

Dickinson College

Dickinson Votes

Civic Learning & Engagement Campus Action Plan 2020

May 31, 2020

Executive Summary

Dickinson College provides a useful, innovative, and interdisciplinary education in the liberal arts and sciences to prepare students to lead rich and fulfilling lives of engaged global citizenship, working for the common good. In keeping with this core mission, Dickinson has long fostered meaningful civic engagement including encouraging participation in elections.

Dickinson Votes, a volunteer, non-partisan group of students, staff, and faculty at Dickinson College, is dedicated to educating all members of the Dickinson community about voting and enabling voters to participate in local, state, and federal elections in Pennsylvania.

While Dickinson has participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) since 2012, in recent years Dickinson Votes has organized additional resources to encourage voter education, registration and participation in all Pennsylvania elections. Data from NSLVE has confirmed that Dickinson's efforts have improved voter participation and identified areas for action.

While preparing for elections held in 2020, Dickinson Votes prepared this Action Plan to coordinate efforts toward the following goals.

Dickinson Votes: Goals for 2020

1. Educate the Dickinson community about voting and voter participation in Pennsylvania.
2. Increase the voter registration rate among Dickinson students compared to 2018 and 2016.
3. Increase the voter participation rate among Dickinson students compared to 2016.
4. Bring additional student, staff, and faculty representatives to join Dickinson Votes as volunteers.
5. Provide additional resources to enable students studying off-campus to vote by mail.

For each of these goals, Dickinson Votes planned a series of specific actions beginning in 2018 and 2019. This Action Plan describes the status of these actions, and lays out work remaining to be done after July 1, 2020 in preparation for Election Day, November 3, 2020.

1. Educate the Dickinson Community about voting and voter participation in Pennsylvania.

Dickinson College, founded for the purpose of preparing students for lives of engaged citizenship, has long encouraged voter participation. In recent years, the college has rededicated itself to the priority of voter education and registration, while expanding efforts to turn out student voters during elections.

Since 2010, Dickinson has:

- a) Established the Dickinson Votes Committee, an all-volunteer group of students, faculty, and staff, that coordinates efforts across the campus.
- b) Partnered with local, county, and state agencies to expand opportunities for voter education and participation.
- c) Joined with local, regional, and national campaigns to share resources and coordinate efforts around student voting.
- d) Developed materials and marshaled resources specific to Dickinson's unique challenges, especially around international students and students studying overseas.
- e) Coordinated expanded programs in classrooms, residence halls, study abroad, and new student orientations providing voter education and registration.
- f) Published and distributed non-partisan information about voting and elections.
- g) Hosted a series of events for voter education including candidates' forums, debates, issue-focused discussions, and ballot machine demonstrations.

This section briefly describes each of these efforts, while later sections in the report expands upon specifics for efforts relevant to that section.

- a) Established the Dickinson Votes Committee, an all-volunteer group of students, faculty, and staff, that coordinates efforts across the campus.

Dickinson students, faculty, and staff began informally expanding efforts to educate and register voters before the 2010 elections. The work was led by student organizers in the College Democrats and Republicans. This work continued in the following years, and by 2015 the Dickinson Votes Committee was established and began operating, with institutional support in the Student Leadership and Campus Engagement (SLCE) office. The group included students in the student Democratic and Republican clubs, many other student organizations, faculty from several academic departments, and staff from the Student Life, Library and Information Services, and Academic Program divisions.

In 2018, the Center for Civic Learning and Action (CCLA) was established at Dickinson College. Among its many initiatives, this new center provides leadership and resources with Dickinson Votes for voter education and participation.

For example, in 2019, CCLA coordinated with Dickinson Votes to organize volunteers during voter registration drives and on Election Day in November. In 2020, CCLA designed and launched the Dickinson Votes webpage to include a variety of resources for Dickinson Voters. This webpage became even more vital immediately after launching, as the novel coronavirus pandemic led to most Dickinson students leaving campus before they could cast ballots in the 2020 Primary Elections. The CCLA webpage became a central hub for information and resources enabling Dickinson voters to participate in the election by mail.

Moving forward in 2020 and beyond, CCLA and Dickinson Votes will continue with outreach to local, regional, state, and national initiatives for voter services. CCLA has become Dickinson's primary point of contact for partnerships with various projects and agencies, including the All-In Democracy Challenge and more. CCLA and Dickinson Votes will develop additional resources, while maintaining and updating existing voter education, registration, and participation guidance.

Dickinson Votes developed strategies from 2015 until the present to enable more voter registration through a series of coordinated actions through 2020. First, a new first-year student orientation (held in the summer) module was created to engage incoming students via the first-year mentor program. Second, monthly voter registration drives were held on the first Tuesday of each month during the academic year, with SLCE providing logistics, leadership, and resources (including postage). Third, a classroom registration drive was established to engage faculty volunteers with educating and registering students in their own classrooms, with presentations by student and faculty members of Dickinson Votes. Fourth, the Center for Global Study and Engagement began coordinating with Dickinson campuses overseas to ensure voter education, registration, and access for students studying abroad. Fifth, Dickinson Votes expanded outreach to the Cumberland County Election Bureau, ensuring access for Dickinson student voters in part by coordinating a shift in voter registration procedures to enable Dickinson student voters to cast ballots in a polling place significantly closer to campus beginning with the 2019 General Election. Moving forward, the Dickinson Votes strategic plan includes expanding all five of these existing priorities, while adding new efforts toward enabling vote-by-mail / absentee voting, additional resources for students studying off campus and while not in residence in Carlisle, and expanding the membership of Dickinson Votes to include additional members of the community that are currently underrepresented on the committee.

b) Partnership with local, county, and state government agencies

Dickinson College has a longstanding relationships with many local, county, and state government agencies and offices related to civic engagement, participation, and voting. These include partnerships with the Carlisle Borough, the Carlisle Borough Council, the Cumberland County Commission and Cumberland County Bureau of Elections, the Pennsylvania Office of the Governor, and the Pennsylvania Secretary of State. In recent years, the Dickinson Votes Committee has undertaken a series of initiatives in partnership with these government agencies and public offices aimed at improving access to voting for members of the Dickinson community.

In 2019, Dickinson Votes worked to coordinate moving the polling place for Dickinson students registered on campus through contacts and logistical coordination with the Cumberland County Bureau of Elections. This enabled moving the polling place from Grace Baptist Church (777 W North St, about 1 mile from the center of campus) to the Carlisle United Methodist Church (45 S West St, about 100 yards from the center of campus). This new location greatly improved access on Election Day, because the older location represented an impediment to voting due to the long walk from campus. In the past, Dickinson Votes provided shuttle service using vans, requiring a team of volunteer drivers and budgeting for the use of the vehicles. Beginning in 2019, most Dickinson students were able to vote simply by walking across the street from the main academic quad.

In 2018, Dickinson Votes contacted the Pennsylvania Governor's Office and Secretary of State to set up a public demonstration site on the Dickinson College campus. That year, Dickinson provided the space for one of the Commonwealth's open sessions for educating the public on the options for new voting machines planned for use beginning in 2019.

Moving forward, Dickinson will continue to maintain and expand these partnerships, looking for ways to improve access to voting to Dickinson voters.

c) Joined with local, regional, and national campaigns to share resources and coordinate efforts around student voting.

Dickinson partners with a wide range of organizations and campaigns in its various efforts to improve access to elections and voting. Among these partnerships are the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, and various partnerships with fellow liberal arts colleges and universities in and around our region. These partnerships and collaborations have enabled Dickinson to develop new resources, strategies, and set ambitious goals for improving student voting.

d) Developed materials and marshaled resources specific to Dickinson's unique challenges, especially around international students and students studying overseas.

Dickinson College is a national leader in study abroad, and a large proportion of our students are studying away from the Carlisle campus each semester. Dickinson has several campuses around the world, and it partners with even more universities, colleges, and study abroad partners in the U.S. and beyond.

One of Dickinson's unique challenges in expanding student voting involves ensuring that students studying abroad have the resources and education they need to cast ballots while away from their Carlisle home. In 2018, Dickinson Votes began a new partnership with Dickinson's Center for Global Study and Engagement. Through this partnership, new resources have been made available to directors of Dickinson's overseas campuses, and new pre-departure orientation materials have been given directly to students. Work is underway to expand these resources and practices to additional campuses and programs. The goal is to ensure that every Dickinson student studying abroad knows where, when, how, and why to vote.

Additional details appear in Part 5 of this Action Plan.

- e) Coordinated expanded programs in classrooms, residence halls, study abroad, and new student orientations providing voter education and registration.

Beginning early in the 2010s, Dickinson began providing incoming students with voter registration forms during summer orientation. From those early efforts, a campus-wide set of programs for voter registration, education, and participation has emerged with the launch of Dickinson Votes Committee in the middle of the decade.

The Student Leadership and Campus Engagement (SLCE) office has provided leadership, support, and resources to enable a continuously expanding voter registration effort. From orientation, to student organizations, to campus events, SLCE and various other groups on campus have continued to provide voter support. In 2019, this culminated with a successful "chalk the walk" effort to point student voters to the new polling place just across the street from the campus.

In 2019 and 2020, Dickinson Votes organized faculty volunteers from across the college to host in-class voter education and registration drives. These fifteen minute sessions provided all Dickinson students—including international and non-traditional students—with educational materials about civics, focused on the history and current shape of elections in the U.S. and Pennsylvania. Those students who choose to register to vote can do so during that in-class session. This initiative followed research published in academic journals that in-class voter registration sessions at the college level are effective at improving voter participation.

- f) Published and distributed non-partisan information about voting and elections.

Dickinson Votes has committed to providing non-partisan information about voting and elections for each election held in Carlisle. The information provided includes sample ballots, lists of candidates and issues on the ballot, links to resources from trusted non-partisan sources (like the League of Women Voters), and more. These materials are distributed during events and on the Dickinson Votes website.

Dickinson's Waidner-Spahr Library developed a wide range of informational materials which are presented in various formats across the library. The library has maintained a voter information area, prominently displayed near the main entrance. The library's website also has a variety of links and information customized for Dickinson Voters.

In the future, Dickinson Votes intends to allow Dickinson voters to opt-in to receiving direct messages from Dickinson Votes with these kinds of informational materials.

- g) Hosted a series of events for voter education including candidates' forums, debates, issue-focused discussions, and ballot machine demonstrations.

Every year, Dickinson hosts a wide range of events open to the public that are valuable for voters and non-voters interested in civic engagement. In recent years, these have included candidate forums, debates, panel discussions, lectures, and demonstrations of election technology and more. Many of these events are hosted by student organizations, academic departments, and the Clarke Forum on Contemporary Issues. In the future, Dickinson Votes plans to co-host additional events of this nature.

2. Increase the voter registration rate among Dickinson students compared to 2018 and 2016.

Dickinson College has a longstanding goal to improve voter participation. As part of that effort, Dickinson has collected data on student voting in several ways. The college became an early participant in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), which provided its most recent Campus Report on voter participation at Dickinson in September 2019. That report indicated that in the November 2018 General Election, 83.4% of eligible Dickinson students registered to vote, and 42.2% of those students cast a ballot. (More details about the voting rate appears in Part 3 of this Action Plan.) These voter registration numbers compared favorably to the November 2014 General Election (another “midterm” election), when the registration rate was only 64.9%. This means that between 2014 and 2018, Dickinson’s voter registration rate improved by 18.5%.

Despite these encouraging developments, Dickinson’s voter registration rate still has significant room for improvement. In 2018, the college had about 2,000 eligible voters, and about 1,670 registered. We estimate that the size of the student body was a bit smaller by the end of 2019, and we expect that the registration rate may have dipped due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic that caused most students to leave campus by the end of March 2020.

Voter registration, of course, is a continuous challenge for colleges, as the student population changes each semester. The Dickinson Votes Committee has developed a robust series of activities throughout the calendar year to ensure that all Dickinson students know how and why to register, and to enable all eligible students to register to vote.

With the leadership and support of the Student Leadership and Campus Engagement (SLCE) office, by 2015, Dickinson Votes created a streamlined process for Dickinson students to register to vote. First, in coordination with the Cumberland County Bureau of Elections, Dickinson students can use a single registration address to ensure that all students (regardless of physical residence location) vote at the same polling place. This significantly improves voter access and turnout by reducing confusion that would be caused by having roughly half of our students voting at a different polling place. Second, in coordination with the Dickinson Mail Services, students receive all voter information by mail at their regular Dickinson mailing address. This enables vote-by-mail / absentee voting, and it ensures that students receive all election mail from the county and from candidates for office. Third, SLCE provides paid postage and a single point of collection for voter registration forms. This eliminates a barrier to registration (the cost and logistics of postage), and ensures that Dickinson student registration forms are handled securely, and this allows students to register even on the final deadline because SLCE can hand-deliver registration forms to the county’s elections office. This also provides a future capability to allow students to opt-in to additional Dickinson Votes messages. Finally, Dickinson Votes has attempted to coordinate registration efforts by third parties by ensuring that they use the Dickinson mailing and registration addresses coordinated with the county Bureau of Elections.

Dickinson Votes began annual voter registration and voter education during the summer new student orientation sessions. Then, in 2016, Dickinson Votes began monthly voter registration drives held on Britton Plaza and the Holland Union Building, major event and activities spaces for students. Around that time, the Waidner-Spahr library provided voter registration forms and resources near

the entrance to the main library. In 2019, Dickinson Votes began a massive effort to coordinate in-class voter education and registration sessions with volunteer faculty, staff, and students.

In Fall 2020, if Dickinson students have returned to campus in large numbers despite the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic, Dickinson Votes plans to expand to weekly voter registration drives in September and October 2020. In-class voter education and registration sessions will take place in September and October 2020, until the Pennsylvania registration deadline. Dickinson Votes will continue to coordinate with the Center for Global Study and Engagement (CGSE), even as study abroad locations shift during the Fall 2020 semester, to ensure that Dickinson students studying off campus have the opportunity to register and vote in the November 2020 General Election.

As Fall 2020 plans during the coronavirus pandemic unfold, Dickinson Votes will work with SLCE, CGSE, and other campus departments to provide all students studying at Dickinson through distance learning with resources to register to vote in the November 2020 General Election. The Dickinson Votes webpage will also continue to serve as a clearinghouse for updates on how Dickinson students can register to vote.

3. Increase the voter participation rate among Dickinson students compared to 2016.

- Over the past four years, we have become more aware of the existing voter registration and participation rates of students on campus because of the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data. In our voter registration classroom visits, we show this data to students as a way to demonstrate to them that while our registration rates are high, we still have quite a bit of room to grow with respect to participation rates. Because of the uncertainty of in-person instruction in the fall, Dickinson Votes will need to be flexible with its programming related to increasing the participation rate among students. If we have some or all of our students on campus in the fall, we plan promote voter education and participation by co-hosting events such as debate watch parties. Additionally, we are sometimes able to host actual debates on campus, such as the one in spring 2019 we hosted for the Democratic primary Cumberland County, PA County Commissioner's race. If permitted to gather in larger groups, we will look for these kinds of opportunities for fall 2020. If we do not have all our students on campus in the fall, we will need to make better use of social media and host voter registration and education events virtually.
- One development that is encouraging, particularly for when students are able to return to campus is that the polling place where students vote has been moved literally across the street from campus, whereas before it was several blocks from the main academic buildings. We already saw a benefit from this move in our 2019 voter participation rates as compared to our 2015 rates and we expect that voter mobilization efforts will be significantly easier now that we do not need to coordinate shuttles but can use sidewalk chalk directing students to the polling place – something that was quite successful in 2019. Finally, our Dickinson Votes sticker campaign has been well-received by students. We began handing out stickers to students who voted in person in Carlisle to in fall 2018. We continued doing so in fall 2019 and saw that a number of students actually mentioned the stickers and asked what they needed to do to get one. We aim to continue this practice going forward and explore options related to 1) making the stickers water-proof and therefore able to be put on water bottles, and/or 2) putting the year and election on the stickers to make them more “collectable”.

4. Bring additional student, staff, and faculty representatives to join Dickinson Votes as volunteers.

- The breadth of individuals currently engaged with Dickinson Votes is a strength. We have students on our committee who are part of partisan organizations on campus (College Democrats and College Republicans) as well as students who are not affiliated with partisan groups, but other groups such as AAUW. We have sought out students affiliated with Student Senate as well. In terms of employees, we have representatives from the faculty, Student Leadership and Campus Engagement, the Center for Civic Learning and Action, the Center for Global Student Engagement, and the Library. We do not feel as though there are significant holes in terms of who is at the table. Our plan for next academic year, however, is to increase student engagement with Dickinson Votes and empower student to feel more ownership over the group. We also continue to work to identify funding sources for the work we are doing. Student Life has paid for postage for voter registration and absentee ballots, but we do not have a reliable funding stream, which limits our ability to plan and purchase things in advance of registration and mobilization drives.
- In spring 2020 we increased our voter registration efforts by asking faculty members to invite us into their classrooms, which (prior to the move to remote learning) was quite successful. In fall 2020, we aim to increase these efforts. We also aim to consider more concrete ways individual faculty members can play a role, especially in voter turnout, such as walking students to the polls at the conclusion of classes.
- Finally, we aim to increase our social media capacity in fall 2020. To date, we have relied on emails from the President's Office to students, but we have done very little with student-to-student communication. We aim to recruit students to Dickinson Votes who have particular interest and expertise in this area.

5. Provide additional resources to enable students studying off-campus to vote by mail.

- Because of the uncertainty surrounding in-person education on college campuses due to COVID-19, enabling students to vote by mail is of the utmost importance. In October 2019, the PA legislature passed a bill, signed by Governor Wolf, allowing all Pennsylvania voters to vote by mail. When Dickinson canceled in-person education in March 2020, and the PA primary date was moved back to June 2, 2020, Dickinson Votes responded by putting information on our website (www.dickinson.edu/votes) walking students through the process of requesting a mail-in ballot via a 3-minute video. Two emails informing students of the presence of information were sent out: one by Student Senate, and the second by President Ensign. If all students are not present on campus in fall 2020 (and even if they are with strict social distancing guidelines) Dickinson Votes will redouble our efforts to communicate with students about how to register to vote as well as request a mail-in ballot and vote by mail.
- Unfortunately, all of Dickinson's study abroad programs are canceled for fall 2020, but prior to that decision, Dickinson Votes had begun making plans about how to engage with students going abroad encouraging them to vote absentee. To date, we did not have much institutional support for students abroad and simply left it to them to request their absentee ballots from their study abroad sites. Recent efforts, which will be expanded in future years, include working with the Center for Global Study and Engagement to provide voter education and registration information during the mandatory pre-departure meeting held for all students. We also began having conversations with Dickinson faculty who direct specific programs, focusing first on those programs with reliable mail service and with faculty directors who ***. We expect to increase our outreach to directors of study abroad programs who are not Dickinson faculty members going forward.