

Belmont University
Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan
Submission #2

I. Executive Summary

Belmont University is in Nashville, T.N., the state's capital. With the state legislation being passed within a close radius of Belmont's campus, and many Belmont's own students being involved at the State Capitol. Belmont University has taken and utilized the many opportunities that this close range has provided, including hosting the 2020 Presidential Debate. After hosting the debate, Belmont's Office of Service Learning and the Belmont Presidential Debate Student Engagement Committee pivoted to the main mission of finding a suitable home for the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative on Belmont's Campus. With the goal of ensuring that the importance of civic engagement stays prevalent within the Bruin Community, the 2020-21 VFC team wished to find a student organization that could fully sustain the VFC initiative far past the excitement and engagement of the 2020 debate. By January 2022, the VFC initiative was successfully transferred over to the leadership of the Belmont Student Government Association (SGA).

Through implementing the VFC through the SGA (under the guidance/advice of the Office of Service-Learning), our plan is to first ensure that every member of SGA understands the purpose and importance of the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative on Belmont's campus. Our team will work to integrate civic engagement activities into recurring events/functions of the SGA. We hope to institutionalize civic engagement activities and information into common resources on campus and student life. Such engagement will be shown as SGA plays a vital role in many student organization events. These initiatives will be carried out throughout the school year, with different initiatives being specialized for each semester. We believe it is within our best interest to ensure those student events are being used to spread important information relative to voting, such as voter registration and election deadlines.

Our coalition will also focus on emphasizing the importance of local elections, seeing that this year includes many anticipated elections both in Davidson County, Tennessee, and the upcoming Presidential Election throughout the nation. In the past, Belmont has continuously been used as a host site for Tennessee's gubernatorial debates,

we hope that another opportunity arises once again for our coalition to use as another civic engagement tool. Hopefully, continuing to raise Belmont's Student Registration further above the national average, as we currently stand at 89% percent compared to the national average of 83%. Another resource we hope to use will be our 2022 NSLVE data. With this being the university's second dataset relative to voting, our coalition has the benefit of using this data to ensure that our civic engagement events/conversations are further tailored to groups within our community who have a lower voter registration/turnout percentage, such as out-of-state students, and students without transportation to voting polls.

Overall, our actions presented within this VFC plan are tailored towards creating a better understanding of the VFC within the new leadership of the SGA, using the resources and broad umbrella of the student government to integrate civic engagement initiatives into traditional/expected campus life activities, with the goal increasing engagement and knowledge of the importance of local elections for in-state, out-of-state, and underrepresented students, faculty, and staff, by utilizing local, national and campus resources.

Belmont University is interested in making civic engagement more of a priority on campus, specifically through the Student Government Association. The following plan is designed to introduce new initiatives, further integrate civic education into existing programs, and reach new areas of the student body. Belmont University will utilize the Voter Friendly Campus Designation to help propel a culture shift on campus and create a stronger emphasis on education and action toward voting registration throughout the '24-'25 academic year, specifically during the November 2024 Presidential Election.

II. Leadership

The Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan is written by the Belmont University Student Government Association's Constitutional Committee:

- Jaelyn Phillips- '23 Parliamentarian, Committee Chair
- Emma Andrews- '24 Parliamentarian, Committee Chair
- Claire Buchanan- Director of Communications
- McKenzie Larrimore- Senator
- Callie Mangrum- Senator

- Maya Ramasamy- Senator
- Sierra Byrd- Senator
- Derian Hamblin- Student Government Association Advisor
- Tim Stewart- Director of Service Learning

The Constitutional Committee partners with different offices on campus:

- Office of Student Engagement
- Office of Service Learning
- Office of the President

We also work closely with off-campus partners:

- Tennessee Secretary of State’s Office
- Tennessee Campus Democracy Network

In creating this plan, we have included perspectives from students, faculty, administration, and Tennessee government officials. The gaps in this representation include non-government inclined perspectives. For example, most students on this committee have government related majors and minors. However, these plans are presented to the broader Student Government Association which has a wider range of expertise. These students can provide feedback via open discussion.

Should there be a shift in leadership within this program, help from the Constitutional Committee will be crucial. At the start of next semester (Fall 2024) the Constitutional Committee will be held with a Committee Chair (head of VFC program), Committee Deputy (assistant to chair), Secretary (evaluating event turn out, communication manager), and Social Media Manager. By splitting the power, changes should flow smoothly through separated knowledge and seniority.

III. Commitment

Our university plans to demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement through:

- a. The visible commitment of the governing board through a show of support at events, allocation of space for the cause, and presence at events.

- b. The support of Belmont University’s senior leadership, including the President, in a commitment to democratic engagement by promoting a more democratically involved campus.
- c. Communicated commitment within the institution to the students, faculty, and staff through social media, Bruin Link, and myBelmont to allow all to participate.
- d. The consideration of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice as tenets and the use of DEI chairs and the Office of Hope, Unity, and Belonging (HUB).
- e. Allowing education towards civic learning and democratic engagement to be a pervasive part of Belmont’s culture using regular engagement with the staff, faculty, and students, active conversations, periodic information sessions, and repeated learning opportunities on and surrounding these topics.
- f. Reflecting the spirit of civic engagement in its history of Voter Friendly Campus action plans, response to the ALL-IN initiative, and its internal documentation allowing students to easily access voting resources.
- g. Ensuring outcomes of more registered voters throughout Belmont’s campus and ensuring accurate numbers by partnering with the Office of Service Learning.

IV. Landscape

As Belmont University hosted the Presidential Debate in 2020, the campus has grown in its interest to attend and provide more opportunities to learn about civic learning and democratic engagement.

However, we are attempting to dive deeper into understanding the student population through examining the NSLVE 2020 data and the context surrounding our state laws.

- a. Analyzing the NSLVE data, the only area that decreased in turnout from the former study in 2018 was that of in person voting. This means we will add more emphasis on mail in ballots for this year’s election. While still increasing, there is significantly less turnout growth in the STEM majors compared to the humanities majors. By hosting campus wide activities rather than targeting certain groups, we hope to continue this growth at a faster rate.
- b. As for state and national laws, we hope to accommodate our large number of our state and international students. Aligning with our conclusions from the NSLVE data, we will accommodate these students by providing extensive information on

mail in ballots and about other ways to get involved besides voting (ex. writing legislators, volunteering with on campus or external civic engagement groups).

SGA is not alone in creating the civic environment on campus. One club has exemplified the growing student engagement, the Belmont Civic Engagement and Advocacy Club (CEAC). With their early start, we plan to partner with them throughout the '24-'25 academic year to broaden the student population involved in such causes.

Finally, we plan to capitalize on the important election year. Because students are already involved due to the traction the election is gaining online, we plan to teach students how to inform themselves properly and act on their conclusions accordingly (following our 3-step action plan: register, inform, mobilize).

V. Goals

Short Term Goals:

- a. Our main source of educating students will be utilizing Well-Core events. At Belmont, these events are hosted by many organizations targeting different areas of holistic wellness (e.g. emotional, environmental, cultural, intellectual wellness) during convocation hour. Belmont's SGA will host several Intellectual Well-Core sessions, a series called "BruinVote", with the following topics and on the following target dates.
 - The History of Voting, partnering with Nashville's League of Women Voters (September 2024)
 - Voting for marginalized populations, partnering with SGA's branch of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and local organizations (September 2024)
 - Writing state officials/legislators workshop (October 2024)
- b. Other campus wide events will be held such as:
 - Voter registration rate competitions between residence halls, Greek life chapters, and athletic teams.
 - Presidential Debate watch party (September 16, 2024)
 - Celebrating National Voter Registration Day at the University's weekly "It Must be Wednesday" event where organizations have the opportunity to table on the main lawn patio. (September 18, 2024 – 2 days prior to the observance day)

- Incorporating voter registration information into the move-in day process. As students move onto campus in the fall, they receive bags with information packets regarding orientation events, local coupons, etc. We hope to have voter registration pamphlets in these bags at the start of next semester, partnering with Belmont Residence Life and Towering Traditions (August 2024).

Long Term Goals:

- As a result of hosting these events, we hope to fill the gaps that presented themselves in the 2020 NSLVE report. Specifically low turnout majors and minority group voters.
 - Classified by major, physical and computer sciences produced the least turnout. Classified by ethnicity, Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native students produced the least turnout.
 - The wide range of topic approaches and easy accessibility on campus will hopefully even turnout rates across majors and ethnicities here at Belmont.

VI. Strategy

Means of Increasing Student Civic Engagement, Our Three-Part Plan:

- Register:

- Having QR codes for registration easily accessible at all events previously detailed in the “Goals” section of the action plan.
- Promoting links to registration on SGA, Belmont, and ALL IN social media.
- Our favorite link to get students registered is through All In to Vote: <https://allintovote.org> as it allows access to registration, checking registration status, creating a voting plan, and information on becoming a poll worker.

- Inform:

- Information will be shared through many perspectives at our events detailed in the “Goals” section of this action plan.
- We are currently working with the “Bell Core” directors about incorporating civil engagement into required first-year seminar curriculum for the incoming freshman of Fall 2025.

- Along with our move-in day informative plan, we will also incorporate encouragement of civic awareness at SGA's allotted time at Belmont's Welcome Week activities. (Ex. directing students to nonpartisan websites detailing candidates' policies and informing them about polling locations).
- We have recently partnered with the Office of Service Learning to create a video about Civic engagement to be shared with students as a part of required Service Wellness curriculum. [Video Link](#).

c. Mobilize:

- On election day we will organize walking and carpooling groups to travel to the polls.
- We will utilize information provided by the All In to Vote website about how to become a poll worker for students interested in this aspect of the voting process.
- We will also utilize the VFC tool kit to promote student turnout.
- We plan to partner with local restaurants and businesses to provide students with an incentive to vote (ex. discount with proof of ballot attendance).

VII. NSLVE

Link to 2020 NSLVE Data: [NSLVE Report 2020-003479 \(Belmont University\)-compressed.pdf](#)

Broadly, the 2020 NSLVE data suggests that Belmont University Students were slightly more engaged than the national institutional average:

	Student Registration Rate	Student Voting Rate
Belmont University	89%	71.2%
National Average	83%	66%

Looking at closer at specific categories we have drawn the following conclusions,

The most change occurs in within the younger age groups. Therefore, we plan to target young students' involvement by presenting information at undergraduate hotspots such as events like "It Must be Wednesday" and Welcome Week. *

Age Group	Rate of Change since 2018
18-21	+30
22-24	+23
25-29	+17
30-39	+11
40-49	+12
50+	0

Compared to other races, Black students at Belmont University showed the least growth in turnout rates since 2018. We plan to even these numbers out by making information easily available for all students* and have already begun partnership with Belmont's Black Student Association to remedy this gap (ex. *Your Vote Your Voice* informational seminar with TN State Representative, Justin Pearson).

Race/Ethnicity	Rate of Change since 2018
Asian	+26
Black	+19
Hispanic	+24
2+ Races	+26
White	+27

Our students appear to have evenly distributed growing turnout rates across all areas of study. We are proud of these numbers and hope to continue this widespread growth for this upcoming election year.

Area of Study	Average Rate of Change since 2018
STEM Majors	+24.7
Humanities Majors	+25.8
Other	+26.4

Though we have seen significant civic growth within our institution, we do still face plenty of barriers:

a. Internal Barriers

- Lack of financial resources
 - o As a small university, we have found it to be rather challenging to set aside funds to support our civic engagement efforts.
- Turnover in organizations
 - o In recent years, many of our student civic engagement leaders have graduated; leaving many uneducated in the topic and having to build a completely new coalition.
- Out-of-state student voters
 - o Belmont University has many out-of-state students. With all the confusion and time regarding absentee or mail-in ballots, there are many students who avoid the hassle of voting in general.
- Transportation to Polls
 - o Though Belmont University has on-campus voting locations on Election Day, there is nowhere on campus to cast an early vote. Many students don't have cars so it can be a challenge for them to get to polling location.

b. External Barriers

- Election laws/restrictions
 - o Tennessee is among the few states that does not allow college identification cards to be used at polling places. There are also many other restrictions in place that create confusion and challenges– further discouraging students to vote.
- General voting confusion
 - o There is a general sense of confusion surrounding elections. Different states have different laws and restrictions, which drives students away from the polls overall.

*More information detailed in the “Goals” section

VIII. Reporting

This plan will be shared both internally and externally as our intention is to reach students, faculty, administration, and the larger Nashville community. This action plan will be presented to Belmont University's Student Government Association and to the Faculty Senate. These organizations will be allowed input on this report and will have the means to share the plans beyond themselves. We plan to have this report published on both the Belmont University website and social media. Internally, there will also be partnership with the Belmont University Residence Life and with the Well-Core Program directors.

The NSLVE numbers will also be largely public as they will be posted on the Student Government social media (mainly Instagram) pages as an extension of the VFC initiative. Due to Student Government's close ties with all organizations and groups on campus, we do not anticipate issues when accessing data and reports.

IX. Evaluation

If greater campus turnout and registration occurs in the 2024 Presidential election compared to that of the 2022 Midterm election cycle, Belmont University will have achieved success in executing this plan. In the past, we have fallen short in our own evaluation of our Voter Friendly Campus efforts. However, we plan to keep better track of our success through both quantitative and qualitative measures by implementing a secretariat position within the Constitutional Committee, the branch of SGA that oversees this action plan. By analyzing these numbers and feedback, we will be better able to revise our plan for future years.

a. Quantitative Measures

- NSLVE report
- The number of students that register to vote after each event
- The number of students that take the accountability voting pledge powered by All In to Vote
- The number of students that volunteer at the polls
- Student attendance at events, tables, and seminars

b. Qualitative Measures

- Feedback from distributed student surveys
- Dialogue amongst students and staff