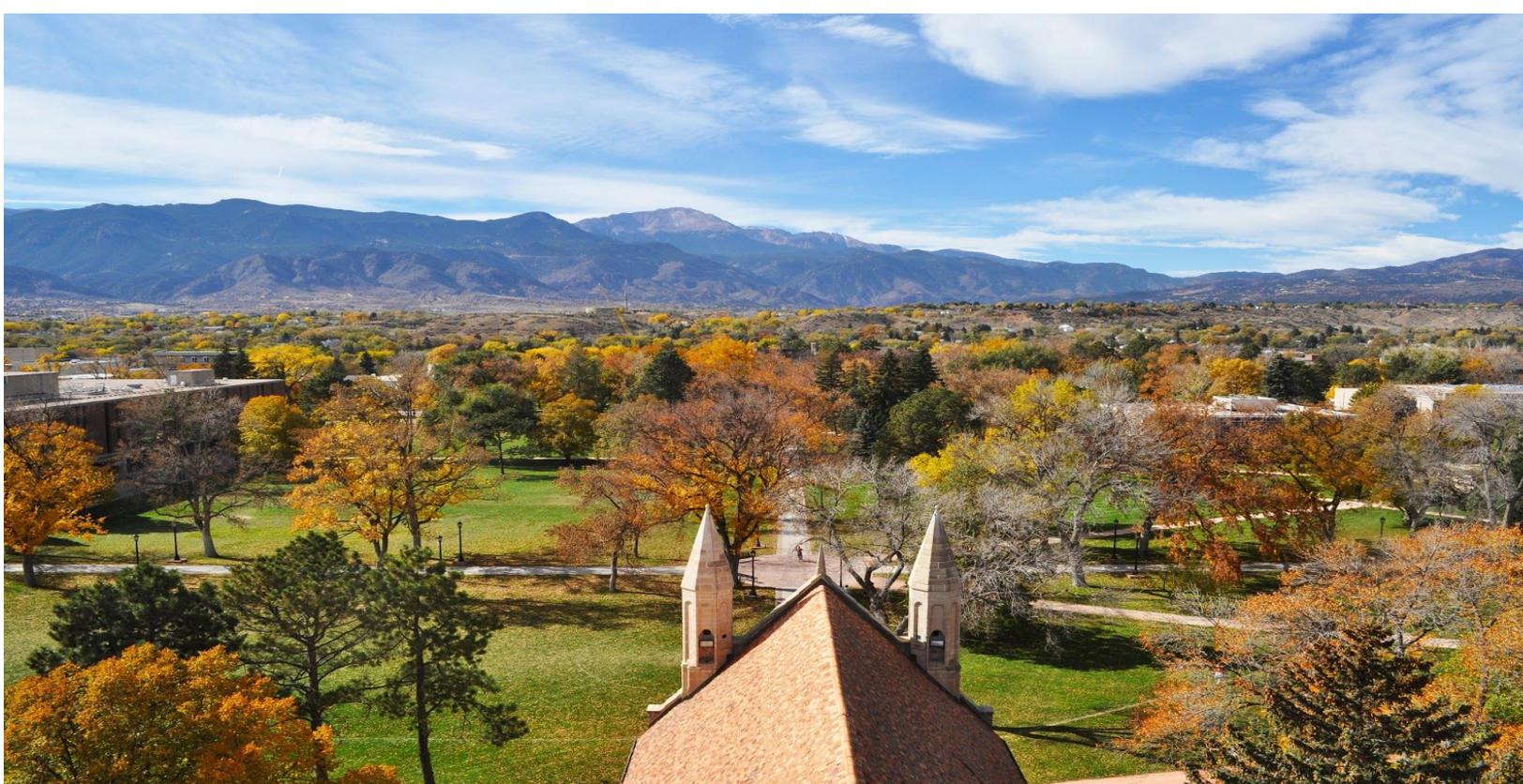




Colorado College
All In Challenge

November 2, 2020

Democratic Engagement Action Plan





Executive Summary

Colorado College’s 2020 action plan was developed by a cohort of students, alumni, staff members of the Collaborative for Community Engagement, and in collaboration with the nonprofit organization, New Era Colorado. The purpose of the plan is to increase voter registration before the November 2020 election. The plan will be implemented both on-campus and remotely between September and November of 2020 to increase short-term voting rates to 43-45% for the upcoming presidential election. However, the principles of democratic engagement presented in this plan will remain at the core of our work and help Colorado College prepare for the 2022 midterm and 2024 presidential election cycles and achieve our long-term goal of at least 49% voter turnout. This percentage will be accomplished through collaborative efforts on behalf of students, faculty, and partnering organizations with a commitment to increasing voter turnout and fostering democratic engagement for years to come.

Leadership

This project is housed under the Collaborative for Community Engagement (CCE) at Colorado College. Our supervisor is Dr. Jordan Travis Radke, the Director of the CCE. The students involved with this project include Andra Metcalfe, Maddi Schink, James Hanafee, and Elena Martinez-Vivot, who are members of a student organization called CC Votes as well as a student Political Advocacy Coalition through the CCE. New Era Colorado, a youth civic engagement organization, is also highly involved in creating and implementing this plan and our voter registration efforts. Our contact through New Era is Luci Keleman. Additionally, we coordinated with the Director of Campus Activities and Student Orientation at Colorado College, Amy Hill, and Niki Sosa, the Community Partnerships Coordinator at the Collaborative for Community Engagement.

Commitment

"At Colorado College, our goal is to provide the finest liberal arts education in the country. Drawing upon the adventurous spirit of the Rocky Mountain West, we challenge students, one course at a time, to develop those habits of intellect and imagination that will prepare them for learning and leadership throughout their lives."

As a liberal arts college, Colorado College’s mission is to engage students in a diverse array of subjects, introduce them to various perspectives, and “prepare them for learning and leadership throughout their lives.” With that in mind, a commitment to bipartisan dialogue, voter engagement, and civic participation is at the foundation of what it means to be a CC community member. Some of the core values of the college, as outlined below, speak directly to the importance of this work:



“As members of the Colorado College community, we share a commitment to ... value all persons and seek to learn from their diverse experiences and perspectives ... [and] encourage engagement and social responsibility at local, national and global levels...”

The institution recognizes the value of student voice and leadership in the pursuit of robust civic engagement and provides the necessary foundational support and resources to amplify their efforts. This mutual commitment creates a campus culture that promotes and celebrates participation in the democratic process. From this spirit, we draw energy and enthusiasm to continue this work for the 2020 election cycle and beyond.

Landscape

Colorado College has employed various techniques to engage students with the democratic process in the past and into the present day. Student groups and Colorado College Student Government Association (CCSGA) have been actively involved in hosting voter registration drives. These have ranged from tabling in front of the Worner Student Center to first-year move-in and orientation events. Additionally, the student organization CC Votes and CCSGA have collaborated with the CC Communications department to send email communications to the entire student body.

One example of this was last spring when students were suddenly forced to return home due to the coronavirus pandemic. In the whirlwind that followed, Colorado College faculty and students remained committed to ensuring that students updated their address on the Colorado Secretary of State website so that they received their ballot for the June 2020 Colorado primary election. Partnering with community organizations such as New Era Colorado and the Citizen’s Project has also brought about opportunities for all CC Residential Advisors to be trained in voter registration and Get Out The Vote phone and text bank initiatives in the broader Colorado Springs community. Lastly, student political organizations, including CC Democrats and CC Middle Ground, are working to encourage democratic engagement by providing students with resources to ensure that they are registered to vote.

Efforts like these have helped to ensure that students could remain actively engaged in the democratic process. CCSGA has also successfully spearheaded efforts to apply for a grant that funded a project to send postcards to every single CC student who is not on campus this fall. Considering that not all students were allowed to campus and most of our classes are online this fall, the goal of these postcards is to remind students to either register to vote in Colorado -- or, at least their home state -- as well as to update their mailing address so that they received their mail-in ballot for the November election.

In the weeks leading up to the election, students on campus will be able to drop their ballots off at the Worner center to be delivered to the nearest drop box by CC Votes. In order to comply with state laws, only up to 10 ballots can be delivered by one person to Colorado Springs drop boxes.



The college will also be hosting a series of virtual Presidential debate watch parties and discussions as a way to encourage students to remain engaged with the political landscape of our country and learn how to participate in productive and meaningful democratic dialogue with our peers. The student organization Middle Ground will provide student moderators for a discussion following each presidential debate so that students have a safe space to discuss politics and feel that their opinions are valid. CC Votes will also be leading a National Voter Education Week to help educate our student body about what is on the ballot. Events will include voter registration, a Colorado ballot breakdown zoom panel, and the release of voter guides from New Era. CC Votes, with help from Outdoor Education, will also host a bike to the polls event on October 24th for National Early Voting Day. Finally, CC students succeeded in petitioning the administration to cancel classes on November 3 to ensure that students can go to the polls to vote, turn in their ballot, or work as an election judge. This outreach to students despite challenging and unforeseen circumstances shows the commitment that the Colorado College community has to improving democratic engagement.

Goals

Aided by guidance from our newest action plan, we hope to increase the short term voting rate to 43-45% for the upcoming presidential election. To accomplish this, we are focused on identifying and using pandemic-friendly tactics in order to increase voter turnout, such as video-based training for campus voter representatives. In the long term, we hope for increased student, faculty, and organizational involvement from the 2020 election to carry forward through upcoming midterm and presidential elections and continue to grow as we create and pursue newer and different tactics for democratic engagement with each election year. The framework we have implemented this year will prove crucial for continuing to grow our college's interest in democratic engagement and voter turnout rates. We also hope to formalize the structure of CC Votes to include a panel of sitting members including a faculty representative.

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

Based on the 2018 midterm election cycle, Colorado College achieved a Gold Campus designation for our 41.8% voting rate, which was higher than the institutional average. However, in our pursuit of higher voter registration and turnout rates, we are aspiring to increase this voting rate to the range of 43-45% in the November 2020 election cycle. Beyond this short term goal, our institution is striving to improve this voting rate beyond 45% to the upward range of the Gold Campus designation, which is 49%, for both midterm and presidential election cycles.



Strategy

Our goals of achieving 49% or greater voting rates in both the 2022 midterm elections and 2024 election cycle will be achieved through increased student voter registration, as well as a commitment to clear and continuous communication between faculty, the administration, student groups, and local political engagement organizations. Through this interconnected network, we will be able to achieve the greatest impact on our student body and election outcomes. We will continue to adjust our strategies alongside the demands of this pandemic and the recommendations of public health officials to ensure that voter registrations are safe, events are virtual, and students are receiving consistent and clear communication. This means that we will continue to use platforms such as the Collaborative for Community Engagement to bring together students and faculty in co-curricular ways and ensure communication between parties so that our efforts are unified, efficient, and effective. Specifically, the Political Advocacy Coalition provides a promising outlet for students from various elements of campus life to come together and touch base with their peers about projects, efforts, goals, and visions for democratic engagement at our school. Ultimately, fostering student ownership and agency in our community will lead to our desired outcomes.

Reporting

Recently, the Collaborative for Community Engagement established a specific CC Votes website to provide students with a central place to find information on how to register to vote and participate in the democratic process. This Action Plan, as well as our NSLVE 2018 report, and any future reports, will be uploaded to this site so that the information is public and accessible.

Evaluation

Colorado College will continue to evaluate our progress regarding this action plan through the data provided by our 2020 NSLVE report following this election cycle. We will strive for an element of reflexivity in our work to reflect on our past voter registration and democratic engagement efforts and adjust them according to the state of our campus and student life. As this pandemic has shown, these efforts will require flexibility and resiliency; as an institution, we will acknowledge that we can learn from and emulate the past while also being brave in pursuing new techniques and platforms.

~ Thank You ~ Happy Voting ~