

## Colgate Vote Project / Max A. Shacknai COVE Civic Engagement Efforts – 2019/20

### Background

[The Colgate Vote Project](#) was born in 2018 as a collaboration between faculty, staff, and students to increase the number of students voting, either in person or by absentee ballot. [Associate Professor of History Heather Roller](#) said she learned in the spring that student voting numbers for the 2014 midterms were low and that 2016 voting participation data showed that campus turnout on election day was also slightly behind the national average. “I thought, we can do better than this, especially with how many students I have in my classes who are engaged with politics,” Roller said.

In response, Roller teamed up with [Associate Professor of Sociology Alicia Simmons](#) and [Professor of Political Science Tim Byrnes](#) to seek four interns who could assist with a summer project of studying how best to create a supportive voting culture on campus. That work — by Ellie Schonberg '21, Sarah Shahidi '21, Benjamin Geisler '18, and Jack Wallan '19 — resulted in the student-led Colgate Vote Project. In addition, about 40 faculty and staff worked to help provide feedback and support for the interns as they worked through summer.

Schonberg said the interns created marketing materials, a CVP logo, and a new webpage that would give students access to a single form, via [vote.org](#), for registering to vote or to apply for an absentee ballot. They also looked at what other universities have done to get out the vote.

“It was important for us to have one standard procedure to facilitate voting, not to offer 50 different ways to do it by each state,” Schonberg said. “Also, I don’t care how what party you are registering for or who you are voting for. Everyone has a right to their own opinion.”

After the formal internships, and with financial support from the Office of the President, Schonberg and Shahidi kept the project rolling throughout the fall semester, eventually growing the CVP to 200 student members and earning permanent club status with the [Max A. Shacknai Center for Outreach, Volunteerism, and Education \(COVE\)](#).

The COVE and Colgate Vote Project celebrated some good news in early 2020, when they heard that Colgate had a dramatic improvement in student voter turnout in 2018, up from 7% in 2014 to 32% in the last midterm elections, according to National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement data from Tufts University. This tracks with national data on the 18-29 year old voting cohort, and is certainly something they hope to sustain and build upon, although the 2018 midterms were historic (the largest % voter turnout for any midterm election in almost a century).

The Vote Project also held voter registration hours/tabling events at Case Library, partnered with Mabel Dart Colegrove Commons to plan Democratic debate watch parties, and joined the Upstate New York Vote Everywhere Coalition, which is an offshoot of Cornell University's partnership with the Andrew Goodman Foundation and seeks to share ideas about voter and civic engagement amongst regional colleges and universities. Finally, they worked with other partners on campus in the Dean of the College division as well as the Upstate Institute to promote civic education about and participation in the 2020 Census.

## **Fall 2020**

As we head into Fall 2020 and the upcoming Presidential Election, plans are ongoing, but thus far we intend to support civic engagement as follows:

1. *Register students to vote using the Vote.org tool*, virtually and in person (with safe physical distancing), and tracking engagement with students who use the service to register to vote. Our goal is to secure commitments or pledges to vote from at least 50% of the student body. As a point of reference, in 2016, Colgate students voted at a rate of 48% in the Presidential election, and in 2012, 45% voted.

- Will also provide envelopes/stamps as needed
- <https://www.elections.ny.gov/VotingDeadlines.html>
- Offer virtual Q&A or “office hours” time to assist students in registration process
- [https://actionnetwork.org/forms/pledge-to-vote-in-2020?source=direct\\_link&](https://actionnetwork.org/forms/pledge-to-vote-in-2020?source=direct_link&)

2. *Identifying Classes and Scholars Groups* (especially those related to politics/civic engagement) where faculty members would welcome a visit or discussion

-take enough time in class to motivate students

-students pair up, help each other complete forms – check for completeness, legibility

3. *Offering rides to the polls* on Election Day and for Early Voting days

\*use Cruiser - personal cars / other University vehicles not likely allowed

4. *Continue collaborating with the Andrew Goodman Foundation* and other colleges / universities in the Upstate New York region to learn best practices and effective engagement strategies.

5. *Holding debate watch parties and an election night party* on virtual platforms or in safe outdoor / physically distanced indoor spaces

6. *Submit an action plan* to the All-In Challenge organization

7. *Continue NSLVE participation*

8. *Collaborate with Democracy Matters*, another nonpartisan civic engagement/education group

9. *Collaborate with other political clubs* such as College Republicans and College Democrats in nonpartisan activities and programming

\*ask Colgate Student Coalition to support / repost

10. *Register for and participate in* [National Voter Registration Day](#) on Sept 22

11. *Distribute promotional materials* across campus to raise awareness about voter education/registration

\*work with bookstore

\*work with CLs or whoever delivers meals

\*email from Pres. Casey / senior leadership

12. *Secure continued funding* support from the COVE and the student activities fee.

13. *Work with new student orientation* to familiarize first year students with civic engagement efforts

14. *Work with Res Life / Commons Directors* on CL training to promote voting in residence Halls

15. *Update COVE / CVP website* with resources

“Learn more about civic engagement” - add red button and dedicated page

<https://www.colgate.edu/about/campus-services-and-resources/current-student-volunteer-opportunities>

16. *Reach out to Athletics* to promote civic engagement through coaches

-video collaboration

-different teams ‘compete’ in terms of registration?

-Meghan Kovac is point person

17. *Attend NY Voter Engagement Summit*

18. Reach out to Maroon-News - pitch a *series of articles on youth voting* - Eliza

19. Encourage students to *become poll workers* - will Colgate allow that?

-need to be registered in Mad. Co / work from 5am - 1030pm?

-what is the availability requirement?

20. Power map

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Planning Exercise: [Votes and Ballots](#)

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Resources

-[US Election Assistance Commission](#)

-[Campus Vote Project State Student Guides](#)

\*[general info](#)

- [History/Celebration of 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment Centennial](#)
- <https://www.studentvoting.org/> (“Ask Every Student”)
- [SUNY Oswego – winner of national civic engagement award](#) – possible contact for ideas.
- [Columbia College Chicago](#) – very good presentation, [video](#) available too
- Students Learn Students Vote – [Strengthening American Democracy](#) report
- [Votes and Ballots planning exercise](#)
  - \*[other materials](#)
- Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP): [Candidate, Issue, and Primary Guides](#)
  - \*[COVID-19 Student Voting initiative](#)
  - \*[Civic Engagement Resource Collection for Online Learning](#)
  - \*[Coronavirus as a Teachable Moment](#)
  - \*[Recording of a conversation on COVID and the Classroom with Nancy Thomas, from the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education \(IDHE\) at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life.](#)
- James Madison University [voter education webpage](#)
- [Ballotready.org](#) – “every candidate and referendum, explained”
- Brennan Center – [How to Protect the 2020 Vote from the Coronavirus](#)
- All-In Challenge - [COVID-19 Campus Engagement Resources](#)
  - [Virtual Democratic Engagement Toolkit](#)
- Knight Foundation Report on Non-Voters - [The 100 Million](#)
- Rock The Vote - Short Civic Engagement issue [“explainer” posts](#); [“Democracy Class”](#) for faculty
- [The Great Indoors Challenge](#) - \$\$ awarded for signing up people to help students find their polling place, learn about candidates, and make a plan to vote
- [Election Administration Courses](#) at Colleges/Universities around the country
- [Poll Workers Needed](#) - \$\$ through Campus Compact
- [Politifact on Coronavirus](#)
- Slides on [Digital Voter Engagement](#) during COVID - Nat’l Voter Registration Day

[-National Voter Education Week](#)

#### IDHE Resources

[-Best Practices from other HE Institutions](#)

[-How Are Campuses Using NSLVE Reports](#)

[-Election Imperatives 2.0](#)

[-Toolkit](#)

[-Data Portal](#)

[-CIRCLE](#)

[\\*Youth data exploration tool](#)

#### Readings

[-Give Us The Ballot](#) – Ari Berman

[-White Rage; One Person, No Vote](#) – Carol Anderson

[-Politics is for Power](#) – Eitan Hersh