

**MAY 31, 2022**



# **ENGAGE THE VOTE**

**A CAMPUS VOTING ACTION PLAN AND REPORT, 2022**

**SANTA CLARITA, CA**

*Good citizens do things: they speak out, they vote, they volunteer, they organize. But to do those things well, citizens need to know things. Civic action requires civic knowledge.*

Russell Muirhead  
*Resuscitating Civic Education (2012)*  
Hoover Institute, Stanford University

## **Introduction**

Increasing rates of civic illiteracy and disinterest in civic engagement plague our nation's colleges. However, research shows that the earlier individuals embrace civic knowledge, as well as experience community service firsthand, the more likely they will become civically aware and engaged in voting and volunteerism throughout their lifetimes (Hollander and Burack, 2008). *Engage the Vote: A Campus Voting Action Plan, Fall 2018-Fall 2019* provided a first-time effort of College of the Canyons (COC) to create a long-term, sustainable campus wide plan to increase voter engagement (See All IN Challenge, 2019). The 2022 plan represents COC's most recent action plan and report. The objective of this plan is to engage the entire campus community in greater civic awareness, especially regarding voter education, registration, and participation. Civic engagement is a concept which describes those philosophies and activities which bridge thought with action and provide meaningful service to communities. As Thomas Ehrlich (2000), former Carnegie Foundation Senior Scholar suggests, civic engagement means:

*...working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes" (Ehrlich, 2000:vi).*

The documented decline in voter engagement is evidenced by plummeting rates of civic proficiency and increasing lack of participation in voluntary associations, electoral politics, religious congregations, and community-based organizations (Carnegie and CIRCLE, 2003 and National Taskforce on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012:6). The civic health of America has reached "anemic" levels; and, when controlling for issues of race, ethnicity, and class, these rates are significantly worse than the rest of the population (Campus Compact, 2010).

## **America's Call to Action**

In response to this escalating problem of "civic unawareness," the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), published *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future (2012)*. This work is written as a response, in part, to the increasing disengagement of our nation's citizenry from American Democracy. *A Crucible Moment (2012)* reflects its title, as it encourages transformative change within postsecondary education by emphasizing the need for civic learning and engagement. It has become the manifesto of a movement dedicated to increasing civic knowledge and community participation among our nation's college students. To make democracy and civic responsibility "central, not peripheral" within our colleges and universities is the desired outcome proposed by those scholars and organizations working in the field (Scobey, 2012). It is no longer the sole responsibility of disciplines like political science and history to serve as the primary conduits of

civic knowledge and civic engagement. It is now the responsibility of *all* disciplines to transmit civic and political awareness (Smith, et al., 2010).

A “civic engagement movement” designed to redefine, revise, and recapture the interest of America’s citizenry, especially among its young, is gaining momentum throughout the country (Saltmarsh and Hartley, 2011). This is especially true of the nation’s community colleges, including College of the Canyons. Following the lead of The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012:15), by emphasizing the concepts of civic ethos, civic literacy, civic inquiry, and civic action, COC is working to excel as a “civic-minded” campus. We recognize that it is time for our nation’s young people to understand their place in the “collective whole,” as well as to “serve a larger purpose” (Boyer, 1996:22).

*A Crucible Moment (2012)* is considered a seminal work in education which examines the need for America to “reclaim” its civic mission and to make civic learning at the postsecondary level expected, not voluntary. Its authors argue that such learning should be infused across the curriculum, as well as incorporated across the campus environment. By creating a campus “culture” of civic engagement, which supports the proliferation of civic literacy, inquiry, action, and a civic ethos, it will transcend institutional boundaries to include all venues of college life. This work has guided the vision of College of the Canyons’ Civic and Community Engagement Initiative. At no other time in American history has it been as crucial for students—no matter their academic goals—to secure civic knowledge and skills in order to protect American Democracy. *A Call to Action: A Campus Voting Action Plan, 2020* recognizes the role COC will play in shaping an engaged civic mindset of a new generation.

### **College of the Canyons**

College of the Canyons (COC), founded in 1969, is a California Community College and Hispanic Servicing Institution located in Santa Clarita, California, North Los Angeles County. COC is one of 116 community colleges operating throughout the state of California. The College operates two campuses, which together enroll over 33,000 (2019-20 academic year). COC offers 242 associate and certificate programs in a variety of career technical and academic disciplines. COC is the largest provider of higher education in Santa Clarita. Articulation exists with programs at the University of California, California State University, and several private institutions. Most recent data report Latinx students account for 47% of the students, White for 29%, African-American for 6%, Asian 7%, and Filipino for 4%, with the balance or individual comprising multiple or unknown race/ethnicity. The student body is 46% female and 55% male, while 62 percent of the students range in age from 19 years or below to 29 years. The success of the College results from the vision of Chancellor Dianne Van Hook, who has served College of the Canyons for over 30 years. Dr. Van Hook is the longest serving Chancellor in the history of the California Community College System, and her commitment to civic engagement is great, as evidenced by the College’s support of its Civic and Community Engagement Initiative. The development of this initiative, along with the establishment of a Center for Civic Engagement, provides the foundation of a voter engagement action plan. In fall 2015, guided by the foundation of *A Crucible Moment (2012)*, COC committed itself to advancing the principles of civic ethos, civic literacy, civic inquiry, and civic action and created a new Center for Civic Engagement (CCE), explicitly dedicated to promoting a “civic-minded” campus culture. (See CCCCO Datamart, 2022 and COC Fast Facts, 2022.)

### **COC's Civic and Community Engagement Initiative**

Applying the concept of civic engagement defined by Ehrlich (2000), especially with regard to community engagement, the need to increase electoral knowledge and participation among the campus community reinforces the goals of COC's Center for Civic Engagement's Civic and its Civic and Community Engagement Initiative (see Robinson, 2015), which was influenced by *A Crucible Moment* (2012). COC's initiative originated from a 2013-2014 AAC&U *Bringing Theory to Practice Grant* and resulted in a day-long workshop conducted to examine the concept of civic engagement at the College, as well as to discuss how to create a civic engagement action plan. Activities included conducting a campus Civic Engagement Gap Analysis, as well as a Civic Engagement S.W.O.T. Analysis. Participants included students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The overall results rendered valuable information, which was shared with Dr. Van Hook. As a result, she determined it was important for the College to pursue the idea of establishing a Center for Civic Engagement. A campus team visited De Anza College in Northern California during spring 2015 to review its work, since the institution has an accomplished history of addressing civic and community engagement. By August, the position of COC's Faculty Director, Civic and Community Engagement Initiatives was created, as well as space secured for a Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). A strategic plan, entitled, *A Call to Action: An Initiative for Civic Engagement, Self, and Society* (Robinson, 2015), was written and a Civic Engagement Steering Committee formed.

The initiative seeks to create a civic-minded campus culture among students, faculty, and staff while emphasizing their place in a global context. "If civic engagement is to gain real traction in today's higher education," suggests Barbara Jacoby, "it must be clearly defined, and civic learning outcomes must be established." In other words, "Opportunities to learn about and practice civic engagement must be embedded throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum" (Jacoby, 2009:2). COC is doing just that. As stated in *A Crucible Moment* (2012:15), a civic-minded campus will incorporate the following areas:

#### **Civic Ethos Governing Campus Life**

The infusion of democratic values into the customs and habits of everyday practices, structures, and interactions; the defining character of the institution and those in it that emphasizes open-mindedness, civility, the worth of each person, ethical behaviors, and concern for the well-being of others; a spirit of public-mindedness that influences the goals of the institution and its engagement with local and global communities.

#### **Civic Literacy as a Goal for Every Student**

The cultivation of foundational knowledge about fundamental principles and debates about democracy expressed over time, both within the United States and in other countries; familiarity with several key historical struggles, campaigns, and social movements undertaken to achieve the full promise of democracy; the ability to think critically about complex issues and to seek and evaluate information about issues that have public consequences.

#### **Civic Inquiry Integrated Within the Majors and General Education**

The practice of inquiring about the civic dimensions and public consequences of a subject of study; the exploration of the impact of choices on different constituencies and entities,

including the planet; the deliberate consideration of differing points of views; the ability to describe and analyze civic intellectual debates within one's major or areas of study.

### **Civic Action as Lifelong Practice**

The capacity and commitment both to participate constructively with diverse others and to work collectively to address common problems; the practice of working in a pluralistic society and world to improve the quality of people's lives and the sustainability of the planet; the ability to analyze systems in order to plan and engage in public action; the moral and political courage to take risks to achieve a greater public good.

Guided by these four areas, the Civic Engagement Center is moving the discussion of civic and community engagement at College of the Canyons from margin to center. It is working to breakdown campus silos and to offer a foundational framework for the entire campus to follow. Its basic principles include:

#### **Mission Statement**

Democratic engagement fosters knowledge, responsibility, civility, and respect by encouraging greater awareness of the social, cultural, and political concerns affecting the public good. Through campus and community partnerships, social issues are addressed from a local, national, and global perspective while creating a citizenry of change agents. Civic transformation is achieved through critical thinking, reflection, and participation in "deep learning" experiences made available through curricular, co-curricular, and professional development opportunities.

#### **Vision Statement**

Democratic engagement bridges theory with practice (e.g., praxis) to create a "civic-minded" culture which fosters representative thought and action to enhance the public good. Through collaboration, service, and reciprocity, students, faculty, staff, and community serve as civic leaders and help to inform others of social issues. Through civic awareness, a concerned citizenry can confront problems facing person, thing, and environment and create social change.

#### **Philosophy Statement**

Democratic engagement exercises a philosophy of social action and personal responsibility through individual reflection to increase awareness and confront community, state, national, and global social problems to ensure greater well-being of the public good.

#### **Core Values**

**Equity:** working to provide fair access and opportunity to all members of society by employing ways to eliminate the "civic opportunity gap."

**Activism:** speaking on behalf of a person, place or thing for the purpose of bringing attention to a social issue affecting the larger collective whole and suggesting social change.

**Sustainability:** increasing awareness of environmental concerns and encouraging personal action in helping to protect the environment and the world's natural resources.

**Dignity:** understanding various cultural, social, political, and religious perspectives within the larger global context and respecting differences.

**Engagement:** creating opportunities to work with community members and organizations to achieve positive social change.

**Leadership:** guiding and inspiring others to contribute to the public good.

**Collaboration:** cultivating internal and external partnerships to address civic concerns through collaboration and shared responsibility.

**Integrity:** setting high standards and addressing issues with strong ethics while displaying consistency, honesty, and transparency of thought and action.

### **Project-Based Learning and a Civic Mindset**

COC is also working to “rebrand” Community-Based Learning (earlier Service Learning) to Project-Based Learning (PBL). This High Impact Practice is the best fit for COC to encourage civic learning and democratic engagement. Often placed within the context of Integrative Learning, which provides a holistic approach to campus and community, it encourages an entrepreneurial spirit among students. Providing venues in which all students—no matter their ethnicity, race, gender, sexual identity, etc.—can engage in problem-solving of today’s *wicked problems* (Rittel and Webber, 1973) to increase civic agency. Because of attending three, and one upcoming, Worcester Polytechnic Institute trainings on PBL (two in-person, two virtual), the work of Civic Engagement is now focused on reframing, redesigning, and redefining the earlier model of Community-Based Learning. In addition, the CCE has also participated in two and one upcoming, virtual trainings of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Integrative Learning and Signature Work Institute (renamed Integrative Learning and Engagement Institute). The CCE also recognizes the long-term possibilities of this pedagogical emphasis, especially as related to Guided Pathways, equity, and 21st Century work readiness.

### **Voter Engagement and the Public Good**

With COC’s work with voter engagement, greater awareness of how to get students involved in participatory democracy has become a priority for the Center for Civic Engagement. American democracy is questioned as many, especially the young, express less interest in the fundamental foundations of democracy, as well as the traditional values that have driven American society. Democracy is at a tipping point. However, by revisiting the original mission of “Democracy’s Colleges” (President’s Commission on Higher Education, 1947), higher education, especially among community colleges, can foster a “civic mind-set” which will reclaim the voice of democracy for new generation which is displaying interest for social change for the public good. As the traditional and historical underpinnings of American democracy are examined, questioned, and challenged regarding representing all groups, hearing all voices, and confronting all inequities. This is especially important in academia, since a “civic empowerment gap” exists throughout our nation’s K-16 educational systems and is large as English and math gaps (Levinson, 2010). Most striking, however, is that this gap is most pronounced among underserved communities, including those affected by class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and first-generation status. Participatory democracy is least likely used by those whose needs are most unheard; and, as a result, most

ignored. Encouraging community colleges to get involved through voter awareness, education, and engagement is one why to have their voices heard through the political process for the public good.

Public good suggests that democracy is a commodity which is non-excludable and non-rivalrous to all within public higher education. Although correct, barriers of race, class, ethnicity, sex, and gender, among other characteristics, greatly impede many from fully utilizing participatory democracy for personal and community well-being (See Kezar, et al., 2005). This is especially true for California's community college students, most of whom experience the "civic empowerment gap" based on marginalized status (Levinson, 2010). Considering that 1.8 million students are enrolled in California's 116 community colleges, these individuals are most in need of having their voices heard (CCCCO, 2022). Civic work is often siloed throughout the curricular and co-curricular fabric of the campus community. As a result, whether a student fully recognizes the importance of participatory democracy is left to random choice, rather than to integrative, intentional planning. As statewide initiatives shape the public good of education, it is timely that the civic engagement movement becomes part of the overarching discussion of Guided Pathway, equity, and workforce readiness. Voter engagement is one way of accomplishing this goal. (See the Center for Civic Engagement's most recent updates at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VJznxvPo58mv5n4vHyhbb0qYS8jFLbTr/view?usp=sharing>)

### **COC's First Voter Engagement Action Plan**

The overall mission of the College's Civic and Community Engagement Initiative fits perfectly with the need to create and implement a voter engagement action plan. Although College of the Canyons is supportive of voter awareness and participation among its student body, the campus neither created nor facilitated an organized voter engagement action plan until 2019. In addition, the campus has primarily focused on voter registration only, while charging the Office of Campus Life and Student Engagement with this task and the Associated Student Government (ASG). Although student voter registration is extremely important, this is only one part of voter engagement. When placing voter registration under the larger umbrella of civic learning and democratic engagement (CLDE), it is also imperative for COC to address voter awareness, education, and participation.

Working in fall 2018 with the theme of *Engage the Vote*, COC did much to create a "civic mindset" focused on political engagement. In fact, when realizing that of 12,944 of COC's eligible voters, only 1,636 actually voted; or, stated differently, only 12.6 percent of students cast a ballot during the 2014 midterm election—much work has been accomplished but much remains needed. Interestingly, 6,935 students at COC registered for the first time in 2014 while 53.6 percent voted. However, of those who voted, only 23.6 percent were between the ages of 18-24, the age group whose voice is most lacking at the polls. First-time and recent National Study on Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) data clearly showed, and continues to show, that COC's current action plan must continue to attend to voter education and participation year-round, not solely during voter registration cycles (see NSLVE, 2018, 2019, and 2021). ***In addition, Chancellor Dianne G. Van Hook has committed to Engage the Vote by supporting the ALL IN Presidential Commitment.***

## **COC Designated a Los Angeles County Vote Center**

Voting in Los Angeles County changed in 2020. Los Angeles County has nearly 5 million registered voters, making it the largest voting jurisdiction in the United States. To accommodate these changes, registered voters no longer vote at neighborhood polling places but at large, county-wide Vote Centers that offer an 11-day voting period. In addition, voters can now vote anywhere in the country, as well as cast ballots at centers or place in drop-off ballot boxes. These centers, having met a strict regimen of requirements, offer the public new, easy-to-use voting devices that assist multilingual voters and voters with disabilities. Working directly with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (LARRCC), served as one of 50 sites throughout the county to hold a two-day Mock Election, September 28-29, 2019. Over 30 new voting stations were assembled in the Student Center and provided the community a “practice” session to tryout the new equipment. As a result, COC was asked to serve as an official LARRCC 2020 Vote Center for the Santa Clarita Valley.

In early 2020, the campus provided a 1,500 square foot location to serve on site to serve as an official L.A. County Vote Center for the California Primary. In addition, it welcomed a Mobile Vote Center (MVC) in May to address the 25<sup>th</sup> Congressional Special Election. And in November 2020, while in the troughs of COVID, the East Gym served as an official Vote Center and welcomed voters from around the community for a 11-day vote period. Voters were required to follow L.A. County Department of Public Health COVID protocols. COC served as a Los Angeles County Vote Center for the March 2020 Primary and General Elections, as well as the Congressional 25th District Special Election.

## **Census**

COC also partnered with the Bureau of the Census to increase awareness, provide education, and foster participation in the 2020 Census. While information was disseminated through the entire campus regarding employment opportunities, a campus-wide campaign provided information from the U.S. Census and California Census regarding processes, timelines, and FAQs. During fall 2019, the Center for Civic Engagement and the League of Women Voters of the Santa Clarita Valley organized an in-person community event about the Census. A representative from the Census Bureau provided an engaging talk about the history and purpose of the United States Census. He dispelled many of the myths surrounding census counts.

## ***Engage the Vote Results for 2018 and 2020—It Worked!***

The Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) became actively involved with *Engage the Vote* through a grant received by Campus Compact in August 2018. As a result, the CCE worked to increase voter awareness, education, and participation throughout the 2018 midterm elections. This included working with Young Invincibles, #VoteTogether, SLSV, ALL IN Challenge, Band of Voters, and the League of Women Voters of the Santa Clarita Valley, LARRCC, and Tufts University, as part of the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).

COC held a bronze seal in comparison with 844 colleges and universities nationwide that were involved in Civic Nation’s ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge that fall (see ALL IN Challenge Homepage). Through the efforts of many campus members, COC pledged to increase student voter registration for the 2018 midterm election by 10 percent (e.g., 691 students) and voter participation by 10 percent (e.g., 164 students). In addition, voter engagement goals were set for the next two

years. Lastly, A Band of Voters, working with Young Invincibles, worked to author California Assembly Bill 963 ([AB 963](#)), *Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act—California Public Universities*. The bill was introduced by Assemblymember Cottie Petrie-Norris, 74<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, on April 26, 2019, to the California State Assembly Higher Education Sub-committee. College of the Canyons was one of many groups who provided testimony to support the bill. The Center also worked with the LARRCC to make COC a Vote Center for upcoming 2020 Primary and General Elections.

Whether the campus-wide effort to increase voter education, awareness, and participation made a difference by 2018, COC can emphatically answer yes. Because of the dedicated work of the campus community, College of the Canyons received multiple awards at the November 12, 2019 ALL IN Awards Ceremony in Washington, D.C. These honors included Overall Most Improved Voting Rate at a Large Community College, Gold Seal for Achievement of 40-49 Percent Voter Participation, and Best in Class for its Action Plan. COC's voter participation seal was elevated from the status of Bronze to Gold. In fact, the College's rate increased from 12.6 percent (2014 midterm elections) to 43.4 percent (2018 midterm elections), resulting in a 30.7 percent improvement. In addition, the campus served as a Los Angeles County Vote Center for the Santa Clarita Valley, as the LARRCC held its first-ever Mock Election in September 2019. COC was one of 50 sites selected throughout the County to pilot the new voting processes for 2020. Lastly, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the *Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act (AB 963)* into law on October 8, 2019, signifying significant support to increase voter participation among California's 3.1 million students enrolled at 147 public universities and colleges (Feminist Newswire, 2019). (The current number of California Community Colleges, California State Universities, and University of California campuses has increased to 149.)

NSLVE data for the 2020 election also show greater voter engagement, even during the lockdown of the pandemic. The overall voting rate increased 18.7 percent from 2016 to include a 67.8 percent voting rate. The registration rate increased from 69.7 percent in 2018 to 81.1 percent in 2020, with the overall number of students registered to vote actually voting increased from 61 percent to 83.6 percent for the 2020 election. The most striking increases are seen across all age groups; however, younger (e.g., 18-21) and older (e.g., 50+) voted at the highest rates at 69 percent and 80 percent, respectively. Voting also increased among enrollment status (e.g., full-time and part-time) and among every field of study except Communication Technologies/Technicians (NSLVE Campus Report, 2021). Examples of voting efforts are discussed below.

## **Goals**

Campus-wide short-term goals for the upcoming 2022 November Midterm Election are listed below; however, long-term goals continue to include a year-long effort to keep the campus community engaged in civic and community concerns, especially by organizing many dialogues, presentations, and activities. This also includes the work of the Engage the Vote Action team which meets weekly and the Integrative, Civic, and Community Work Group, which meets monthly. Additional goals include rising the campus registration rate of eligible voters from 81.1 percent (2020) to 85 percent (2022) and increasing the voting rate of eligible students voting on Election Day from 67.8 percent (2020) to 75 percent in 2022 (see NSLVE, 2021).

### **Continuing to Engage the Vote During a Time of COVID**

The pandemic created a unique environment for Get Out the Vote efforts during fall 2020. COC transitioned to remote learning in March and then to an online format in August. Although classes did not meet on campus or in-person, using the virtual platform of Zoom rendered positive results. Beginning in early August, an Engage the Vote Student Action Team was formed, which first included COC Honors students. However, as the semester progressed, several non-Honors students also joined the group, including an officer from ASG. The Engage the Vote Student Action Team comprised 25 students lead by COC's Faculty Director, Civic and Community Engagement Initiatives. The group met weekly from mid-August through early December, and all hour-length meetings were held via Zoom and recorded.

Through our weekly meetings, participants identified specific topics of interest to pursue throughout the semester, including voter registration, voter education, and dialogue discussion. By creating a specific plan, the group divided into sub-teams to address the member's identified interests. These included increasing voter registration, providing information on voting, competing in California Secretary of State's University and College Ballot Bowl, taking part in Election Worker training, assisting the COC Vote Center, promoting the *365 Days of Voters* project, supporting *Understanding California's 12 Propositions* webinar, attending the *Nation We Want to Be* dialogue, and organizing the *City of Santa Clarita's Water Board Candidate's 'Meet and Greet.'* Members also placed directional signs and banners around the East Gym and related parking lots to assist with the 11 days of voting at the COC Vote Center. Through the efforts of this highly organized and motivated team, much was accomplished. In fact, working virtually and presenting through a virtual medium allowed the group to reach a much larger campus and community audience. The team continues to meet weekly through the academic year. And the work associated with civic learning and democratic engagement extends far beyond the weeks leading up to an election. The faculty director has provided training about meeting the requirements of AB 963 to the College's Managers Advisory Council (MAC). Future changes will include greater student involvement in classes regarding the upcoming 2022 Midterm Elections.

### **Keep Engage the Vote Going**

COC elevated its All In Campus Democracy Challenge seal from bronze to gold in 2018 and is using NSLVE data from 2020 to continue increasing voting rates, especially among racially and ethnically diverse groups. Looking towards the 2022 Midterm Election, voter registration, education, and engagement goals remain focused and include:

- 1) Provide greater student outreach, participation, and mobilization of voter registration. In addition, think in terms of how to reach families, especially those of first-generation students. Many parents of our students are not registered; and to assist with this process, provide voter information in English and Spanish.
- 2) Work with existing partnerships established since the 2018 midterm elections, including LEAD California (formally California Campus Compact, All In Challenge, Young Invincibles, #VoteTogether, SLSV, Band of Voters, and Campus Vote Project. In addition, continue to build an ongoing partnership with the LARRCC.

- 3) Organize voter engagement activities throughout the year and provide ways to connect to PBL. The formation of an Engage the Vote Action Team creates an ongoing group of students who continue to address issues of voter registration and participation throughout the year. While working in tandem with the Integrative, Civic, and Community Engagement Work Group, PLACE Action Team, Engage the Vote Action Team, PBL projects, Honors, Associated Student Government, Multicultural Center and related student alliances, as well as with curricular and co-curricular departments, the campus will keep the subject of voter engagement highly visible.
- 4) Connect issues of CLDE to the various events, presentations, and workshops organized by the Center for Civic Engagement throughout the year. This also includes working directly with the Engage the Vote and PLACE Student Action Teams to examine issues of homelessness, food insecurity, housing insecurity, media literacy, civility, mass incarceration, mental health, etc., and other topics that affect personal and community well-being. This work emphasizes the importance of taking part in participatory democracy.

As the Center for Civic Engagement revises its Voting Action Plan, it is working more closely with Instruction, Student Services, Admissions and Records, Campus Life and Student Engagement, Academic Senate, Public Information Office, COC Foundation, and the ASG to promote voter education throughout the academic year. This is especially important for the 2020 Midterm Election, as Millennials and Gen Z represented 37 percent of the nation’s electorate in 2018, falling behind Boomers (Cilluffo and Fry, 2019). In comparison, 18–29-year-olds are voting more (Pike, 2020).

### **Leadership and Civic Engagement**

COC’s Faculty Director, Civic and Community Engagement Initiatives works hand-in-hand with COC’s Integrative, Civic, and Community Engagement Work Group which represents a diverse group of campus stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and community members, as well as student members of the Engage the Vote Action Team. The creation, facilitation, and implementation of a campus wide Civic and Community Engagement Initiative over the past seven years has provided COC with the opportunity to experience its own “crucible moment.” Some of the work accomplished by the Center for Civic Engagement is listed below.

#### **Select History of Civic Engagement Work at College of the Canyons**

- Joined The Democracy Commitment.
- Agreed upon the use of Thomas Ehrlich’s (2000) definition of civic engagement.
- Established Civic Engagement Steering Committee.
- Attended 5<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary Celebration of The Democracy Commitment.
- Formed regional, state, and national partnerships and networks.
- Developed COC civic engagement strategic plan (e.g., *A Call to Action: An Initiative for Civic Engagement, Self, and Society*).
- Awarded five *Bringing Theory to Practice Grants*.
- Re-branded Service-Learning program to Community-Based Learning and now to Project-Based Learning.

- Organized deliberative dialogue trainings and dialogues based on support from The Democracy Commitment and Kettering Foundation.
- Presented at state and national conferences, including AAC&U Annual Conference, California Community College League of California, California Community College Research and Planning Group (RP Group), Imagining America, Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE), and Association of California Community College Administrators.
- Involved with Imagining America—Southern California Cluster.
- Organized five *California Community Colleges Civic and Community Engagement Student Summit*.
- Supported three COC Foundation annual student scholarships related to civic engagement.
- Created Civic and Community Engagement 15-unit Certificate along with the new courses, including Introduction to Civic and Community Engagement and Introduction to Community-Based Learning.
- Awarded a Zonta Grant.
- Hosted 2016 Candidate “Meet and Greet” of Assembly and Senate Candidates, as well as COC Board of Trustees Candidate “Meet and Greet.”
- Received a Foundation for California Community Colleges’ *Civic Impact Grant*.
- Awarded nine *COC Foundation Mini-Grants* and four *COC Associated Student Government Grants*.
- Nominated four COC students who served as Civic Impact Scholars with the Foundation for California Community Colleges *Civic Impact Project*.
- Helped to found the League of Women Voters of the Santa Clarita Valley (LWVSCV).
- Organized 2016 Presidential “Debate Watch.”
- Established “*Making the Invisible Visible: Telling Their Stories*” Theme to guide Civic Engagement.
- Collaborated with classified staff to create opportunities for professional development opportunities related to civic and community engagement.
- Constructed and administered COC’s own *Civic Engagement and Mutual Respect Survey (2016)*. In addition, Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data have been collected.
- Commitment by Chancellor Dianne Van Hook to dedicated space (e.g., 1500 sq. fee) for a permanent Center for Civic Engagement.
- Connection to California Community College System groups like the California Community Colleges’ Success Network (3CSN) and statewide initiatives like Guided Pathways, “Doing What Matters,” Student Equity, and “Vision for Success.”
- Presented at LINKS 2018 Conference for 3CSN (California Community Colleges’ Success Network), which has proposed a statewide 3CSN Community of Practice for Community-Based Learning.
- Served on the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) 2018 Annual Conference planning team, including faculty director and student intern.
- Organized presentation by League of Women Voters of the United States National President, Chris Carson, in collaboration with the LWVSCV.

- Planned multiple events with the LWVSCV, including “Cookies and Conversation—Understanding the Propositions” and “Sips and Civility”—A Community Dialogue on the “America We Want to Be.”
- Administered Civic Engagement/Mutual Respect Surveys: Fall 2016. Results published in Civic Engagement/Mutual Respect Report #313.
- Joined California Campus Compact.
- Awarded AAC&U *Civic Learning in the Major by Design Grant*.
- Awarded funding to assist with voter registration and election awareness, including support from Campus Compact and The Democracy Commitment Initiative, #VoteTogether, and Young Invincibles.
- Joined Tufts University’s *National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)* initiative.
- Joined All IN Campus Democracy Challenge.
- Invited to take part in Campus Compact National Community College Planning Team convening.
- Participated in third-year discussion of the Kettering Foundation and The Democracy Commitment community college deliberative dialogue project.
- Designated COC as an official LARRCC Vote Center.
- Organized Engage the Vote Action Team.
- Held multiple virtual informational presentations and candidate “meet and greets” during COVID.

***Engage the Vote work has also included--***

- Worked with the LARRCC to place a Vote-by-Mail ballot box on the COC campus. Students registering for the first time were encouraged to Vote-by-Mail to take advantage of not having to cast their ballots at a polling location.
- Created a variety of marketing materials, including banners, flyers, bookmarks, and announcements posted on campus wide digital monitors. Help provided by the Public Information Office.
- Constructed an Engage the Election letter, as well as Engage the Election handout which was sent to over 2,000 individuals who are listed on the “coc-all” distribution list.
- Emailed a series of “Voting and Election Fun Facts” sent daily to coc-all for one week.
- Created a campus hashtag of #COCVotes to promote efforts via social media.
- Developed the tag line of “Democracy. Everyone’s Responsibility.” to reflect the Engage the Vote campus wide campaign.

***Additional efforts assisted the campus to Engage the Vote in 2018, included the following--***

- An interdisciplinary team of faculty developed the Youth Wave campus wide initiative to encourage students to register to vote and to cast their ballots. Students who provide proof of registration and voting receive extra credit points.
- A faculty member from Political Science, along with a team of students, created a Quick Response (QR) Code linked to the California Secretary of State’s Office, which provided online voter registration. The QR code was emailed to the entire campus community, as well as printed on bookmarks distributed throughout the campus.

- Several faculty presentations addressed issues or topics concerned with current affairs, political engagement, and issues related to self and society, including the departments of History, Humanities, Sociology, and the Institute of Ethics, Law, and Public Policy.

### **Engage the Vote 2020 Activities During COVID**

Below is a list of activities that the Center for Civic Engagement helped to organize and facilitate during fall 2020 for the General Election.

#### ***365 Days of Voters***

Collaborated with L.A. artist Deborah Aschheim to gather narrative and headshots of the COC campus community to include in her 365 Days of Voters project.

#### ***Engage the Vote Student Action Team***

- Worked with 25 students interested in voter education and registration. The group has met weekly from mid-August to the present. While the group addressed issues and activities concerning the November 3rd election, it will continue to meet and organize events for spring.
- Created social media accounts, including Instagram and Facebook.
- Organized and facilitated the *Santa Clarita Valley (SCV) Water Board 'Meet and Greet' Candidate Forum* (October 2). The two-hour presentation was recorded and made available for public viewing.
- Assisted Bridge to Home in registering clients experiencing homeless.
- Participated in *Voting 101* and *How to Become an Election Worker* presentations presented by Jeff Klein, Los Angeles Register-Recorder/County Clerk's (RRCC) office. The one-hour presentation was recorded and made available for public viewing.
- Worked to get participants for 365 Days of Voters.
- Facilitated the October 27 campus dialogue entitled *The Nation We Want to Be*. This was the first of three--Dialogue #2: *The Community We Want to Be* (November 17) and Dialogue #3: *The Citizen I Want to Be* (November 24).
  - Dialogues are planned for spring and will include a “deep dive” into topics surrounding electoral politics and related legislative processes, as well as organizing “meet and greets” with local elected officials (e.g., city council, mayor, COC Board of Trustees, and SCV Water Board).

#### ***Partnership with League of Women Voters of Santa Clarita Valley (SCV)***

- Collaborated on *Understanding California's 12 Propositions* with a SCV League member COC Political Science professor on October 7. While the audience size was impressive, we failed to realize that we had scheduled the virtual event the night of the Vice-Presidential Debate. (The presentation was also presented virtually to the Belcaro Retirement Community on September 23 and Friendly Valley Retirement Community on September 25 as part of COC's *Afternoons with the Professors and Friends* lecture series).
  - The October 7 two-hour presentation was recorded and made available for public viewing.
  - A student from the Engage the Vote Action Team compiled information from the presentation, including the PowerPoint narrative, to create a written document explaining California's propositions. This information was disseminated

electronically throughout the campus, as well as to community partners and networks.

### ***Collaboration with Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk***

- Worked with Jeff Klein to create a campus-community informational session on *Voting 101* and *Becoming an Election Worker* on October 12.
- Combined efforts with LARRCC and COC Facilities Department to have COC's East Gym serve as an official Los Angeles County Vote Center for the General Election. The Vote Center provided Early Voting, as well as a ballot drop-box for mail-in ballots. The Center included a staff of 11 with 30 voting devices. Social distancing and wearing of masks were enforced, while the days/times of operation included:
  - October 24-November 3rd (11 days of consecutive operation)
  - October 24-November 2nd (10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.)
  - Election Day (7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.)
- Faculty director took part in a 3-hour LARRCC training webinar, as well as worked with the COC Facilities Department in monitoring issues/concerns/problems of the Vote Center over the 11-day voting cycle.
- Members from the Engage the Vote Action Team assisted in the posting of directional signs to the Voting Center, as well as providing limited decorations.
- Participated in the SLSV California Student Vote Summit
  - Faculty director served on the planning committee of this statewide group organized by California Campus Compact and Students Learn Students Vote Coalition. The virtual summit registered over 600 students from the State's 2- and 4-year colleges and universities.
  - Because of COC's participation on the planning team, as well as meeting several other requirements, the College received a \$500 mini-grant. The funding provided purchase of six 3' x 6' banners which were placed inside and outside of the Vote Center. Additional funds were used for supplies.

### ***California Secretary of State's University and College Ballot Bowl***

- Enrolled COC as a participant. In doing so, the College provided a registration link to the Secretary of State's website to register online through the COC homepage.

### ***Census***

- Disseminated announcements about the Census and its changing deadlines. Also held an on-campus event with a Census Bureau representative.

### ***Publications***

- COC mentioned as one of America's Best Colleges for Student Voting--published in *Washington Monthly*.
- COC highlighted in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) monthly newsletter. The article examined voter campus involvement at three colleges. COC was the only community college discussed.

### ***Campus Wide Emails and Announcements***

The faculty director sent ongoing coc-all campus wide email blasts (reaching over 2,000 campus and community members) with messages, announcements, and reminders concerning deadlines and Vote Center information. In addition, various materials were disseminated electronically to encourage voter education and engagement. Emails were also sent to community partners to share with their community-wide networks (e.g., League of Women Voters of the Santa Clarita Valley, Zonta, City of Santa Clarita, Love SCV, etc.). A six-page *Engage the Vote Resources* handout was also created by the faculty director to assist the campus community with important voting links, as well as recordings of local candidate forums.

### ***Vote Friendly Campus (Applied for 2021-2022 Voter Friendly Campus Designation)***

The Voter Friendly Campus designation program was started through a partnership between the Fair Elections Center's Camps Vote Project and NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) and its NASPA LEAD Initiative. The goal of the program is to help academic institutions develop democratic engagement action plans that coordinate the effort of the campus community to increase voter registration and participation.

### ***Washington Monthly Publication***

An article highlighting the nation's best colleges for voting included College of the Canyons. See "America's Best Colleges for Student Voting 2020," *Washington Monthly*, September 9, 2020.

### **California Primary Election Activities 2022**

#### ***Engage the Vote Sign Painting with LA. artist Deborah Aschheim***

Held on campus, April 13, 2022. See more information in Artists 4 Democracy ([A4D](#)) Newsletter.

#### ***Los Angeles County Sheriff Candidates' "Meet and Greet"***

***April 28, 2022***

Six out of eight candidates participated in the virtual event with questions developed by Engage the Vote Action Team members. Students developed and asked the questions of candidates: Captain Steinbrenner, Captain Rodriguez, Chief Rhambo, Chief Luna, Chief Vera, and Lieutenant Strong.

#### ***Student Civic Empowerment Summit***

***April 29, 2022***

The faculty director worked with A Band of Voters, Student PRIGs, and Democracy Works to plan and host this statewide event. In addition, as a sponsor, the Center for Civic Engagement helped to support the following speakers:

- **The Power of the Colleges**

Manju Bangalore, Director of Strategic Organizing, A Band of Voters

- **The Power of our Generation and the Law we passed: AB963**

D'Aungillique Jackson, President, Fresno State Associated Students, Inc.

- **The Power of the Action Plan and Student led Events**

Celina Avalos, Master of Public Policy Candidate, UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy

- The faculty director continues to work with the original author, Joey Forsyte, on expanding knowledge of the Bill.
- Two students, Sona Tigranyan and Isabella Solorio, were selected statewide to serve as paid interns with A Band of Voters, Joey Forsyte, Founder and CEO.

***California Secretary of State—California Youth Voter Summit***

***May 6, 2022***

Engage the Vote Action Team member, Sona Tigranyan, spoke on behalf of community colleges at this statewide event.

***LA. County RR/CC Mobile Vote Center (May 31)***

COC will serve the local community by holding in-person voting on May 31 from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Lot 4, Valencia campus.

***Assembly Bill 963—Student Voter and Empowerment Act***

- Passed into law by the California State Legislature in fall of 2019, COC is working to meet the requirements of this law, including required activities, events, and presentations. Our goal is to address civic learning and democratic engagement year-round.

***Future plans to Engage the Vote in upcoming semesters. (Work will first include virtual formats during COVID, while all efforts will depend on staffing. Tentative goals include:***

- Work with students in Graphic Media Arts to create a visual image to complement the Engage the Election Vote effort for 2022. Display image throughout the campus community.
- Meet with the Public Information Office to create a *Engage the Vote* publicity plan for the campus, including hanging banners around campus, displaying important voter information on campus monitors and classroom computer screens, and ongoing Public Service Announcement (PSAs) regarding voting deadlines, activities, and presentations. This includes placing related events on the COC Event’s Calendar, which is accessible to the general public. With COC serves as a Vote Center, include information on the roadside marquees.
- Incorporate some aspect of voter education into COC’s First Year Promise program.
- Increase voter registration during “off seasons” to include important days of recognition like Martin Luther King Day, Presidents’ Day, Cesar Chavez Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day, Patriot Day, Citizenship Day, and Veterans Day, as well as Heritage Month themes.
- Organize an “Action Team Rush” at the beginning of spring semester to recruit students to join the Engage the Vote Student Action Team.
- Contact Andrew Goodman Foundation and discuss the possibility of creating an Andrew Goodman scholar position at COC.
- Encourage COC students to apply for the Ronald Reagan Leadership Foundation Scholarship.
- Administer Campus Election Engagement Project Campus Electoral Engagement Assessment.

- Distribute information (as done in 2018) regarding important registration and voter dates and deadlines, as well as helpful voting tips. Send via coc-all, as well as work directly with the Public Information Office to expand the College’s outreach into the local community.
- Provide faculty with examples of how to engage students in the upcoming election by including examples of assignments and projects. Encourage faculty to infuse some aspect of civic learning and democratic engagement in their courses. This is especially true for PBL assignments.
- Advertise websites (as done in 2018) of organizations dedicated to increasing the vote among college students.
- Organize a “Department Challenge” Campaign. Departments will work to create ideas of how to politically engage students in their areas
- Encourage students to participate in campus wide dialogues by using issue guides available by the National Issues Forum Institute (NIFI) and Living Room Conversations.
- Create a repository of *Engage the Vote* resources for faculty, clubs, and ASG.
- Organize “Meet and Greet” sessions throughout the year with local elected officials.
- Develop Civic Engagement/Engage the Election mini-workshops to address a variety of topics related to American history and government.
- Work to hold a naturalization ceremony in COC’s Performing Arts Center, while encouraging student observation and participation.
- Send a campus-wide “Message from the Chancellor” regarding the importance of registering to vote, as well as voting.
- Create a large display board to highlight photos of COC campus community members with a quick response to the question, “I vote because....”
- Instruct a greater number of students, especially from ASG and student clubs, in the techniques of dialogue. Encourage students to lead dialogues on various topics related to democratic engagement.
- Increase number of students taking part in the annual Reagan Foundation Leadership Conference.
- Work with campus (e.g., *The Monday Report*) and local media sources (e.g., radio, newspaper, television) to publicize events.
- Include voter information in the annual college catalogue.
- Create a “Fact Bits” weekly email blast providing information on historical and political voting and election facts, as well as interest information about the Census. In addition, this election cycle we hope to include 100 days of “civility matters” sending out quotes from George Washington’s 100 rules for civility.
- Train students how to register students effectively.
- Work with Academic Senate to create a campus resolution committed to fostering civic learning and democratic engagement among our campus community.
- Send reminder texts (e.g., voter registration deadline, Election Day) to students from Admissions and Records.
- Organize an *Engage the Vote* film series.
- Work with LARRCC to provide on-campus education and instruction on the mechanics of voting (e.g., how to read a ballot and use new interactive voting devices, etc.).

- Connect early to statewide challenges for colleges, especially as developed by the Office of the California Secretary of State and California Community Colleges Office of the Chancellor.
- Organize a campus-wide student “I Am a Voter” pledge card campaign.
- Continue efforts to organize *Making the Invisible Visible* themed civic engagement events while connecting to social and political concerns.
- Create a series of short one minute “Telling Their Stories” Video clips highlighting COC students and staff discussing “Why I Vote,” “My First Time to Vote,” etc.
- Train peer advisors seated at information desks to assist with voter registration.
- Include more information on COC Homepage, as well as include QR code to assist with voter registration.
- Train Engage the Vote Student Action Team members to make short presentations in classes regarding the importance of voting.
- Generate a campus-wide competition to beat our 2018 NSLVE data results.
- Organize a Civic Engagement Student Summit with a portion of the event devoted to voter awareness, education, and engagement.

### **Plans for 2022 Midterms**

The CCE will combine the help of many groups on campus, including the Engage the Vote Action Team, ASG, and Integrative, Civic, and Community Engagement Work Group to advance a variety of plans forward for fall semester 2022. The Engage the Vote team will continue to meet weekly, as well as welcome new members over the summer. In addition, to recruit more members for Engage the Vote, members will collaborate with campus alliances, clubs, honor societies, athletics, ASG, and Canyons Promise to encourage student participation. Plans for the following activities are based on interests presented by representative from the above groups and include:

- Organize a variety of informational sessions that include representative from the L.A. RR/CC to show how to vote using the mail-in ballot, as well as voting machine. Our plan is to hold several in-person events, as well as virtual presentations, that can be recorded and disseminated across the campus. This is especially helpful if faculty will post recordings on their course Canvas shells.
- Facilitate a series of virtual “Meet and Greets” including local candidates. Record presentations to disseminate to campus and community stakeholders.
- Distribute pledge cards across the campus community and ask participants to secure the pledge of one to two friends or family members to vote. They will pledge to follow-up with them once voting begins.
- Connect recruitment work to larger, existing activities like the fall Star Party, athletic events, Welcome Week, Club Fest, etc.
- Provide ongoing registration and information announcements around special days/weeks (e.g., Constitution Day, Early Voting Week, Last Day to Register, Election Day, etc.). Send out information campuswide, as well as connect with various groups to post information on social media platforms.
- Organize 5<sup>th</sup> Annual California Community Colleges’ Civic Engagement Student Summit for fall 2022.
- Work with the LARRCC to provide an onsite Vote Center on the COC campus.

- Plan multiple campus-wide election sign painting parties.
- Organize an Election Watch Party the evening of election returns.
- Create an Engage the Vote campus-wide logo contest. Prizes awarded to top three entries. First prize logo used by COC Makerspace students to create on-campus presence.
- Hold major Engage the Vote registration event.
- Facilitate a variety of campus-community (both in-persona and virtual) dialogues addressing multiple topics.
- Organize student volunteers to assist with registration efforts at the local homeless shelter, Bridge to Home.
- Create a series of several podcasts that highlight student, faculty, staff, and community members response to the prompt, “Why Do I Vote?”
- Party to the Polls—encourage voting on November 8.
- Partner with L.A. County RR/CC to encourage student participation as poll workers.
- Place California Secretary of State’s voter registration link on COC homepage.
- Create a series of 2–3-minute informational videos using Engage the Vote students to address registration dates, etc. Material will come directly from the California Secretary of State and L.A. County RR/CC websites.
- Offer Engage the Vote students the opportunity to participate in 60 hours of internship hours and earn 1-unit of credit for their work.

Besides the hours of support provided by COC’s Associated Student Government officers and many faculty and academic departments, the campus plans to continue partnerships with local, regional, and national groups.

### **Reporting**

The Faculty Director, Civic and Community Engagement Initiatives makes updates and revisions and revisions to this plan. By working directly with members of the Integrative, Civic, and Community Engagement Work Group, Engage the Vote Action Team, and ASG, she helps guide participants in ongoing reflection of successes and challenges. Review will occur every six months while strategies to meet the above goals will remain fluid, as ideas will shift. She shared COC’s 2018 and 2020 NSLVE data with the campus community and a press release also went out to local media. Data are helping to shape future voter registration, education, and participation strategies for the June 7 California Primary Election and 2022 Midterm Election. Using outcomes derived from the evaluation of the data, new strategies exist. Progress reports are made available to the Chancellor, Board of Trustees, and Executive Cabinet. In addition, the faculty director will disseminate updates to the entire campus community.

### **Evaluation**

While COC continues to create an evaluation process which will gauge the impact of civic engagement and its related activities on participants, we will continue to monitor headcounts of participants or attendees. The Center is currently reviewing a variety of publications that discuss evaluation measures for civic engagement, as well as AAC&U’s Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric (AAC&U, n.d.). However, comparisons between past and current NSLVE data will assist with the evaluation of the Center’s overall action plan. In addition, the *Democratic Action Plan Rubric* created by the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition continues to provide guidance (Students Learn Students Vote, 2019: 27-28). (See also Assembly Bill 963 Toolkit, 2021.)

## Conclusion

As an institution of higher education, College of the Canyons can no longer allow its students to observe as spectators nor to watch as bystanders, especially as local, national, and global problems escalate. To address social issues collectively is a basic tenet of democracy, as John Stuart Mill proclaimed in 1859, since the sovereignty of a nation lives in its people or, more precisely, its citizenry (Mill, 2002). In fact, “A morally and civilly responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric,” suggests Ehrlich and “considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own.” (Ehrlich, 2000:xxvi). Therefore, to take action, especially through voter engagement, is paramount to ensure the continued wellbeing of society (Bowen, 2010). The Center for Civic Engagement and the Integrative, Civic, and Community Engagement Work Group has done much to bring attention to social concerns in the campus community by organizing presentations, events, workshops, summits, and dialogues. Each of which has been framed around the ongoing theme of *Making the Invisible Visible*. It is time that political engagement becomes visible. With the help of *Engage the Vote: A Campus Voting Action Plan and Report, 2022*, we are confident that an increased number of student voices will be heard during the next midterm election cycle.

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