

**Belmont University 2020-2021 Voter Friendly Campus Plan**



**May 2020**

## **Overview:**

Belmont University hosts a variety of voter engagement, education and registration opportunities, and our campus plan for 2020-21 is to build an informational coalition amongst all stakeholders. Using the interest and momentum provided by the United States presidential debate that Belmont is hosting, we aspire to provide the groundwork for a voter engagement plan for the campus. In putting together this plan, we identify various groups, programs, and individuals working on voter engagement across student, staff, and faculty groups, and we list out the various stakeholders this year in hopes to move efforts toward coordination and collaboration in subsequent years.

## **Executive Summary:**

The Office of Service-Learning has coordinated with various offices and student groups to put this plan together. For the 2020-2021 academic year, our plan for Belmont is to create a coordinating body that centralizes information for Belmont. Moving forward, most of the engagement work will be done by faculty and students while staff serve in an advising and informational centralization role. These functions also support the presidential debate Belmont will host in the fall. Once we have access to NSLVE data, we can compare current and past initiatives with the data to create targets and goals that help coordinate efforts to engage and register voters. These should be reflected in future campus plans that create benchmarks for voter friendliness within Belmont's context.

Overall, the primary goal of the upcoming academic year is to build the framework necessary for Belmont to centralize all existing voter engagement initiatives as there are various programs, initiatives, and projects working in this direction.

## **Coalition:**

### **Voter Friendly Campuses Coalition:**

- Molly Deakins - Debate Student Engagement Committee Co-chair
- Keidron Turner - Debate Student Engagement Committee Co-chair
- Tim Stewart - interim chair, Director, Office of Service-Learning
- David Ding - Graduate Assistant, Office of Service-Learning
- Cady Tice - Debate Student Engagement Committee Advisor - Assistant Director, Office of Residence Life
- Karen Bennett - Debate Programming Committee, Recruitment Coordinator- College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
- Doug Bisson – Professor of History, Department of History
- Rachael Flynn-Hopper – Associate Professor, Department of Education
- Bonnie Riechert – Associate Professor, Department of Public Relations
- Jennifer Duck – Instructor, Department of Media Studies
- Mary Ellen Pethel – Professor of Practice, Honors Program

Campus-wide:

- Belmont 2020 Debate committee

Student:

- Belmont Debate Student Engagement Committee
- Student Government Association (SGA)
- College Democrats
- College Republicans
- Turning Point USA
- Panhellenic Association
- Black Student Association
- Hope Council
- College of Business Student Advisory Board
- College of Law Student Bar Association

Staff:

- Office of Service-learning
- Belmont Athletics Department
- BOLD leadership program
- Office of Student Affairs
- WELL Core Office
- Belmont Athletics

Faculty & academic department:

- Department of Social Work
- Massey College of Business
- Department of Theatre and Dance
- Media Studies/Cinema, Media & Television
- Department of Education
- Department of Public Relations
- Department of Media Studies
- University Honors Program
- Belmont Department of Political Science
- School of Social Sciences
- College of Theology and Christian Ministry

**Description of Work**

- Voter Registration

Student groups and organizations - Student groups engage voters by building community and awareness around the importance of voting. Voter Registration will be advocated for in many events held on campus, but especially concentrated during the week of National Voter

Registration Day (September 22). Student organizations will partner to host voter registration tables across campus utilizing the online voter registration platform TurboVote, which will give students full access to resources to help them become a registered voter.

TurboVote, an online voter registration tool, will be utilized by the VFC committee to register Belmont students and collect data. TurboVote is a non-partisan, non-profit organization run by Democracy Works. All voter registration that takes place via TurboVote is accessed with a phone number or email; every Belmont student and faculty member has access to a University email address/account.

Along with campus-wide voter registration, Belmont also seeks to partner with other Universities and Colleges within the Metro-Nashville area. Tennessee State University and Vanderbilt University have already expressed interest in collaborating. This partnership with Nashville-area college campuses functions to ensure all college students across the city are registered voters. In enacting this current plan to become a Voter Friendly Campus, Belmont University will become the benchmark for other campuses within Davidson County, as well as promote voter registration to eligible students.

- Voter Education

Belmont currently hosts numerous opportunities in a variety of formats to engage and educate students and community members about voting.

- Academics - Currently, many faculty integrate voter education into their courses. Generally, professors who engage students about voting teach courses in social science and humanities, though Belmont does offer events for all students to participate in academic voter engagement education.
- WELL-Core events - All Belmont students are required to complete a number of WELL-Core (co-curricular) events to graduate. Any Belmont University community member can organize WELL-Core events, and several events that students, staff and faculty have hosted qualify as voter engagement and education events.
- Student groups and organizations - Student groups also engage voters in building community and awareness around the importance of voting. They host events related to voting and its importance throughout the year
- Student Engagement Committee - To generate excitement and engagement surrounding the 2020 Presidential Debate at Belmont, a diverse team of students from a variety of majors and classifications have formed the Debate Student Engagement Committee to coordinate student efforts and engagement around voter engagement.
- BOLD Leadership Program - Like WELL-Core requirements, the BOLD (Belmont Office of Leadership Development) program requires students to explore a civic engagement

component to graduate. The program provides avenues to explore voting issues and processes as a part of voter engagement.

- Presidential Debate 2020 - Belmont is hosting one of the debates of the 2020 election, and by doing so, the campus provides many faculty, staff, and student the impetus and opportunities to participate in the voter engagement process,

#### Faculty initiatives:

- Courses - Belmont faculty teach classes on subject areas tangential and directly related to voter education and issues in voting. This is one of the academic avenues in which faculty and students participate with voter engagement.
- Service-learning courses - Certain classes have a service-learning designation at Belmont, and students attending such classes participate in various forms of community service. Several of these classes involve voter engagement components in service.
- Research - Several Belmont faculty engage in research projects that are related to voting. Their involvement spans from assessment of voting data to methods of improving the voting process and ways to engage more voters

#### Voter Turnout:

To increase the chances of a high turnout rate on Election Day, Belmont is prepared to work with the following tools and departments to ensure students are constantly reminded of voting opportunities and their importance:

- Rock the Vote- Collaborating with Belmont's annual Best of the Best Showcase, students will be able to register to vote with the Rock the Vote organization at this concert during Welcome Week. Once students register with Rock the Vote, the organization constantly reminds students of upcoming elections in their district areas.
- TurboVote- Implementing this tool for the rest of the semester after the showcase through registration drives with other student organizations, students will similarly be able to register to vote while also being reminded of upcoming election dates. Belmont University will also be able to track registration numbers from Belmont affiliated events through TurboVote.
- Office of Residence Life - By collaborating with the Office of Residence Life, students will be constantly reminded of upcoming elections through flyers/announcements, as well as events that will take place in residence halls, such as the Debate Watch Parties leading up to Belmont's debate.
- Polling Stations - On Election Day, Belmont University has the honor of hosting a polling station on campus, so this opportunity increases the chances of Nashville-registered students being

present on Election Day. This opportunity also opens the door for a few voter advocacy opportunities that are still in the brainstorming process.

### Students as Voter Advocates:

In addition to efforts by the student body to engage in the presidential debate, the Belmont University Voter Friendly Campus Coalition will continue to create programming to engage students to continue to be active voting citizens. In putting in place formative relationships between the students, faculty, campus organizations, and the greater Nashville community, members of the Belmont community will become Voter Advocates for future local, state, and national elections. In implementing more WELL-Core events, as well as increasing voter-friendly initiatives across campus, Belmont University is creating programs to sustain and increase students as voter advocates.

## Timeline

### COVID-19 Considerations

In light of the current state of COVID-19, Belmont University is willing and prepared to take precautionary actions to the Voter Friendly Campus Plan to ensure the health, safety and well-being of all students, faculty, staff and employees. For Belmont University's campus response to Covid-19, "A multidisciplinary team consisting of representatives across campus is meeting consistently to monitor the situation, take precautionary measures, procure necessary materials and prepare plans in the event of a case being identified on campus (Belmont University [COVID-19 Response](#))." Our current timeline is operating under the assumption campus/student life will return to normal in August, at the beginning of the school year. However, it would be prudent for us to assume that campus will not operate as it did before the COVID-19 outbreak. With this in mind, the Belmont University VFC committee has crafted backup plans to adjust any programming to comply with CDC and WHO, as well as state and local guidelines, as they begin to shift within the coming months. While attempting to understand these unknown circumstances, the Belmont VFC committee is still devoted to ensuring efforts for voter registration, advocacy, education, and turnout still occur across campus, even though they could possibly appear differently than the original plan of action.

Possible voter friendly initiatives and events include but are not limited to the following:

- August 22nd: "Rock the Vote with the Best of Belmont" Concert and Family Fun Festival. Combining both a Belmont Tradition and an age-old registration organization, Rock the Vote, with the Best of Belmont will be the fall semester's first showcase highlighting Belmont's very own musical talent through various performances by students, while also creating a fun atmosphere to encourage individuals of all ages to register to vote with the Rock the Vote Organization.
- September 21st-25th: Voter Registration tabling across different campus locations. Tables will be staffed with student volunteers trained to answer any questions from

campus-wide student organizations. All tables will be equipped with iPads to register students via the platform, TurboVote.

- September 21st-28th: Humanities Symposium on the topic of Voting
- September 22nd: National Voter Registration Day. Along with tabling and other events occurring across campus, National Voter Registration Day will have concentrated events in hopes to stimulate excitement across campus.
- September 22nd-29th: 1st Presidential Debate Watch Party with analytical event before debate and post student discussion after. \*
- October 1st-7th: Vice Presidential Debate Watch Party with analytical event before debate and post student discussion after\*
- October 12th-15th: 2nd Presidential Debate Watch Party with analytical event before debate and post student discussion after\*
- October 22nd: Belmont's Presidential Debate with analytical event before debate (via online resource) \*
- October 26th-30th: Last analytical event discussing Belmont's debate and Election Day.

This will be the last analytical event for Belmont students before they head towards the polls on Election Day. In this event, Belmont's Political Science Department will educate students on the political issues that took place on Belmont's very own campus and how they may echo out on Election Day, and Belmont's Debate Committee will most likely discuss the logistical success of hosting this year's debate.

\* The day of each debate watch party, the engagement committee plans to partner with the Political Science Department to host an analytical event where its professors discuss how each debate may play out and the issues that may become present. After the debates are over, the committee also plans to host a post-debate discussion (Debate Watch) in which the students will discuss the aspects of the debate amongst their own peers, while also submitting analytical questions they would like the Political Science Department to answer in the next analytical event.

## **Success**

Success for Belmont to become a voter friendly campus for the 2020-2021 academic year involves the following:

- Documenting a comprehensive representation of concurrent Belmont voter engagement, registration, and education initiatives
- Increasing number of WELL-Core events related to voter registration and engagement
- Creating a coordination body of students, faculty, and staff for voter friendliness for Belmont
- Using NSLVE data to benchmark current voter registration and turnout