

ALVERNO COLLEGE – Milwaukee Wisconsin
2020 ALL IN DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE
Campus Action Plan for the 2020 Presidential Election

Alverno College is committed to the ability of Effective Citizenship. For 50 years, Alverno faculty and staff have incorporated this ability into their courses because it is the responsibility of educated citizens to participate in the civic life of the community in ways that make it better. Being a voter is an essential part of being an effective citizen, and so the College has recommitted itself to participation in the 2020 All-In Democracy Challenge.

Now that the COVID-era is upon us, we need to think about how to shift our election programming to a mostly online format. At the present time, the College is finalizing its' plans for what the fall semester will look like – online or on-campus classes? We've been asked to plan for both. This action plan is a work in progress as it will need to be adjusted depending on what the fall semester looks like. Our goal is to achieve full eligible student voter participation.

Activities will be organized by the leadership team listed below and will be implemented with the assistance of our Campus Compact Newman Civic Fellow. We also hope to be awarded another CEEP Fellow to work with student groups on these activities.

Leadership

Project leadership

- Sue Leister, Chair, Experiential Learning Committee, Project Director, Alverno Poll Worker Project, Director, Internship Program, Career Studio
- Megan Anderson, Chair, Effective Citizenship Ability Department, Asst. Director, Internship Program, Career Studio
- Tom Bottoms, Director, Student Leadership and Engagement
- Ann Romei, Director, Residence Life
- CEEP Campus Fellow (TBD)

Campus stakeholders

- Joseph Foy, Vice-President, Academic Affairs
- Kevin Casey, Dean, School of Arts and Humanities
- Kelly Cole, Communications Specialist, Alverno Marketing & Communications

Community Support

- Milwaukee Election Commission
- League of Women Voters

Commitment

When former Alverno President Mary J. Meehan began her tenure in 2004, one of her first acts was to declare Presidential Election days as a campus holiday. She encouraged the entire college community to participate in elections in some way, not only by voting, but to seek other ways to be engaged in the process. That year, the

Alverno College Poll Worker Project was born. The College partnered with the City of Milwaukee Election Commission to hold on-campus poll worker training sessions for students, staff and faculty. That year over 100 campus members, mostly students, worked as election inspectors at voting sites across the city. Since then over 500 students, staff and faculty have been trained to work the mid-term and presidential elections, with many bilingual students stepping up to work the polls in primarily Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. The project has been the recipient of a U.S. Election Assistance Commission grant and in 2014 was honored with Wisconsin Campus Compact's Esther Letven Campus-Community Partnership Award.

Now, in 2020, our current President, Sr. Andrea Lee, continues this tradition of building Presidential Election day into the campus holiday calendar. She continues to support the Poll Worker Project as well. Faculty support election and GOTV activities as they embody the College's commitment to Effective Citizenship, one of [Alverno's Eight Abilities](#) .

Landscape

Alverno College is a Catholic, Franciscan liberal arts college, founded by the School Sisters of St. Francis, whose mission of educating women goes back to 1887. Currently our graduate and online programs are open to women and men, *but our undergraduate program continues to support the College's mission of educating women only*. Our student body (n=1700+) is one of the most diverse in the state, with 49% of the students claiming non-white heritage. Alverno was the first Wisconsin college/university to earn the designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. In addition, nearly 70% of our incoming students are first-generation.

Effective Citizenship is one of the College's Eight Abilities. Each of the Eight Abilities is considered a department and faculty are expected to choose one ability department to sit in, along with their academic discipline department. These interdisciplinary ability departments work to forge strong relationships between faculties of varying departments (representing all of the campus Schools), provide cross-discipline conversation and joint project planning and learning. The ability department is responsible for developing ability outcomes that are imbedded into coursework across the curriculum. They also act as consultants for educators across the world who seek learning about how to work with abilities in their own curricula.

While the College's administration is fully supportive of all efforts related to Effective Citizenship and civic engagement, a dedicated Civic Engagement Office and staff has not been established. Currently, the Effective Citizenship Ability Department is the home of our Campus Compact membership, with support from the Experiential Learning Committee. Individual academic staff from the Internship Program/Career Studio are the primary contacts for the All in Democracy Challenge, CEEP and other related resources and opportunities. These staff seek out colleagues and students from various departments when campus partners are needed for projects and events and have found Student Affairs to be very willing partners. Obviously, not having a dedicated civic engagement office is a barrier when it comes to programming. To the College's credit, it has created a unique culture of collegiality across academic and administrative departments that make it easier to reach out to the various stakeholders on campus when opportunities present themselves.

A possible barrier to garnering student engagement is the fact that the campus is primarily a commuter campus. While the campus does have two residence halls, usually less than 300 undergraduate students live on campus in any one semester. Many of our students hold outside jobs while raising or supporting their families and managing their education.

Another obvious aspect of the current campus landscape is the effect the coronavirus has had on our campus, community and country. Presently the College is working to determine what our fall will look like – campus or online? Combination of both? The situation adds new challenges to our campus GOTV plans and activities.

Added to this is the political upheaval in Wisconsin over the issue of having a mail-in election. Wisconsin allows early in-person voting, election-day registration and absentee voting by request. Currently the Wisconsin Election Commission has approved a plan to mail absentee ballot applications to all Wisconsin citizens, except those who are already registered for absentee ballots and the 158,000 people that are considered to have moved from the address on the voter records. Milwaukee is also planning to send out absentee ballot applications to city residents. There is fear that this could cause some confusion (getting two applications) and result in multiple ballots eventually being sent to voters. Whatever the scenario, we will need to stay on top of the process so we convey correct information about registering to vote.

NSLVE DATA

Alverno College has participated in the NSLVE project since 2012. In 2019, the College received a Platinum Award from the National All-In Democracy Challenge for its high student-voting rate in the 2018 mid-term election. The national student-voting rate in 2018 was 39%: 61% of Alverno students voted in the 2018 mid-term election, an 11% increase from 2014. Alverno also received “Best in Class” (“small liberal arts college” class) designations in two areas: Best Overall Voting Rate and Best Undergraduate Voting Rate.

The NSLVE report shows majors related to the Public Service, Communication and Arts categories had lower voting rates since the 2014 midterm election, and so they will be targeted for “special” attention for this year’s election. We were happy to see an increase in the voting rates of majors related to the sciences, which were surprisingly low last time, considering the political issues related to the environment and climate change.

Strategy

As described under “Landscape” Alverno’s commitment to effective citizenship is imbedded in our curriculum. Faculty teach to and create assignments and activities for, students to understand their responsibility to be civically-engaged. Our ability-based curriculum has been part of Alverno since 1971, which shows the College’s long-term commitment.

In terms of work for the fall election, the pandemic has created a need, challenge and opportunity to think about how to connect with students about their civic responsibility to vote. The College is still working on its fall plan (Will classes be held online? Hybrid? On-campus?), and so we will need to look at the various activities we’ve already planned and adjust them for an online environment – Plan B if you will. This planning is still in process, as our semester has just ended and so we can focus more of our thoughts on our Plan B.

Examples of Registration Activities

- Work with Student Affairs and the student orientation planning committee to build voter registration into the orientation activities in August.
- National Voter Registration Day celebration and event (Sept 22, 2020)
- “Why I Vote” slide series that features Alverno students. Shown on the TV screens throughout campus. Posters with featured students posted on campus. *Plan B: These can be converted to individual social media blasts to students*
- Support from Residence Life – info/registration session in the dorms related to voting and voter registration. Engage the floor Community Advisors in this process

- Weekly tabling in the Commons where students can register online to vote – partner with League of Women Voters *Plan B: Regular communications to students about how to register to vote online.*
- “Trick or Treat” voter information and registration fair on Halloween
- Highlight voter registration during Alverno’s annual Community Day (*Plans for Community Day are unknown at this time*)
- Class visits about the importance of voting. *Plan B: identify students from classes who would be willing to do voter registration advocacy in their classes, even online classes.*
- Emails to faculty with information about how their majors participated in the last two elections (as per the NSLVE report) and encourage conversation among their majors about the issues important to them and the importance of voting.
- Regular updates on state voter registration and voting decisions (via social media)

Examples of Get Out The Vote Activities

- Wisconsin gives opportunities to vote early. Early Voting group walking trips to vote at Zablocki Library (dates to be determined after early voting calendar is released by the Milwaukee Election Commission)
- “Donut Forget to Vote” is going to be a voter information fair (with donuts) with the focus on helping people find their polling site and make a plan to get there on Election Day.
- On Election Day, “Get Out The Vote” tables will be reserved in the Commons Lobby for most of the day. Focus on helping people find their polling places and connect with resources for getting a ride to the polls (e.g. volunteer drivers; Bounce Milwaukee, Lyft).
- Group voting trips for dorm students to the polling site nearest Alverno (across the street) – celebration in numbers!
- Discipline-specific GOTV work. Look at the majors that had lower voting rates and enlist the help of those faculty to make a case for voting. Interestingly, in the NSLVE report, majors related to Public Service, Communication and Arts had lower voting rates since the 2014 midterm election. We were happy to see an increase in the voting rates of majors related to the sciences.

Other Election-related Activities

- Poll Worker Training Project in partnership with the Milwaukee Election Commission. Sessions will be held on campus where students, staff and faculty are trained to be poll workers for the City of Milwaukee. Students are then assigned to a polling site near their home campus or elsewhere in the city. Spanish-speaking students will be trained to be bilingual poll workers too. Students also learn about applying for absentee ballots. The campus has been running this project since 2004. *Note: the Poll Worker Training Project will depend on the city’s plans to train poll workers, as the way the city will vote in August and November are still up in the air. It was just announced that the leadership of the Election Commission will be changing in the next few weeks and so new connections are being made between the commission and the college.*

Reporting

After the 2018 election, we made the results of the NSLVE report public in several ways. The full report was sent to the College administrators and academic affairs. A synopsis of the report was shared with faculty, who could request a copy of the full report. Marketing and Communications used the information about our results in their media coverage related to our Platinum award.

In 2020, besides the activities above, we will be more attentive to collecting data to determine those activities that were most effective. If on-campus, we will track the number of students we engage. Online, we will use the tools that the various social media outlets provide to determine the amount of engagement related to what we send out.

Evaluation

The Effective Citizenship Ability Department and the Leadership team will review the NSLVE data against the goals set for the project. We will also enlist feedback from the various stakeholders on campus about how they viewed the project's success (or lack of success).

Summary

Alverno College is committed to engaging student in GOTV activities, resulting in full eligible student participation. We will enlist our campus and community partners to plan in-person and online events, which will be held according to the dictates of the current pandemic situation. We feel uniquely situated to be successful in this endeavor due to our long tradition of educating students on the importance of civic engagement.

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