

Agnes Scott College Civic Engagement Action Plan



Developed May 2022

For the 2022-2023 Academic Year

Executive Summary

This civic engagement action plan was developed by the Civic Scotties Coalition, a cross-discipline group of faculty, staff, students, and community partners dedicated to promoting and advancing the role of civic learning and democratic engagement as part of the work of Agnes Scott College. This plan provides an overview of Agnes Scott College's plan for the 2022-2023 academic year but provides long-term goals stretching as far as 2030.

This plan was developed after numerous students requested that the college, and specifically the Center for Leadership and Service, do more to engage students in democracy and civic learning. Through the coalition's brainstorming, it became apparent that while the Center for Leadership and Service was already doing a lot to support students, these efforts were not well known or well advertised. Additionally, these offerings were done in a vacuum with minimal input from students about what they want and need from civic learning and student engagement. This led to the creation of the Civic Scotties Coalition, which in turn, assisted in the creation of this action plan and will be the key partner in its implementation.

Due to the current climate and decisions that must be made regarding the global pandemic, the coalition thought that it was prudent for us to develop a plan that could be implemented regardless of place and space.

Leadership

At Agnes Scott College, The Gué Pardue Hudson Center for Leadership, Engagement, and Service, specifically the Assistant Director for Service, is responsible for overseeing Agnes Scott College's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement. Under initial leadership from JLP Prince, Director of Community, Civic, and Global Engagement, a coalition was brought together to address the civic learning and democratic engagement programming on campus. The coalition is co-chaired by LeAnna Rensi-Casey and Destiny Tisdale '24, a current student and Impact Peer Leader for Prison Reform.

The primary role of the coalition is to develop the action plan to be implemented by the Center for Leadership and Service. Additionally, the working group will help promote civic engagement events during the Fall 2022 semester. Beyond the 2022 election, the coalition will serve as an advisory group in helping determine the direction of civic engagement efforts at the college.

Student members of the coalition were selected based on the students who showed keen interest in advancing civic engagement efforts on campus. These students, along with the former Director of Community, Civic, and Global Engagement, identified potential faculty, staff, and community stakeholders to serve on the working group. Emails were sent to the potential members inviting them to join. In addition to campus representatives, a representative from Georgia Equality's civic engagement arm was invited to join the coalition. Georgia Equality has been a key partner in previous voter engagement efforts. At this time, the working group member's responsibilities are primarily advisory in nature, with the student members taking on leadership for some of the student events that have been developed as part of the action plan.

Our working group is comprised of the following individuals:

LeAnna Rensi-Casey, Director of the Gué Pardue Hudson Center for Leadership, Engagement, and Service

Destiny Tisdale '24 (co-chair), Student, Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow, Fair Fight U Chapter Manager

Christian Dacus, State Outreach Organizer, Georgia Equality

Julia Rademacher-Wedd, Student, Democracy Fellow

Nicole Herranz, Student, Democracy Fellow

Sydney Little, Student

Erin J. Austin, DeKalb County Election Board

Peyton Capehart, Coordinator for Leadership Development, Gué Pardue Hudson Center for Leadership, Engagement, and Service

Our group met bi-weekly during the Spring 2022 semester to coordinate the development of the action plan and will continue to meet monthly in regards to the execution.

Commitment

At this point in time, civic learning and democratic engagement are not explicitly demonstrated by the institution but is threaded more implicitly through things such as our mission statement; *Agnes Scott College educates women to think deeply, live honorably, and engage the intellectual and social challenges of their times*, our strategic plan, and our student learning outcomes. In a similar manner, a commitment to civic engagement is a part of campus culture, though with limited formalization outside of the Center for Leadership, Engagement and Service. While there are faculty and staff members throughout the institution who are personally dedicated to advancing democratic engagement, it is not manifested in campus-wide initiatives. The true influence in this culture is our student body. They are passionate about a variety of social issues and are heavily engaged with civic learning, especially as it relates to activism and advocacy work and they are a large driving force behind the work happening in civic learning and democratic engagement.

The college has a centralized assessment and evaluation process that is overseen by the President's Office and the Office of Institutional Research. Offices have the freedom to choose what they assess each year, but they are required to complete the assessment. The Center for Leadership, Engagement and Service will choose to focus on educational programming, voter registration, institutionalized civic engagement, and implementation of resources as part of our assessment efforts for the 2022-2023 academic year. Currently, there is not an expansive awareness of the dispersal of civic learning and democratic engagement in the general education curriculum, but the Civic Scotties Coalition is planning to use this year to develop a stronger awareness of what is currently happening so that we can better implement it in the coming years. Additionally, beyond the work of the Center for Leadership,

Engagement and Service, mapping needs to be completed for the integration of civic engagement throughout the co-curriculum.

Landscape

Currently, civic learning and democratic engagement are only limitedly represented in our campus student learning outcomes, but the skills necessary are represented very heavily. These outcomes are tied to the Summit initiative, which prepares students to be leaders in a global society. These outcomes include:

1. Identify, explain, and analyze global themes, processes and systems
2. Demonstrate knowledge and skills essential for global engagement
3. Critically examine the relationship between dominant and marginalized cultures, subcultures or group
4. Communicate effectively through writing and speaking, especially across cultural or linguistic differences
5. Recognize, analyze and evaluate arguments
6. Articulate and appraise problems and solutions from multiple perspectives, critically considering diverse sources of information
7. Recognize, analyze, and employ effective teamwork
8. Identify and assess one's values, interests and abilities
9. Practice or interpret creative expression or probe fundamental questions of value and meaning
10. Interpret quantitative information or demonstrate the methods of inquiry appropriate for investigating the natural world
11. Analyze human behavior or social relations
12. Cultivate and maintain interpersonal relationships and networks
13. Demonstrate confidence and motivation to effect change

14. Practice continual improvement of one's whole person and seek and utilize feedback
15. Identify, evaluate and strategically utilize campus and community resources
16. Demonstrate honorable and ethical behavior and civic engagement

In terms of assessment data, the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement provides the most complete picture of our campus' democratic engagement. In the 2020 election we saw 91.4% of our eligible students were registered to vote and 91.5% of registered students voted on the 2020 Election Day. We are well above national averages, but know that we can still improve these numbers with a more coordinated cross-campus answer.

One of the most interesting dynamics demonstrated on campus is seen in our student organizations - while we do not have student organizations for political parties (such as College Democrats or College Republicans), we do have a large number of groups for advancing specific political issues such as reproductive rights, environmental justice, immigration, voting access, and empowering women to run for office. These group's efforts manifest in various ways including educational and social events, but also activism, protests, and advocacy work with elected officials. Additionally, the Student Government Association is attempting to change the college's academic calendar so that there are no classes on major election days. The Student Government Association is also integrating the components of civic engagement into the student perspective of the importance of voting for class representatives and executive boards to be a parallel to our Democratic system in America.

We, as an institution, are currently unsure of how civic learning and democratic engagement manifests itself within the curriculum. There historically has not been any attempt to track or champion this cause. Because of this, we are including research into the implementation of civic learning and democratic engagement in the classroom as part of our

short-term goals. We have anecdotal evidence that some faculty are including it, including the faculty representation on this coalition, but no quantifiable data.

Civic learning and democratic engagement at Agnes Scott College is centered in the co-curriculum and is coordinated by the Center for Leadership, Engagement, and Service, and specifically the Assistant Director of Service. This directly manifests in the office's Scotties Vote initiative which has historically included voter registration drives, coordinating rides to polling locations, and paying for absentee ballot postage, among other things. While other departments develop skills that are essential to being an engaged citizen, that is secondary to the context of the programs.

In the age of COVID-19, internal barriers have increased since the coalition has formed. College funding for community, civic, and global engagement is proposed to be reduced by over 50% in light of predicted enrollment declines due to the pandemic. Additionally, because the college has been primarily focused on leadership and global learning over the past few years, as well as professional success more recently, it is hard to have a voice at the table to have campus partners reframe their work in terms of civic learning and democratic engagement. Additionally, there is only one staff member at the college who has civic engagement as part of their job responsibilities, and those responsibilities exist alongside other responsibilities such as community engagement/service and co-curricular global learning.

Being positioned in Georgia, Agnes Scott College faces unique challenges when getting our students to the polls to vote. Due to the exact match policies with voter registration to state records, along with stringent ID requirements, it is difficult for students, especially those from out of state to vote at their campus address. Anecdotal conversations have shown that some students have had to vote via a provisional ballot because their Driver's License

was from another state. Additionally, despite having a polling location less than a quarter of a mile from campus (Renfroe Middle School), students who register to vote on campus are assigned to a polling place approximately a mile away from campus (Holy Trinity Parish Episcopal Church). Include something here about not being able to provide transportation to polling places for students.

In an attempt to overcome these external barriers, we are doing education work with students about the voter ID requirements. Because of Agnes Scott College's Summit program, each student participates in a global study tour during the spring semester of their first year. This has led to the implementation of passport programs on campus where students can apply, take passport photos, and receive financial assistance to obtain a passport. We are educating students and reminding them that this passport is also a valid form of identification for elections that they already have, regardless of their home state. Historically, with the situation involving polling place distance, the institution has started providing shuttle service to the polling place on election day and hopes to expand to include our early voting site on the Saturdays leading up to the election. Include something here about finding other solutions due to new legislation.

Overall, the resources Agnes Scott College needs in order to successfully achieve the civic learning and democratic engagement goals outlined in this action plan are ones that we already have. While additional fiscal assistance would be wonderful, what is truly needed is an increase in human resources. Additional staffing would be appreciated, but what would be most beneficial is an overall increase in campus buy-in to civic learning and democratic engagement as something that is everyone's responsibility, not just those within the Center for Leadership, Engagement, and Service and the Political Science and History departments.

Goals

Long-Term Goals

- Increase voting rate to 90% of eligible students by 2030.
- Increase registration rate to 95% of eligible students by 2030.
- Create a culture where skills such as deliberative dialogue, information literacy, and community service are seen as key elements of civic learning and demographic engagement by 2030.
- Integrating civic learning and democratic engagement into academic curriculum to enhance the learning outcome of the student body by 2030.
- Establish a civic engagement standard that will be used to analyze faculty syllabi and their appliance with integrating democratic efforts into class curriculum by 2030.
- Develop a relationship with Agnes Scott College Student Government Association to encourage civic engagement in our democratic process by emphasizing their previous roles as college students who elect student representatives.

Short-Term Goals

- Create a MyAgnesScott page to support the dissemination of civic engagement resources to students before the beginning of the Fall 2023 semester.
- Increase voter registration rates of Science and Mathematics students to similar levels as other disciplines by the 2022 midterm elections.
- Campus wide closure for Election Day in 2023 and the years that follow.

Strategy

Voter Registration

Agnes Scott's Civic Scotties Coalition's strategy to increase voter registration on our campus includes a series of voter registration events. This includes voter registration tables at both Move-In and a community resource fair during New Student Orientation to capture first-year students. During the first few weeks of the semester, we will have a weekly table in the main campus dining hall with resources for registering to vote and voting in the 2022 midterm elections. There will also be tabling events at many major fall semester events to encourage students to register to vote and learn more about upcoming elections. The Civic Scotties Coalition will also be partnering with various campus organizations and centers to host events on National Voter Registration Day and National Vote Early Day.

Educational Programming

The Civic Scotties Coalition will be utilizing social media campaigns to push educational material to the student population. This includes using traditional social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) as well as campus specific social media (MyAgnes, the Irvine daily newsletter). These campaigns will focus on educating students on the voting platforms we currently use, TurboVote and IssueVoter, as well as educating students on local politics and voting procedure. These social media campaigns will also include education on national and local voter education resources and how to best utilize them. The content of the social media campaigns will include infographics, interactive polls and questions, student takeovers and other attractive posts to engage students participation.

This educational programming strategy will also include in-person programming during National Voter Education Week and Constitution Day that includes a watch-a-thon of ‘SchoolHouse Rock’ to provide students with the necessary information while permitting them to have a good time.

Community-Based Programming (Scotties for the Polls)

Agnes Scott College prioritizes partnerships with local organizations in Decatur, including our governmental representatives. We plan to launch initiatives that will encourage students to vote, while also contributing to the voting efforts of our community. We host a Welcome to Decatur Fair every fall in the beginning of the semester, which provides students with networking opportunities with different local businesses. With Dekalb County Voter Registration and Election Office in attendance, students will be able to sign up as poll workers. We hope to extend this partnership so that students will be trained to register other eligible voters and to receive Deputy Registrar Training. Pushing Scotties to be Poll Workers on Election Day.

Reporting

This action plan, its results, as well as our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement reports will be made available on both the website and Canvas site mentioned above. Its placement on the public website, along with the internal Canvas site, will ensure that it is available to multiple audiences.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a core component of the civic engagement action plan process. This will allow Agnes Scott College to understand our progress towards the goal outlined in this plan. Evaluative data will be gathered from sources such as the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, as well as data collected from TurboVote, attendance at civic learning events, and usage of MyAgnesScott page. NSLVE will provide information regarding students who are registered to vote and actually voted, providing demographic breakdowns based on information such as racial identity, gender, and major discipline. Additionally, with the TurboVote referral link process, we are able to create specific urls for different locations (such as social media, website, canvas, campus newsletter, etc) to see which of our campaigns are most effective at getting students registered to vote.

The Associate Director of Service Will be primarily responsible for the evaluative efforts with assistance from the coalition members. For data gathered that we have baseline information, we will compare results for previous years to determine success. For the other data points being collected, we hope to establish baseline data that can be used to determine future success. Evaluation results will be shared in a summative format via the aforementioned website as well as the MyAgnesScott page.