

Voter-Friendly Campus Report
May 31, 2022
Boston University

Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by members of the BU Votes Council. The inaugural council was created in the spring of 2021. The positions and job descriptions are included in an appendix at the end of this report. Co-presidents, Katy Collins and Niamh Stull, and Vice-President Diane Crowley contributed to this report. Katy is the Director of Student Outreach and Engagement in the Dean of Students office. Niamh just graduated in May 2022 with her BA in Political Science. Diane is the Director of the Fall River Campus for the School of Social Work.

This action plan seeks to be a resource as we work towards our goals throughout the next academic year. This plan will be implemented on all three campuses at Boston University: Charles River, Medical, and Fenway. We will host programming both virtually and in person. BU has developed a ten-year strategic plan with strategic priorities that align with BU Votes' goals. Of the five strategic priorities, "Community, Big Yet Small," is a chance for BU Votes to shine. This priority includes objectives to "further integrate the Medical, Fenway, and Charles River campuses" as well as "impart a common identity and focus engagement with university-wide activities." Our intended programming will further these objectives and therefore raise awareness of our work.¹

This action plan begins in June 2022 and ends in May 2023. As we are still a relatively new coalition, our focus is primarily on short-term goals. We will review this action plan during each monthly meeting and update accordingly.

We worked to make this plan equitable by using Boston University's larger strategic plan as a guide. Anyone is welcome to join BU Votes and all of our documents, including this action plan, are available to members to review and comment on in our shared google drive.

Leadership

Our coalition is composed of political science professors, administrators from various colleges, staff from student affairs, members of student government, club leaders, and students from different colleges. We recently selected new members to join the BU Votes Council. This was our second application process and all of the new Council members are new to BU Votes, which means that we have extended our reach in the past year.

¹ <https://www.bu.edu/plan2020/strategic-priorities/community-big-yet-small/>

We work with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and with Civic Holidays as a partner. Our members attend webinars to learn about best practices and implement programming on Civic Holidays to maximize our impact.

We are held accountable to the Dean of Students who reports to the President. As of right now, these positions are entirely voluntary and no one is compensated monetarily for their work. There has been a push university-wide to eliminate student volunteer positions and to make them paid. If the University makes that decision and funds us, we will gladly pay our student workers.

Our students are proficient in monitoring our social media account and developing social media campaigns. When we created the job descriptions for the council, we restricted certain Council positions to just students or just faculty/staff based on constituents' strengths and positionality.

We don't currently have a diverse representation of faculty. Most of our faculty members belong to the College of General Studies. While we are open to all community members, we need to do a better job advertising that fact through consistent outreach. We do not yet have viable support from senior leadership, and a lack of diverse representation doesn't help us gain credibility. One way that we hope to address this in the upcoming year is to develop a monthly newsletter that we could share with members of the community.

We did request to have TurboVote included on the new SIS that was supposed to be implemented this summer but has been delayed to the fall. We were assured that this would be a simple thing to include and will follow up as we get closer to an implementation date.

Our group meets once a month virtually to accommodate as many members as possible. We also utilize a slack channel and email to plan programming and share relevant information. If someone needs to take time off—a faculty member goes on sabbatical, a staff member takes a leave of absence, or a student needs a break to work on a class project—we meet to reprioritize our goals in light of their absence.

Commitment

Institutional commitment is still an aspirational goal. An email from the President and the Dean of Students went out in November of 2020 encouraging students to vote, and President Brown did sign the All In Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation.

Our Community Service Center continues to excel in supporting civic learning. Every August, the CSC sponsors the First Year Service Orientation Program—FYSOP. This program is open to incoming students and is facilitated by current students. For one week, incoming students are introduced to the CSC’s philosophy and given an opportunity to conduct service in different Boston neighborhoods. The CSC does a great job reducing the “othering” that can occur with service programs and works in tandem with members of the community that are already doing the work. Each service opportunity includes a reflection component so students can take stock of their work as part of a larger community.

We have a number of courses dedicated to civic learning. Course descriptions of a few listed for the Fall 2022 semester are listed in the appendix. The below learning outcomes are met with these courses:

- Students will identify and apply major concepts used in the social sciences to explain individual and collective human behavior including, for example, the workings of social groups, institutions, networks, and the role of the individual in them.
- Students will analyze at least one of the dimensions of experience—historical, racial, socioeconomic, political, gender, linguistic, religious, or cultural—that inform their own worldviews and beliefs as well as those of other individuals and societies.
- Students will participate respectfully in different communities such as campus, citywide, national, and international groups, and recognize and reflect on the issues relevant to those communities.
- Students will demonstrate, through comparative analysis, an understanding of global diversity as expressed in at least two different languages, cultures, religions, political systems, or societies.
- Students will demonstrate detailed understanding of at least two cultural contexts through foreign language or culture study at BU, participation in a language or culture living-learning community at BU, or study abroad. This will involve reflection on the challenges and pleasures students discover in orienting themselves in new and unfamiliar cultures.
- Students will be able to identify, grapple with, and make a judgment about the ethical questions at stake in at least one major contemporary public debate, and engage in a civil discussion about it with those who hold views different from their own.
- Students will demonstrate the skills and vocabulary needed to reflect on the ethical responsibilities that face individuals (or organizations, or societies, or governments) as they grapple with issues affecting both the communities to which they belong and those

identified as “other.” They should consider their responsibilities to future generations of humankind, and to stewardship of the Earth.²

Landscape

Our barriers remain the same: we have limited funding and we are a volunteer coalition, which limits our ability to have a wide-reaching impact. While it’s wonderful that we made it through last year without BU Votes inaugural leader, our Council members need to strike a better balance in working towards short-term goals as well as long-term goals.

We also noticed last year that our students seemed to vocalize a more pessimistic view of the voting process. We are hopeful that by doing more education connecting voting with everyday impacts we can re-energize investment in voting.

Goals

Boston University’s ten-year plan includes five strategic priorities³:

1. A vibrant academic experience
2. Research that matters
3. Diversity, equity and inclusion
4. Community, big yet small
5. Global engagement

Each priority has a number of objectives. For example, one of the objectives for the priority “Global engagement” is to offer all students an international experience.⁴ Members of the Boston University community have been designated as initiative owners for these objectives. Each initiative owner developed a charter, a mission statement, a budget, key performance indicators, milestones, and a risk assessment. A team leader ensured that KPIs were SMARTIE. Additionally, the team leader and a project management software system make sure that initiative owners remain on track to meet their goals.

BU Votes’ goals include reaching each first-year student during summer orientation 2022. We also intend to create a social media campaign around the midterm elections in order to reach all of our students with registration status in states outside of Massachusetts. Mobilizing students to vote will require more ubiquitous education regarding the role that voting plays in

² <https://www.bu.edu/academics/hub/learning-outcomes/>

³ <https://www.bu.edu/plan2020/strategic-priorities/>

⁴ <https://www.bu.edu/plan2020/strategic-priorities/global-engagement/>

making change. How do local elections affect policies that affect you? We hope to prepare them for the longevity of being an engaged citizen and emphasizing that voting is just one of many ways that they can be civically involved.

Strategy

Voter Registration

For the first time we will be hosting voter registration drives during our Orientation for incoming students this summer. These will occur during our “Open Campus” event where student facilitators bring incoming students to visit different departments on campus. This is our first in-person Orientation since 2019 so we will make sure that there are students staffing each drive to make those important connections with the new students. Each drive will include an opportunity to sign up for BU Votes, and for the first time, we will have branded tablecloths and giveaways. We hope that this will assist in increasing awareness of our efforts.

We will also host voter registration drives during each of the National Civic Holidays. We have signed up to be a partner for each of the Civic Holidays. After summer 2022, our voter registration drives will occur on all three campuses in person.

Our team meets virtually once a month. We would use this team to train and/or refresh best practices for hosting a voter registration drive.

Voter Education

Our voter education efforts have previously been limited to presentations given by our political science professors. These presentations occurred once a semester virtually. While these have been popular in attendance, we would like to mobilize interest in these educational topics by hosting more webinars and providing expertise from other academic disciplines.

Voter Turnout and Mobilization

We had a 70% voter turnout for the 2020 presidential election. While midterm elections can be less charged, we hope that our social media campaigning and educational efforts will encourage students to vote. Our programming for the National Civic Holidays will also ensure that we are available to help students register to vote and remind them of important deadlines.

Voter Access

Similar to our efforts in 2020, BU Votes will encourage academic deans to excuse students from class on Election Day. Additionally, we will make sure that our communication efforts always include important deadlines.

In order to deepen capacity and competence related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in tandem with civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation, our coalition needs to develop partnerships with the office of diversity and inclusion. This office opened in 2019 and since then many of the individual colleges have also developed their own diversity and inclusion positions. Employees in diversity and inclusion roles meet once a month to share knowledge and challenges. Developing relationships with these individuals will help us learn where we can partner to meet diversity and inclusion goals.

Building sustained commitment beyond a single election cycle will require the development of an office with paid employees dedicated to this work. It's not possible to deepen capacity within BU Votes while so many departments remain understaffed. A budget and a reporting line to a senior leader would go a long way towards institutionalizing this work.

Our succession plan with respect to BU Votes includes a process for current council members to reapply as well as for anyone in the community to apply for any open positions. One way our work can outlast individuals is by having our work entwined with university-wide events such as Orientation. If we can embed our work into Boston University traditions, it's more likely that our work will outlast any one individual of BU Votes.

Reporting

We will share this plan on our BU Votes webpage. This plan is also shared with the Dean of Students, who also receives bullet points that can be passed on to the President. Our student government liaison shares the plan during a student government meeting.

Evaluation

During each monthly meeting, we check-in on our short and long term goals to ascertain if we are on track or if we need to pivot. In December 2022 and April 2023 we will conduct a more in-depth review of our action plan. In order to make a case for an office with paid employees, we will need to assess our impact beyond voter registration data. In the next few years, we would like to partner with the BU HUB, our general education department, in order to ascertain how well the learning outcomes for relevant courses are being met as well as how we can work together. We will also partner with Institutional Research to work on creating quantitative and qualitative surveys to better understand our students' needs and educational gaps with respect to civic engagement.

The success of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts will be evaluated in conjunction with the office of Diversity and Inclusion's evaluative efforts.

We have succeeded in meeting our goal to have voter registration drives be a part of Orientation for incoming students. We have gotten closer to our goal of incorporating civic engagement as an educational topic in FY101 by the fall of 2024. We had volunteers visit each class last year to talk about BU Votes and other ways to be civically engaged on campus and in the neighboring area. We were also able to add TurboVote to our Campus Engage webpage, and we will be adding it to our class registration page when our new Student Information System goes live—postponed to Fall 2022.

In addition to maintaining the progress that we have made in the past few years, we would like to establish a relationship with our local election office to better support larger scale community civic engagement efforts.

Appendix:

BU Votes Council Membership

Executive Leadership

Co-Presidents: open to all members of the BU community

- Vice-President: open to faculty and/or staff
- Secretary: open to all members of the BU community
- Deputy Secretary: open to all members of the BU community
- Student Government Liaison: open to BU students
- Boston Votes liaison: open to BU students

Committees

- Voter Engagement
- Outreach & Recruitment
- Media
- Voter Education

Representatives

- 2 representatives from each college and administrative units

BU Votes Council Job Descriptions:

Co-Presidents: heads of Council, call and preside at meetings, develop annual goals with Council, ensure proper reporting to external partners such as NSLVE and the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative.

Vice-President: assists co-presidents as needed, recruits college and faculty membership in the council

Secretary: note-taker, maintains membership and communications lists

Deputy Secretary: assists secretary, keeps track of voter events, and disseminates across campus.

Student Government Liaison: keep Student Government and BU Votes apprised of opportunities for collaboration

Boston Votes Liaison: keep Boston Votes and BU Votes apprised of opportunities for collaboration

Voter Engagement Committee

- Support and facilitate voter registration drives.
- Develop programs and incentives to increase voter turnout in elections.

Recruitment Committee

- Conduct outreach to student groups and communities regarding BU Votes efforts
- Organize efforts to recruit student members to BU Votes and assist the VP in recruiting faculty members to BU Votes

Media Committee

- Maintain up to date & accurate information regarding elections and events on the BU Votes website
- Develop social media content and manage BU Votes social media accounts

Voter Education Committee

- Develop presentations and programs to educate voters on topics such as individual voter rights, voting history, national and state developments, etc.

Representatives from colleges and administrative units

- Keep area apprised of BU Votes efforts and opportunities for collaboration
- Organize voter registration events in their area

Relevant Courses

SED ED 225

Project Citizen: Promoting Civic Engagement

The course examines how a model of citizen action (Project Citizen) can be used to promote active and informed citizenship among youth and adults. Students apply that model to analyze and influence a current public policy of their choice. Effective Fall 2018, this course fulfills a single unit in the following BU Hub area: The Individual in Community.

SED ED 412

Civic Context of Education

Political and professional decision making in education in a democracy, emergent issues in educational policy, and the ethics of educational practice, based upon reading, discussion, planning exercises, and extensive writing by students. ED 410 A1 and ED 412 A1 must be taken in the same semester or ED 410 B1 in the fall and ED 412 B1 in the spring. 2cr.

SED HD 316

Children's Political Lives

Course will reconstruct the development of children's and adolescents' political understanding; explore how political attitudes are shaped by race, class, nationality, the political system and

historical circumstance (e.g. war, immigration, climate change); develop strategies for youth's political education and empowerment.

CAS PO 334

Political Violence

Explores the concept of political violence and the dynamics of violent political behavior. Critically examines the causes and consequences of political violence around the world. Topics include civil war, government repression and disciplining, electoral violence, riots and demonstrations, vigilante and intercommunal violence. Comparative perspectives with a particular emphasis on the Global South. Effective Fall 2019, this course fulfills a single unit in each of the following BU Hub areas: Social Inquiry II, Global Citizenship and Intercultural Literacy, Critical Thinking.

SPH PH 874

Public Health Practice within Political Contexts

The public health leadership seminar is one in a series of four 1-credit requirements that will serve as the main integrative pedagogic experience of the DrPH doctoral program. The purpose of this course is to focus on preparing DrPH students to analyze the political context that surrounds a health topic of interest. By understanding the politics involved, students will be better prepared to craft proposals, recommendations, and policies that will not only be grounded in scientific evidence, but be more feasible given existing politics. This course will explore politics while building skills in regional data analysis and recommendation development, to prepare students for their comprehensive exam and help them conceptualize a field-relevant dissertation topic.

CAS EE 521

Law for Sustainability

Survey of the major features of environmental law and relevant procedural and constitutional issues. Comparison of practical realities (political, economic, social, geographic, biological) with the ideal context for what should be. Projects include legal research and mock advocacy.