

Buena Vista University Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2024-2025 academic year

I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Samantha Kay, Director of Community and Student Engagement, to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Buena Vista University. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2024-2025 academic year, on and around our campus in Storm Lake, Iowa. The following groups will be leading this work at Buena Vista University to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Undergraduate Students
- Staff
- Faculty

II. Leadership

Samantha Kay, Director of Community and Student Engagement, will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. She will be supported in this work by: Jamii Claiborne, Vice President of Student Success, Mandi Mollring, Assistant Dean of Student Success and Campus Engagement.

II. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate a commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They include the goal of "inspiring students to serve, empower, and transform communities through education for service."

On campus, we've seen:

- Distribution of Voter Education Resources
 - Face to face tabling events, email campaigns, social media posts, and Campus Groups (our student activities events platform) events and communications

On campus, we've experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Celebration of civic holiday events
 - Constitution Day/National Voter Registration Day
 - National Voter Education Week Programming
 - Voting 101 & Voter Registration 101
 - Voting in Person vs Voting by Mail 101
 - Making your Plan to Vote
 - Know your Ballot

- Civil Discourse 101

- Established a satellite voting location for all Buena Vista County registered voters
- Support for students in mailing and postage for voter registration forms and absentee ballots

III. Landscape

The following information provides a brief overview of the landscape of our campus.

Buena Vista University's total enrollment, including both graduate and undergraduate programs, is currently 1,890. Seventy-six percent of this total enrollment is undergraduate students and 24 percent is graduate students. Of the undergraduate students, 57 percent are fully online student with 43 percent on the Storm Lake residential campus.

Focusing on the Storm Lake campus, our total enrollment is 810 with 70 percent of student from the state of Iowa, 30 percent from out of state, and less than one percent international students. Buena Vista University is a residential campus with options of commuting if qualifications are met. Eighty-seven percent of BVU students are residential with 13 percent classified as commuter status.

Of the Storm Lake campus population, 49 percent of students are men, 50 percent women, and 1 percent unknown. No information is available on transgender/non-binary gender demographics. The age breakdown of the Storm Lake campus consists of 2.5 percent being below 18, 87.4 percent 18-21, 9.4 percent 22-24, and 0.7 percent 25-29. Lastly, of the Storm Lake population, our racial demographic breakdown is 75.3 percent White, 13.5 percent Hispanic or Latino, 4.3 percent Black or African American, 2.5 percent Asian, 0.1 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.1 percent Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 2.7 percent unknown, and lastly 1.5 percent identifying as two or more races.

IV. Goals

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration.

We know our campus faces the following challenges internally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- We don't have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is very siloed within one office.

We also know our campus faces the following challenges externally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- We don't have a working relationship with our local election office.
- The political views of our students do not generally align with our institution's surrounding communities.

With that said, we know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan mention civic learning and democratic engagement.
- We have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have established and reliable ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- We use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have sustainable or consistent funding.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We are able to engage student leaders for the leadership of our initiatives.
- We have working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement.

With this in mind, we have set the following three goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

- Develop a coalition of people that includes administrative leadership, faculty, staff, and student representation to develop a continued plan of civic engagement and learning opportunities on campus.
- Develop strategies to involve our online and graduate programs within civic engagement efforts.
- Research and develop strategies for increased engagement overall of all students, staff, and faculty.

V. Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years. These are tactics that we plan to do in the short term:

- Begin piecing the committee together to be fully functioning by Fall 2025.
- Recognizing Constitution Day & National Voter Registration Day
- Providing educational opportunities during National Voter Education Week
- Development of social media, Campus Groups, & email campaigns for all students, staff, and faculty for education

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

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2022. In 2022, our registration rate was 86.6 percent. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate had decreased. In 2022, our institutional voting rate was 32.8 percent and our voting rate among registered students was 37.9 percent. During

this year, our voting rate was slightly higher than the national average. We need to increase our data gathering in general, especially voting data by demographic groups, including gender and race.

VII. Reporting & Evaluation

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Email to Student Leaders
- Email to campus administration

We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Post on the campus website

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Sending a post-election survey to students
- Regrouping to debrief and reflect
- Integrating feedback collection into individual campus efforts

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- Seeking out feedback throughout the action planning process from people outside of our action planning team
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly