

Colgate University / Max A. Shacknai COVE Civic Action Plan – 2022/23

Background

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 were very low (7%) and that 2016 turnout (48%) was also behind the national average (53%), she knew Colgate could do better. She and other faculty, staff, and students formed the [The Colgate Vote Project](#) in 2018 as a non-partisan 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 which allows students to register to vote, apply for their absentee ballot, identify their local polling place, and search for state- and county-specific voting information.

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 % 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 48.4% 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. Considering the drastic effect of COVID on CVP's ability to directly engage with the student body in person, we are exceptionally pleased with these numbers and inspired to consider 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 with, 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. Last year, CVP visited 17 First-Year seminars, reaching over 250 students, to directly engage with First-Year students. We also hosted two different educational events, a Brown Bag with Former Mayor of Syracuse, Professor 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.

Our action plan seeks to further institutionalize voter engagement at the University, increase voter turnout above the 31% threshold for the last highest midterm turnout in 2018 to 50%, to connect disparate political clubs focused on nonpartisan voter engagement and organize their strategy, to have a sustained focus on the voting process in the weeks leading up to the election, and to educate the campus community about salient issues this election cycle. To help accomplish this, the COVE has hired two student interns to work 8-10 hours/week to help coordinate student strategy, events, and energy. Additionally, the COVE has added another nonpartisan group named Democracy Matters into our advising portfolio. Between Democracy Matters and the Vote Project, we will be working with four student leaders and dozens, if not over 100 students in these two clubs.

Fall 2022 Plans

Initiative	Goal	Notes	Timeline	Point Person(s)
New Student Orientation Presentation	Meet w/ all LINKS	success	August	Jeremy, CVP
Submit Action Plan	All-In Challenge Campus Vote Project	Final revisions, input needed	By Sept 19	Full Team
Joint Strategy Meeting	All nonpartisan voting groups / interns meet	DM, CVP, CE Interns	Sept 14	Georgette
Votes and Ballots activity	At interest meetings?		Decide by Sept 22	CE Interns
Emails sent to students based on state residency	Ask Dorsey, IR Ask Madison County Board of elections		Meeting with Dean of Students on 9/16	Sarah VanDyke Jeremy Wattles
Voter Registration Drives (Vote.org) *National Voter Registration Day on 9/20* *additional dates	150 students registered 40% of eligible students pledging	Provide envelopes, stamps if needed Frank, Case, and Coop Also offer Voter Pledge Drive Inviting Dems, Socialists, Republicans, Planned Parenthood	Throughout Sept/Oct	All Hands On Deck (DM, CVP, CE)

Voter Turnout	50%	up from 31% in 2018	NSLVE 2023 Data Set	Jeremy
Voter Information Email	Useful information sent to all students Also request Pres. Casey or Laura Jack include information in all campus emails	Draft email Final Draft NY Deadlines	Sept 20	Interns, Jeremy
Get Involved or Colgate webpage edits	Ensure information is current		Sept 23	CE Interns
Q & A / Office Hours for Voters	3-6 times before election day	During CE interns hours?	Thru Nov 8	CE Interns
Visiting FSEMs, other relevant classes	All FSEMs Poli Sci Ed Dept	Pair students; help complete forms if time Also offer Voter Pledge Drive	End of Sept	CVP
Visiting Student Groups, Athletic Teams	10 groups minimum Focus on communities that are historically under represented in democracy	AMS, Benton, OUS, First, Questbridge, SGA, CLs, Commons, etc	By Oct 7	All
Collaborations with partisan clubs	Nonpartisan voter registration drive Election Night party Other events?		offer/decide by Sept 26	CE Interns
Walk/Ride to the Polls	Early Voting & Election Day	Shuttle, Van, on foot	Oct 29 - Nov 6 Nov 8	CE Interns

Connect to Upstate NY Vote Everywhere Coalition and/or NY6 Schools	Schedule a video call			Jeremy
National Voter Education Week	<p>Push out social media information</p> <p>Newsletter and/or voting guides to share with campus community</p> <p>Hold another voter registration drive</p>		Oct 3-7	All
Promotional Materials on campus		<p>Posters, stickers, wallets, t-shirts</p> <p>Remind students they need valid IDs to register</p>		CE Interns
Weekly Social Media Plan	Minimal weekly posts for CVP, DM and/or COVE	<p>Need to determine areas of focus, interest</p> <p>Countdowns to deadlines / election day</p>	Begin Sept 12	CE Interns
Maroon-News outreach	Feature Article		By Oct 1	Kristen
Election Night Party	200+ people	<p>Location TBA COOP TV room?</p> <p>Cosponsor with Poli Sci</p> <p>Email sent to ask who to get into contact with</p>	Nov 8	CE Interns Georgette
Post-Election Survey to students	<p>What went well?</p> <p>What can we do better?</p>			Jeremy, CE Interns

