

All IN Campus Challenge
Berea College 2020 Campus Action Plan - DRAFT

Executive Summary

At Berea College, the Voter Empowerment and Political Awareness Coalition (VEPAC) continues to take the lead in promoting awareness, education, and programming related to voter engagement and voter empowerment. This cross-campus collaboration, made up of students, staff, and faculty, promotes voter registration, voter turnout, engagement with elected officials, and the development of civic engagement skills. Student leadership and collaborations with community-based organizations strengthen the impact of VEPAC's work.

Following VEPAC's formation during the 2017-18 school year, it has benefited from strong student leadership, on-going staff and faculty involvement and leadership, and support from Berea College's administration. Due to the safety responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, Berea College VEPAC leaders are prepared to adapt successful strategies and to develop new strategies that accommodate the potential of altered academic schedules and social distancing protocols in fall 2020. Despite these challenges, VEPAC remains focused on the goals of increasing voter registration and voter turnout, and of continuing to offer educational programming that provides opportunities for students to develop skills of civic engagement.

Leadership

The Berea College VEPAC planning team includes:

- Ashley Cochrane, Director, Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTs)
- Gus Gerassimides, Associate Vice President, Student Life
- Michelle Johnson, Program Coordinator, Student Life
- Sarah Rohrer, Associate Director, CELT's
- Dr. Andrea Woodward, Associate Professor of Social Sciences
- Student Government Association Representation
- Additional Student Leadership from across campus

Administrative support for VEPAC comes from President Dr. Lyle Roelofs, Provost Dr. Linda Strong Leek, and Vice President for Student Life Dr. Channell Barbour.

Commitment

Founded in 1855 as the first interracial and co-educational college in the South, Berea College promotes understanding and kinship among all people, service to communities in Appalachia and beyond, and sustainable living practices. Berea charges no tuition and admits only academically promising students, primarily from Appalachia, who have limited economic resources. Today, every Berea College student receives a full-tuition scholarship and holds a ten to fifteen hour per week labor position either on campus or in the community.

Guided by its motto, "God had made of one blood all peoples of the Earth," and its Great Commitments, Berea College has a long history of public engagement, service, and nonviolent social justice activism.

Berea demonstrates its commitment to improving civic learning through existing programs, affiliations, and collaborations, which include:

- Recipient of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement (awarded in 2008, renewed in 2015)
- Bonner Scholar program (established in 1990, the founding Bonner Scholar school in the nation)
- Project Pericles member institution
- Campus Compact member institution, and active member of Kentucky Campus Compact
- Student Life hosts a labor (work-study) position focused on coordination and support of VEPAC's work
- Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTS), Carter G. Woodson Center for Interracial Education, and the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center, are three of the centers at Berea College that promote place-based education, development of awareness of and skills to address current social issues related to social justice, identity, and place, and engagement with local community partners through collaborations, service, and outreach
- A variety of academic courses across the disciplines include service-learning collaborations and civic engagement topics and pedagogical strategies
- Participation in the NSLVE to track the campus' political engagement
- Campus collaboration with TurboVote

Landscape

Recent voting snapshot: In 2018, 62.4% of Berea College students were registered to vote, and 33.4% of those registered voted in the 2018 midterm elections.

Local Community Collaborating Organizations: Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and the Berea Human Rights Commission have collaborated on voter empowerment activities and civic engagement education programming with Berea College VEPAC.

Challenges: The campus exists in four voting precincts and two different voting locations, which makes it challenging for students to know where to vote, resulting in a barrier to student participation. Some students don't feel safe going to the polls due to past voter intimidation and voter discouragement. The national climate of political polarization extends to every community in our country, including our own.

Goals

- 90% of Berea College students eligible to vote will be registered to vote.
- 80% of registered Berea College voters will vote in any local, or national, election.
- Every Berea College student will encounter multiple opportunities to register to vote and to participate in the development of civic engagement skills

Strategy

On-going and general strategies:

- Develop opportunities for students to register to vote through activities like
 - Orientation, housing selection, academic courses, residence life, labor meetings, and others.

- Civic engagement recognized as part of wellness campus opportunities
- Participation in National Voter Registration Day
- Voter registration opportunities at campus-wide events like Volunteer Extravaganza, Mountain Day, and others
- Election Day listed on official Berea College academic calendar
- Election Day shuttles to voting precincts
- Outreach to incoming students before their arrival
- Educational collaborations with other groups on campus
- Develop a sense of fun and celebration around voting

Specific strategies for fall 2020:

- Adapt existing, successful strategies as needed for current pandemic protocols (for example, more on-line or virtual opportunities)
- Develop voter information modules for first-year orientation and send-off events
- Host candidate forums for local elections
- Provide information to faculty to make it easy to integrate information about voter registration and voter turnout into classes