

# Albion College Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022-2023 Academic Year

## I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Elizabeth Netcher, Assistant Director for Campus Life to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Albion College. While the Office of Campus Life will be facilitating and leading these efforts, they will ultimately be joined by many different units, offices, departments, and organizations on and around Albion College. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over the 2022-2023 Academic Year, for the 2022 election, on and around our campus in Albion, Michigan. Albion College has only one campus in Albion, Michigan. It centers on in-person learning and is trending towards being a majority black institution (approximately at 45% currently), but is still a predominately white institution today. Because of this trend, great care was taken to ensure key stakeholders across campus were invited and part of the Voting Initiatives Coalition. These stakeholders provided important information on how to reach diverse audiences and ensure that we are centering non-dominate populations in our strategies.

This action plan was developed because Albion College began centering student voting advocacy in the 2020 election, and wishes to continue this advocacy with a focus on improving student voter turnout. Our college mission states "...that valuable learning takes place in and outside the classroom, on and off campus" which makes voting integral, not only to democracy, but to our institution as well. In order to do this, we have four specific goals, both long and short term, that we would like to achieve for the 2022 Election. Our four short term goals that we will be most focused on for this action plan are:

1. Raising the voter turnout on Albion's campus for the midterm election to 35%. Currently Albion's voter turnout for the 2018 midterm election was 27.7%
2. Have the Provost include information about voter registration in the suggested content for syllabi
3. Faculty participation and understanding of the importance of voting and its relevance to all classrooms
4. Presidential announcement of NSLVE report, as well as publishing on website

The following groups will be leading this work at Albion College in order to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Undergraduate Students
- Faculty
- Civic/Political/Community Engagement Center
- Student Affairs Staff
- Academic Affairs Staff

After the 2022 midterm election we will be convening as a coalition again to evaluate our action plan, the steps that were actually taken, and what improvements or new strategies could be utilized for the 2024 election.

## **II. Leadership**

Elizabeth Netcher - Assistant Director for Campus Life will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be facilitating the creation of Albion College's Action Plan, overseeing the Voting Initiatives Coalition, and ensuring that the voting plan is carried out to the best of the coalition's ability. The Assistant Director currently does not have succession plans, but this will be determined after the 2022 Election.

This coalition is tasked with carrying out, not only this action plan, but all voting initiatives for Albion College. This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:

- Representation from different parts of campus, including student leadership,
- Representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise,
- Trusted leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy,
- Leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus in to our work

The below are all committed members of the Voting Initiatives Coalition. They were all chosen based on their representation of key stakeholders across campus or in the community, or based on their previous work with voting at Albion College. New members are recruited either by direct recommendation from current coalition members, or as the coalition gains popularity, we have had some groups seek out membership themselves. Because voting involves everyone, we accept all those interested in joining and add them to the coalition. Should an individual be unable to continue, we would first ask another member of that area/organization, etc. to takeover.

- Kaitlyn Hernandez - Student Organization, Diversability
- Amber Zoerman - Student Organization, College Democrats
- Daniel Saunders - Student Organization, College Republicans
- Samantha Ahnen - Student Organization, Student Senate
- Brittany Burch - President's Office representative
- Eddie Visco - Gerald R. Ford Institute for Leadership in Public Policy and Service
- Carrie Walling - Political Science Department
- Laurie Merian - Athletics, Women's Lacrosse
- Jake DeCola - Athletics, Men's Lacrosse
- Karlo Delos-Angeles - Athletics, eSports
- Mikayla England - Student Organization, Students for Reproductive Justice
- Jill Domingo - City of Albion, City Clerk
- Gabe Shafer - Community Living

Aside from this diverse group, the only other members we wish could be involved would be more members of the community (and particularly maybe members of the local government), as well as more faculty participation.

Our group plans to meet once a month spring 2022 – virtually. We will meet more frequently in fall 2022, most likely virtual as well.

### **III. Commitment**

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. Our President has signed the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation and is committed to increasing Albion's voter turnout.

We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state:

- "We value: - An intellectually challenging and diverse community of learners, teachers, scholars, and thinkers who share and promote a passion for learning and innovation in teaching and scholarship;
- Our passionate, loyal, and committed alumni;
  - Diversity as an expression and affirmation of the human condition and as a source of strength and celebration for all members of the community;
  - Fairness, justice, ethical development, and personal responsibility;
  - Small classes and personal attention in a residential undergraduate environment where the daily interaction of faculty, staff, and students fosters critical thinking, advances knowledge through collaborative scholarship, respects academic freedom, and inspires lifelong learning;
  - Disciplinary and interdisciplinary study;
  - Intellectual, personal, social, ethical, and spiritual development within our local and global communities that prepares graduates for productive lives and careers; a breadth and depth of opportunities and experiences; and, the drive to help each other make meaningful and educated contributions to our world;
  - Effective stewardship of all our resources—physical, intellectual, environmental, human, and financial; we strive to make decisions that are fiscally responsible;
  - Opportunities for collegiality based on shared interests for the common good that lead to rich friendships among faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the greater Albion community."

On campus, we've seen:

- Voter education resources
  - Creation of communication toolkits for each election to help faculty and staff communicate with students about voting
- Political clubs or student organizations
  - We have lots of political student organizations doing a variety of events in election and non-election years. Some consistent ones have been:
    - Constitution Day celebrations
    - National Voter Registration Day
    - Debates – both with local candidates and with political student organizations together (like College Democrats and Republicans)
- Campus leaders promoting voting
  - The use of the communication toolkit, mentioned above, has helped campus leaders feel confident in their ability to reach students through a variety of templates
- Voter registration tables
  - We have had voter registration tables, but often not consistently and most often on specific days (like National Voter Registration Day).
- Protests / rallies / walkouts
  - We have had protests for issues that students feel strongly about (such as Black Lives Matter or Suicide Prevention)
- Voting programming (i.e. Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day, etc.)
  - Voting programming has been one of the most consistent with many academic departments and student organizations taking part in this work, albeit often individually.

On campus, we've experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
- Deliberative dialogues

There is no mention of civic learning and democratic engagement in our mission, vision, or values - yet!

## **IV. Landscape**

Albion College is a small private liberal-arts residential college. It has approximately 1300 students and most are in-state students.

While we are a small institution, this can be an asset because the likelihood of students encountering someone who asks them about voting is much higher. This is helpful knowledge to have because we know we can direct information to these important figures, as well as

involving student organizations, which often have overlapping members with other organizations.

While we do not have access to comprehensive demographic information about our student body at this time, currently, Albion College is still a majority white institution. But, with a campus on its way to becoming majority black, our focus has shifted, as well as our approaches to voting outreach. We are deliberate in involving students of color in the Voting Initiatives Coalition in order to ensure that the strategies and goals we have will realistically reach this important demographic.

## **V. Goals**

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration:

We know our campus faces the following challenges internally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan do not mention civic learning and democratic engagement outright.
- The voter engagement work on our campus was very siloed within offices.
- We don't have sustainable or consistent funding.
- Our current president is an interim president, with no current indication of when a permanent one will be hired.
- Our 2020 NSLVE data indicates that second year students are the least likely to vote.
  - Although the data from 2018 had them just barely above first years (by 10 votes)

We also know our campus faces the following challenges externally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- The political views of our students do not generally align with our institution's surrounding communities.
- There is apprehension from the surrounding community about Albion College and whether it should have as large of a hand in community matters as it does.
- Our working relationship with our City Clerk was only forged this year.

With that said, we know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- We have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.

- We use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is distributed throughout many offices and areas of expertise.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We are able to engage student leaders for the leadership of our initiative.
- We have a working relationship with our local election office.

With this in mind, we have set the following goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

1. Raising the voter turnout on Albion's campus for the midterm election to 35%. Currently Albion's voter turnout for the 2018 midterm election was 27.7%
2. Have the Provost include information about voting registration in the suggested content for syllabi
3. Faculty participation and understanding of the importance of voting and its relevance to all classrooms
4. With a new president, we would like to see a presidential announcement of the 2022 NSLVE report, as well as publishing on the website (with past NSLVE reports)

We have also set the following goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

1. Raise voter turnout on Albion's campus above the national average (midterm or presidential)
  - 1.5. Based on NSLVE information from 2016/2018 the turnout difference between presidential election and midterm was approximately 6.3%. Our sub goal would be to get this gap to 2% or lower
2. Include voter registration information in 1st year packets sent during the summer (currently comprised of mostly information about housing)
3. Consistent budget for voting initiatives
4. Inclusion of civic learning and democratic engagement in a job description

Bonus goal: Have civic learning and democratic engagement added to at least one (or more!) of: mission/vision/values/strategic plan

## VI. Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** in the **short term** (within the next year):

- Voter registration drives
- passive engagement like encouraging emails, and specifically a campus-wide communication toolkit
  - calls-to-action from administration
- student newspaper ads
- debate watch parties
- debates with local candidates

- non-partisan voter information about candidates
  - links to multiple non-partisan sources on our webpage
- contract with TurboVote to have a dedicated website to register, request ballots, and election reminders
- standing webpage on Albion.edu that not only directs to TurboVote, but also has an FAQ section, as well as non-partisan voting guides from many different sources

These are tactics that we **plan to do** in the **short term**:

- Provide free stamps for absentee ballots
  - Albion City does not currently include paid postage with absentee ballots. Since this is a barrier to voting, and we know that Albion City is not the only voting district to not include paid postage, we will have free stamps for all absentee ballots in the Post Office located on campus, within our student union.
- Provide ID cards at no cost during the period Oct 25<sup>th</sup> – Nov 8<sup>th</sup>
  - Oct 25<sup>th</sup> is the last day to register online and by mail. After this date, students will have to register in-person and will need a form of ID to do so. Because college IDs are a recognized form of ID for voter registration, the replacement fee should be waived during this period. This will ensure that students, regardless if they lost their only form of ID or cannot afford a replacement cost, will be able to vote.
- Promote voter registration through our events software - Engage
  - There is a prompt that comes up every time a student logs into Engage that asks them if they are registered to vote and re-directs to TurboVote if the student clicks the prompt
- Direct students to TurboVote more often
  - Because TurboVote is a one-stop-shop for almost all things voting, we are making a conscience effort to utilize this service as often as possible, especially when online voter registration is arguably the easiest way to register.
- Update communication toolkit
  - This will include: powerpoint slides that can be added to presentations (with or without commentary, long and short commentary to say before/after class or before/after a presentation, long and short email templates, long and short commentary for coaches to use before/after practices
- Encourage the use of a voting plan
  - When talking with students if they indicate they are already registered, the next question should always be "what is your voting plan?" We know that voters with a plan are more likely to follow-thru on voting – which is an area Albion lacks the most.
- Encourage students to hold their peers accountable - "I am voting, are you?"
- Encourage all student organizations to develop their own suggested voting guide
  - At minimum, have those student organizations that are part of the voting initiatives coalition start the momentum

- Share the 2020 NSLVE report
  - Publishing on the website
  - And sharing the data with academic departments that had low turnout and emphasizing the need for engagement within said department.
- Partner with the Nature Center for walks to the polls
  - In an effort to not only promote voting, but sustainability as well, we plan to partner with the Nature Center to facilitate walks-to-the-polls every hour the polls are open. We know that having a buddy will encourage students to keep standing in lines, no matter how long.

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **short term**:

- Fuel for Voting Block Party
  - Have our student programming board, Union Board, host a Fuel for Voting block party with refreshments, food trucks, and music. The food and atmosphere will entice students over, where we will have students ask them if they have voted, and if not to join the walks-to-the-polls, which will leave from the block party every hour. Peer pressure may not always be a good thing, but it can be used for good.
- Encourage staff and faculty to register and vote
  - While our efforts are obviously concentrated on students, we can't forget that there are whole other voting demographics within arms reach as well.
- Have the President announce the publishing of the 2020 NSLVE report
  - This will ensure that a benchmark is established and hold the college accountable.
- Have the President also announce his own voting plan (in-person or absentee ballot)
  - Not only do we know those with a voting plan are more likely to follow-thru on voting, but the president has incredible sway over the entire campus. Announcing this will not only encourage students to vote, but faculty and staff as well!
- Voter registration information added to guideline syllabus
  - The Provost puts out a guideline syllabus with all information the college would like added to each faculty member's syllabus. Though they are not required to add this information, it will hopefully encourage faculty to add it to their own syllabi
- Presence of City Clerk(s) on campus
  - We would love to have the City Clerk host hours on campus. Ideally, all fall semester, but at minimum during Oct 25 – Nov 7, the period after online and mail registration has ended.
- Borrowing of voting materials (voting stations, sample ballots, etc.)
  - Although the proximity to Election Day may pose a logistical challenge, we would like to borrow some voting materials from the city clerk's office to host a "How to Vote" event. Many first-time voters may not feel comfortable or even anxious

voting for the first time and not knowing what to do. With conflicting information, and many voters who may have voted in different states, it can be scary walking into an unknown location and then immediately being asked to sign something! We would be able to walk them through each step of voting so that they can feel comfortable and confident actually voting on election day.

- TurboVote competitions
  - Utilizing TurboVote, we will encourage academic departments, athletic teams, and Greek houses to compete to register the most voters! We would promote the competition starting near the end of September. We will have the competition run Oct 1 – Oct 25 (the last day of online registration).

These are tactics that we **are already doing** for the **long term** (beyond the next year):

- Application to get Voter Friendly Campus designation for 2024 election season
- Publishing of NSLVE reports
  - This will not only hold Albion College accountable, but will establish public benchmarks for how we are doing
- Working to institutionalize civic learning and democratic engagement work

These are tactics that we **want to do** in the **long term**:

- Host debates with local/state (and perhaps even federal) candidates
  - In the past Albion has hosted a few debates with local candidates, and occasionally a state candidate. It would be great to restart this.
- Inclusion of civic learning and democratic engagement in one or more job descriptions

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **long term**:

- HR Volunteer Days expansion
  - The HR department has a policy to give every employee two days to use for volunteering within Albion City. The use of this policy is great for encouraging already registered voters to sign up and be an election inspector (poll worker). Currently, it is strictly limited to Albion City, which is difficult for election inspectors because each voting location is limited in the amount of people they can accept. So even if you applied to work in Albion City, you may be assigned to a surrounding community that needs you more, putting your volunteer day(s) in jeopardy. We would like to see an expansion of this policy to include volunteering that is not directly in Albion City.
- Have voter registration information announced at all athletic games
  - Or at minimum have a graphic added to visual boards (?)
- Creation of a Great Lakes College Association (GLCA) voting working group
  - The GLCA currently has groups for things like conduct, Vice Presidents, etc. I would like to see us meet as similar institutions regularly to discuss our efforts in civic learning and democratic engagement.
- ID office ask about registration

- When students come to get their ID we would have them also ask if that student is interested in registering to vote. The ID office currently has public use computers that could have a webpage for TurboVote up at all times

Post-election, these are tactics that we **plan to do**:

- “Now what?”
  - Shortly after the election we would like to host an informative session breaking down what the results of the election mean. Especially in Michigan, there are quite a few ballot initiatives that could have reaching effects.
- How to contact your representatives
  - We would like to have our coalition members, College Democrats and College Republicans, host sessions on how to contact each type of representative (from local to federal), be it mailings or phone calls or even how to visit in person (and whether or not you can do that!). Most students are not aware that contacting your representative not only, does/can make a difference in their stances, but is also incredibly easy and quick!
- Informative sessions on the issues
  - Also in partnership with College Democrats and College Republicans, we would like to host sessions on issues students may not feel they are informed about. We would bring in experts to break down all the nuances and do our best to invite faculty who are relevant to the issues to speak, as well as inviting the crowd to ask questions they may not have been able to ask before

Post-election, these are tactics that we **hope to do**:

- Sessions with local representatives
  - Because local elections often happen outside midterm and presidential elections, but still have sweeping consequences for local citizens, we would like to use the partnership we have with the City Clerk, as well as the college’s own partnership with high-ranking local officials to host sessions where these elected representatives can speak to what they do (like what is a comptroller? What is a road commissioner? Why are these even important?) and ways that concerned citizens can talk to them about local issues, as well as inviting the crowd to ask questions they may not have been able to ask before

## **VII. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)**

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2018 and 2020. In 2018 our registration rate was 64.8%. While we don’t have data for midterm elections before 2018, our registration rate did go up in 2020 to 84.7%. Albion does

not report race or ethnicity, but we do have access to data breaking down other important categories.

In 2018 Albion College had 1421 eligible voters, but only 394 voted. In 2020 Albion had 1444 eligible voters, but only 890 voted.

Albion College is a private liberal arts institution and in comparison, nationally other private institutions had a voting average of 39% in 2018, while Albion's own percentage was only 28%. In 2018 we had 176 students vote in-person and 192 students not in person, with 26 students with an unknown voting method.

In 2018 we had 1347 enrolled students ages 18-21, with only 358 who voted. We had 97 enrolled students ages 22-24, with only 32 who voted. Our numbers for 2020 are reasonably the same, but we did have increases. In 2020 we had 1356 enrolled students ages 18-21, with 829 who voted. We had 102 enrolled students ages 22-24, with 57 who voted.

In 2018 we had:

394 first years enrolled, with only 20 who voted.

404 second years, with only 21 who voted.

651 upper level, with only 36 who voted.

In 2020 we had:

472 first years enrolled, with only 52 who voted.

344 second years, with only 62 who voted.

649 upper level, with only 66 who voted.

Excluding Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Humanities, which encompasses students who haven't declared a major, in 2018 the program with the most students who voted was Social Sciences with 60. In 2020 the program with the most students who voted was Biological and Biomedical Sciences with 94. The program with the least number of students who voted was Visual and Performing Arts in 2018 with 12. In 2020 the program with the least number of students who voted was History with 15.

With all of this information we have determined that:

Most students prefer to vote absentee

There are significant gaps in who is eligible to vote and who actually votes

More focus needs to be on second and first year students who consistently vote the least.

There needs to be more outreach to individual academic program departments because we have multiple departments that had enrolled students, but none that actually voted.

There are also significant gaps in academic programs with enrolled students vs. students who voted.

## **VIII. Reporting & Evaluation**

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Email to members of our campus coalition
- Email to the President

We plan to share the 2022 NSLVE data when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Posting to our webpage
  - [albion.edu/vote](http://albion.edu/vote)
- Hopefully, a presidential announcement as well!

We will collect feedback on this Action Plan by:

- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect
- Integrating feedback collection into individual campus efforts

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly