



ALLEGHENY
COLLEGE

2020 Initiative

ALL IN Campus

Democracy Challenge

Introduced by the Allegheny
Coalition for Student Voting and
Engagement, December 1, 2019

Information About Allegheny

Allegheny College is located in the city of Meadville in northwest Pennsylvania. Allegheny is a close-knit, four-year liberal arts college and home to just under 2,000 students. The College attracts vibrant undergraduate candidates eager to explore their many interests and positively impact their communities. Not surprisingly, Allegheny already has a number of established civic engagement organizations, most notably the Center for Political Participation, a chapter of the Andrew Goodman Foundation, an active student government, and many clubs devoted to social diversity and justice. However, voter turnout rates have been low in recent years, with just 8.8% of students casting a ballot in the 2014 midterm elections. We hope that the strategy outlined in this document will unite these on-campus forces and ultimately increase voter turnout in 2020 and beyond.

Allegheny Coalition for Student Voting and Engagement Mission Statement

The Coalition strives to establish a social culture on campus built on the importance of electoral participation. Students will be encouraged to register to vote, turn out at the polls, and engage in other forms of political participation. We are committed to fostering a community that further encourages this central value in the academic, co-curricular, residential, and social aspects of the College, as a reflection of a core purpose of higher education in a democracy.

Recent Data and Goals

The National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) reported Allegheny College's voter turnout rate at 53.2% in 2016 and 35.9% in 2018. Turnout likely dropped in 2018 because it was a midterm year as opposed to 2016's presidential election, but nevertheless, this is a very significant improvement from the 2014 midterm turnout rate. With the 2020 presidential election on the horizon, we feel that we are in good standing to propose a goal of **67% (approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of eligible voters) turnout in 2020**. This 67% is further defined by all participants voting as Meadville residents, as opposed to residents of their home city and state.

While 67% is ambitious, we feel that this goal is feasible because of the energy and momentum federal elections will bring, as opposed to a purely local or state ballot. In addition, with the very rapid growth demonstrated between midterm elections alone, we feel that the student body will bring even more energy and passion to a presidential race. It is important, however, to note that we have a number of larger-scale goals that will not likely be completed in 2020, but are nevertheless on our radar:

- All students, whether first-year or returning, are re-registered to vote at the start of a new academic year
- A polling location is installed on campus
- Allegheny College recognizes Election Day as a holiday and offers special programming relevant to the current election

Our Team

To complete both the short-term and long-term goals previously outlined, we will assemble a diverse team of students and faculty. We will be collectively known as the **Allegheny Coalition for Student Voting and Engagement**. The Coalition will invest in a number of students and faculty members who have shown exemplary passion and leadership in previous elections.

The Coalition will be composed of the following members:

- Faculty Leadership
 - Director of the Center for Political Participation (CPP)
 - Director of the College's chapter of the Andrew Goodman Foundation (AGF)
 - Representative from the Office of Residence Life
 - Representative from the Office of Spiritual and Religious Life (SRL)
- Student Leadership
 - CPP Student Fellows
 - AGF Ambassadors

We also hope to maintain regular contact with representatives from the Athletics Department and Student Life and Involvement (SLI).

Summary of Positions and Functions

The faculty members of the Coalition will serve as points of first contact for the greater student body and administration, oversee meetings, and delegate various tasks. One of these members must also serve as the college's primary contact for ALL IN. The student members, meanwhile, will devise and execute various on-campus events promoting civic engagement and aligned with both the short-term and long-term goals.

Communications

We understand that this will be a large, robust action group and that regularly getting everyone in one room will be a difficult task. Therefore, we are only mandating that the Coalition meet together in person twice per semester, likely at the beginning and end of each academic term, to identify more goals and track progress. Otherwise, each member is only required to notify the chairs of their progress through email once a week from the beginning of the fall semester to Election Day, and then once every other week following the election.

Our Strategy

Before and leading up to the 2020 election, the Coalition hopes to accomplish the following:

- Conduct voter registration drives, most notably on National Voter Registration Day in September, and likely during the spring semester ahead of the April 28 primary
- Host voter registration training sessions
- Make voter information more easily accessible on the Allegheny website
- Host a monthly event on campus related to civic engagement, ideally with many different academic departments and/or student organizations
- Film a promotional video encouraging local registration and turnout with many different students (different majors, student athletes, fraternity and sorority members, etc.)
- Host a presentation during matriculation/orientation walking new students through registering to vote in Meadville
- Run a door-knocking campaign ("Knocktober")
 - Students knock on doors in residence halls once a week from October 5 to October 31

- Start an email list tracking students' commitment to vote in 2020
- Provide students with additional voter information, if necessary
- Register students to vote
- Ask that students pledge to submit a complete ballot on Election Day, voting in all races, as opposed to solely federal elections
- Host a local/state candidate forum
- Make voter registration applications available in the Henderson Campus Center and Pelletier Library, as well as in residence halls
- Give rides to the polls on Election Day and host a watch party in the Henderson Campus Center as election results arrive

Additional projects may be added, removed, or edited at the discretion of the Coalition.

Outreach is the primary strategy in place—student Coalition members will aim to bring the central value of civic engagement to new spaces, like residence halls, student clubs and organizations, and athletic programs.. We hope that our efforts will be anything but traditional. Using alternative outreach methods like social media posts/takeovers, door-knocking campaigns, and inclusive promotional videos, we aim to bring democracy right to students' doors and develop a greater sense of community among the student body.

Our Action Plan: Timeline and Structure

We strongly believe that civic engagement should not be regarded as a one-day, annual event occurring on Election Day—if we truly hope to incorporate greater political awareness as a culture on campus, we should actively work to make it a reality during the entire academic year. Our plan reflects this belief, with the attached PDF of our timeline spanning from January to December. Understandably, the months

immediately leading up to Election Day (mainly September and October) are significantly busier than others, but nevertheless, including projects in the spring semester helps students prepare for the April 28 primary, strengthens relations between the Coalition and the greater student body, and makes the remaining fall semester workload much more manageable. Also, while this initiative was designed for the 2020 election season, we hope that it can serve as a more permanent blueprint for all future elections, with future Coalition members evolving the plan to fit current needs.

Measurement

To accurately measure our efforts' success, we will be relying primarily on the 2020 NSLVE data. Another indicator of a well-designed initiative will be the continued existence of the Coalition itself. Meanwhile, as a possible goal-setting mechanism, we also hope to issue a preliminary survey every December or January (starting in 2019), analyzing students' attitudes towards engagement.

Conclusion

This is an extremely demanding set of goals for a small institution revitalizing its connections with ALL IN, but we feel that an election as pivotal as 2020 calls for ambitious solutions. Our plan, if executed correctly, will do so much more than simply register students to vote—we'll maintain regular connections with them through email and door-knocking campaigns, attract their diverse interests through a number of events with different academic departments and organizations, and motivate them to be active in their democratic system during our Election Day programming. Civic engagement is one

of the most fundamental components of a liberal arts education, and we hope that our initiative will better reflect that value at Allegheny.