

2024 Campus Democratic Engagement Plan Bowdoin College April 2024

Outline

Summary
Leadership
Institutional Commitment and Landscape
Goals
National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) Strategy
Proposed Collaborations
Evaluation & Reporting

Summary

This plan was developed to promote coordination and broad campus contributions to civic engagement efforts at Bowdoin College from January 2024 through January 2025, with a focus on the fall presidential election and spring primaries, but with a broader goal of cultivating students who identify themselves as active and informed stewards of a stronger democracy. This plan is informed primarily by two resources: [Election Imperatives](#) from the Institute for Democracy in Higher Education, and [Strengthening American Democracy](#) from the Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV) Coalition.

This plan will be implemented primarily by the staff of Bowdoin Votes, with important contributions to be made by advisory group members and by others who are drawn into collaboration due to their position and/or enthusiasm for the project.

As was the case with Bowdoin's 2022 plan, this plan includes both firm intentions and initial suggestions for how various departments might engage in this work. Collaborations and conversations with stakeholders will continue to develop throughout 2024.

Leadership

Bowdoin Votes is led by one or two student leaders and Wendy Van Damme. In the 2023-2024 school year, the student leaders are Jane Hirschman and Ellen Salovaara. Bowdoin Votes is a program under Bowdoin College's McKeen Center for the Common Good, which focuses on community engagement. Due to the engagement of the staff of the McKeen center with Bowdoin Votes, if Wendy Van Damme were to leave her position, the McKeen center staff would be able to temporarily fill her position as needed until a new individual were to be hired.

Student leaders typically serve for one to two years, with Jane Hirschman leaving in the 2024 year and Ellen Salovaara continuing with her role in the upcoming school year. To select new student leaders, a job posting is posted on the campus jobs page. Wendy Van Damme and other McKeen center staff aid in the hiring process. For any new individuals involved within Bowdoin Votes, Bowdoin Votes has a Microsoft Teams file that contains all documents and information used by the program to ensure an understanding of what has occurred in previous years.

The advisory group is chaired by Wendy Van Damme, who administers Bowdoin Votes for the McKeen Center. The members of this iteration of the advisory group are being recruited winter of 2023-2024 and will meet twice per year. This year, the group consists of coaches, professors, student athletic leaders, facilities managers, members of the office of co-curricular development, institutional research faculty, student affairs faculty. The role of the advisory group has been to review past practices and provide input on the Campus Democratic Engagement Plan as it has been drafted. After submission of this plan, the Advisory Group will continue with a more fluid lineup and individual roles, enabling broader contributions to the execution of activities named in this plan.

Bowdoin Votes also actively collaborates with fellow New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) schools. Together we have formed the NESCAC Votes coalition which meets monthly to compare strategies and form goals as a conference. These meetings are supervised and guided by representatives from ALL IN.

Bowdoin Votes has formed an essential partnership with the Brunswick Town Clerk that will continue to strengthen. The Clerk's office has a list of Bowdoin students and their residences that serves as proof of residence for their voter registration. This makes the Maine voter registration process much easier for students as they do not have to provide further proof of residence beyond identifying their College residence. The Clerk has also helped Bowdoin Votes to track voter engagement by reporting the numbers of students who have voted in each election. We meet with the town clerk annually to ensure that our plan aligns with the schedule and needs of Brunswick as a whole and to set out a plan for the year that streamlines the registration and voting process for students.

Institutional Commitment & Landscape

In its [Statement On a Liberal Education](#), the faculty of Bowdoin concludes that “the success of a Bowdoin education is evident in the capacity of graduates ... to engage competing views critically, to make principled judgments that inform their practice, and *to work effectively with others as informed citizens committed to constructing a just and sustainable world* [emphasis ours].” This vision neatly mirrors the definition of *civic learning and democratic engagement* (CLDE) used by the SLSV Coalition in its guide for developing Election Engagement Plans. According to the SLSV Coalition, CLDE is “promoting the education of students for engaged citizenship through democratic participation in their communities, respect and appreciation of diversity, applied learning, and social responsibility.” The similarity of the values articulated by Bowdoin and the SLSV Coalition suggests that CLDE are implicit goals of Bowdoin's entire curriculum and that they are also pursued explicitly in particular departments, programs, and courses.

CLDE are also goals of many programs in Bowdoin's co-curriculum, particularly within the Division of Student Affairs' student life departments, which include The McKeen Center for the Common Good. As the campus department dedicated to modeling and advancing Bowdoin's historical commitment to the common good, the McKeen Center was an appropriate launch point for an effort in 2016 to enhance students' democratic participation. Outcomes from that cycle clarified the need for a collaborative apparatus of students, faculty, and staff that can provide a consistent, programmatic approach to facilitating CLDE among students.

Notwithstanding the importance of the language quoted above, and the centrality of the Common Good in Bowdoin's understanding of its own culture, it is nonetheless consequential that civic learning and engagement are not named explicitly in either Bowdoin's mission statement or in the curricula for any of its departments. The absence of an institutional goal around civic engagement means that CLDE are cultivated unevenly across campus life. This stands in contrast to Bowdoin's education with respect to sustainability, where the addition of an Environmental Mission Statement during the past decade has provided the grounding for a long-term investment in all students' education for sustainable living. As Bowdoin Votes continues to develop a coalition in coming years, we will explore models from institutions like James Madison University and Tufts University, which embrace CLDE as institutional priorities on an equal footing with environmental stewardship.

Bowdoin Votes partners with many campus departments to inform and support its voter outreach and educational programming. Our goal is for this work to be informed not just by practical insights, but also by ongoing assessment of CLDE outcomes. We are still devising methods, and initiating conversations, to shed light on such outcomes. One promising approach we envision is to develop a CLDE Report Card that would be delivered to the faculty annually, and would include updates on data from NSLVE, as well as from a handful of questions featured on Bowdoin's First Year survey and Senior Surveys. By looking longitudinally at each cohorts' responses to questions such as "*how often did you discuss social, political or academic issues outside of class?*", we may be able to detect slow changes in the campus culture. Making annual reports to faculty is one way to stoke faculty interest in integrating CLDE into teaching and research.

Arguably, the "bottom line" CLDE outcome is democratic participation: how many students vote. In 2016 Bowdoin began measuring voting rates by joining the [National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement \(NSLVE\)](#). We are currently awaiting 2022 registration and voting rates data from NSLVE. Once we receive the voter registration and voting rates data from NSLVE, we will further refine our actionable steps for the upcoming election cycle in 2024.

Following 2020 NSLVE data, there is a discrepancy between race / ethnicity and voting rates. White students and students of two or more races both had participation rates in the 2020 election at 89%. However, Asian students voted at a rate of 78%, Black students voted at a rate of 71%, and Hispanic students voted at a rate of 79%. We detail in our goals and strategies below how we attempt to close these gaps. Additionally, [90% of Bowdoin students](#) are from out of state, which means that making an emphasis on how students can vote in their home state is a priority.

Goals

Short-Term Goals 2023-24:

1. Educate students on the issues & candidates that will appear on the ballot, as well as related topics such as polling, electoral reform proposals, and basic civics.
2. Run at least five voter registration drives before state primaries begin in early March 2024.
3. Run at least ten voter registration drives after the primaries and before Election Day 2024.
4. Work with Off-Campus Study staff to help students studying abroad register and vote by including information on how to vote in study abroad meetings.

5. Support students voting out-of-state with absentee ballot drives, state-by-state election information, and posters with out-of-state deadline reminders in the mail center.
6. Incorporate voter registration and conversations about civic engagement into first-year orientation.
7. Partner with five student organizations to co-sponsor events, registration drives, registration challenges, etc.
8. Sustain and expand the Bowdoin Votes Advisory Group (BVAG), which will include our biannual meetings and reaching out to at least five other student organizations.
9. Increase campus engagement in local politics while sustaining and expanding relationships with the Brunswick Town Clerk and other local representatives.
10. Register students to vote. We hope to maintain or increase our voter registration rate (94.8% of eligible students registered in 2020).
11. Increase students' voter turnout. We hope to maintain or increase our voter registration rate (84.8% of eligible students voted in 2020).

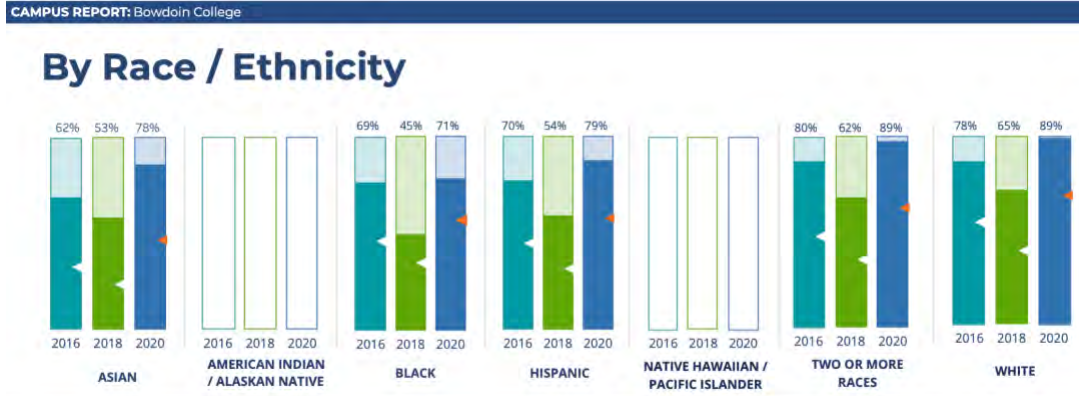
Long-Term Goals 2023-24:

1. Integrate Bowdoin Votes into all aspects of the Bowdoin institution: residential life, academics, social scene, etc.
2. Increase faculty collaboration with and investment in Bowdoin Votes, such as presentations about voting in class, hosting discussions, encouraging setting time aside to vote, etc.
3. Lower affective barriers to voting; promote students' beliefs that voting is important, intellectually approachable, convenient, and is a basic democratic right that is only as powerful as it is practiced.
4. Sustain civic dialogue and programming beyond major election years.

National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

In 2020, 94.8% of eligible students registered to vote and 85.4% voted. This was a significant increase from both the 2018 midterms and the 2016 election. While our registration and turnout rates continue to increase, and are well above the national average for college campuses, there is certainly room for improvement. Women tend to vote more often than men, and underclassmen tend to vote more often than upperclassmen. Asian, Black, and Hispanic students voted at a lower rate than white students and students of two or more races. We are awaiting NSLVE's data from the 2022 elections. Moving forward, we hope to include more students of color on our advisory board as well as increase our collaboration with affinity groups and other student organizations to see how Bowdoin Votes can better serve students of color. Panels, workshops, and speaker events related to civic engagement could be opportunities for co-hosting and working with affinity groups on campus. We feel strongly that it is our role as an organization to listen to what students of color feel would be the most helpful way to engage with them and groups on campus and form our goals based off of those conversations.

Bowdoin College's Voting Rate by Race



Bowdoin College's Voting Rate by Sex

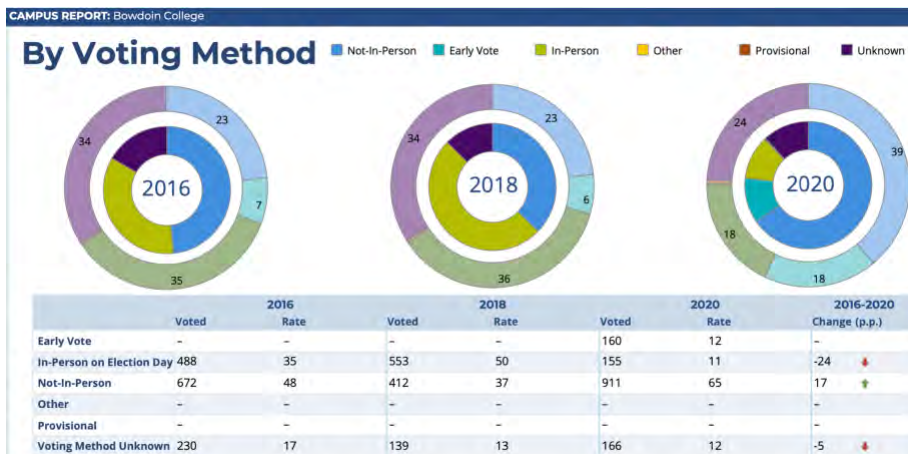
CAMPUS REPORT: Bowdoin College

Looking Closer

By Sex

	2016			2018			2020			2016-2020 Change (p.p.)
	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	
Female	927	733	79	934	618	66	845	747	88	↑ 9
Male	908	660	73	892	486	54	790	649	82	↑ 9

Bowdoin College's Voting Methods



Bowdoin College's Voting Rate by Field of Study

By Field of Study

FIELDS	2016			2018			2020			2016-2020	
	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	Change (p.p)	
Area, Ethnic, Cultural, and Gender Studies	48	36	75	54	34	63	50	35	70	↓ -5	
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	154	124	81	135	78	58	138	119	86	↑ 6	
Computer and Information Sciences	42	35	83	47	25	53	43	38	88	↑ 5	
Education	-	-	-	44	31	70	20	19	95	-	
English Language and Literature	40	30	75	36	25	69	47	42	89	↑ 14	
Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics	19	13	68	13	-	-	17	12	71	↑ 2	
History	18	-	-	39	27	69	20	18	90	-	

Strategy

Below is a rough chronology of the tasks that comprise this plan. The list includes efforts that may require only McKean Center staff and volunteer support to execute. Most of them are definite plans, while a few may be pruned back or abandoned depending on the capacity that is achieved through volunteer recruitment. Following the list is a table of additional ideas that would require cooperation from other departments, and we will explore these possibilities in early 2024.

Spring Semester 2024

Month	Action Items
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Revise “Where Should I Vote?” guide to compare impact of voting in home states vs. Maine so students will feel more confident about their decision on where to vote ● Compile guide on types of primaries (open, closed, mixed, caucus vs. primary) by state to help students will feel more educated about the logistics of the election ● Create training guide for tabling volunteers— information on how to help students register, rules/deadlines/elections in Maine and other states to better pass down institutional knowledge ● Map out components of <i>Bowdoin Votes</i> student-facing campaign, and develop SMART goals for each aspect of it to pass down institutional knowledge of Bowdoin Votes ● Participate in February 9, 2024 NESCAC Votes gathering at Tufts University so Bowdoin Votes will be able to incorporate knowledge from other schools ● Table in Smith Union for absentee ballot request forms and Maine registration ● Publish comprehensive guide to spring/summer primaries in different states to help students feel more confident in where and how to vote

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Host viewing parties for presidential primary debates so students feel more confident regarding their decision to vote in the election ● Meet with Bowdoin Votes Advisory Group to incorporate knowledge from the Bowdoin community
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Table in Smith Union for absentee ballot request forms to help students prepare to vote ● Plan event with international students to discuss democracy and voting in home countries to help all students feel included in Bowdoin Votes ● Initiate conversations with affinity group leaders about how Bowdoin Votes can best serve students of color with the goal of increasing the percentage of voting students of color (specifically focus on Black Students Union, Asian Students Alliance, and Latin American Students Organization given our data) to help incorporate ideas and knowledge of students of color to better serve their needs. In 2020, 78% of Asian students, 71% of Black students, and 79% of Hispanic students voted. We hope to increase each percentage by 2 percentage points.
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Present information about absentee voting at the meeting for students going abroad next year to help students who are studying in other countries feel prepared to vote ● Develop program with mail center to facilitate voting-by-mail for primaries (covering postage, signage in mail center, etc.) so students will feel comfortable voting by mail ● Begin recruiting for 2023-2024 Bowdoin Votes Program Assistants and 3 Democracy Ambassadors to help Bowdoin Votes prepare its work for the upcoming presidential election
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Train a new program assistant and consider ways to pass down institutional knowledge ● Seek collaboration with first-generation college students through THRIVE and other student groups to host conversations about voting and politics on campus to help better serve first generation college students' needs ● Further refine action plan for presidential election for the fall 2024 semester

- Register students once they know their address for the fall

Fall Semester 2024

Month	Action Items
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recruit and train volunteers, as well as paid student democracy ambassadors, to help with tabling and social media output ● Table at high turnout events (for example, athletics events, speaker events, etc.) and other strategic dates (for example, National Voter Registration Day) to help increase voter registration and reach those who may not already be registered to vote. In 2020, 94.8% of students were registered, and we want to maintain or increase this percentage. ● Register first year students on move in day by tabling ● Create a calendar of Bowdoin Votes fall events, key dates, and opportunities. Create comprehensive posters with all of this information and distribute them around campus (dining halls, library, mail center, dorms, etc.) to help inform campus of Bowdoin Votes' events. ● Recruit leaders for Bowdoin Votes Advisory Group, especially students of color in order to better serve students of color ● Meet with Bowdoin Votes Advisory Group

<p>October</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enlist individual(s) from each team and affinity group to remind their team/group about deadlines, etc. to support increased turnout among individuals who may not have historically voted ● Hold absentee ballot party(s) for students registering outside of Maine (we provide photocopier, postage, etc) to help students feel comfortable voting outside of Maine ● After registration push, run turn-out campaigns to motivate, interview students about why they vote for Bowdoin Votes Instagram ● Early voting walk to the polls (town hall) with campus celebrities—President Zaki, Randy Nichols—to promote increased voter turnout rate ● Organize a local politics panel with Brunswick officials and representatives to promote student involvement in local government. ● Co-organize debate watching parties (in College Houses) and topical debates with campaign representatives and/or faculty experts to help students feel more informed on pressing issues. ● Create and email out a voting guide for questions on Maine ballot
<p>November</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use social media platforms, Service News bulletin, posters, and email (including by campus celebrities) to reach students electronically with reminders and updates to keep students informed about deadlines and details. In 2020, 90.1% of registered students voted, and we want to maintain or increase this percentage. ● Distribute nonpartisan materials prepared by national organizations (for example, CEEP candidate guides, League of Women Voters Ballot Guide, etc.) to streamline information for students ● Offer stickers for students who submit ‘voting selfies’ at mail room (absentee) or polling place to encourage students to be excited about voting ● Organize vans to the local polls on election day, including snacks and campus celebrities at the pickup point to make voting accessible to students and to encourage students to be excited to vote ● Host campus-wide election results viewing party to keep the momentum going and interest students in staying engaged ● Send out campus-wide Bowdoin Votes program survey on election day or soon thereafter to gain data that can make our events and initiatives even stronger

December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief with staff and individually with collaborators (email, meeting, and/or survey) to get their feedback to promote even better turnout in future elections. • Analyze feedback, summarize findings, and make recommendations for 2025 and 2026.
-----------------	---

Proposed Collaborations

Activities and Possible Partner(s)	
Send every student registration & voting information, and reminders, for both Maine and their home state (electronic and/or hard copy)	Registrar Residential Life IT Mail Center
Support students who are studying abroad to get registered and vote absentee (before and/or when they are out of USA)	OCS office Mail Center
Establish Election Engagement liaisons in each College House	Residential Life
Enlist an individual or two on each team to send reminders about deadlines, etc.	Athletics
Political dialogue/civic engagement event(s) for students to engage Brunswick community leaders and members	What Matters Program
Create post-election surveys for the student body and analyze the results	Institutional Research / Bowdoin Orient

<p>Host conversations about race and voting and formulate goals to support students of color on campus during election season</p> <p>Enlist an individual or two in each affinity group to send reminders about deadlines, etc.</p>	<p>Affinity Groups</p> <p>Athletes of Color Coalition</p>
---	---

Evaluation & Reporting

Evaluation of this plan's efforts will allow stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of our efforts, analyze students' needs and preferences, and make informed adjustments to the plan's goals and strategies. We will not only measure the degree of democratic participation in 2024 (through NSLVE and numbers reported by the Town Clerk) but also investigate the degree to which success is influenced by factors such as student attitudes, the amount of resources devoted to the effort, and simple competition for students' attention, time, and energy. We also plan to use an anti-racism lens in order to assess the results of our work with students of color and campus affinity groups. Assessing outcomes from the 2024 cycle will 1) measure the efficacy of our nuts-and-bolts work, 2) deepen our insight into constraints on election engagement, and 3) suggest possible demographic areas and modes of engagement where there is room for greater reach.

Given that our efforts are aimed at all Bowdoin students who are eligible to vote, it would be ideal to survey the entire student body for feedback on the program. We have had success in the past with distributing surveys via campus wide emails and incentivizing students to respond to surveys with gift cards to local stores and restaurants. Additional surveys may be created and targeted to students who participate in specific programs such as affinity group and athletic team voting campaigns.

We will ask students in person at our events and tables after the election about outcomes related to our goals (for example, did they register, do they believe voting was accessible, etc.) and about their impressions of the quality of particular efforts. This will be a third source of data in addition to NSLVE/Town Clerk counts and an online poll. We will also invite ideas for what could be done differently to reach and motivate students.

Data will be analyzed qualitatively for trends in both types of responders and patterns in the responses. Relevant portions will be shared with collaborating departments as we re-tool for the next iteration of this plan in 2026, and to a lesser extent in 2025.

We will post this plan on the Bowdoin Votes page of Bowdoin College's website. We will also share this report with the Bowdoin Orient. We will work with the Bowdoin Orient's data desk for assessing and reporting our data. We will plan on emailing out our plan along with voter data and a survey to the entire student body.