on implementing these strategies this fall and will continue into the spring, in collaboration with students, centers, and university administrators:

- Inclusion of governance information in orientation packages and a Fall forum on university governance

- Greater standardization of student application and selection process for committee participation
- A comprehensive and easily accessible list of committees and their work at the university (Committees@Brown like Courses@Brown)
- Orientations and trainings for committee members
- Incentives for student labor in university governance
- Creation of a Shared Governance@Brown Website, which would incorporate Committees@Brown as a live access and application portal for all committees

The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (2017) finds that voting rates among students nationally were higher in areas where residents were more engaged in their communities. This finding is relevant for university campuses as well: inclusive governance is one form of fostering greater civic engagement in students most proximate community. Additionally, university governance structures educate community members about deliberation and democratic citizenship more broadly. Participation in university governance prepares students to help build healthy democratic practices during and beyond their time in higher education.

Reporting

The NSLVE reports for Brown from 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018 are shared prominently on the [Swearer Center website](#), along with reports from Swearer's Higher Education and Democratic Practice Initiative. The Swearer Center shares the outcomes of the NSLVE broadly on our social media, with campus partners, and with the Brown Daily Herald, our student run newspaper.

Evaluation

In addition to information provided by the NSLVE, the Swearer Center will evaluate our progress towards goals by tracking:

- Number of students who requested voting materials at multiple distribution sites on campus.
- Traffic and hits to the *BrownVotes* LibGuide.
- Survey results demonstrating the use of voter education slides in classes led by Swearer Center Engaged Scholarship faculty.
- Specific and targeted voter outreach plans with our campus and community partners.
- Progress toward including Turbovote as part of the Brown course registration or pre-orientation process.

- Development of Swearer Center workshops that have the goal of increasing civic learning and voter understanding of the candidates and ballot issues.
- Deeper pathways of beyond the ballot opportunities for non-citizens and those who are ineligible to vote to promote civic engagement.
- Website and other materials outlining the University's shared governance processes, as a method of democratic engagement.
- Student participation in shared governance opportunities (i.e. applicants for a specific committee position) across the University.