

## **Election@Bard**



Bard College's ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan  
Created: December 15th, 2021 // Revised: December 10, 2023

## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Purpose of the Plan**

The following plan reflects Bard's belief that institutions of higher learning have had a role in shaping citizens since the founding of the Republic. As Charles Elliot, Harvard's long-term President, stated more than a century ago, "At bottom, most of the American institutions of higher education are filled with the democratic spirit. Teachers and students alike are profoundly moved by the desire to serve the democratic community." Yale University's former President Bart Giamatti said: "I believe that the formation of a basis for how we choose to believe and speak and treat others—how, in short, we choose a civic role for ourselves—is the basic purpose of an education in a democracy."

Election@Bard and the College together have challenged local efforts to limit access to the franchise for over twenty years through a series of four lawsuits organized in partnership with other Hudson Valley schools and the Andrew Goodman Foundation. Election@Bard, a student-led initiative launched in 2014, originated from the College's fundamental belief in the power of young people to lead and a deep commitment to the idea that colleges should be civic actors in the ongoing struggle to expand voter access particularly for young people as is guaranteed by the 26th Amendment. Election@Bard is a program supervised by the Bard Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). Specifically, Election@Bard is directly supervised by the CCE's outreach coordinator and associate dean. The student team is indirectly supervised by the Vice President for Civic Engagement and the Executive Vice President. All four positions coordinate goal setting sessions and post-election debriefs, in collaboration with the student team. Together, the CCE and Election@Bard ensure that voter outreach work is sustainable and institutionalized as well as maintains peer-to-peer education amidst student team turnover.

### ***Campus Planning Team***

The plan is collaboratively developed and inclusive of focused working groups from across campus departments. Coordination is led by the CCE and Election@Bard (in partnership with the Andrew Goodman Foundation (AGF)). Election@Bard's student team is comprised of student staff and volunteers working in five key areas (our goals are also closely integrated into these areas):

1. Voter registration
2. Issue-based voter engagement and beyond the ballot initiatives
3. Voter education
4. Voter mobilization and participation
5. Voter protection and advocacy

More details about the team are outlined under the Leadership section.

### ***Duration of our plan***

The plan is a living document that is reviewed 4 times annually to ensure that the team is meeting benchmarks that reflect the institutional and constituent goals for the designated time period. The team re-assesses goals after each semester and coordinates and develops new initiatives for the following semester based on NSLVE data and our own data from the previous, similar election cycle (since we have not received our 2022 election data, we are basing much of our 2024 plan on our 2020 NSLVE data) and where we are in the election cycle. The plan is reviewed by the Election@Bard team and CCE's staff in collaboration with campus partners.

### ***Goals for the plan***

1. Guarantee all campus community members (including student, faculty, staff) have access to the polls.
2. Lead with student voices while providing ongoing sustainable institutional support.
3. Reach 100% (or near 100%) eligible voter participation.
4. Educate voters and student poll workers
5. Ease the experience of voters.
6. Track and address challenges to voting.
7. Develop programs, projects, and courses that “go beyond the ballot.”
8. Integrate civic learning into the curriculum and experience of all Bard students, regardless of voter eligibility

### ***Plan Implementation***

Election@Bard is funded annually by the CCE through the operational budget provided by the institution. As a student initiative, Election@Bard also receives support from the student convocation fund (as a club) and community partners (Andrew Goodman, Partners for Campus Community Engagement (PCCE), and additional voter outreach grants). Student staff are compensated by the CCE and Andrew Goodman Foundation. The curricular initiatives are supported through the CCE and Engaged Liberal Arts and Science (ELAS) program, which supports faculty-led work and is coordinated in partnership with the academic programs and dean's office. The plan will be implemented primarily on our main campus (in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY) as well as with our high school early college campuses in the tristate area (such as in the Hudson Valley, three New York City boroughs, and Newark).

The campus team and working groups implement the plan based on a collaborative planning model that integrates voter registration into systems like student check-in, course registration, room draw and senior project day. This coming year, the plan will include a new civics focused initiative to support integration of civics learning into more classes and into the required first year seminar course. The project is funded through the CCE, ELAS, Open Society University Network (OSUN) and Mellon Foundation. New funding is in process but announcements about the initiative are still embargoed.

## **II. LEADERSHIP**

The Campus Team is composed of students, administrators and faculty in key departments that support Election@Bard and represent the institutional priorities to preserve and protect student voter rights.

### Campus Leadership Team

- Jonathan Becker, Executive Vice President, Director of Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) (core team)
- Erin Cannan, Bard Vice President for Civic Engagement, CCE (core team)
- Cicily Wilson, Assistant Director for CCE (core team)
- Sarah deVeer '17, Bard Outreach Coordinator, CCE (core team)
- Simon Gilhooley, Chair, Politics Program
- Jovanny Suriel, Assistant Dean, Director, Career Development Office (CCE)
- Sierra Ford '26, 2023 Lead Campus Initiatives Intern, Election@Bard (core team)
- Yale Coopersmith '26, Campus Initiatives Intern, Election@Bard Intern (core team)
- Malena Perez Diaz '27, Campus Initiatives Intern, Election@Bard Intern (core team)
- Fiona Flynn '25, Campus Initiatives Intern, Election@Bard Intern (core team)
- Ella Walko '26, Campus Initiatives Intern, Election@Bard Intern (core team)
- Henry Mielarczyk '25 Co-Lead Coalition Intern, Election@Bard
- Samuel Mutter '25 Co-Lead Coalition Intern, Election@Bard
- Vera Topcik '25 Co-Lead Coalition Intern, Election@Bard Intern
- Emily "Lee" Ta '25 Co-Lead Coalition Intern, Election@Bard Intern

### Campus Professionals Working Group

- Malia du Mont, President's Office, VP for Strategy, Chief of Staff
- Michael Sadowski, Associate Dean of the College
- Jen Murray, Dean, International Studies
- Claudette Aldebot, Dean of Inclusive Excellence
- Haron Atkinson, Assistant Director of Inclusive Excellence
- David Ferguson, Director, Student Activities
- John Cordella, Director, Residence Life
- Jana Mader, Academic Director, Hannah Arendt Center
- Philip Lindsay, Democracy Innovation Program Manager & Communications Coordinator, Hannah Arendt Center

### Campus Students Working Group

- Working on establishing relationships with identity-based clubs through our partnership with Student Activities and Student Government

### ***Community Partners:***

Election@Bard liaises with community organizations and local elections officials to monitor and track voter registrations. This helps identify problem areas and develop strategies to improve voter experiences, including litigation.

- The Andrew Goodman Foundation
- Yael Bromberg, Principal of Bromberg Law LLC, and Of Counsel, Andrew Goodman Foundation

- Hannah Black, Democratic Commissioner, Dutchess County Board of Elections
- Dr. Melissa Gaeke, Marist, Center for Civic Engagement, Hudson Valley Student Voter Coalition (newly formed)
- League of Women Voters

### ***Work Plan Summary***

Election@Bard's goal is 100% participation of eligible voters while working to engage voters *beyond the ballot*.

Annually, this includes:

- Voter Registration across the Bard student experience
  - Voter registration drives with Bard High School Early Colleges in the tristate area during the spring semester
  - Mandatory voter registration station during First Year Orientation arrival day for all students at every arrival day)
  - Voter registration outreach for students as they are approved to move to off-campus residences
  - Voter registration stations for graduating students (“The Key to Your Voting Future”)
- Voter engagement across sectors (students of color, LGBTQ+, first gen, gender)
- Voter data analysis and tracking retreats for the student team
- Candidate meet-and-greet forums on-campus
- Issue-based programming (like gun control, formerly incarcerated college students’ rights, and immigration rights)
- National Voter Registration Week, Constitution Day, food-based voter education and advocacy events (like Mail-In Ramen cooking party)
- GOTV organizing: tabling, signage, social media stories, door knocking, phone banking/text banking campaigns (one of each the week before the voter registration deadline + Election Day; one of each on the last day of voter registration on-campus tabling + on Election Day)
- Student leadership conferences
- MLK Day of Engagement voter education panels and workshops

### ***Voter Advocacy***

For over 20 years, Bard College has coordinated advocacy efforts (including four lawsuits) to protect student voting rights. This advocacy campaign is to also ensure voter accessibility and safety at the polls. Bard worked with voter rights groups and legislators across NYS to pass legislation requiring polling sites on college campuses where 300 local voters are registered. We are now involved in an effort to identify eligible campuses to determine if BOE's are in compliance or if campuses are even aware of the new law. Bard College supported this effort for and with Vassar College last summer when we raised funds to help challenge the Dutchess County Board of Elections when the BOE was out of compliance. Ultimately, local community organizations worked with the Vassar community members to successfully challenge Dutchess and to establish a polling site on campus.

Bard's own polling site (previously located two miles down a dark, rural county road at a small community room in a church) was not ADA compliant nor Covid safe. After our legal action and advocacy work in collaboration with disability rights coalitions, our polling place was moved to the Bard's main campus. Our polling place is now permanently located in our large Multipurpose Room in the Campus Center. The move was included in our town's redistricting and now Bard's campus is one contiguous polling district (meaning our polling place only services Bard voters). The CCE leadership team and the Election@Bard student team coordinated the work required, with pro bono legal counsel.

Additionally, the PCCE supported a civic innovation grant to host a Coalition building meeting for the emerging Hudson Valley Student Voting Coalition (HVSVC), a collaborative, student organization focused on youth voting access and engagement.

### ***Academic Planning***

The Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) funds Engaged Liberal Arts and Science (ELAS) courses, which includes integration of civic learning into the curriculum.

### ***New Academic Initiatives***

The CCE and Politics program have launched the Civics Initiative to *make civics a class* providing funding for faculty who are interested in integrating a civics focus for at least one class a semester. Connected to these efforts is a recent initiative within Bard's First Year Seminar (FYSEM) course that has received funding to support integration of relevant topics. Dr. Simon Gilhooley, one of the directors of FYSEM, sits on Election@Bard's planning team.

Bard launched a certificate in civic engagement two years ago that includes four ELAS courses, co-curricular civic engagement hours, and leadership requirements. The certificate recognizes the link between coursework and experiential learning. The core course in civic engagement is co-taught by Jonathan Becker (founder of Bard's CCE) and Erin Cannan (inaugural staff member of CCE). Additionally, students can take an internship-based course called "All Politics is Local," which provides hands-on experience in government offices. Lastly, with funding from the Mellon Foundation, Bard created a new network collaborative course (taught in conjunction with campuses that have a strong voter outreach history, such as Tuskegee University and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCAT)).

Annually, Bard offers about 30 ELAS courses with an enrollment of over 400 students (about a quarter of Bard students).

Sample Courses:

- Politics of Citizenship
- All Politics is Local
- Civic Engagement (core course for certificate)
- Pedagogy and Practice in Civic Engagement
- Visual Storytelling for Civic Engagement
- Archaeology of African American Farms, Yards, and Gardens
- Divided Cities
- Public Access and the Local Groove

- Asylum
- Labor and Democracy
- Women and Leadership
- Reproductive Rights and Human Health
- Digital Literacies

Additionally, because civic engagement is such a key element in Bard's mission, Bard faculty teach a variety of courses that relate to voter engagement (either directly or indirectly) and voter education (who/what is on the ballot, understanding global political movements, etc.) that are outside of the ELAS distinction.

Sample Courses:

- The Supreme Court and (your) Human Rights
- Human Rights Advocacy
- Foundation of Law
- Copaganda? Media and the History of Police Reform in the United States
- Human Rights to Civil Rights
- Global Citizenship
- Women's Rights, Human Rights
- Telling Stories About Rights
- Human Rights at the Border
- Labor Economics
- The History of Development since 1945: Global and Transnational Histories
- Technology, Labor, Capitalism
- The Making of the Modern Middle East

### ***Volunteers***

In addition to all of the above named core team, Election@Bard's recruits student and faculty volunteers, who join mobilization projects primarily during the voter registration and GOTV programming. Election@Bard has gained over 20 volunteers since the beginning of 2022.

### ***Campus Partners:***

In addition to a campus-wide planning team, Election@Bard cultivates campus partnerships across departments. Staff liaisons change annually but the team annually partners with the following offices:

- Center for Student Life and Advising and Dean of Students
- Office of the Dean of Inclusive Excellence
- Council for Inclusive Excellence
- Office for Alumni Affairs and Development Office
- Athletics Department
- The Office of Accessibility and Disability Resources
- The Office of Admission
- Wellness
- Parkhurst Food Services
- Student Government and Student Clubs

- Posse Advisors

***Succession Plan:***

The Voter Action plan is supervised by the CCE. As a student-led organization, Election@Bard membership rotates annually. To ensure smooth succession, the CCE staff supervises recruitment and hiring of the student staff and leadership. CCE’s Outreach Coordinator supervises that process and meets with the student staff weekly to implement the work plan and oversees the AGF partnership. Additionally, Election@Bard develops annual student-led programming and project ideas to reflect the interests of the student body in a given year (in conjunction with the NSLVE data from the previous, similar election cycle). The CCE and ELAS staff manage funding to support integration of civic engagement into the curriculum and support faculty initiatives. These responsibilities are included in job descriptions and supported by the Vice President for Civic Engagement, who also sits on the planning team.

The President’s Office is involved in regularly communicating to the campus about elections and the President has been a named litigant in most of the lawsuits. Leadership support has been critical to the success of voter advocacy at Bard and remains a value of the institution that is realized through the work of the CCE and the CCE’s campus partners.

***Leadership Engagement:***

As Nancy Thomas put it in her article “Institution as Citizen,” “when institutional leaders at the very top are involved, the result can transform a community and impact the culture of the institution.” The transition of institutions in becoming a justice-oriented framework requires a commitment from senior leadership. University leaders seemed to have been largely silent or absent from the debate about the 26th Amendment.

Bard College’s senior leaders make annual statements of solidarity with students and have tracked and intervened in efforts to disenfranchise students. This has included speaking out against efforts to limit access to the polls. Leadership has applied authority and resources to expand the franchise in Dutchess County and built out the Election@Bard program in support of student-leadership as well as institutional leadership.

Bard’s Boards of Trustees reinforced senior leadership messaging and reinforced the College’s commitment to voter rights. The Bard College Board of Trustees passed a resolution in January 2000 supporting “the rights of students at Bard” and other area colleges to vote “where they study and live.” The resolution called upon the Dutchess County Board of Elections to “change their discriminatory practices that impinge upon student voting rights.” Accompanying that statement are clear policies and procedures that support involvement in the electoral process.

Leadership strategies include:

- Regular distribution of campus-wide communications from the President, Executive Vice President, and Vice President for Civic Engagement articulating institutional support, protection and encouragement of student voting on an annual basis. This includes a note from the president to first year students prior to their arrival for orientation, along with regular communications throughout the semester (for the first month of the semester, these communications are weekly; in the week leading up to



Election Day, these communications become daily) to the whole campus (this includes students, staff, and faculty).

- Bard’s advocacy work has included public statements on the College’s position that students not only have the right to vote where they live, work, and study, but that many students should vote at College because it is their community home and they deserve to be treated no differently from other citizens. Multiple op-eds and public statements can be found on our website [here](#). This includes signing the All In Higher Education Presidents’ Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation.
- Through Bard’s advocacy work, leadership has challenged false claims that students shouldn’t participate. The institution has played a watchdog role in monitoring attempts to disenfranchise students. This includes taking a lead role in supporting legal action, encouraging poll work/poll watching that includes senior leadership.
- We have made continuous public commitments to resource voter engagement and voter protection efforts that include ongoing resources for our campus team responsible for the expansion of voter engagement and action planning.
- Bard’s leadership actively encourages and makes room for faculty, staff and students to participate in voter registration and election day processes as poll watchers or poll workers. Information on opportunities for participation are advertised widely to the whole community.

### **III. COMMITMENT**

#### ***College Mission***

Bard’s tagline is “a private university acting in the public interest,” where the lived values is realized through credit bearing and degree granting programs in 9 public high schools/early colleges. Bard is also the largest degree granting program in American prisons, provides accredited Clemente humanities courses, and runs microcolleges in community centers and libraries around the county. Of the 10,000 students enrolled in free courses or degrees national and internationally, less than 2000 are at Bard’s main campus.

This value extends to the legal action and watchdog role Bard has assumed around voter access and enfranchisement for 20 years that include increasing voter access, participation, and engagement. Bard’s mission states: Bard acts at the intersection of education and civil society, extending liberal arts and sciences education to communities in which it has been underdeveloped, inaccessible, or absent. Through its undergraduate college, distinctive graduate programs, commitment to the fine and performing arts, civic and public engagement programs, and network of international dual-degree partnerships, early colleges, and prison education initiatives, Bard offers unique opportunities for students and faculty to study, experience, and realize the principle that higher-education institutions can and should operate in the public interest.

#### ***Commitment of Senior Leadership***

As mentioned in the section on Leadership, the core team overseeing voter outreach on Bard’s campus includes two vice presidents, one of which is the Executive Vice President who originally founded the Center for Civic Engagement. Additionally, the Bard President has been

involved in multiple advocacy efforts including being named as a litigant in the lawsuits securing on-campus voter access.

As part of the integrated action goal, two major initiatives have been launched.

#### Initiatives

##### 1. [Certificate in Civic Engagement](#)

The Certificate in Civic Engagement was launched four semesters ago to provide a structured path for undergraduate students interested in deepening their knowledge and understanding of civic and community engagement by merging curricular and co-curricular interests. The certificate sets out expectations that students will be knowledgeable about theories of citizenship, democratic participation, civil society, and social action. Successful students in the cohort are also familiar with their local community and are cognizant of the ways in which the local, national and global are linked. Courses that are a part of the certificate focus on themes related to civic engagement and/or the practice of it. The certificate is acknowledged on each student's transcript.

The learning outcomes associated with the certificate inform the learning objectives of ELAS courses like the Voting Rights course (see point 2) and are being considered as part of the new Civics Initiative.

#### Learning Outcomes

- Understand the core concepts of civic engagement, civil society, civic agency, engaged citizenship and social action and their relationship to these concepts. (foundational knowledge)
- Apply theory to practice by engaging with community partners through curricular and co-curricular experiences that develop their capacity to think critically about the context, impacts, challenges and opportunities of civic engagement activities, including those in which students lead or participate. (application)
- Analyze different types of civic actors (from small not-for-profits to transnational advocacy organizations), scope of activities (local, national or global), and political (liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes) and economic environments (advanced industrial democracies or developing countries), in order to help understand their capacity and that of others to act effectively. (contextualization)
- Reflect on what it means to be an engaged citizen and the ethical implications of civic engagement activities in order to help them act responsibly. (empathic practice)
- Conceptualize and integrate applied skills, research, practice and reflection to develop their own sense of agency, leadership, responsibility, self-confidence and civic skills. (learning to lead)

##### 2. [Voting Rights Network Collaborative Course](#)

The Mellon Foundation is funding a network course and the creation of OER materials. Research and teaching materials on the history of voting rights, with a special focus on the 26th Amendment, in the form of written and video case studies, recorded lectures, and oral histories are being produced. These materials are contextualized by the historic and contemporary struggles for voting rights on four campuses in a codesigned and co-taught network collaborative

courses is taking place simultaneously at the four main partner institutions of higher education: Bard College, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Tuskegee University, and Prairie View A&M University. The materials are being used in Andrew Goodman Foundation's trainings of their Vote Everywhere student ambassadors.

### Student-led Initiatives

Election@Bard dedicates its work to encouraging and magnifying students' voices when they seek to engage with their local and federal governments. Efforts are geared at reaching out to voting-age students. As of December 2023, the team has held numerous in-person events at locations with high student-traffic to support registration, answer questions relating to upcoming elections, and raise awareness/excitement about local political engagement. Election@Bard is set on a clear, measurable goal: increasing the rate of voter registration and actual participation across campus. Events that reach out directly to students serve the purpose of increasing registered voters and volunteers and awareness of voting. Beyond those "tabling" events that also ensure productive dialogues on civic engagement, E@B also aims to protect students' right to vote with accessibility and ease. Election@Bard maintains a practical list of over a dozen key steps to defend student voters, including the provision of free transportation to polling sites, legal advocacy for an on-campus poll, and tracking voter outcomes to ensure equitable access. All of these steps are part of a greater goal to guarantee that students can utilize their right to vote without difficulty or discouragement.

Election@Bard aims to make its home somewhere students are not only free to engage with their local and national government through civic engagement and voting, but a beacon of inspiration for the next generation of activists, scholars, and leaders to work together in tandem with their country's democracy. This mode of democratic engagement is emphasized by Bard's curriculum that focuses on providing students with the skills to interact with their communities, develop programs that benefit individuals and groups, and create change beyond the simple act of voting. Election@Bard further provides spaces for discussion of legislation, human rights, intersectionality, and other important topics not only through its connection with institutional and off-campus partners, but throughout its continued efforts to foster conversation between students, faculty, and guest speakers in formal and informal settings. Through these interfaces between the student body and activist leaders, Election@Bard also emphasizes inclusivity on campus and within its team structure. The team is beginning planning and exploring ways to include and encourage international students in dialogues surrounding American politics, as well as aiming expanding outreach to those with the BPI (Bard Prison Initiative) and including their voices in an incipient project that will address mass incarceration.

Bard strives to highlight the fruitful connections between "higher education and civic participation" that "can and should operate in the public interest," goals taken directly from the college's mission statement. Bard provides its students with a *bildung*, an education rooted in the actuality of the real world and the preparation to enter it. This includes an emphasis on the relevancy of current events, inclusivity in all aspects of learning, and nuanced respect in academic language. Part of that standard, educational process is informing students how they can "give back" to their communities, using the knowledge they've gained in their undergraduate studies and applying it to real world situations. Bard doesn't just work to popularize this stature of civic engagement amongst its students, but aims to proliferate the liberal arts experience and

its social/political outcomes in local areas. In doing so, Bard is removing the elitist barrier to higher education, as well as making the capacity to work with the public universal for all individuals, regardless of their access. As a microcosm of that broad goal, Election@Bard seeks to raise the rate of voter registration and civic participation on-campus, removing barriers for the marginalized or disenfranchised in order to demonstrate to students how much change they themselves can impart in the name of public interest. As students declare their majors and complete their graduation requirements (and eventually graduate out), students' growth into impactful, professional roles as leaders, activists, workers, artists, and scholars is only possible with their first step in registering to vote with Election@Bard.

#### **IV. LANDSCAPE**

The College is still waiting on the 2022 NSLVE. However, during the 2022, the team implemented a few new procedures in an attempt to capture better data and understand voter outcomes.

1. Created a form to send to incoming first years outlining voter registration options and requesting current voter registration status. Most students are registered now through a high school program. Many are not familiar with the absentee voting process. Voter education on those processes are provided to help voters make informed decisions about where to register upon arrival to campus.
2. All first year and transfer students are required to check-in in person at the voter registration room upon arrival. Approximately 95% of eligible students are reached in this process and those opting to register locally are processed on-site. Over 50% of first year students registered locally in August 2023.
3. In 2022, we developed a new engagement survey to capture student interests (this information was then shared with appropriate offices/programs and pertinent information about engagement options sent to students) along with voter registration information for students who elected to remain registered at the address where they are from. Additionally, on the engagement survey, 20% of our incoming students listed Election@Bard as one of their top three interests now that they're on-campus.
4. Through ongoing voter registration tracking, we were able to strategically reach students during the GOTV process and track whether local voter registrations forms are successfully processed. Currently, over 500 students are registered locally. About 280 students voted in the 2023 local elections. We tracked this information throughout our new process.
5. We are now analyzing demographic information about the voters who elected to vote in order to identify gaps in voter engagement.
6. In addition to all arrival days, voter registration is now connected to Housing Selection. All students will need to complete a form that includes a voter registration status look-up with information about primaries and absentee ballots processes. Students opting out of Housing Selection will be prompted to re-register with their new off-campus address.

Old 2020 NSLVE Data to be updated upon the submission of the new report.

### ***Area of Study/Overall:***

Multiple trends were seen in voting rates on the campus. From 2016 to 2020, Bard college saw an increase of 3.9% in voting rate, bringing the campus to 72.7%. The registration rate increased marginally from 2016 to 2020, reaching 89.9%.

- The Natural Resources and Conservation department saw the highest growth in voting rate. The growth was 17% from 2016 to 2020.
- There was a large decrease in the Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Humanities department where the voting rate fell by 38%.
- Another decrease in the voting rate was seen in the Business, Management, and Marketing department, having fallen by 4%.
  - Overall, a decline in voting was seen in 2018 during midterm elections. However, during the presidential election in 2020 the rates flattened and managed to increase compared to 2018 election voting rates.

### ***Race/ethnicity:***

A positive trend was seen in voting rates across different race/ethnicity groups. However, there is no exact data across the groups. It is apparent that there should be a protocol in place where the team can get the data about the voter's race/ethnicity. Once the guidelines are implemented, it will be easier to analyze trends and incorporate various strategies to facilitate voting across those groups.

- In the Asian demographic, there is a trend of growth across voting rates.
- No data is present for American Indian/Alaskan Native.
- There is a trend of growth across voting rates in the Black demographic.
- There is a trend of growth across voting rates in the Hispanic demographic.
- No data is present for the Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander demographic.
- There is a trend of growth across voting rates in the multiracial demographic.
- There is a trend of growth across voting rates in the White demographic.

### ***Age Groups:***

A general growth rate has been observed in the data compiled from 2016-2020 of voting trends across the student population at Bard. They include:

- A general trend of growth has been seen across the data, without excluding the decrease of voting rates in ages 30-39 that had a -17% decrease rate, the growth rate is 1.5%. - However, excluding the decrease, the growth rate across ages 18-29 is 7.7%. - This data shows that through the years 2016-2020, the student population ages 18-29 has become more facilitated in the elections thus prompting the increase in voting rates across the 4 years.
- However, it is unclear why the voting rate has fallen by 17% in the age group 30-39 in the past 4 years. It is clear, though, that the youngest cohorts also have the highest rates of engagement.

***By Sex/Gender:***

There is no data present on the sex of the voters on campus. This facilitates the idea that there should be a guideline implemented for data collection about demographics that are excluded from NSLVE data and aren't currently monitored by the Election@Bard team (sex/gender is not a required field on the New York State voter registration form).

## **V. GOALS**

***Short term:***

Spring 2024 semester

Election@Bard student-led initiative:

- In February 2024, Election@Bard will launch a rebrand in order to increase student engagement (logo redesign, a new social media presence that is curated for the needs and interests of our student body, and a new approach to voter registration and informational tabling).
- Election@Bard will be engaging student graphic designers and conducting research on social media marketing and communication.
- Election@Bard's spring 2024 goals are to:
  - Create digital voter information stations in the Campus Center for with voter "look up" options to double check voter registration status
  - Provide ongoing voter registration opportunities in partnership with faculty, courses, clubs and Athletics to help students determine where and how they will vote in the 2024 primaries and general election
  - Develop an interactive digital map for the Campus Center with absentee voter processes by state
  - Conduct individual outreach to voters via text messaging and dorm storming to prepare voters for the 2024 spring primaries
  - Create a "why I vote" campaign in partnership with Beings at Bard, a social media group on campus
  - Finalize report on 2023 student engagement based on voter demographic information to better understand where to develop deeper engagement.
  - Create voter engagement/education materials to help students understand "what to expect at the polls" (either in person or absentee) to encourage students to be active voters with awareness about voting processes and their engagement with those processes.
  - Present 2024 election plans to be presented to the Bard community at the start of the spring term. Including fun, engaging, arts-based activities like the recent Election Parade to the polls organized by Election@Bard in fall 2023.

***Long term:***

Over the coming election cycles Election@Bard looks to expand its peer-to-peer network through:

- Engage incoming first years - expand opportunities for those students to consider where to vote in advance of arrival.
- Continue to table regularly for voter registration, especially in the weeks leading up to a

voter registration deadline and on registration day.

- Surveying incoming students upon check in to gauge their eligibility and voter registration status to establish a baseline
- Launching an “I Vote for/because...” campaign that will run over social media and in person through creation of personalized signs and buttons that students can keep
- (Encouraging civic engagement through tabling is emphasized throughout the year, regardless of elections.)
- Developing in-dorm table events in dorms with the lowest rates of registration in order to effectively spend time connecting with students. Dorm pop-ups would ideally be organized mainly in the months preceding local and federal elections in order to raise solid awareness.
- Establishing a relationship between Election@Bard and Residence Life Office allowing Peer Counselors to reach out to Election@Bard for assistance in creating a programming event geared towards voter education/registration in dorm halls.
- Establish a curriculum that will take place weekly or biweekly that includes an activity/ and training rooted in civic action that can impact elections, letter writing, canvassing, phone banking.
- Hire an intern with a focus on communicating with out-of-state voters via email, Instagram, and direct contact to remind them of deadlines, support them with requesting absentee ballots, and provide other important resources.
- Enhance collaboration with CCE and Career Development Office by promoting research/internship opportunities for students who are seeking employment opportunities with government agencies and elected officials.
  - Enhancing collaboration with OSUN, the Civics Initiative, ELAS program , and the Language and Thinking orientation program to prepare and develop future civic engagement courses, as well as to create institutional events where students are given the opportunity to register alongside their classmates at key points during the semester.
- Update the CCE website to provide students with all possible resources to work with Election@Bard.
- Create a full suite of promotional materials that are branded to the college and Election@Bard. This emphasizes coherence within the team as well as the team's consistent efforts at effective outreach.

The Election@Bard Team would also like to start an initiative to cancel all classes on Election Day, led by the following steps:

- Create a campaign for faculty and program chairs to adjust their syllabus to account for Election Day either through moving class or incorporating election topics into the course for that day.
- Establish clear communication with faculty and staff about information relevant to election day and registration
- Present new student-led initiative proposals for Election Day and electoral participation to college administration for support.

## **VI. NSLVE**

See outline on how Election@Bard initiative is better integrating demographic data into the planning and developing better processes and voter touchpoints. See commitment section on new curricular initiatives better integrating civics into the curriculum and the expansion of civic engagement overall.

Based on the 2020 NSLVE data, Election@Bard has worked more closely with the ELAS program and with faculty to increase voter participation in key areas including disciplines like the humanities. Through the Civics Initiative, we will reach more students in a wider range of majors and expand opportunities for students to engage beyond the ballot.

The arts program has engaged in a number of election oriented projects that are incorporated into the art program, including “why I vote” signs that are used every election. The Election Parade engaged Conservatory and music students as well as theater and dance students. Ongoing coordination with student-led initiatives, opportunities for engagement with local campaigns and with local offices through courses and one-on-one outreach to eligible voters can help Election@Bard reach 100% of voters.

Using the 2023 demographic information, the team has already recruited the Council for Inclusive Excellence to develop a working group to diversify our reach. Currently, the group is in contact with Out@Bard to develop voter education materials and conduct research on best practices to support LGBTQ+ students who are confused about requirements for registration with legal vs. preferred name. Additionally, Election@Bard is developing a strategy in coordination with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to connect more strategically with scholarship students, students registered with the Disability Office and with Identity Based clubs and organizations including Gilson Place, a space on campus for students of color. This includes targeted recruitment to expand the team.

We are aware that once the NSLVE data does come in, that we will better incorporate that data into our planning process that is already underway using the data that we have collected ourselves from the last two elections. The team has taken the feedback from ALL IN seriously, and are increasingly looking to the data to inform our practices.

## **VII. STRATEGY**

Short term

Curricular

First Year Seminar

As mentioned, a number of curricular initiatives are underway. We anticipate announcing an exciting new project through our required first year seminar course which has received funding but the announcement remains embargoed.

Co-Curricular

Election@Bard’s team considered the following questions in planning:

How are voter registration processes tracked? At what rate are voter registration forms rejected



and for what reason? What is the experience of students at polling sites during early voting or on Election Day? Do students have to travel far from campus? Are polling sites accessible by public transportation and are they handicap accessible? What is the experience of student voters at the polling site? Are they turned away by poll workers or forced to vote affidavit due to concerns about ID's or for other reasons? Do they know what their rights are if they are challenged? Are student absentee ballot or mail-in forms counted or challenged? Have students been disproportionately purged from the rolls and/or made "inactive"? If so, for what reason?

***Practices include:***

Communication Strategy: Election@Bard along with the College's Publications and Communications office have developed a communications plan that incorporates all levels of institutional response including strategies to engage students and to publicly address issues that might arise through the registration and voting process, including explicit statements from the College's leadership. This strategy includes:

- Public Statements from the president affirming students' right to vote
- Senior leadership sitting on planning team
- Coordination of messaging to families to support new voters in managing the voter registration process starting with first years prior to arrival day
- Social Media campaigns and messaging beginning prior to first year arrival - student-to-student communications
- Marketing and rebranding all materials
- Faculty messaging and engagement to encourage students to get out the vote

Monitoring Mechanisms: Election@Bard monitors voter registration to identify challenges to successfully enrolling voters (to educate students whose forms are incorrect and to identify any tactics to suppress voting or purge student voters); monitors voter enrollment following voter registration to track areas of concern: are students successfully being placed on voter rolls after registration forms are submitted? Are students making clerical errors or are student voters rejected? If so, what are the reasons cited? Do voters remain on the rolls long term? How regularly are rolls purged and for what reasons?

- Advocacy Task Force: Election@Bard intends to organize a cross-constituency taskforce that includes students, faculty, and college administrators charged with advocating and expanding voter rights with local officials; identify strategies to address challenges that may emerge during the process of enrollment and voting.
- Partnerships: Election@Bard has identified local and national partners focused on voter advocacy and voting rights protection, including a legal team that helps on Election Day as poll watchers and act as advisors when voting issues arise. Our legal team has helped to determine what other forms of legal intervention are necessary as challenges to voter participation and the team has identified and assessed those challenges. Partnerships also take the form of Election@Bard's connections to the curriculum (OSUN and ELAS classes, for example) that encourage civic engagement. In addition to our legal team and our curriculum connections, Election@Bard will also partner with the student affinity groups and organizations on campus, our office for residential life, the Hudson Valley Student Coalition and other institutional organizations and initiatives.
- Student action: Election@Bard's student team runs tabling events at least once a month several months prior to elections. Interns provide students with information and

registration resources outside high-traffic areas on campus, such as by the dining hall or in dorms, to emphasize peer-to-peer engagement and outcomes that strengthen student relationships with the team and civic engagement in general.

### ***Monitoring Voter Registration:***

Monitoring begins at voter registration. While colleges are obliged to register voters, and Bard does advocate for pro-active efforts which include mechanisms to make voter registration part of the orientation and/or course registration processes, analogous to motor-voter law, Election@Bard has organized an institutionally-sponsored voter registration team to track student voter registration forms after they have been submitted to Boards of Elections. This allows the team to identify problems at two critical times: prior to the end of registration and prior to Election Day. Early monitoring can allow students to correct clerical errors, like misspelled names. It can also alert them when they have been made inactive (for example, if a postcard from the Board of Elections was returned), so that they can either re-register prior to the deadline. Alternatively, at least in New York, student voters can ask for a provisional ballot. In principle, this should count. However, if student voters are not on the rolls on Election Day, this can also signal the need for organized efforts to fight voter suppression efforts. This unfortunately happened in Dutchess County in 2012 when the Board of Elections suddenly rejected registrations that did not include dorm room numbers. Only after a federal lawsuit was filed by the New York Civil Liberties Union on behalf of the students, those voters were reinstated.

In order to effectively monitor, Election@Bard provides mechanisms for students to indicate if their registrations have been rejected and/or ask students to check their registrations with publicly available state/county databases. If student voters have problems, the student team can then inform the institutional team. We make FOIL requests for lists of registered voters to compare them with forms collected in registration campaigns. Election@Bard reaches out to voters whose forms were rejected before registration deadlines to ameliorate any difficulties. Tracking the reasons given for those rejections can also help inform future advice given to students during the registration process so that forms are completed accurately.

### ***Monitoring Election Day Voting:***

Election Day can be fraught for any voter; however, students (especially students who have been marginalized in the past) can struggle to successfully cast a ballot. To ensure that rights of student voters are preserved, Election@Bard has an extensive election-day strategy and plan for follow-up which involves monitoring and responding in real time to challenges to student voters. This strategic plan includes the following action teams to mobilize and manage a variety of interventions on Election Day:

- Clerical errors, like the misspelling of a name, can lead to a voter being sent away; uninformed and poorly trained poll workers can ask for the wrong type of identification; hostile poll watchers can intimidate student voters by challenging them with or without reason; and election day court-decisions by local judges can disrupt the voting process.
- Encourage students, faculty, and administrators to serve as poll workers and poll watchers at polling sites where students vote; Train non-partisan monitoring teams to track student experiences at polling sites;

- Deploy information teams to distribute electronic communications and be available at relevant locations around campus to remind students of requirements vis-a-vis identification and what to do if challenged and provide sample ballots for students to review prior to arriving at a polling site;
- Partner with community organizations to provide support if challenged, including volunteers with legal expertise;
- Provide transportation to and from polling sites as well as transportation for voters who need to affirm their right to vote in front of a judge.
- Provide an election-day hotline via phone or text for students with trouble voting to assist and troubleshoot. Establish a central voter hub to provide in-person resources for voter questions staffed by trained students, faculty, and staff.

The presence of advocates on Election Day accomplishes a few goals. First, it reinforces the institutional commitment and acts as a visible indicator that the institution is not only facilitating the process of voting but protecting voter rights. Second, the process of voting becomes an educational experience as students learn how to vote and what their rights are in the case that they are challenged. Students are often confused by the voting process, even if they are not a first-time voter. Even with campus teams deployed, much of the work of the monitoring teams on election day at Bard have focused on voter education. Many students have expressed confusion about where to go to vote, assuming they can show up at any polling location to vote or to fill out same day registration forms (New York State is not a same day registration state). These teams are able to educate and help ensure that students are aware of how the voting process works. Troubleshooting registration issues that include identifying students who may not have been appropriately registered or who did not submit a registration form, can be a powerful tool in reaching future voters. Election@Bard's monitoring teams are unaffiliated and explicitly available to protect voter rights and are not connected to any student club or organizing efforts on behalf of a specific candidate or party. Institutional initiatives are non-partisan and solely focused on youth voting rights and access to polls.

## **VIII. REPORTING**

The Election@Bard team is working on a complete rebranding that includes a website update. The plan will be shared with all working groups in January of 2024 to help teams coordinate with more campus offices. As mentioned, new initiatives are being organized to reach out to more diverse voters and to connect more widely on campus. Senior leaders are working with department directors to collaborate. Much of the team's efforts in the past have been in the advocacy space where voter engagement and education has suffered. With the polling site now permanently in place and a polling site redistricting plan that was implemented this year making Bard's campus a polling site that only includes Bard voters, it makes it easier for us to track voter engagement and support voter education. The newly formed HVSVC in the region is helping students identify best practices and strategies around engagement.

## **IX. EVALUATION**

Evaluation and monitoring has been one of the hardest sections for our team to manage. Most of the evaluation has been done after an election. Updates to the data are now year round with monthly reviews of student data. The CCE is developing more survey tools to better understand student experiences and provide more frequent feedback on the process of voter registration and voting at Bard.

Besides demographic data from NSLVE, Election@Bard tracks data in coordination with Residence Life and the Dean of Students Office to help understand who is engaged and where there are gaps in our voter engagement. Staff and students are trained on management of the data. Then, the data is used throughout the August-October period to ensure that staff and the student team can use housing data and graduation years to help with student voters when they move or graduate. More efforts are being organized to support students moving off-campus into new districts and those who are graduating and leaving their student residences. Processes are in place to help students voting from their study abroad campuses and efforts are being put in place to help support international student voting in their home countries as part of a larger effort to link up to elections beyond the U.S.

The data is primarily used and analyzed by the Election@Bard interns but managed with the supervision of CCE staff. Data is collected at dorm pop-ups, tabling, athletic events, club fair, orientation, civic holidays, all openings, etc. and information updated regularly. In this upcoming year, the plan is to update data weekly and to reach 100% voter registration for all voters as well as having a complete list of where all voters are intending to vote. It will help evaluate impacts following the election and troubleshoot problems prior to voter registration end dates.

Additionally, we are tracking engagement through volunteer hours, course enrollment, internship and campaign involvement along with participation in the new civics initiative. Bard recently participated in the NASCE survey on engagement and is in the process of better understanding the impact of Covid on our volunteer and engagement numbers.

Activities impact: we intend on building out a calendar of events and coordination organized by voter registration, voter advocacy, data management, communications, GOTV (primaries and general including Student Government elections), and beyond the ballot organizing. Additionally, Bard's curricular initiatives to host better events and activities will give the Bard core team a better understanding of impacts and outcomes.