Campus Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates

Executive Summary

Civic engagement is a distinctive of an Alfred State education and a fundamental element of ongoing strategic initiatives related to applied learning, student success and local/regional impact. Our institution offers both associate and baccalaureate degrees that are anchored by this applied learning approach and the Colleges mission *to prepare in-demand and involved students in a caring community* makes civic initiatives a cornerstone to engagement across campus. While civic initiatives are integral to our campus culture, we continue to identify new inroads to broaden engagement and learning pertaining to political involvement and voting rates. As such, the following comprehensive campus action plan is focused on registering, educating, and turning out student voters. Our politically neutral plan focuses on co-curricular and curricular pathways to enhance the likelihood of pervasive outreach and substantive, informed civic participation among students. Implementation will rely on robust collaboration engaging internal and external stakeholders in data informed programming and information sharing.

The plan will be implemented on the Alfred and Wellsville campuses and our Northland extension as well as integrated into the online platform for online students. The timeline will run one academic year from summer 2023 through summer 2024, though the evolution of efforts will persist beyond that timeframe. Our goals are centered around increased understanding and exposure to resources, increased voter participation and political impact of our student body, and long-term development of campus processes to ensure we are reaching our entire student body and building sustainable systems, intentional access points, and accessible political engagement culture across our campus. While all three areas have immediate, short-term implementation components, our intention is to scaffold access and increase our ability to connect and engage our student body each year because of improvements and diversification of our outreach model. This plan was developed by the Director of Global Engagement and Civic Wellbeing and the Assistant Vice President for Wellness & Student Support, garnering important feedback and collaboration faculty/staff colleagues and student leaders. Of notable value was the input of the leadership team described below, an inclusive committee of civic advocates who help inform actions taken to achieve short- and long-term goals for engagement.

Leadership

The leadership team for this initiative includes the following positions:
- Deputy Commissioner, Allegany County Board of Elections
- Coordinator, Accessibility & Tutoring Services, Academic Affairs
- Deputy Commissioner, Allegany County Board of Elections
- Student Senate representative, Student
- Civic Engagement Advocate, Student

ALFRED STATE COLLEGE
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

- Director of Global Engagement and Civic Wellbeing, Student Affairs
- Assistant Vice President of Wellness & Student Support, Student Affairs
- Office of Accessibility, Academic Affairs

The leadership team is based on position rather than focused on individuals. Should there be any transition of professional staff, a new staff member would be requested to serve a role within the group. Student representation will often change from year to year due to student government elections and employment selection. However, students serving in these positions would consistently demonstrate a knowledge and passion in supporting this political engagement effort. We intentionally weave in our Accessibility Service area to ensure that we are doing our best to eliminate barriers to engaging with the democratic process. This office helps further guide how we are disseminating information across campus and directly supports engagement through the accessibility services area.

Locally, the Allegany County Board of Elections is a key community partner in exchanging information and coordinating efforts to maximize student engagement. The Community Advisory Board provide valuable external input on the activities and direction of this office. This board, which meets annually, is made up of leaders from key sectors within the region who can share additional insight for future effective action.

National partners enable access to resources and best practices that enhance outreach and engagement. These partners include:

- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge whose mission "strives to change civic culture and institutionalize democratic engagement activities and programs on college campuses, making them a defining feature of campus life".
- Voter Friendly Campus Designation, a joint venture of Campus Vote Project and NASPA seeks to "help institutions develop plans to coordinate administrators, faculty, and student organizations in civic and electoral engagement."
- Tufts University Institute for Democracy & Higher Education is a non-partisan applied learning entity which has developed customized National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement reports that outline Alfred State students' aggregate voter registration and turnout rates in national elections since 2012

Commitment

Alfred State College has a long tradition of community engagement, outreach, collaboration, and service. This tradition is exemplified in the institutional seal with the words "Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve". Our campus values of respect, integrity, service, and dedication alongside a core strategic commitment to *cultivate a caring community* helps us encourage democratic engagement across divisions, departments, and disciplines. Notably, our campus president has recently (March 2024) signed the ALL In President's Commitment, further signifying campus wide support for our initiatives.

Our Center for Civic Leadership provides dedicated infrastructure and leadership to civic initiatives, keenly focused on promoting a culture of civic engagement on campus to prepare students to be civic leaders in their community. The Center will continue to serve as a catalyst for political engagement efforts on campus in collaboration with a representative leadership team and proactively weaves voter awareness resources into all service opportunities.

While our initiatives have been favorably received by campus partners, the President's visible commitment gives greater credence to our engagement efforts, and it is our hope that this visible commitment will expand and enhance our reach by way of willing collaborators.

Each year we have been able to make greater inroads into campus wide celebration of civic life in respect to voting. Our civic leadership team has been able to expand to host 6 dedicated student Civic Engagement Advocates in the 2023-2024 academic year (up 2 from the year prior), each holding a shared commitment to expanding our non-partisan political activism across campus, amongst other duties. Our student staff ranges from first year students to seniors, each with different majors and connections across campus. Their perspective is invaluable when developing ways to reach our student body.

While we have been able to passively engage students during Orientation Sessions in previous years, we received administrative support in August of 2023 to intentionally weave voter registration information into the first-year onboarding experience as part of the mandatory information sessions conducted after move-in and all of the students in attendance were invited to register (if eligible) and provided voter resources. It is this type of support that is a direct result of administrative commitment and, given the presidents recent ALL-In commitment signing, we have been able to further advance efforts by garnering support to build Voter Registration inquiry and resources into an online orientation module that will sit alongside other mandatory sessions as part of the onboarding process for all new students, including transfers. Administrative support and campus collaboration is key in demonstrating the shared commitment to voter engagement and political awareness.

Messaging from the college President and VP of Student Affairs is utilized to support get out the vote efforts beyond the reach of the Center for Civic Leadership. Over the past year, we have also seen greater connection with academic departments and have had opportunities to bring this information directly into different classrooms as guest speakers. In addition, campus forum events such as Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day and Awareness Week offer opportunities to highlight expertise and ideas from faculty and our wider community. Our Community Needs Hub, which serves as a campus resource, thrift, and pantry space, has voter awareness and registration information housed at the front entry. A Residential Life competition called Pioneer Cup provides incentives for related activities and event attendance. Collaboration with key community partners throughout the year, like the League of Women Voters, enables synergy of effort and enhanced impact.

ALFRED STATE COLLEGE
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Landscape

SUNY College of Technology at Alfred (Alfred State College) is located on two rural campuses positioned in the Southern Tier of New York State and one extension location at the Northland Workforce Training Center, located in the city of Buffalo. According to IPEDS, 49% of our student body are Pell recipients. While we aim to get voter resources in front of our entire student body, we have been able to work intentionally with groups like our Educational Opportunity Program to ensure we are weaving civic awareness and engagement into their summer preparatory experience and broadening likelihood that they will register to vote and build connection with Civic Leadership for future efforts. With a student body just over 3500, the vast majority are residential or commuter students. Approximately 240 of our students are completely online and while we have voter registration information available on our Political Engagement website, and all student receive communications from administrative leads each semester regarding voting, we would like to identify other intentional ways to get voter resources in front of our online student body (potentially creating a link on the student portal page – goal for future plan).

We are still awaiting our most recent NSLVE data. That said, the September 2022 "Student Voting Rates for SUNY College of Technology at Alfred" NSLVE Campus report provided significant insight into the voting patterns of Alfred State students. This report highlighted substantial increases in the percentage of students registered to vote and the voting rate since 2014. We are hoping to have moved the needle in a positive direction once NSLVE report is released but we know we have continued work to do in several areas. Our last report highlighted a need to invest renewed effort in accelerating our positive trajectory. Despite progress, Alfred State student voting metrics have not yet achieved average benchmarks of like institutions. More specifically, students in certain majors are significantly disengaged compared to their peers in other majors. Focused efforts on connecting with students in these majors promise to generate the most momentum in adjusting overall metrics upward. Goals and programming will be aligned to generate traction in the following metrics:

- *Registration rate:* The percentage of your students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and registered to vote.
    - The 62.8% 2018 registration rater represented an 10% increase from 2014.
    - The 2016 to 2020 primary election rates showed about a 6% increase.
    - The 2022 goal sought to achieve a 5% increase from the 2018 mid-term election for an overall rate of 67.8% (awaiting to see if this was met)
    - The 2024 goal is to see a 2.5% increase on whatever current data reveals.
- *Rate of registered students* is the percentage of students who registered and actually turned out to vote.
    - The 22.6% 2018 rate represented a 6% increased from 2014.
    - The 2016 to 2020 primary voting rate of registered students showed about a 16% increase.

- ○ The 2022 goal sought to achieve a 10% increase from the 2018 mid-term election for an overall rate of 32.6% (awaiting to see if this was met)
  - ○ The 2024 goal seeks to maintain a 10% increase trajectory on whatever current data reveals.
- *Voting rate* is the percentage of students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and voted.
  - ○ The 44.4% 2018 voting rate represented nearly a 5.6% increase from 2014.
  - ○ The 2016 to 2020 primary election voting rates showed about a 14% increase.
  - ○ The 2022 goal sought to achieve an 10% rate increase from the 2018 mid-term election for an overall rate of 24.2%
  - ○ The 2024 goal seeks to maintain a 10% increase trajectory on whatever current voting data reveals.

Our leadership team will continue to evaluate and utilize NSLVE data to develop and fine tune strategies for the coming two years. We will also begin identifying new goals to continue the positive momentum.

Goals

Alfred State has identified three primary goals for democratic engagement for 2023-2024 that focus on efforts to maximize student involvement in the electoral process. These goals include:
1. Develop a greater understanding of voter resources from registration to candidates, parties, and platforms.
2. Increase voter participation in general to maximize the political impact of the student body.
3. Define sustainable campus processes to ensure all students have opportunity for intentional engagement with voter engagement resources.

These three goals are consistently both short term and long term with an overall vision of enabling 100% informed voting by all eligible students. As mentioned, the metrics associated with the efforts for the 2024 election are as follows:

1. *Registration rate:* The 2023/24 goal will seek to achieve a 2.5% increase from the 2020 primary election for an overall rate of 74%
2. *Rate of registered students*: The 2023/24 goal will seek to achieve a 10% increase from the 2020 primary election for an overall rate of 72%
3. *Voting rate*: The 2023/24 goal will seek to achieve an 10% rate increase from the 2020 primary for an overall rate of 54%

The **first goal** for 2023-2024 is to enhance knowledge on the pathways to political engagement. Many students are confused by the paperwork, regulations, and other similar barriers that depress young adult turnout and participation in New York. Alfred

State plans to continue making significant traction in achieving this goal by leveraging multiple platforms and events throughout the year. Examples include:

- Register students during new student orientations in January and July
- Embed voter registration in the move-in process for returning students.
- Embed voter registration resource information into civic initiatives with EOP Summer Prep Academy
- Embed voter registration resources in mandatory first-year onboarding.
- Embed voter registration materials in the parking decal procurement process for commuter students.
- Embed voter registration in the Pioneer Cup residence hall competition
- Conduct bi-weekly voter registration events by tabling at key campus intersections such as the Central Dining Hall and the Student Leadership Center
- Leverage National Voter Registration Day, Constitution Day, Voter Awareness Week and other key events and civic initiatives throughout the year to initiate pushes for new registrations
- Utilize social media, emails to students, tabling, hand-outs, and other platforms to publicize key dates, resources, and websites
- Create posters and design informational bulletin boards in residential halls focusing on the impact of voting
- Maintaining relevant resources in our campus Community Needs Hub.
- Embedding voter registration opportunity in accepted student day and in early onboarding Alfred State portal information.
- Continue leveraging the Office of the President to send reminders to students on registration and participation

The **second goal** for 2023-24 is to develop a greater understanding of candidates, parties, and platforms. Consistent avenues for non-partisan information will be designed to raise awareness around important local, regional, and national issues. A few examples include:

- Collaborate with other departments to organize programming focused on civility, digital literacy, and other relevant issues to the upcoming election
- Distribute and display non-partisan information on candidate positions. Make available straightforward party platform posters and handouts
- Leverage Constitution Day and Voter Awareness Week programming to register and share voter education materials
- Hold mock ballot election around election days to help students better understand the voting process
- Make available resources so students know their electoral rights. For example, improving the visibility and accessibility of resources like the "Student Voting Guide for New York", produced through the Fair Elections Legal Network and VOTE411 through the League of Women Voters Education Fund.
- Leverage platforms like Rock the Vote and other apps designed to make involvement and engagement easier for online oriented students.

- Hold debate watch parties in the residence halls
- Design informational bulletin boards and posters in residence halls & academic buildings with important election-oriented dates
- Intentionally weave voter resources into ongoing civic film series in partnership with Social and Behavioral Sciences.
- Collaborate with faculty to engage students via courses

The **third and final goal** for 2023-2024 is to increase voter participation in general to maximize the political impact of the Alfred State student body. A few examples of specific programs designed to enhance voter participation include the following:

- Partner with food services to decorate the Central Dining Hall with voting paraphernalia and information on election day
- Partner with Student Senate to have a van shuttle for students seeking to travel to the polling station throughout election day
- Encourage students to sign a "Pledge to Vote"
- Leverage our student content creation space, Bandwagon, to enhance messaging.
- Work with Marketing and Communications on potential social media takeover
- Leverage Tor Echo, student newspaper to engage student voices in process and information sharing.
- Use chalk to clearly mark out the footpath through village from campus to the local polling station to make it as easy as possible for students to locate this venue.

Strategy

The goals outlined above represent a student focused strategy designed to deliver resources where they are most effective. These venues include the classroom, residence halls, co-curricular venues, dining locations, and other settings. Incorporation into ongoing competition's such as the Pioneer Cup and ongoing events such as Constitution Day reduce duplication of effort and enhance effectiveness.

The tactics outlined above under each goal represent an overall strategy of collaboration with key departments and divisions including Academic Affairs, Residential Life, Student Engagement, Dining Services, and the Diversity & Inclusion office. Student collaborations will take place with Student Senate, clubs/organizations, honor societies, student employees, and others. The tactics and activities will be informed by a collaborative effort designed to engage as many students as possible.

Long-term strategies will be informed by the success of actions taken over the course of 2023-2024. With recent changes in leadership, we are actively building our knowledge base as we reflect on past years and look forward to sustainable growth. While the overall goals will remain the same, approaches, programming, and metric measuring

success will be adjusted to account for the learning gained through meaningful feedback loops.

Reporting

This action plan, as well as the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) reports, will be shared broadly in the interest of transparency and accountability. Specifically, information will be shared within the institutional intranet so all students, faculty, and staff can access the information, specifically under our institutional research area. In addition, we intend to create opportunities to share with our Student Affairs Leadership Team (SALT), our Civic Advocates, and Student Senate so that we can intentionally report out and garner feedback and buy in as we create new goals and engagement efforts. Past NSLVE report will also be shared through this forum.

This platform ensures easy access to the public as well as internally with faculty, staff, and students. This effort to make plans, data, and reports available will not only demonstrate a commitment to broadening and deepening civic learning and democratic engagement but may inspire ideas and input from stakeholders that can benefit ongoing efforts.

Evaluation

Effectiveness of methods and strategy will be evaluated by collecting key metrics such as event participation and voter registrations completed. Student survey data will also be leveraged to inform effectiveness and efficiency of programming efforts. Finally, data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement will continue to play a central role in measuring progress over time and developing benchmarks to further streamline goals and objectives of this effort.

Event participation, voter registration data, and event evaluations can take place on an ongoing basis. NSLVE data would not be available until well after the election. The political engagement leadership team will utilize this immediate feedback loop as well as the NSLVE data to inform programming focus and communication strategies throughout the year.