

Colgate University / Max A. Shacknai COVE

Civic Action Plan - 2024

Background/Executive Summary:

Since 2014, Colgate University has participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) run through Tufts University, which provides information on voter engagement in comparison with hundreds of other colleges and universities across the United States. When [Associate Professor of History Heather Roller](#) learned that student voter turnout for the 2014 midterms was only at 7%, and that 2016 turnout of 48% was also behind the national average of 50%, she knew Colgate could do better. She and other faculty, staff, and students formed [The Colgate Vote Project](#) (CVP) in 2018 as a nonpartisan initiative seeking to increase student voter turnout. In the Fall 2018 semester, Professor Roller and 40 faculty and staff worked to help provide feedback and support for student leadership at the time. With financial support from the Office of the President, Ellie Schonberg '21 and Sarah Shahidi '21 led the project throughout the fall semester, eventually growing the CVP to 200 student members and earning permanent club status, funding, and advising support with the [Max A. Shacknai Center for Outreach, Volunteerism and Education](#) (COVE).

Since then, the Colgate Vote Project has expanded its initial plans and increased engagement through student-oriented educational events, campus-wide voting promotion, and online and social media campaigns. The CVP aims to standardize the voting process by utilizing Vote.org as an online tool that allows students to register to vote, apply for their absentee ballot, identify their local polling place, and search for state-county-specific voting information. Additionally, CVP has collaborated with leadership within the COVE to host guest speaker events and panel discussions with faculty, staff, and students on current political or electoral topics.

In 2018, Colgate had a dramatic improvement in student voter turnout in the midterm elections, up to 32% from 7% in 2014, according to NSLVE. This tracks with national data on the 18-29-year-old voting cohort, and is certainly something we hope to sustain and build upon, although the 2018 midterms were historic (the largest % for voter turnout for any midterm election in almost a century).

The COVE and the Colgate Vote Project received outstanding news following the 2020 Presidential election, as well. Voter turnout increased by 22.4% from 2016 to 2020, from 48.8% to 70.8%. While this trend is certainly in line with the national increase in voter turnout, Colgate's rate was nearly 5 points higher than the national average of 66% of eligible voting students. We are exceptionally pleased with these numbers and inspired to continue this important work.

Prior to the 2020 Presidential election, the Colgate Vote Project held a National Voter Registration Drive, hosted an online "Pledge to Vote" Campaign with whom 350 students interacted, provided rides to the polls, partnered with Colgate Athletics to reach 100% student-athlete voter

registration and join efforts with multiple other student organizations to increase voter awareness and education. In 2021, CVP visited 17 First-Year seminars, reaching over 250 students, to directly engage with First-Year students. We also hosted two different education events, a Brown Bag with the Former Mayor of Syracuse Stephanie Miner on local elections/politics, and a panel discussion with Political Science Professors Rosenfeld and Koter, and Director of the COVE Jeremy Wattles on gerrymandering and redistricting.

Additionally, in the Fall of 2021, Democracy Matters joined the COVE as another non-partisan volunteer organization on campus. Democracy Matters began in 2001 when Adonal Foyle, a Colgate alumni and former NBA basketball player, along with his parents Joan and Jay Mandle, dedicated themselves to voter education and reducing the influence of money in elections. Foyle and his family still travel around the world to universities to promote the importance of democracy and being an engaged citizen in society. Democracy Matters works alongside CVP to host voter registration and education events, hold Brown Bags surrounding important political and historical issues (such as the role of women throughout history in elections), and hold meetings where club members discuss the importance of social activism. Today Owen Fahey '25, Logan Wilson '26 and Maeve Reiter '26 lead Democracy Matters, who work alongside CVP leaders Lauren Levin '26, Ciara Anselm '26, Gwen Field '26 and Sarah van Dyke '25.

In the fall of 2022, the COVE created an intern position specifically for Civic Engagement, to work alongside the student leadership team of CVP and Democracy Matters. The COVE hires an additional intern during national election cycles to supplement voter engagement efforts. Usually, students in this role have connections to either the Colgate Vote Project or Democracy Matters and will work 8-10 hours a week. Their role during the election semesters is to directly assist CVP and Democracy Matters with national voter registration day, voter registration events, and coordinate an Election Night Party for students. During off years when there are no national elections, one intern continues to work with the COVE to institutionalize civic engagement across campus. In this upcoming election year, we will employ two interns. Typical intern duties include: Writing a bi-weekly newsletter, assisting the two clubs, and collaborating with other campus organizations on Civic Engagement efforts, among other related duties.

Student leaders from CVP, Democracy Matters, the Civic Engagement Intern, and COVE Director Jeremy Wattles collaborated on the creation of our action plans for 2023 and 2024 (see below). Through these plans, we hope to further institutionalize voter engagement at Colgate University, and increase voter turnout from 70.8% in 2020 to 75% in 2024. Finally, we hope to create a community amongst all politically active groups on campus, increasing voter education and political engagement across all facets of University life for the long term.

Action Plan 2024 Goals

Initiative	Goals	Notes/Action Steps	Timeline	Point Person
1. Voting Pledge and Registration Goals	Gain support for voting ahead of time, and encourage students and faculty to make plans to vote in the Fall. Create 2 check-in points to contact the Board of Elections and access our registration numbers. We want to track the number of voters registered overall, and how many registered in Madison County. Our goal is 300 student pledges.	We plan to use the Ask Every Student template for Voter Pledge cards. If we have students fill out the voter pledge cards we can then mail them, and follow up via email to remind students about their plan to vote before election day. The voter pledge cards would also allow us to track the percentage of students who claim that they will vote. We would also like to keep track of how many students we register overall.	Continuous through Fall 2024 Check-ins: May 15th (Jeremy), October 15th	CVP, Democracy Matters, and Civic Engagement Interns
2. Updating CVP Information on the Website	Make sure updated voting information can be provided on the Colgate website to all who need it.	Update the CVP voting page on Colgate's website and change it to a broader voting information site. Include important voting information and resources.	April 18th, 2024	Lily
3. Partner with Residential Life	Build up a relationship with the Residential Life office. Reach out to the Residential Fellows and coordinate events. These types of events help us interact with the younger student populations who live in the dorms.	Meet with Gwynne Lim to begin voting registration initiatives involving Res Life resources. With Residential Fellows, coordinate Snack Break Talks, where the Civic Engagement Intern works with a Residential Fellow to plan an informal snack break where voting and voter education is discussed.	Meet with Gwynne: April 18 Continuous	Civic Engagement Interns
4. New Student Orientation Presentation	Meet with Links to discuss how to help incoming freshman students register to vote. We would like this meeting to last more than 20 minutes and we hope to make at least 2 contact points for this goal. The meeting goal is for the first week of	Reach out to Beth (Orientation/link staff leader) to schedule a meeting. We could either meet with Beth or the lead links to discuss a strategy to implement voting registration into the orientation program.	Reach out by April 15th	Jeremy and Civic Engagement Interns

	May.			
5. State Specific Outreach - Candidates, Deadlines, Absentee Ballot	Provide students with state-specific information including candidates, deadlines, and absentee ballot information. This information can be sent out through emails (with institutional support) or hard copies and social media.	Create a document/graphic including state-specific voting deadlines and information.	August 2024- Election	Civic Engagement Interns
6. PE Credit Ideas - Fall 2024	Create and execute a Civic Engagement PE credit program. This could help us with further outreach to the student community in order to incentivize sustained voter engagement and support for polling sites.	We want to institutionalize voter education in a unique way on campus, which could also help us generate poll workers for the polling site.	September 2024	Democracy Matters and Civic Engagement Interns
7. Office Hours for Questions	Hold office hours to help students register to vote, request absentee ballots, and register to vote in Hamilton.	We want to be able to create a space where students can access drop-in hours if they have questions about voting, this could be something that takes place every week leading up to the election once October starts.	September-October 2024	CVP, Civic Engagement Interns, and Democracy Matters
8. FSEM visits and visiting any other relevant classes	Continuing the tradition of visiting First Year Seminars.	Engage with as many first years as possible to create habitual voters, not just one-time voters. Important as we try to reach the 300 threshold.	September and October of 2024	CVP
9. Voter Information Email	Send out a voter information email about the election on the day of the election with instructions on how to access voting resources on campus.	Include information about how to vote absentee by submitting ballots in the mail, as well as how to vote in Hamilton (if registered in Madison County).	Send emails: October 22 November 4, 5	Civic Engagement Interns and Jeremy
10. National Voter Education Week Programming	Shine light on National Voter Education Week, whether that is through smaller events or larger educational opportunities.	Potentially host a small luncheon or Brown Bag during National Voter Education Week to help promote awareness about the national election, as well as facilitate a conversation on the	October 7th-11th	Civic Engagement Interns

		importance of voting. We can also continue tabling around campus, with an emphasis on National Voter Education Week.		
11. Athletics Outreach	Reach out to all teams, including both coaches and athletic director, to request support for voter engagement and registration.	Meet with athletes and discuss the possibility of including voter education during commercial breaks of games such as trivia to get people thinking about voting. We will create a separate action plan for athletics outreach .	Spring 2024 start, and push hard in the Fall of 2024	CVP, Democracy Matters, Civic Engagement Interns
14. Maroon News Articles on Voting on Campus	Have the Maroon News, our student newspaper, publish an article discussing the importance of voting.	Include information about the significance of the voting in the upcoming election and discuss why it's important to consider Colgate home. We hope this story brings voting to the forefront of students' minds	September 2024	Civic Engagement Interns/Georgette
15. Register students to vote on National Voter Registration Day	Use this event to increase voter registration numbers through social media and tabling.	Make basic How-To style instructions we can hand out around campus. Try to access as many students as possible across different places on campus through tabling and social media.	National Voter Registration Day is September 17th.	CVP and Democracy Matters, with the help of Civic Engagement Interns
16. Do a walk to the mailboxes to mail absentee ballots	Organize a walk to the mailbox for students who are voting absentee.	While we want students to vote in Hamilton, we do just want students to vote and if that is within their home state as an absentee ballot then we want to make an activity of those students sending in their absentee ballots	Election Day! November 5th!	CVP, Democracy Matters and Civic Engagement Interns

17. Offer a “March to the Polls” event from campus to Cruiser and/or Hamilton Public Library	Organize an event to have students walk to the cruiser and/or the Hamilton Public Library together.	Mobilize student voters to walk/drive to vote together. Heading there as a group may motivate more students to vote.	Election Day! November 5th! (Publicize by the end of October)	Civic Engagement Interns
18. Election Night Party	Hold an election night party in which > 100 students attend in the Hall of Presidents and watch live election coverage. We would like to have food and activities while watching the results.	Food preparation from local businesses, IT set up of screens within the HOP, recruiting people to come, advertising across campus to all student grade levels	November 5th (Election day)	Fall 2024 Planning Committee: Students, CVP, Democracy Matters, and Civic Engagement Interns
19. Post Election Survey	Send out a post-election survey to students so we can understand how the COVE and relevant student groups did on advertising the events we were hosting, as well as how many students voted. This will help us improve our strategy.	Sent out as a Google form. Civic Engagement Interns, Democracy Matters, and CVP hold a joint meeting where we reflect on the aspects of our action plan that we have successfully completed and tasks we have not completed. We use the survey info to improve for the next election cycle	November 11th	CVP, Civic Engagement Interns, Democracy Matters, and Jeremy
20. Post Election Brown Bag	Host a Brown Bag in the COVE after the election. The guest speaker will be a Political Science professor.	Reach out to a professor in the Political Science department to see if they would be interested in leading a Brown Bag with the COVE. Coordinate with COVE to schedule this and advertise this publicly.	Week of November 11th	CVP, Civic Engagement Interns, Democracy Matters, and Jeremy
21. Repeated Joint Strategy Meetings and Strategic Collaborations with Other Organizations	Continue Joint Strategy Meetings with members of CVP and Democracy Matters to feel organized and continue to keep collaboration and communication high. We would also like to collaborate with other	We plan to invite other clubs to schedule meetings with us on collaboration, i.e. Civic Engagement office hours. These meetings would be publicized or sent by invitation. Collaboration Outreach Strategy	Continuous	Civic Engagement Interns leading these meetings, Jeremy acting as the advisor

	campus organizations to work together on Civic Engagement efforts (e.g. ALANA Cultural Center, Athlete Ally).			
22. Bi-weekly Political Newsletter	Create and promote the political newsletter in a way that readership increases, and allows for further education on campus.	Want to make this more collaborative. Ensure the topics being covered are election 2024 related, but maybe also focus on other hot topic areas. Highlight Colgate's NSLVE track record and promote our goal of exceeding the 2020 turnout rate of 71%	Spring and Fall of 2024 (bi-weekly) Continuous	Civic Engagement Interns
23. Increase Voter Turnout to 75% of enrollment	Exceed 2020 NSLVE verified Voting Rate of 71%	Promote this goal heavily through social media and physical newsletter	November 2024 - Summer 2025, when we receive report from NSLVE	University wide
24. Maintain continuous communication with the Madison County Board of Elections	Remain in communication with the Madison County Board of Elections. Attempt to register 300 voters in Madison Country through voter registration drives. Once this is complete, we would like to meet with the Board of Elections again to strategize how to gain a polling site on our campus.	Register voters across campus through voter registration drives and sharing relevant resources. We are looking to track the number of voters registered overall, and how many registered in Madison County.	Continuous Check-ins: May 15th (Jeremy), October 15th	Georgette/Civic Engagement Interns/Jeremy

Additional Ideas - Spring 2024 (we are still in discussion on these initiatives)

- Sample ballots shared/images created
- [Ask Every Student convo guide](#)
- Decision Tree for students in conversation or tabling
- [PE Credit Ideas](#)

- Tracking: Poll students in the Fall about their registration status, and ask if they want a follow-up to complete registration or absentee request; ask for email addresses on pledge cards so we can follow up
- Possible goal/initiative: Create candidate documents for all the United States Territories and States on who was running in that election for all the positions possible. Distribute the list via the COVE Newsletter so all students have easy access to candidate websites and know who is on their ballot.
 - Debating doing this again, because it could be a waste of resources since we are unsure how many people used this document/resource last year. This if we do it will not be as high of a priority as other things.
 - Look back at what Georgette created - how extensive was it?

Leadership Succession Plan:

Democracy Matters: Currently led by Owen Fahey '25 and Maeve Reiter '26, is actively looking for younger first-years and sophomores to lead the club as the two become upperclassmen.

The Colgate Vote Project: Currently led by Brenna McConnell'24, Ellie Markwick'24, and Sarah van Dyke '25, are actively looking for underclassmen to fill the roles of Brenna and Ellie when they graduate this upcoming Spring.

Civic Engagement Interns: Georgette Manos '25 will continue the role through Fall of 2024, and will welcome another co-intern during the election semester for planning and help.

Fall 2024: Intend to have Owen Fahey, Logan Wilson, Georgette Manos, Sarah van Dyke and a combination of student leaders from the Democrats, Socialists, Republicans, and Planned Parenthood on a steering committee dedicated to the non-partisan goal of increasing voter turnout on campus.