



Columbia College Chicago 2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan  
Developed by: Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin

### **Executive Summary:**

Columbia Votes has grown from a classroom-based voter engagement initiative into a more robust civic engagement initiative centered on voting. Its main prong is still an in-person, ask-every-student feature in most sections of "Big Chicago," a first-year course—trained voter registration geniuses lead a 50-state voter education, motivating and registration module in each class. But we also sign students up on the Motivote platform to help with targeted follow-up texts and to further their engagement in other civic activities, such as working as poll judges, contacting elected officials, and engaging in civic activities on campus and off.

We continue to provide a Columbia Votes link in every Canvas (LMS) page for every course on campus. This link takes students to our intranet site containing a video version of the in-class presentation and links for registering and requesting vote-by-mail ballots. In addition, Columbia Votes staffs a table in the Student Center for about 6 hours every week, and monitors an email help line ([vote@colum.edu](mailto:vote@colum.edu)). Voter registration geniuses are available to help students by phone, text, email or Zoom if they encounter any obstacles, including the need for photocopies, envelopes and stamps.

We have VR events planned for spring and fall 2024 in the dorms, during intermissions in student theater productions, at film screenings on campus, and at college events with partner student organizations. We also have an active Instagram account [@ColumbiaChiVotes](https://www.instagram.com/ColumbiaChiVotes). Columbia Votes is now in the Strategic Plan a key feature of the college's commitment to civic engagement, and is part of the new CAPE initiative (Civic Activism, Participation and Engagement).

Columbia Votes continues to evolve in response to students' attitudes toward voting, which were notably and negatively affected in the fall by the war in Gaza. We rewrote our motivational script, emphasizing deep listening to hear students out first, then connect their concerns to voting. This has been very effective, and Sharon has been asked to present about it at the April Student Voting Research Network conference. She has also shared the new slide deck with Students Learn Students Vote so that other campuses can adopt and adapt it for their use.

Our goal is to maximize the student vote in 2024 by through the Ask Every Student model of in person engagement of as many students as possible, but with the special emphasis on first year students. We set a high bar for ourselves in 2020, raising our campus voting rate to 71.8% from 56% in 2016—a 15.8% increase.

Other recent achievements include an on-campus polling place and making election day a school holiday.

### **Leadership:**

Our leadership team includes:

Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin, the creator of Columbia Votes. Sharon is a professor of journalism in the Communication Department. The rest of the leadership team is composed of five undergraduate and graduate voter registration geniuses, whom she hires and trains. The 2024 VRGs are Teddi Karnes, Daniellia Marshall, Haley Patton, Laila Bonner and Colin Kniss.

Sharon is also part of the leadership team for CAPE along with the dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the head of Student Affairs. However, this is about to change because the campus is undergoing a restructuring due to financial distress.

The 2022 VRGs are Anna Busalacchi and Carolina Ayala (senior VRGs), and Ethan Alonzo and Ricky Luoto (junior VRGs). We work closely with and value support from SLSV and the HE-SVE.

## **1 Commitment:**

Our campus has signed the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation.

Our campus uses the following methods to communicate with students about the election:

- Class visits to every in-person section of Big Chicago, a required first-year course.
- Text messages sent through Motivote.
- A table at the Student Center.
- A help line.
- Events at the dorms and at the library
- Pop-ups during intermissions at on-campus theater performances and film screenings.
- Canvas module (our learning management system)
- Instagram page
- Posters at election times
- Partnering with the Maker Space and student organizations.

## **Landscape:**

Our campus demographic and voting data:

Total enrollment in Fall 2023 was 6,309 undergraduate and 185 graduate students. New first-years accounted for 1,608 of the undergraduate, and new transfers 553. Of all students, 42% are Pell recipients, 44% are first-generation college, 345 are LGBTQ+ at entry. Of all students, 59% are from Illinois, 36% from other states and 5% international. Of all students, 34% are white, 34% Latinx/Hispanic, 21% Black, 3% Asian, and other groups are under 3%.

According to NSLVE campus voting data, 56.4% of eligible students voted in 2016, 42.2% of

eligible students voted in 2018, and 71.8% of eligible students voted in 2020. Among eligible voters, 82.6% registered in 2016, 81.5% registered in 2018, and 87.7% registered in 2020. And of registered voters, 67.8% voted in 2016, 51.5% voted in 2018, and 81.9% voted in 2020.

This is the data that drives our focus on voter education and motivation, not just on registration. We work on turning registered voters to actual voters (though we register them, too!)



### Goals:

Our campus democratic engagement goals are to encourage and enable every student who is eligible and interested to register to vote and to request a vote-by-mail ballot on campus or back home, as well as to obtain non-partisan information on all candidates on their ballot.

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### Strategy:

We are implementing the following strategies in Fall 2024:

- Class visits to every in-person section of Big Chicago, a required first-year course using our new messaging, which emphasizes deep listening to what students care about prior to connecting that to voting.
- Signing students up through Motivate.
- A table at the Student Center where we welcome students with voting-related stickers and then engage them in conversations about voting.
- An email help line.
- Events at the dorms and at the library
- Pop-ups during intermissions at on-campus theater performances and film screenings.
- Canvas module (our learning management system)
- Instagram page
- Posters at election times
- Partnering with the Maker Space and student organizations.

### NSLVE:

Columbia College Chicago has authorized NSLVE.

**Evaluation:**

In addition to our NSLVE data, we plan to keep track of the number of students we reach and the number we help register to vote through Motivote.

**Reporting:**

We will report our campus action plan and NSLVE reports in the following ways:

- Our action plan is posted on the campus intranet and is available for anyone at the institution to view.
- Our campus NSLVE reports will be posted on our campus website and shared with the campus community.