

**Campus Election Engagement Plan**  
**Harvard Center for Community Partnership**  
**Bates College**  
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## **Summary**

This “Call to Action” plan was developed in 2019 based on work completed by two campus planning groups working in conjunction over the past eight months. The plan outlines the scope and specifics of the civic learning and election engagement work that Bates faculty, staff, and students plan to undertake to create a campus culture that promotes democratic engagement and to increase both voter registration and voter turnout in the 2020 election.

We are issuing a call to all members of the Bates community – students, faculty, and staff - to commit themselves to specific actions they can take to promote civic learning and democratic engagement and to increase student registration and turnout in the 2020 election and beyond. We are excited about engaging the entire campus in this transformative work during the coming year and in the future.

## **Institutional Context and Commitment**

Since its founding in 1855, Bates College has been committed to educating its students to serve the public good. Its commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement is clearly articulated in its mission statement, which includes these declarations: “...we engage the transformative power of our differences, cultivating intellectual discovery and informed civic action [and]. . . preparing leaders sustained by a love of learning and a commitment to responsible stewardship of the wider world....” With leadership from the College’s Harvard Center for Community Partnerships, Bates continues to enjoy national prominence as an innovative center of community learning, research, and practice. The College’s institutional plan calls for the continued development of curriculum and courses that have thoughtful components of community engagement and for a greater systematic integration of community engagement in the overall experience of Bates students. We embrace the challenge and opportunity before us to broaden our community’s civic learning and deepen our democratic engagement.

## Landscape

In recent years, there has been significantly increased election engagement among our students. This work has been generated by faculty, staff, and students and coordinated through the Harvard Center. It has included academic departments, co-curricular programs, and a wide range of campus stakeholders.

There are presently two groups on campus focused on promoting civic learning and election engagement. One is chaired by Joshua G. McIntosh, Vice President for Campus Life and Dean of Students, and the other by Peggy Rotundo, Director of Strategic and Policy Initiatives at the Harvard Center. Dean McIntosh's group focuses on developing programming and curriculum that promotes civic learning. The Harvard Center's nonpartisan work focuses on increasing voter registration, voter education, and voter turnout among students.

In spring of 2019, a working group of faculty, staff, and students was convened by the Harvard Center on two different occasions to consider the Bates NSLVE results. The group was eager to discuss who among our eligible students was voting and what barriers existed for those who were disengaged. While we were pleased with the 19.5 % increase in voting participation between the 2014 and 2018 elections, we understood that we still fell below the average of NSLVE surveyed institutions (39.1%) and had a lot of work to do to improve our voter participation. We were particularly interested in understanding the discrepancy between the relatively high percentage of students registered to vote (74%) and the number of students who actually voted (37.3%). We were also interested in zeroing in on those groups of students, and those academic areas, where turnout was low. We discussed practices that have proven effective in our work in the past (for example, a variety of tabling opportunities for voter registration; training members of athletic teams and co-curricular groups to register other students to vote; asking faculty to invite trained students into their classes to register students; making early voting available to students; distributing nonpartisan information on candidates and issues to students; addressing barriers to voting, such as social anxiety; making voter registration information available online, etc. ). From this group of staff, faculty, and students emerged ideas about how we could make it easier for students to register and vote (these ideas are listed under the strategy section) as well as suggestions of others on campus who were central to our work and needed to be invited to join our working group.

During the fall of 2019, Peggy Rotundo from the Harvard Center reached out to engage those identified by the working group in a conversation about how they and their departments might contribute to campus-wide election engagement efforts. Involved in these conversations were staff from the Communications Office, Dining Services, and Information and Library Services, as well as the Director of Athletics

and the Assistant Dean of Accessible and Student Support. Conversations with staff from Residential Life, Campus Life, the Information Technical Program Manager, and AESOP leaders continued as well.

Also in the fall, the Harvard Center hired an Election Engagement Fellow, Amalia Herren-Lage '22, for eight hours per week to help with this work. With Amalia's assistance, we mounted a full voter registration drive on campus as well as a GOTV campaign in connection with the local 2019 elections (both in Lewiston and in students' hometowns). We provided nonpartisan information on state ballot questions and on candidates in the form of a local candidates' forum hosted jointly by the College Democrats, Bates Republicans, and the Harvard Center. Our student fellow, who will continue working for another semester with help from a Campus Compact grant and funding from the Harvard Center, is currently overseeing efforts to help students register in Maine or in their home states to vote in presidential primaries in the spring of 2020.

The working group convened by the Dean of Students complements the work being led by the Harvard Center. This group is made up of faculty from the departments of Politics and Rhetoric, Film, and Screen Studies; the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion; the Assistant Dean of Students for Residence Life and Health Education; the Associate Dean of Students for Campus Life; and a member of the Harvard Center. This group's focus is on programming to develop students' capacity to engage with different points of view and deepen students' understanding of a variety of public policy matters. There is overlapping membership between these two groups, and good lines of communication have been established.

One challenge we face is coordinating with external affinity groups that are active on campus and partisan in nature. Given that the work of the College is nonpartisan, we have to draw clear lines between the official College work and the work of off-campus groups that hire Bates students to engage in voter registration and GOTV. The lines are often blurred for students when there is not full disclosure. A student who is interested in registering to vote, for example, might not realize that two registration tables positioned next to each other are sponsored by different groups – one partisan and the other nonpartisan.

We also face the challenge of misinformation, which inevitably appears during the election cycle and is designed to discourage students from voting in Maine. When this has happened in the past, we have been swift to reassure students of their constitutional right to vote in either Maine or their home state, including clear statements to this effect from the College president and the Maine Secretary of State. This challenge is outweighed by the strengths we enjoy: agreement throughout the campus of the importance of electoral engagement; faculty and administrators who are supportive and engaged; engaged students; support from the Lewiston City Municipal Clerk, who with great professionalism facilitates the ease with which

students can vote; Maine's same-day registration law; and the College's proximity to the polling place designated for students.

## Leadership

As previously noted under Landscape, there are two groups working together to provide leadership in meeting our goals. One is led by Joshua McIntosh, Vice President of Campus Life and Dean of Students. The other is led by Peggy Rotundo, Director of Strategic and Policy Initiatives at the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships, and Amalia Herren-Lage '22, who is the Election Engagement Fellow at the Harvard Center.

Dean McIntosh's group, whose membership was previously outlined, is focused on bringing about a cultural change on campus by developing programming around civic learning. The other working group, convened by Peggy Rotundo, is focused on increasing voter registration, education, and turn-out. The latter group consists of the President of the Student Government; the Election Engagement Fellow; representatives from the Bates Democrats and Republicans; representatives from several teams and co-curricular groups; other interested students; staff representatives from the offices of Intercultural Education; Global Education; Residence Life and Campus Life. The group has also established an excellent working relationship with the Lewiston City Clerk, Kathleen Montejo, with whom we frequently consult.

The College has embraced the opportunity to participate in a variety of national organizations and is proudly participating in the NESCAC Votes! Challenge. We are grateful to our colleagues affiliated with the All In Democracy Challenge; the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition; the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, which produces the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE); the Maine Campus Compact; Project Pericles; and the other NESCAC schools, who have guided our work and provided inspiration for it.

## Goals

### Short Term

- Increase voter registration among eligible students to 85% in 2020 and student voting to 65% in 2020.
- Engage faculty, staff, and students in this effort, with every college department (academic and non academic), residence hall, athletic team, and co-curricular group involved in promoting electoral engagement.
- Remove barriers to voting and provide access to nonpartisan information on candidates and issues, regardless of where a student chooses to vote.

## Long Term

- Create a culture on campus where lifelong habits of informed voting are established.
- Create a politically engaged campus where students have the opportunity to develop and practice the skills necessary to work through differences with others in a mutually transformative way.
- Continue to develop courses and curriculum that have thoughtful components of democratic engagement and contribute to the systemic integration of community-engaged learning in the overall experience of each Bates student.

## Strategy

### Winter 2020

#### Dean's Programming Group will finalize its plans for:

- Debate watching parties and pre and post discussions lead by faculty.
- Wind Down Weekend Presidential Trivia and pizza.
- Election Night (multiple election night venues – pizza and viewing).
- Day after election: What happened? Panel discussion with faculty.
- Viewing of Presidential Inauguration with commentary by faculty.
- Campus speakers for fall of 2020 to address topics such as Voting Rights; Election Security; Climate Change; the Economy; Equity.
- Selection of a relevant Common Read for all incoming first-year students for fall 2020.
- Selection of a relevant Convocation Speaker for fall 2020.
- Development of Civics Class Modules for use on campus.

In addition, Professor Stephanie Kelley-Romano of the Rhetoric, Film, and Screen Studies Department, who has been designated a Periclean Faculty Leader through Project Pericles, will incorporate voter education as a key theme within two sections of the department's introductory course, "What Is Rhetoric?" Student projects may include the creation of nonpartisan information for use on the Bates campus and in the larger Lewiston/Auburn; activities or materials designed to further the public's understanding of political advertising and "fake news;" the hosting of debate watch events in the off-campus community; and facilitation of relevant discussions on campus and in local public libraries, high schools, and community colleges. Professor Kelley-Romano will also offer her upper-level course, "Presidential Campaign Rhetoric," in fall 2020, which will include several voter engagement dimensions.

## **Group working on Voter Registration and GOTV:**

**Reconvene the working group (of faculty, administrators, and students) with representation from campus departments and groups that were not present for the initial spring meetings.**

**Each representative to this working group will be asked:**

*What challenge can you take on to further the goal of increasing student registration and voter turnout? What can you commit yourself to do this spring and fall to contribute to a dynamic and urgent Call to Action on campus?*

**Designate a person or persons within the group to take responsibility for the following:**

- Outreach to coaches and team liaisons and captains to involve and commit to specific ways to participate.
- Outreach to student co-curricular liaisons and officers.
- Outreach to the Bates Communications Office to establish a communications strategy and build on its social media presence.
- Design a Bates Votes logo and plan for and launch the Bates Votes website.
- Conduct follow-up outreach to the Office of Intercultural Education; International Student Programs; Office of Global Education; President's Office; Dean of the Faculty (and to specific academic departments); Dining Services; Library Services; Registrar's Office; IT; and Student Life offices.
- Conduct follow up to the Annual Entering Student Orientation Program (AESOP) student leaders and the staff overseeing AESOP.

## **Spring**

- **Follow up to commitments made by departments across campus.**
- Work with the IT Program Manager and the Registrar to design easy access to voter registration information for incoming students and to make registration materials available through other portals, like class registration or housing.
- Prepare the summer letter for incoming students who live in states requiring in-person registration.
- Finalize plans with Residence Life about how to maximize voter registration opportunities during Move in Day, throughout Orientation, and in residence halls, etc.
- Reach out to off-campus affinity groups to discuss guidelines for their on-campus activities and determine ways to help students differentiate between the nonpartisan and partisan work on campus.
- Plan for an Orientation gathering that focuses on the importance of voting (similar to the one on inclusion and diversity done in 2019 by OIE).

- Invite the President to stress the importance of voting in her Convocation remarks.
- Invite students to submit ideas about ways to encourage election engagement.
- Through Communitylinks, OIE newsletter, etc. invite students to become trained to register other students to vote.
- Explore the best ways to handle absentee ballot registration in the fall. *What are the most helpful websites? What kinds of reminders are needed and when? Plan a voter absentee party? Make stamps available in Post and Print to enable students to mail in ballots?*
- Plan activities around September's National Voter Registration Day.
- Organize the websites that provide good information for students: how to vote absentee, nonpartisan info on issues and candidates throughout the country. What is the best way to make these sites easily accessible to students?
- Create a Bates Votes logo and think about creative ways to use the logo.
  - *What kind of "stuff" should be available to students with the logo?*
  - Create a huge VOTE banner. Order "I Voted" stickers.
  - *Organize an "I Pledge to Vote Campaign"?*
- Train volunteers in voter registration techniques so they are prepared to hit the ground running in September!
- Continue to encourage students to undertake activities that create a sense of excitement and urgency around voting.

## Summer

- Send registration information out to students through the Dean of Students' office.
- Send a special letter to students coming from states where they are required to register in person.
- Take care of logistics for events: room reservations, etc.
- Through the Center for Global Education, send out information about absentee balloting to students studying abroad in the fall.

## Fall

**Activate all on campus who promised to take pieces of this work, which include:**

- Orientation
- Tabling in Commons, athletic events, residence halls, etc.
- Social Media platforms
- National Voter Registration Day
- Absentee Ballot Party
- Voter registration training (Encourage team members, members of co-curricular groups, staff, faculty, etc. to help).

- Implement plan to register students through campus-wide events, classes, co-curricular groups, teams, residence halls, the Library.
- Coordination of activities, such as return of the registration cards, with the City Clerk's Office.
- Encourage faculty to adopt a resolution on the importance of election engagement and to remind students in their classes of its importance.
- Use Instagram and other social media to psyche students up to vote (take pictures of individual students registering to vote, etc.).
- Make nonpartisan information on candidates and issues easily available for students regardless of where they will vote. Make Ranked Choice Voting information available for students voting in Maine.
- Work with Bates Democrats and Republicans to invite candidates to campus to speak.
- Create bipartisan video to ease social anxiety around voting.

### **GOTV**

- Arrange transportation for early voting
- Post bipartisan video to ease social anxiety around voting
- Ads on posters/ campus flat screens/ napkin holders
- Chalking of sidewalks around campus
- Organize student leaders to walk to the polls
- Celebrity reminders and walks! President, etc. walk with students to polls
- Get the Bates Bobcat out in Commons!

## **Reporting and Evaluation**

We understand the importance of evaluating our work and trying to measure our effectiveness.

Holding ourselves accountable starts with clearly articulating for the campus what our goals are. Toward this end, this report will be shared across the College campus; specifically, with the President; her leadership team; the Dean of Students and his staff; faculty; the Athletic Director and coaches; officers of co-curricular groups and athletic team captains; and the staff of the student newspaper.

Externally, it will be shared with ALL IN Challenge for posting on their website and will eventually be available on the Bates website.

We will continue to use the NSLVE data to assess our success in reaching our quantitative goals and will work with our Institutional Research and Planning Office to explore ways to measure some of the more subjective goals we have set for ourselves, such as the development of lifelong habits of voting, the acquisition of skills of civility in public discussion, and the long-term impact curricular changes and



campus programming have had on student development. The Harvard Center has done some work on measuring the impact that community engagement has had on students' development. We will explore with staff at the Center additional ways we might employ to measure the impact that community engagement has on civic learning and election engagement.

We have had conversations as well with a faculty member in the Politics Department to explore ways his students might delve into the NSLVE data. What are the real and perceived barriers that students face when attempting to register and vote? Why is there a big discrepancy between those who are registered and those who actually vote? Why do students in some academic disciplines vote at a higher rate than in other disciplines?

We will also design a post-election survey for students to try to determine which on-campus activities were most effective in helping them register and motivating them to vote. We may also conduct a survey early in the fall of 2020 and then after the election to determine whether student interest in the election and understanding of the issues increased as a result of on-campus programming.