



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, D C



American University 2024 Nonpartisan Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Developed by: AU Votes

Executive Summary:

This nonpartisan democratic engagement action plan was developed by American University in DC for the 2024 election. The purpose of this action plan is to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter registration, education, and turnout in the 2024 election.

Background

American University aspires to be a cornerstone for fostering civic engagement through voting, seamlessly integrating President Alger's vision of cultivating future global citizens. The university's voter engagement initiative, AU Votes enriches the campus experience by offering engaging student programming, fostering informed civil discourse on elections, and facilitating interactions with key community leaders to deepen an understanding of pertinent social issues. Committed to American University's values of civic responsibility, intellectual curiosity, and community, AU Votes equips students with the essential resources to transform them into knowledgeable voters. This effort not only reflects the university's dedication to service but also amplifies its role in shaping committed citizens who contribute thoughtfully to their community, the nation, and the world.

AU Votes is a non-partisan initiative at American University focused on increasing voter participation and civic engagement within the university community. This program aims to educate and mobilize students, faculty, and staff on the importance of voting and being active participants in the democratic process. AU Votes facilitates voter registration drives, provides

educational resources about voting, and organizes events to enhance the political engagement of the university community. Through collaboration with various university departments and external organizations, AU Votes strives to ensure that all eligible members of the American University community are informed, registered, and motivated to vote in elections.

Mission

AU Votes will work with campus and community partners to support and empower all eligible students to engage in local, state, and federal elections and become lifelong Changemakers who vote. AU Votes will build and sustain a nonpartisan campus-wide coalition dedicated to fostering a climate of democratic engagement and participation across campus.

The goals for American University for the 2024 election are:

- **Establish and Empower AU Votes Working Group:** Form a robust working group with campus and community partners, define its structure, roles, and responsibilities, and develop a comprehensive action and budget plan for the 2024-25 academic year.
- **Enhance Voter Education and Communication:** Develop educational resources such as a Canvas module for AUx courses, Faculty Guide for voter engagement, update the voting information webpage (AU Library LibGuide), and create a strategic communication plan to ensure all pertinent voting information, including key dates, deadlines, and civic holidays, is effectively communicated to the campus community.
- **Foster Collaboration and Partnership:** Strengthen partnerships with student organizations, academic and student affairs departments, and external groups to enhance voter engagement opportunities.
- **Institutionalize Voter Engagement Practices:** Work with senior administration to join NSLVE for data-driven approaches, develop a robust assessment strategy, and institutionalize these practices across campus with a sustainable and strategic succession plan for AU Votes and American University voter engagement.

Leadership:

Our leadership team includes the following, campus groups, and organizations:

Leadership Team

- Melanie Bullock, *Director for the Center for Leadership & Community Engagement*
- Gwendolyn Reece, *Director of Research, Teaching, and Learning, University Library Operations*
- Dayne Hutchinson, *Assistant Vice President for Student Engagement & Success*
- Mychaella Bowen, *Director of Research, Teaching, and Learning, University Library Operations*
- Syndney Henry, *Communications Coordinator, University Library Operations*
- Alyssa Levin, *Co-President of Voters of AU*
- Emma Baumgarten, *Co-President of Voters of AU*
- Tyler Brown-Dewese, *President of the Nu Beta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated*
- Denia Smith, *President of Students for Change*
- TJ Callan, *Assistant Director of Peer Programs, AU Center for Wellbeing*
- DaVanta Parker, *Assistant Director, Leadership Development & Global Engagement, Center for Leadership and Community Engagement*

Campus Groups and Organizations

- Voters of AU
- Center for Leadership and Community Engagement
- Center for Student Involvement
- AU NAACP
- AU NPHC
- AU Library
- AU Division of Student Affairs
- AU Student Engagement
- AU Student Government Association
- Washington College of Law American Constitution Society for Law & Policy Chapter
- AU Center for Well-Being Programs and Psychological Services
- Washington College of Law Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Affinity Relations
- The Civic Life Initiative

Community Partners

- District of Columbia Board of Elections
- Montgomery County Board of Elections
- Arlington Voter Registration & Elections
- Disability Rights DC
- League of Women Voters

Commitment:

American University is committed to fostering a campus culture where civic engagement and responsible citizenship are at the core of our educational and co-curricular activities. Through the AU Votes initiative, we dedicate ourselves to empowering our students, faculty, and staff to actively participate in the democratic process. This commitment aligns with our university's mission to *advance knowledge, build community, and empower lives of purpose, service, and leadership*, fostering the development of students who are actively engaged in public service and democratic participation.

We actively integrate civic education into our curriculum and co-curricular programs. Supported by a robust coalition of campus and community partners, including the Division of Student Affairs, Student Engagement, Academic Affairs, Center for Leadership and Community Engagement, Student Government Association, Washington College of Law, the AU Library, and more, AU Votes ensures that every member of the American University community has the resources and knowledge to make informed voting decisions.

Moreover, American University has also committed itself to creating meaningful change in the world, for students' ability to rethink global and domestic challenges and opportunities, and for having students who actively engage in the world around them. To live up to its commitment, the university aims to encourage political participation in elections beyond presidential elections but also to include any midterm, gubernatorial, special elections, and ballot initiatives across the country. The methodology of AU Votes seeks to capitalize on high-touch points across a student's time at the university to encourage voter registration, provide election information, and get students out to vote. The initiative has identified three points to accomplish these goals: 1) during the first year move-in as a part of the "check-in" process to the university; 2) during

transfer student orientation at the start of the fall semester; and 3) at the end of the academic year as part of the “check-out” process when a student leaves the university where they will be asked to register to vote, update their voter registration status, or sign-up for election reminders. Throughout the academic year, AU Votes will collaborate with campus and community partners to host events that in turn help foster political discourse and civic engagement learning.

By institutionalizing these practices, American University not only upholds its dedication to public service and civic responsibility but also ensures that its values are a living, breathing part of our university culture. We are committed to nurturing an environment that values and promotes democratic engagement, preparing our community for a lifetime of active and informed participation in our democracy.

Commitment in Action

To strengthen this commitment, President Alger has signed the ALL IN Higher Education Presidents’ Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. This agreement underscores American University’s ongoing dedication to enhancing civic engagement among students and supporting their full participation in the voting process. This step aligns with the university’s broader goals of fostering a campus environment that encourages active and informed citizenship.

In addition to the ALL IN Higher Education Presidents’ Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation, President Alger has created the initiative “The Civic Life: An American University Experience.” The Civic Life initiative at American University capitalizes on the institution’s diverse academic strengths, from politics and the arts to STEM and business, to equip the entire university community with the necessary resources for effective engagement and productive communication across diverse viewpoints and experiences. This initiative integrates both curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities. Additionally, The Civic Life features key AU centers and programs such as the Sine Institute of Policy and Politics, the Project on Civic Dialogue, AU Votes, and the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL). It also includes the Dialogues Across Differences initiative, which promotes inclusive excellence by emphasizing respectful inquiry, critical thinking, and active listening.

Commitment Communicated:

Public Events and Speaker Series: American University hosts public events, such as seminars, lectures, and forums, often featuring prominent public figures, policymakers, and thought leaders. These events, which are frequently open to the public and often streamed online, serve to disseminate the university’s civic engagement initiatives to a broader audience.

Online Presence and Social Media: Through its official website and active social media platforms, American University regularly shares updates, stories, and achievements related to civic engagement. These digital platforms provide an effective means to communicate with alumni, prospective students, parents, and global audiences interested in the university’s activities.

Public Polls and Research: The Sine Institute of Policy and Politics at American University is an innovative hub for policy and political research and engagement, designed to address critical societal challenges through a collaborative and bipartisan approach. The Sine Institute conducts annual surveys, like the “Reimagining Political Leadership” poll, which provide insights into young Americans’ preferences in political leaders and their views on civic engagement. These

polls not only gather valuable data but also engage the public by sharing insights that influence policy and leadership styles that resonate with younger demographics. The Institute actively engages the community through events that discuss significant political and civic themes, bringing together experts, leaders, and students. These events are often open to the public and serve as a platform for disseminating ideas and engaging with broader community issues, thereby reinforcing the university's commitment to civic engagement.

Commitment to Inclusive and Diverse Voter Engagement

American University's AU Votes initiative exemplifies its commitment to inclusive and diverse voter engagement through strategic collaborations with organizations such as the NAACP and the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). These partnerships enhance the outreach and effectiveness of voter engagement campaigns across the campus and beyond, particularly focusing on underrepresented communities.

Program Collaboration: By working together, we develop and implement programs that educate students about the importance of voting, how to register, and the impact of civic engagement. These programs often include workshops, seminars, and panel discussions tailored to address the specific needs and concerns of diverse student populations.

Shared Marketing Strategies: AU Votes leverages the robust networks of various organizations to disseminate voter education materials and event information. This collaborative marketing approach ensures wider and more effective distribution of resources, reaching a broader audience.

Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity: Current collaborations with groups like the NAACP and NPHC and future collaborative opportunities with groups such as Black Girls Vote bring a culturally informed perspective to voter engagement strategies, which is crucial in addressing the unique barriers faced by minoritized students in the electoral process.

Commitment to Civic Learning

American University is committed to fostering a campus culture that values and prioritizes civic learning and democratic engagement. This commitment is embodied in our comprehensive approach to education, integrating civic responsibility into both the general education curriculum and co-curricular activities.

General Education Curriculum: American University includes civic education components within its general education requirements. Courses across various disciplines incorporate themes around civic responsibility, democracy, and social justice, encouraging students to explore the impact of civic engagement on societal outcomes. These courses often involve critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and discussions on the role of citizenship in a democratic society. Examples of courses include:

- **Foundation Courses:** Students begin their experience with courses such as AU Experience I and II, which are foundational to their development and understanding of university life and civic responsibilities. These courses help students transition into college-level learning and introduce opportunities to engage with community.
- **Habits of Mind:** These courses encourage students to explore different ways of thinking about the world. They cover areas like Creative-Aesthetic Inquiry, Socio-Historical Inquiry, Ethical Reasoning, Natural-Scientific Inquiry, and Cultural Inquiry, each aimed at

developing critical thinking and reflective skills crucial for understanding and participating in democratic processes.

- **Complex Problems Seminars:** These courses are designed to challenge students to think critically about various global and local issues, encouraging them to come up with innovative solutions. Offered as part of the first-year experience, these seminars provide an interdisciplinary approach to understanding complex social, economic, and political problems.

AU Votes & American University Learning Outcomes

Civic Engagement: AU Votes directly supports American University's learning outcome on civic engagement by cultivating an understanding of the importance of both individual and collective action in society. The initiative promotes active participation in voting as a responsibility to the public interest and social justice, encouraging students to act as informed citizens engaged in the democratic process.

Critical and Creative Thinking: AU Votes challenges students to critically assess political information and platforms, encouraging them to consider multiple perspectives before drawing conclusions. This aligns with the learning outcome of engaging critically and creatively with issues, supporting thoughtful and informed voting decisions.

Cultural Competency: The initiative promotes an understanding of diverse political beliefs and cultural perspectives, essential for effective participation in a global and multicultural society. AU Votes enhances students' appreciation of different viewpoints, which is crucial in navigating the complex landscape of national and international politics.

Content Knowledge: AU Votes enriches students' understanding of political processes and civic responsibilities, adding depth to their academic pursuits. The program helps students connect their specialized knowledge areas to broader civic activities, encouraging them to apply their learning in real-world contexts.

Information Literacy: By providing resources for informed voting and facilitating access to reliable political information, AU Votes helps students develop strong information literacy skills. The initiative guides them in identifying, retrieving, and evaluating information essential for knowledgeable voting decisions.

AU Votes effectively integrates these learning outcomes by providing a structured framework for students to engage in meaningful civic participation, enhancing their educational experience and preparing them for responsible citizenship.

**** This is the first action plan that American University has developed for ALL IN.*

Landscape:

American University (AU) is located in Washington, D.C. and is known for its strong focus on international service, public affairs, and political science, reflecting its proximity to the center of American political life. The university offers a range of undergraduate and graduate programs across various fields, including arts and sciences, business, communication, education,

international service, and public affairs.

American University is a private 4-year institution and joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2024. Our institution is a predominantly white institution.

AU's general education curriculum, known as the AU Core, includes specific courses and modules focused on civic responsibility and public affairs. These courses often tackle issues such as ethics, social responsibility, and public policy, encouraging students to think critically about their roles in society and various social issues. There are also courses offered at AU that incorporate service-learning components, which blend academic learning with community service. These courses offer practical experience in community and civic engagement by allowing students to work directly with local, national, or international organizations on public service projects. Under the direction of the Center for Leadership and Community Engagement, American University offers the Community Service-Learning Program (CSLP). CSLP provides an opportunity for undergrads to work with a community organization, such as a non-profit, while earning an additional credit towards graduation. It gives students the chance to get hands-on experience by going beyond what they learn in a classroom while creating an impact in the DC community through service.

American University supports a wide range of student organizations and clubs that focus on political activism, social justice, and community service. These groups offer students practical opportunities to engage in civic initiatives, organize events, and lead campaigns that address local and global issues. AU Votes, a non-partisan initiative, focuses on increasing student participation in the democratic process. AU Votes organizes voter registration drives, educational workshops, and events designed to increase political awareness and participation among students. Given its location in Washington, D.C., AU offers numerous internship opportunities in government agencies, non-profits, and international organizations, allowing students to gain firsthand experience in public policy and civic engagement.

Our campus demographic and voting data:

- American University has 14001 students.
- A large portion of the student population, about 96.86%, comes from out of state, and around 4.16% from outside the United States, enhancing its geographic diversity.
- AU hosts a significant number of international students, contributing to the university's diverse campus atmosphere. Students come from over 130 countries, making it a hub of multicultural interaction.
- AU's student body includes a mix of races and ethnicities, with white students making up the largest group, followed by Hispanic, Black or African American, Asian, multi-ethnic, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students.
- The university caters to a wide range of ages, though the majority of students are traditional college age (18-21 years old), making up approximately 50.78% of the student body.

Currently, we do not have voting data or democratic engagement data for our campus, however American University has authorized the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement. This will assist us with collecting detailed reports on student voting habits and information on voter registration data and voter turnout. With the specific data provided by NSLVE, American University will be able to identify areas where we can improve civic education and engagement.

Barriers/Challenges

Limited Funding: Financial constraints can restrict the number of programs and activities that can be initiated or sustained, affecting the breadth and depth of civic engagement opportunities available to students.

Political Polarization: Given its location in the nation's capital and a strong focus on political science and public affairs, AU often deals with the challenge of navigating a politically charged atmosphere, especially during election seasons. Ensuring respectful dialogue and managing conflicts that may arise from political differences are potential challenges.

Informed Decision-Making: Decision-makers are hindered in their ability to make informed choices because they lack the necessary information to evaluate the current conditions or predict future trends effectively.

Continuity and Consistency: Frequent changes in leadership can disrupt ongoing projects and initiatives leads to shifts in priorities and a lack of continuity in policies and strategic directions, which creates confusion and can at times demotivate staff and students alike.

Goals:

Our institution's nonpartisan democratic engagement goals are:

Goal 1: Increase the student voter registration rate at American University.

- Achieve a voter registration rate of 85% by the 2024 Presidential election and 87% by the 2026 midterm elections.

Goal 2: Increase the student voter turnout rate at American University.

- Aim to achieve a voter turnout rate of 70% in the 2024 Presidential election and 72% in the 2026 midterm elections.

Goal 3: Implement and increase the number of educational workshops focused on voting rights, the voting process, and the importance of civic engagement among students.

- Conduct at least two workshops per semester, totaling at least eight workshops by the end of 2026.

Goal 4: Broaden participation in civic engagement activities by implementing targeted outreach and programming that addresses the diverse needs and concerns of underrepresented student groups.

- Increase participation from underrepresented groups in civic engagement activities by 30% by 2026.

Strategy:

To ensure the effective implementation of American University's civic engagement and democratic participation objectives, a structured approach to strategy development is crucial. This section outlines a series of targeted strategies designed to achieve four main goals:

increasing voter registration and turnout rates, enhancing educational workshops on voting rights and civic engagement, and broadening participation in civic activities among diverse student groups. These strategies involve collaborative efforts across various university departments and student organizations, leveraging technology, and utilizing personalized outreach to address the unique needs of American University's student body. Through these efforts, American University aims to significantly enhance its civic learning environment and empower its students to become proactive contributors to democracy.

American University will implement these strategies to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter participation.

Summer:

- Identify, invite, and finalize a 2024-25 AU Votes working group that includes campus and community partners. Establish working group structure (e.g., co-chairs), processes, and responsibilities based on roles.
- Develop an action plan and budget for fall 2024 activities and 2024-25 academic year.

Short-Term:

- Continue to develop Canvas module for AUx courses with voting information and faculty resources.
- Create a communications plan to communicate key information to the campus community (e.g., dates and deadlines).
- Make a calendar with key dates including all Civic Holidays to include: National Voter Registration Day, Vote Early Day, residence hall move-in, orientation.
- Update Voting Information webpage on AU Library site/LibGuide and AU Votes page.
- Continue to promote the AU personalized voter platform that allows students to check registration, request absentee ballots, and more.
- Establish a paid fellowship for undergraduate/graduate students to provide leadership opportunities and needed help to carry out plans, events around voter engagement.
- Work with senior administration to join National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement ([NSLVE](#)). Develop an assessment strategy for AU Votes initiative.
- Continue to identify new student organizations for partnering on events and support with messaging and communication during the academic year.
- Identify volunteer opportunities with parties, campaigns, and interest groups. Have those opportunities listed in the AU GivePulse platform.
- Leverage social media platforms to run targeted ads and posts that remind and encourage students to register before the deadlines.
- Utilize peer influence by training student leaders to encourage their peers to vote, making voting a social activity.

Long-Term:

- Institutionalize and sustain voter engagement practices across campus.

Evaluation:

To effectively assess and evaluate the impact of American University's civic engagement initiatives, a comprehensive plan that includes both qualitative and quantitative measures is

essential. Here's a structured approach to developing an assessment and evaluation plan for the strategies outlined to achieve the set goals:

Data Collection Methods:

- **Surveys and Polls:** Conduct pre- and post-event surveys to capture changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding civic engagement.
- **Attendance Records:** Keep detailed records of attendance and participation in all related events and initiatives.
- **Voting Records:** Collaborate with local election boards to access anonymized data on student participation in local, state, and national elections.

Timeline for Evaluation

- We will set specific times for evaluation, such as after major civic events, at the end of each academic year, and following election cycles. This allows for timely adjustments to strategies as needed.

Analysis Techniques

- The use of statistical software to analyze quantitative data for trends and patterns.
- Application of qualitative analysis to open-ended survey responses and feedback to gather insights into student perceptions and experiences.

Reporting:

Reporting and Feedback Mechanisms

- We plan to regularly report findings to key stakeholders, including university administration, student organizations, and external partners.
- The team will use results to refine and enhance future initiatives. We can share summaries of these reports in university publications to demonstrate progress and accountability.
- Our campus action plan will be posted on our campus page on ALL IN's website <https://allinchallenge.org/campuses/american-university/>.