



**CAMPUS  
DEMOCRACY  
CHALLENGE**

Columbia College Chicago 2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan  
Developed by: Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin

**Executive Summary:**

Columbia Votes began in Fall 2019 as an Ask Every Student model of whole-campus voter registration delivered in freshman classes. This was chosen because the orientation model pioneered by Northwestern University wasn't possible at Columbia College Chicago. During the Fall 2019 pilot program, students in freshman English classes were taught about the power and importance of the youth vote and assisted 50-state voter registration and vote-by-mail ballot requests. In Fall 2020, Columbia Votes was to expand to reach all freshmen enrolled in "Big Chicago," a first-year course. But because of the pandemic, it had to be revised for remote delivery. During Spring 2020, a curricular model was developed for implementation in Fall 2020: a voter registration module in the learning management system (Canvas) for all "Big Chicago" classes that includes a video about the importance and effectiveness of the youth vote and the option students have to vote on campus or back home, a quiz, and state guides with step-by-step instructions for registering and requesting a ballot. In all other courses, a Canvas link takes students to an intranet site containing the same resources. In addition, in Fall 2020, voter registration geniuses (student workers) were available 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. at an email address (vote@colum.edu) to help students by phone, text, email or Zoom if they encountered any obstacles, including the need for photocopies, envelopes and stamps. This was widely promoted by faculty as well as academic affairs and the registrar. The aim is for every student to have access and assistance. The official start date was the first day of classes in Fall 2020. In the fourth week of the semester, we were able to resume tabling hours in the student center. It will end the day of the election. Columbia Votes is partially funded by the college president's office, and partly grant-funded by Students Learn Students Vote. The short-term goal is to maximize the student vote in 2020 despite the pandemic. The long-term goal is to go back to an Ask Every Student model of in-person engagement to help students register to vote.

**Leadership:**

Our leadership team includes:

Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin, the creator of Columbia Votes. Sharon is an associate professor of journalism in the Communication Department. The leadership team includes the college president's chief of staff, Laurent Pernot, who approves expenses to hire work aides (other than money from a grant from Student Learn Students Vote), and five student work aides (voter registration geniuses): Serene Arena, Jess Eckerstorfer, Ally Longo, Anna Busalacchi and Nolan Flavin. Columbia Votes has benefitted greatly from the guidance and support of Michael Peshkin of Northwestern University, who created the model many schools follow, and has been instrumental in the creation of state guides. And we work closely with and value support from SLSV and the HE-SVE.

**Commitment:**

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

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

Before the pandemic: class visits and a table at the Student Center. During the pandemic: Canvas (learning management system), email, Instagram and limited hours at the Student Center.

### **Landscape:**

Our campus demographic and voting data:

Total enrollment in Fall 2020 is 6,542 undergraduate and 227 graduate students. Undergraduates are 48% white non-Hispanic, 15% Black non-Hispanic, 23% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 5% multi-racial. They are 59% female and 41% male.

Of the 1,826 freshmen enrolled in Fall 2020, 1,784 are from the United States. The top ten states of origin are Illinois (981), Indiana (91), Michigan (77), Wisconsin (69), California (56), Minnesota (53), Ohio (50), Texas (48), Missouri (25) and Florida (24).

According to NSLVE campus voting data, 56.4% of eligible students voted in 2016, and 42.2% of eligible students voted in 2018. Among eligible voters, 83.1% registered in 2016 and 81.9% in 2018. And of registered voters, 67.9% voted in 2016 and 51.5% voted in 2018.

### **Goals:**

Our campus democratic engagement goals are:

Short-term: Encourage and enable every student who is eligible and interested to register to vote and 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 -- in spite of the obstacles caused by the pandemic. Long-term: Return to in-person assistance along the Ask Every Student model, still based in classrooms and also the Student Center, because we don't have an orientation model that works for this purpose.

### **Strategy:**

Our campus has used the following strategies and organized the following events:

Classroom voter registration presentations (in-person in Fall 2019 and early Spring 2020; virtual visits during the pandemic).

In addition to in-class voter education and registration, we've managed a lively Instagram campaign, partnerships with the library, outreach from academic affairs to faculty and from the registrar to students, tabling the Student Center, participation in the library's National Voter Registration Day programming, voter registration table at an exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Photography's "What Does Democracy Look Like?" exhibit (on campus).

### **NSLVE:**

Columbia College Chicago has authorized NSLVE.

**Evaluation:**

We will evaluate our action plan in the following ways:

This is something we lost with the move to remote classes. In Fall 2019 and early Spring 2020, we did in-person, on-paper voter registration and were able to keep a spreadsheet of all students reached, whether they registered, where they registered, etc. Because we are remote this semester, we aren't able to capture reliable data.

**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.