



**CAMPUS
DEMOCRACY
CHALLENGE**

**Columbia College Chicago 2022 Democratic Engagement Action Plan
Developed by: Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin**

Executive Summary:

Columbia Votes was created by Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin, a professor in the Communication Department, in 2019. It has been widely embraced by the administration, faculty, staff and students at Columbia College Chicago, and has grown from a volunteer effort to a funded program that is able to hire and train “voter registration geniuses” (VRGs) who help educate and motivate their peers about the power and importance of the youth vote, and then assist them in registering to vote.

Columbia Votes is now a module in all sections of "Big Chicago," a first-year, college-wide course, as well as a feature in “Introduction to Visual Culture” in the Design Department. In these courses, the VRGs provide follow the ask-every-student model to provide 50-state voter registration, motivation and education, and assist students who wish to vote back home with requesting VBM ballots. A peer-to-peer presentation is followed by assistance registering online or filling out the NVRA form. We provide photocopying of IDs and properly addressed envelopes and stamps for items that need to be mailed. This year, we are using Vote America as our online registration portal so that we will also have data about our effectiveness in advance of the NSLVE data.

In addition, there is 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, and monitors an email help line (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 in the dorms, during intermissions in student theater productions, and at college events with partner student organizations. We also have an active Instagram account @Columbia_Votes. Columbia Votes is promoted by the registrar. It is even mentioned in the college's Strategic Plan as a key feature of the college's commitment to civic engagement.

We will concentrate our efforts on the first 8 weeks of the semester because of the midterms. Our goal is to maximize the student vote in 2022 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.

Leadership:

Our leadership team includes:

Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin, the creator of Columbia Votes. Sharon is a professor of journalism in the Communication Department. The leadership team includes the college president's chief of staff, Laurent Pernot, who approves expenses (other than grant money from Students Learn Students Vote), and four to six student work aides (voter registration geniuses). The 2022 VRGs are Anna Busalacchi and Carolina Ayala (senior VRGs), and Ethan Alonzo, Francia Garcia Hernandez and Ricky Luoto (junior VRGs). We work closely with and value support from SLSV and the HE-SVE.

We work closely with several campus partners. Because of our academic partners who provide us access to Big Chicago and Intro to Visual Culture classes, we are embedded in the curriculum. We also partner with the Columbia College Chicago Library to run programs for special days, like National Voter Registration Day and Constitution Day. We partner with Residence Live to offer dorm-based events. We partner with Student Affairs to table at new student convocation. And we are beginning a new partnership this year with the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion that will allow us to team up with student organizations on mutually beneficial programs throughout the year.

Outside of our campus, we are active members of Students Learn Students Vote, where we are a Co-Designer Campus and share resources with other campuses. We have been paired with nearby Governors State University and are working closely with them as they create their voter-engagement and registration group. And Sharon serves on the Blue Ribbon Committee for Civic Influencers.

Sharon is currently working on a succession plan—something she will have more time to dedicate to after the midterm elections. She wants to house Columbia Votes in one of the campus offices—perhaps the Office of Community Partnerships or the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (we have no Civic Engagement office).

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:

- A welcome letter from the Registrar that invites students to register to vote and explains what Columbia Votes is and how to engage with it.
- Class visits to every section of Big Chicago, a required first-year course, and Intro to Visual Culture, a multi-section course where we catch many transfer students.
- A module on Canvas (our learning management system) that professors in other courses can suggest or require their students engage with.
- A table at the Student Center and an email help line (vote@colum.edu)
- Events at the dorms and at the library, and pop-ups during intermissions at on-campus theater intermissions.
- A lively Instagram account that follows and is followed by other student organizations as well as individual students.
- Partnering with other student organizations on events.

In 2022, Sharon was the inaugural winner of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Teaching Activism Award, and her work with Columbia Votes was specifically mentioned when the Provost announced the award.

Landscape:

Columbia College Chicago's mission states that it "conducts education in close relationship to a vital urban reality and serves an important civic purpose by active engagement in the life and culture of the city of Chicago." It is an unabashedly social-justice oriented campus, where activism and community engagement are encouraged and celebrated in the curriculum and campus events. A few examples:

- The school's Collective Impact Series explores community engagement and social justice in art-making through a series of visiting artists and performers.
- This summer, the school is offering a Summer Social Justice Institute and a course called Social Justice, Creativity and Placemaking that focuses on artmaking and activism
- The course catalog is filled with courses that demonstrate a commitment to social justice, including "Documenting Social Injustice" and "Art and Activism Studio Project."
- Sharon created and taught a class in Spring 2022 called "Defending Democracy," about the history and present state of voter suppression and the fight for voting rights, and it filled immediately.
- The campus is deeply committed to DEI, and has provided anti-racism training for all faculty and staff.

Our campus demographics:

Total enrollment in Fall 2021 was 6,493 undergraduate and 243 graduate students. Undergraduates are 47% white non-Hispanic, 15% Black non-Hispanic, 24% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 5% multi-racial.

Our domestic students come from 49 states. Of the 1,696 freshmen enrolled in Fall 2021, the top ten states of origin are Illinois (895), Indiana (77), Michigan (72), Minnesota (66), Ohio (63), Wisconsin (59), California (52), Missouri (44), Texas (41) and Massachusetts (21).

Our campus voting data:

Before Columbia Votes, students were encouraged to register and vote in Chicago, but there were just a few in-person efforts to help them. The Student Government Association (SGA) did table in some campus buildings several times during election years, the Library offered a registration table twice a year, and the registrar sent out a letter to all in-coming students encouraging them to register to vote, but that was about it.

Columbia Votes aimed to make our approach to students systematic, inviting and 50-state, as described above.

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.

Goals:

Broadly speaking, 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.

This is how they can be expressed using the SMARTIE rubric:

Specific: We want to raise our midterm voting rate closer to our presidential election year voting rate. In 2018, only 42% of our students voted in the midterms, which was 14% lower than the 56% who voted in the 2016 presidential election. Having raised our 2020 voting rate to 71.8%, our goal is for our 2022 midterm election voting rate to be above 60%.

Measurable: This year, we aim to get data on our effectiveness from Vote America as well as from NSLVE.

Ambitious: Raising our midterm election voting rate by 18 percent is ambitious!

Realistic: I think it's also realistic, given our presence on campus since 2018 (which was before Columbia Votes launched) and our plans, as outlined above.

Timebound: This is just the plan for 2022. We will set a higher bar for the 2024 presidential election cycle.

Inclusive and Equitable: We were previously emphasizing freshmen; the addition of the Visual Culture class increases reach to transfer students. And our emphasis on partnering with student organizations increases our personal outreach to a variety of specific groups of students.

Through curriculum-based, dorm-based and organization-based events and outreach, we seek to make sure we are actively inviting all students into the voting process.

Strategy:

We are implementing the following strategies in Fall 2022, all of which are described in detail above:

- Classroom voter education, motivation and registration presentations in Big Chicago and Intro to Visual Culture classes
- Canvas module replicating this available to all professors to incorporate into their classes
- Intranet site with a virtual version of Columbia Votes
- 24/7 email help line
- Tabling the Student Center
- Participation in the campus library's National Voter Registration Day and Constitution Day programming
- Voter registration tables at scheduled dorm events and pop-up theater intermissions
- Instagram campaign
- Partnerships with student organizations
- Outreach from academic affairs to faculty and from the registrar to students

Long term, this adds to our campus culture of activism and engagement. After the 2020 election, Columbia Votes continued its work, creating voting guides for disabled voters, and continuing to engage students with the importance of voting. We aim to do the same after the midterms. We'll use Spring 2023 to build more alliances on campus, and return to our intense registration activities in Fall 2023.

Reporting:

Columbia College Chicago has authorized NSLVE.

- 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.

We are happy with ALL IN posting them, too.

This year, we are also going to use Vote America's tools when we help students register to vote online, which will provide them with reminders when it is time to request a VBM ballot, mail in a ballot and vote in person.

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 (the latter through the Vote America tool). Sharon and the

VRGs will analyze it, and we may ask the Office of Institutional Effectiveness if they can take a look and share their insights with us, too.