

Belmont University 2022-2023 Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan



May 2022

Overview

Having hosted two presidential debates and being located in the capital of Tennessee, Belmont University has and will continue to host a variety of voter engagement, education and registration opportunities for students, faculty, and staff alike. Our campus plan for 2022-23 is to not only continue to build an informational coalition, but also to further institutionalize civic learning and democratic engagement into common aspects of campus life. We aspire to create a sustainable, exciting action plan that continually informs students of the important lesson of leadership and service that comes with being an educated, participating voter within our democracy. In putting together this plan, we identify various groups and individuals working on voter engagement, and we list out the various ways in which we hope to institutionalize the ideals of the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative both in our Student Government Association and Belmont University itself.

Executive Summary

Towards the end of the 2020 election season after hosting the 2020 Presidential Debate, the 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).

Now 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. Next, our team will work to integrate civic engagement activities into recurring events/functions of the SGA. With SGA playing a vital role in many student organization events, from freshman orientation, BOLD leadership programming, panhellenic activities, and student diversity and inclusion projects, 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 judicial and congressional elections both in Davidson County, Tennessee, and throughout the nation. In the past, Belmont has continuously been used as a host site for Tennessee's gubernatorial debates, and with the TN gubernatorial election occurring this November, we hope that this opportunity arises once again for our coalition to use as another civic engagement tool. Another resource we hope to use will be our 2020 NSLVE data. With this being the university's first 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.

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, and increasing engagement and knowledge of the importance of local elections for in-state, out-of-state, and underrepresented students, faculty, and staff.

Coalition

VFC Initiative Team

- Belmont University Student Government Association, Constitution Committee
 - Jada Rolston - Parliamentarian; Chairwoman
 - Disha Patel - SGA President; ex officio member
 - Claire Buchanan - Director of Communications; Senator
 - Ali Graham - Director of Academic Affairs; Senator
 - McKenzie Larrimore - Senator
 - Annalie Malone - Senator
 - Jaelyn Phillips - Senator
 - Keidron Turner - Senator
 - Kam’Ron Young - Senator

- Belmont University’s Office of Service-Learning
 - Tim Stewart - Director of Service-Learning
 - Keller Hawkins - Assistant Director of Service-Learning

Campus Department/Organization Partners

- Belmont Student Government Association
- Belmont College Democrats
- Belmont College Republicans
- Belmont University’s Office of Leadership Development (BOLD)

Coalition Partners

- Voter Friendly Campus Initiative
- Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV)
- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
- Tennessee Campus Democracy Network

Description

Our coalition is working to create the following activities and events to better prepare students for the 2022 election cycle:

Voter Registration

- Tabling with the VFC team at It Must Be Wednesday, a weekly event hosted by Belmont's Division of Student Life where students can enjoy free coffee and check out tables set up by student organizations and other campus departments.
- Tabling at the annual Student Organization fair with voter registration/Turbo Vote QR Code
- Continue to use Turbovote as a resource to ensure students register to vote, and potentially partner with data collaboratives.
- Hold a registration event with the SGA President for eligible students during New Student Orientation
- Participate in National Voter Registration Day, using various resources from the Campus Takeover program.

Voter Education

- Create a voter registration/resources tab on the SGA website
A resource tab on the SGA website will allow students to view up-to-date information about the election process.
- Create an Election Day "Game Plan" Template
This "Game Plan" will be a checklist for all students, providing adequate steps on how students can cast their vote or submit a mail-in ballot/absentee ballot.
- Host Informational Well-Core Events for Voter Education Week
At Belmont, the goal of WELL Core is to instill in each student the ability to live a satisfying, meaningful, and purposeful life; therefore, students are required to earn 10 credits for each of the 4 categories within the program. For Voter Education Week, Belmont intends to create a tabling event where local civic engagement organizations can discuss information about elections and voting. By educating students on the complexities of voting, this event will count as an Intellectual Well-Being WELL Core credit for Belmont students. During this week, Another event will be held to better assess and present Belmont University's 2020 NSLVE data to students, as well as inviting several guest speakers, such as Tennessee's Secretary of State, to campus. Events of this matter will count as a Community Well-Being WELL Core credit due to the opportunity it presents for students to participate in civic engagement within our local community.
- Propose a Civic Engagement Amendment into the SGA Constitution by Constitution Day.
The Student Body Senate will vote on implementing a civic engagement amendment to the SGA Constitution by September 17th to ensure every individual is aware of the Voter Friendly Campus initiative and the commitment SGA now has to advancing civic engagement on campus.

Voter Turnout

- Heavily rely on and participate in Vote Early Day, on October 28, to encourage students to obtain/submit their absentee ballots. Vote Early Day is a civic holiday that focused on helping every voter know how, where, and when they can early vote.
- Create our own “Mail-in Ballot” day to spread awareness of being proactive with mail-in ballots.
- Use Coalition Resources such as “Pizza to the Polls” to encourage students and community members who vote at Belmont’s Polling Location.
- Create pamphlets related to important election information that will be made accessible in physical copies and online. These pamphlets will be available to the entire student body and will be promoted to other student organizations in order to reach a larger audience. These pamphlets will include information such as election dates, polling locations, and absentee information.
- Host a “Vote by Mail” party to encourage students to submit mail-in ballots.
- Add important election dates and civic holidays to the MyBelmont calendar, the University’s online platform.

Students as Voter Advocates

- Volunteering as a Poll Worker for Service Credit

Advocacy at the polling station has been a previous goal of our VFC team, seeing that Belmont University serves as a polling location for Davidson County. Our team hopes to work with the Office of Service-Learning and BOLD to ensure students can receive service credit for becoming a poll worker and volunteering on Election Day. Furthermore, our team hopes to work closely with the Davidson County Election Commission to ensure SGA and the student body is properly educated on what is required to become a poll worker during the November election.
- Creating an annual Student Organization Debate

In 2020, the Presidential Debate Student Engagement Committee hosted a student organization debate as a prime example for students to actively participate in the civic engagement process. SGA will empower other organization to host another student organization debate with the goal of making this an annual event SGA can support. If successful, participating student organizations will engage in civil discussion/discourse on an array of topics related to voting rights, participation in our democracy, and others relevant to Election Day.
- Increasing advocacy in our own coalition and recognition of the VFC by creating SGA “Get out and vote” merchandise.

Timeline

The activities and events listed above will revolve around the timeline of both prominent civic holidays for 2022 and major events on Belmont's academic calendar, including but not limited to the following:

- August 19th-24th: Welcome Week (Freshmen Orientation)
- September 17th: Constitution Day
- September 20th: National Voter Registration Day
- October 3rd-7th: Voter Education Week
- October 12th: Semester Mid-Point
- October 28th: Vote Early Day
- November 7th: Election Hero Day
- November 8th: Election Day**

Success

Success for Belmont to become a voter friendly campus for the 2022-2023 academic year involves the following:

- Increasing voting registration within the academic majors and groups that registration is not prominent in.
- Encourage students to create a better voting plan where they are properly informed about the current election process.
- Enhancing and promoting more meaningful political/civic engagement within major aspects of campus life.
- Providing students with strategic tools to educate themselves on political candidates before casting their vote on Election Day.
- Having an impactful civic engagement presence within campus life to the point where discussions on adding civic learning to all First Year Seminar courses can begin with upper administration.
- Creating 1-3 recurring activities/events from this action plan to further institutionalize civic learning and engagement into campus life.