

# Bard



**Bard College's ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan**

**January 15th, 2020**

## Executive Summary

- *Background:*
  - Election@Bard is an initiative funded by the Bard Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) and the Andrew Goodman Foundation (AGF) that facilitates voter registration, provides non-partisan candidate and election information, and fights for voting rights protection. Bard College and Election@Bard believes that voting is one of the most fundamental rights in a democratic society and we encourage all students to exercise the right to vote.
  - Since its launch in 2014, Election@Bard has activated its network to go beyond voter registration. . Election@Bard hosts candidate meet and greet forums for students, lobbies for voter rights with public officials, raises key issues like gun control and immigration rights, sponsors student leadership conferences and makes civic engagement more accessible to the student body. , Election@Bard is playing an active role in working to protect voter rights and polling site accessibility for college-age voters in Dutchess County.
- *Who developed this plan?*
  - **Erin Cannan**, Bard Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Civic Engagement, **Bonnie Goad**, Bard Associate Director of Civic Engagement, and **Sarah deVeer '17**, Bard Outreach Coordinator. **Ava Mazzye '20**, GOLD Team Leader and Director of Election@Bard, and **Kathy Gaweda '21**, GOLD Election@Bard Co-Leader.
- *Who is a part of our coalition?*
  - Election@Bard partners with local non-partisan voter groups like League of Women Voters, the Andrew Goodman Foundation, and campus partners within the College.
- *What is this action plan for and what does it seek to accomplish?*
  - Bard's All in Challenge action plan is a 2020 roadmap; this year will take our campus through cyclical voter registrations, a national census, a New York State primary, presidential, governor and senate election (and corresponding campaigns), and post-election aftermath.

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## **Leadership:**

### *Election@Bard Core Team:*

- *Jonathan Becker* -- Bard Executive Vice President, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Executive Advisor to Election@Bard
- *Erin Cannan* -- Bard Vice President of Student Affairs, Election@Bard Campus Champion
- *Bonnie Goad* -- Bard Associate Director, Center for Civic Engagement, Election@Bard Poll Watcher
- *David Shein* -- Bard Associate Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs, Dean of Studies, Election@Bard Poll Watcher
- *Sarah deVeer '17* -- Bard Outreach Coordinator, Election@Bard Campus Champion
- *Ava Mazzye '20* -- Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Team Leader
- *Rhayne Batista '23* -- Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassador
- *Katarzyna Gameda '21* -- Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassador
- *Adrian Costa '21* -- Election@Bard Team Member
- *Sadia Saba '21* -- Election@Bard Team Member
- *Volunteers* -- Additionally, Election@Bard's work could not be done without the work of dedicated volunteers, who join with us to support mobilization efforts.
- *Community partners* -- The Andrew Goodman Foundation, The League of Women Voters, Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson New York, Dutchess County Board of Elections
- *Campus partners* -- The Center for Civic Engagement, The Office of Residence Life, Center for Student Life and Advising, the Athletics Department, The Office of Admission, Bard Democrats, IGNITE Bard College Chapter, Bard High School Early College network

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## Commitment

Election@Bard is an initiative that demonstrates student and faculty commitment to promoting democratic engagement amongst youth voters. While Election@Bard focuses on voter registration, candidate and election information, and protecting voter rights, Bard as a whole is deeply committed to integrating issues related to national and local elections within the curriculum. This commitment is illustrated through a number of courses that are taught and centered on themes of democracy, American government and voter engagement that will be held during this election year. Specifically, Jonathan Becker (Executive Vice President and Executive Advisor to Election@Bard) and Erin Cannan (Vice President of Student Affairs and Election@Bard Campus Champion) co-teach a class each year entitled “Engaged Citizenship: Civic Engagement Locally, Nationally, and Internationally.” Throughout this course, students attend local Town Board meetings and meet with local and national leaders, including the Mayor of New Orleans. Additionally, they encourage students to attend election panels, participate in reviewing the development of the federal government on Constitution Day and the history of voting in the United States ahead of Election Day.

In addition to the course, Professor Simon Gilhooley of the Political Studies department, has taught “American Politics: Issues and Institutions.” This course introduces students to the basic institutions and processes of American government. The class provides students with a grasp of the fundamental dynamics of American politics and the skills to be an effective participant in and critic of the political process. During the semester, students examine how the government works, interpret current political developments and debates, and consider how to influence the government at various levels. They also link with the “Engaged Citizenship” course for cross-classroom discussions.

In addition, there is a third unique course taught by Professor Jackie Goss of the Film department, entitled “Framing the Election.” This course is taught every four years during the presidential election cycle. “Framing the Election” provides a structure for students to capture, process, frame and produce some aspect of presidential politics in terms of one’s own personal experience. Following the chronology of the election, the students utilize the first two months of the semester to gather source material and consider texts produced out of prior elections. The latter part of the semester is dedicated to the production of films, videos, sound works or internet-based projects made in response to the results of this election. As an all-class group project, students plan an event that will take place the day before Election Day, either on-campus or off-campus. The last time this course was taught in fall 2016, students created an interactive, experimental ballot-processing art, due to the contentious topics of rigged elections and voter suppression.

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Bard's Hannah Arendt Center conference features prominent and disparate voices on topics related to politics. The 2020 conference is focused on *Revitalizing Democracy: Sortition, Citizen Power, and the Space of Freedom*. Arendt Center faculty will teach associated courses in the fall of 2020 that address questions related to American democracy along with sponsoring more speakers and events.

## **Landscape**

### *Off-campus polling place*

The largest barrier to voting at Bard College is not having a polling place on campus. Bard's designated polling place sits several miles down a sidewalk-less road at St. John's Church. The 550-square-foot space barely allows enough room for the voting equipment and personnel. Each election day, students and community members alike line up out the door, forced to face cold weather or rain. Additionally, the site isn't accessible by public transport—despite there being a clear preference in election law for sites located along public transportation routes. These conditions create a number of hurdles that keep the local community from fully participating in elections.

For years, Election@Bard has lobbied local government officials and the board of elections to move the polling place from St. John's Church to campus. This has included advocating for a change to local town boards and the county election commissioners office. Sixty-eight percent of the district's eligible voters reside at Bard College, meaning that if the polling place were relocated to campus, the majority of eligible voters would be within walking distance from casting a ballot. This would allow students to vote with ease, in between their various classes and jobs. In addition to the student voters, non-campus community members would also benefit from the move of the polling site, as the College's campus *is* accessible by public transportation, has ample parking, is ADA compliant, and has the spatial capacity to allow for voters to comfortably wait to cast their ballot.

### General voting culture at Bard College --

Voting culture at Bard College can be characterized as generally positive and habitual, which is largely due to pro-voting initiatives like Election@Bard. Upon coming to campus as first years, students interact with institutionalized voter registration practices at move in day. Much like students would get in line to receive their student ID, or their room key, Bard students register to vote, either at the College, or at another permanent address. Upper college students model healthy voting habits by engaging in the political process through proper voter registration or re-registration processes, casting a ballot on Election Day, participating in formal and informal get out the vote efforts that set the tone for community norms. Election@Bard supports students pre-election by providing non-partisan information on candidates along with active get out the vote reminders. Election Day

# Bard CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

features easily accessible transportation to polling sites throughout the day, voter advocates to troubleshoot, poll watching, coordinated transportation to help voters contesting their voter

registration status or supporting voters at the wrong polling site. Post election, Election@Bard hosts returns parties and post election results information for the community. Passionate student organizers engaged with advocacy groups like the Sunrise Movement and the Bard Immigration Coalition, contribute to voter mobilization by tapping into issues important to the student body, while Election@Bard provides students the means to access polls regardless of party affiliation as a fundamental right for all voters.

Changing national and state legislation --

The makeup of New York State's legislature changed drastically with the 2018 elections when a new democratic trifecta was put in office: a Democratic governor, and Democratic control of the state senate and assembly. With one party in control, the State is tackling the issue of election policy reform. These policy changes will largely impact how organizers across the state approach youth mobilization. With pre-registration having been enacted by the NYS legislature for 16 and 17-year olds, the College is excited to see what our registration and voting rates are next year, as a new generation of young voters enrolls. In addition to the pro-voting reforms already passed by the legislature, other laws are still on the table, like S4378 which would designate college campuses as polling place sites. This is one example of pro-voting legislation that Election@Bard plans to support in the coming year.

## *NSLVE Reports*

Bard College's 2018 NSLVE report demonstrated the positive effects of pro-voting initiatives. Currently, the voting rate at Bard College sits at 47.2%, which is significantly higher than the national average of all institutions, which is 39.1%. Additionally, the report shows an 85.2% registration rate, which demonstrates the success of Election@Bard's institutionalized voter registration processes, which students engage with upon first coming to campus. As a result of these feats, Bard College was awarded a Gold Seal at the 2019 ALL IN Challenge Awards Ceremony. Finally, Bard College's 2018 NSLVE report showed significant improvement in both voter registration rates when compared with 2016.

Although the 2018 NSLVE report for Bard College has some material that doesn't necessarily benefit our initiative (the numbers relating to voting rates by academic discipline appear rather inaccurate for our specific institution) there are aspects of the report which should inform how we conduct our programming. For example, the report demonstrates that Bard College students between the ages of 18-21 have markedly better voter turnout rates than their older peers. This data would suggest that our voter mobilization efforts may see improvement if we target older student. Additionally, the report breaks down voting numbers by graduate and undergraduate

# Bard CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

students, allowing us to focus registration or mobilization efforts on one or the other when necessary

*Goals --*

The Election@Bard team seeks to establish goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timebound, inclusive and equitable. Additionally, all of our goals fall under our tri-pronged approach to improving democratic culture on campus: voter registration, voter education, and voter inclusion and engagement.

## **Short term goals (1 year)**

- Expand the Election@Bard team by hiring new five interns who are first years or sophomores.
- Develop three new sustainable community and campus partners by collaborating on programming, as well as promoting others' nonpartisan resources. Host at least five events in the spring semester focused on the primaries. This includes materials explaining how the primary works.
- Focus on civic education providing materials outlining the roles of all elected officials up for election in NYS by April 2020.
- Monitor and support the absentee ballot process using interns trained in national voter regulations for the primaries.
- Create an Election@Bard handbook for future student leaders as current students graduate by May 2020.
- Draft policies relating to the following activities on campus by September 2020: third party voter registration, petitioning for candidates to be on the ballot, and campaigning.
- Identify Election@Bard issue to engage with elected officials.
- Host a lobby day in Albany to encourage student engagement in other democratic processes by April 2020.
- Create materials for the website on roles of American government by September 2020.
- Host regular skills based workshops in collaboration with CCE to promote information literacy to counterbalance impacts of fake news.
- Review demographics of Bard voters to ensure voter engagement is inclusive by September 2020. Identify areas of growth.

Goals for the 2020 election -- our success in these goals will be evidenced by the 2020 NSLVE report.

- Raise the voter registration rate from 85.2% to 90%.
- Raise the voting rate of registered students from 65.7% to 75%.

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- Raise the overall voting rate from 55% to 60%


## Long term goals

- Relocate our designated polling site to Bard's campus through engaging processes available through government.
- Engage in pro-voting lobbying efforts at our state capital in Albany, NY in order to further protect voter rights.
- Enhance opportunities for students to find internships with government offices and elected officials through programs in Bard's Career Development Office, including paid positions through CCE's summer Community Action Award program
- Expanding courses and internships for credit available for students interested in American politics.

## Strategy

- Short-term programming -- the registration, education, and engagement of Bard College students begins with programming. Through a wide array of diverse activities, including screenings of debates, voter registration/absentee ballot drives, and trivia nights we hope to engage the varied interests of our student body.
  - *Screening of the 2020 State of the Union* (date tbd) -- screening of this event in the College's Campus Center, accompanied with snacks.
  - *Screening of all future presidential debates* -- screening of this event in the College's Campus Center, accompanied with snacks. Students in attendance will have the opportunity to learn more about the remaining candidates vying for the presidency.
  - *Voter registration drives* -- With the vast majority of our student body registered to vote in New York State, the bulk of these voter registration drives will occur before the NYS deadline to change parties (February 14th).

ONLY 55% OF  
LITERATURE AND WRITTEN  
ARTS MAJORS  
VOTED IN THE 2016  
GENERAL ELECTION.



**WHY?**

Election  
@  
Bard

Data from NSLVE

ONLY 46.4% OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCES MAJORS  
VOTED IN THE  
2016 GENERAL ELECTION.



**WHY?**

Election  
@  
Bard

Data from NSLVE

ONLY 46% OF  
PRACTICING ARTS MAJORS  
VOTED IN THE  
2016 GENERAL ELECTION.

**WHY?**



Election  
@  
Bard

Data from NSLVE



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- *Absentee ballot drives*
- *Democratic candidates' Trivia Night at the Campus Center* -- students test their knowledge on the remaining Democrats who are vying to compete against President Donald Trump. Through this event, we hope to create a more educated voting populace, who will think through their choice before casting a ballot in the Democratic Primary.
- *Poster campaigns* -- A voter registration poster campaign targeting students of specific academic disciplines. These posters would be accompanied by advertisements of upcoming voter registration drives.
- *Regular office hours* -- The majority of students on the Election@Bard team hold regular office hours at the Bard Center for Civic Engagement. These office hours are advertised in various college newsletters, as well as on Election@Bard's social media channels. Students are encouraged to stop by with any and all questions related to voting. Additionally, students can register to vote, or fill out an absentee ballot application.
- *Promotion of third party pro-voting resources* -- Election@Bard promotes other organizations' pro-voting resources, including voting guides produced by the League of Women Voters, Ballotpedia, and Ballotready, as well as guides created by nonpartisan student groups, such as Bard's chapter of the Sunrise Movement. Other tools created by groups such as Rock the Vote, HeadCount, Democracy Matters, and Vote.org are also promoted by the initiative.
- *The fight for an on-campus polling site* -- Election@Bard and its affiliates plan to continue fighting for an on-campus polling place. The group plans to submit an op-ed regarding the barrier to student voting to several local media outlets. Additionally, the group plans to open more direct lines of communication between student voting advocates and the commissioners at the County Board of Elections.
- *Faculty engagement* -- coordinate on campus events, lectures, panels and forums to engage students through courses.
- *Innovative publicity campaigns* -- to attract more volunteers to participate in political campaigns with candidates running for a variety of offices.
- *Expand opportunities to engage with democratic processes* -- identify opportunities to speak with elected officials, sponsor calling and letter writing campaigns, provide information on current legislation and coordinate events focused on how American democracy works.

