

# Dickinson

Campus Action Plan  
for  
Voter Registration, Education, & Engagement  
2022-2023



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

While preparing for general and primary elections held in 2021-2022, Dickinson Votes and the Voter Engagement Coordinator updated their existing Action Plan to coordinate efforts toward the following goals through the 2022 election.

### Dickinson Votes: Goals for 2022-2023

1. Educate the Dickinson community about voting and voter participation in Pennsylvania.
2. Increase voter registration rate among Dickinson students compared to 2018 and 2020 with particular emphasis on racial and ethnic groups that voted at lower rates than the overall campus in 2020.
3. Increase the voter participation rate among Dickinson students compared to 2020 with particular emphasis on racial and ethnic groups that voted at lower rates than the overall campus in 2020.
4. Recruit, train, and engage new student, staff, and faculty representatives in Dickinson Votes initiatives.
5. Provide additional resources to enable and encourage voting by mail among the substantial number of students studying off-campus during elections.
6. Increase our equity and inclusivity efforts by building stronger relationships with Dickinson's Greek Life and Athletics organizations.

The Action Plan that follows describes the status of these actions and lays out key elements of our voter engagement strategy for 2022-2023 both on Dickinson's main campus and in its several study abroad locations.

## Leadership

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 from 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 from the Student Leadership and Campus Engagement (SLCE) office. The group included students from many student organizations, faculty from several academic departments, and staff from the Student Life, Library and Information Services, and Academic Program divisions. During the 2021-2022 academic year Dickinson Votes built on this foundation to develop a stronger relationship with the relatively new Center for Civic Learning & Action (CCLA) at Dickinson and the college's renewed commitment to civic engagement as a pillar of the Dickinson experience. The current Dickinson Votes committee consists of the following individuals who have participated directly and/or supported the strategies and planning outlined in this document:

### Faculty:

- Sarah Niebler, Associate Professor of Political Science (Faculty Advisor)
- Erik Love, Associate Professor of Sociology
- Colin Rathbun, Assistant Professor of Chemistry
- Adeline Soldin, Associate Professor of French
- Noreen Lape, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and Director of the Writing Program

### Students:

- Rachel Pistol '25 (Voter Engagement Coordinator)
- Carrie Becher '23
- Walker Kmetz '25
- Willow Palmer '25 (SAAC Representative)
- Erin Zacks '25
- Sloane Butler '23
- Gabriel Carrillo '25

### Staff:

- Gary Kirk, Associate Provost and Executive Director of CCLA and the Clarke Forum for Contemporary Issues
- Meta Bowman, Program Coordinator for CCLA
- Laura Megivern, Director of Community Engagement
- Maureen O'Brien Dermott, Associate Director of Access and Building Services
- Marissa Mitchell, Associate Director of Education Abroad
- Todd Nordgren, Director of LGBTQ Services

In 2021, CCLA supported the creation of a paid student Voter Engagement Coordinator for Dickinson Votes. The position works closely with the faculty advisor from the Dickinson Votes committee and the associate provost, Gary Kirk. The Dickinson Voter Engagement Coordinator is charged with developing and leading campaigns and events to increase voter engagement at Dickinson College. In coordination with Dickinson Votes, the coordinator serves the campus by enhancing nonpartisan efforts related to voter education, voter registration, and voter turnout. The coordinator serves as a primary point of contact for community, regional, state, and national voter engagement networks and initiatives. This

position was established to provide stable student leadership throughout the school year and to further establish the student-directed efforts of Dickinson Votes. The coordinator also recruits students from all class years for Dickinson Votes to ensure that the transitions into new school years and new coordinators are seamless. Recruitment occurs at first-year orientation, Dickinson Votes classroom visits, and semesterly activities fairs.

Since the creation of this position, the coordinator has designed and planned events to engage campus constituents in all aspects of voting, primarily focusing on voter registration and voting participation. The coordinator has also successfully disseminated accurate and timely information about local, state, and national elections, registration deadlines, and voting procedures on social media and at in-person events.

In the 2022-2023 academic year, the Dickinson Votes committee has made a concerted effort to ensure diversity within the committee. Students on the committee have reached out to groups on campus that serve students who are underrepresented in our NSLVE report, notably people of color, male students, and STEM and business majors. Dickinson Votes has successfully partnered with the Upsilon Delta chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., a historically Black sorority, to host a voter registration drive in Britton Plaza, the center of campus. Efforts are also being made to partner with MANDatory, an academic enrichment group for men of color, and Sigma Lambda Beta, the historically Latino fraternity on campus. Dickinson Votes established a connection with the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) to begin working with the athletics department, a large group within the community, and we are creating a strong partnership with coaches and student athlete ambassadors to encourage all athletes on campus to engage with elections. Dickinson Votes has also previously piloted joint programs with Greek organizations. We believe these partnerships hold great potential in reaching groups of students who have participated in voting at lower rates than the broader campus population. The current Dickinson Votes Coordinator is a member of a sorority with ties to Panhellenic organizations and the larger Greek Life presence on campus, which has aided the outreach process.

## **Commitment**

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 priorities of voter education and registration, while expanding efforts to turn out student voters during elections.

In 2019, the Center for Civic Learning and Action was established at Dickinson College. Among its many initiatives, this new center provides leadership and resources for Dickinson Votes related to voter education and participation. In 2020, CCLA supported the design and launch of the Dickinson Votes webpage to include a variety of resources for Dickinson voters. This webpage became even more vital immediately after launching, as the COVID-19 pandemic led most Dickinson students to leave campus before they could cast ballots in the 2020 Primary Elections. The webpage became a central hub for information and resources enabling Dickinson voters to participate in the election by mail. Now, it serves as a resource for students to know when and where to vote, along with nonpartisan information about what is on the ballot each election.

Dickinson Votes works with several college offices in a joint effort to encourage civic involvement. The committee's connections with Student Leadership & Campus Engagement (SLCE), the library, and the President's office has greatly boosted our voter registration and action efforts. Most recently, Dickinson Votes partnered with the President's office and WDCV, the college radio station, for National Voter Registration Day. Students from Dickinson Votes led the registration effort while President John E. Jones spoke to the student body to encourage voting. The President's office will also be working with Dickinson Votes on election day to encourage students to vote, as well as providing information about

voter intimidation and the election hotline. President Jones has also signed the Higher Education Presidential Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation to further cement his support of and partnership with Dickinson Votes.

Due to the coordinated effort between CCLA and Dickinson Votes, we were able to successfully register over 200 Dickinson students from different class years and disciplines throughout the 2022 fall semester.

## **Landscape**

Dickinson College has had a rapidly improving voting record in recent years. In 2018, the last election cycle before Dickinson Votes had the support of CCLA, Dickinson had a turnout rate of 49%. With the efforts of CCLA and online outreach during COVID shutdowns, Dickinson was able to raise its turnout rate to 85%, earning the Highest Voter Turnout Award and Highest Voter Registration Award of four-year institutions from the Pennsylvania Department of State, as well as a Platinum Award (80-90% Voting Rate) from the ALL IN: Campus Democracy Challenge. While part of the increase in voter turnout is undoubtedly due to the presidential election as opposed to a midterm, Dickinson Votes still saw a marked increase in both registration and turnout, especially with most of the student body being remote. This year, the committee expects to see a similar turnout rate as registrations have remained steady.

One challenge that Dickinson Votes has faced is differential voter turnout by race, major/field of study, and gender. In 2020, White students at Dickinson had a turnout rate of 89% while Black and Hispanic students had rates of 70% and 76% respectively. While these are still better than the national average, Dickinson Votes aims for all racial groups to fully participate in each election. To help boost the registration and turnout rates for students of color on campus, Dickinson Votes has made efforts to partner with diverse groups on campus, as stated earlier in the leadership section. Dickinson Votes seeks to raise these turnout rates to match those of White students and boost the overall rate.

Additionally, female students voted at a higher rate (79%) in 2020 than male students (68%). Dickinson Votes has made an effort to reach out to more male students and to have more male involvement in the committee to encourage more men to register and vote. There are also large gaps between academic departments, with computer science majors (33%), math majors (42%), and international business and management majors (66%) voting far below our general turnout rate. While several students on the Dickinson Votes committee are political science majors, a department with an 89% turnout rate, both the students and faculty of Dickinson Votes have reached out to other departments to boost voter awareness with these students. Educational classroom visits have aided in this process as a number of professors in these departments requested early-Fall class presents by a Dickinson Votes committee member, diversifying outreach.

## **Goals**

Since both the voter registration and turnout rates have significantly improved over the years, Dickinson Votes has set ambitious goals for the 2022 midterm elections and beyond. Registration data and outreach efforts in the 2022 fall semester have asserted that we can be confident in the trajectory of our goals. Outside of the 2022 midterm and other future elections, Dickinson Votes has also set goals for community engagement and representation efforts.

Goals for voter participation include:

- Increasing the overall student voting rate to 90%

- While this is only an increase of 5 points, Dickinson Votes acknowledges that midterms generally have lower turnout than presidential elections and thus, there is a different baseline for voter participation than in 2020
- Increasing voter turnout for Black and Hispanic students by 10% each
  - This includes facilitating a discussion group with Black and Hispanic students to discuss concerns over voting and voter intimidation, in an effort to create a support system that allows these students to feel comfortable at the polls
- Encouraging academic departments, especially those with low voter turnouts, to vote together as a social event
  - Emails will be sent out to each department chair encouraging professors to either walk with their classes to the polls, or for the whole department to go, dependent on number of students
- Encouraging athletic teams to walk together to the polls to vote as a group activity
  - The SAAC representative will oversee each team in their efforts to organize to vote
- Engaging with the Center for Global Study and Engagement (CGSE) to ensure the timely receipt of absentee ballots for students studying abroad
  - 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.
  - Dickinson Votes' partnership with CGSE began in 2018 and has included voter education information and absentee request forms in the pre-departure orientation packet
  - Dickinson Votes will continue and enhance this partnership to ensure that every Dickinson student studying abroad knows where, when, how, and why to vote.

Goals for voter education include:

- Continuing to utilize the CCLA and Dickinson Votes websites to disseminate information about the candidates on the ballot in each election
  - Dickinson Votes will continue to use nonpartisan sources such as the League of Women Voters while also searching for valuable supplements when information is lacking
- Handing out cards on election day with ID requirement information and the PA election hotline to protect students from voter misinformation and voter intimidation
  - This will also ensure that students who feel unsafe going to the polls will have the security of knowing how to handle potential issues when voting
- Utilizing as many mediums as possible to disseminate information on upcoming elections and the candidates who are running
  - This includes tabling, Instagram, a school-wide email, the school newspaper, etc.
- Increasing outreach and education in the larger Carlisle community by attending community events
  - In the 2021-2022 academic year, Dickinson Votes attended the Black Cultural Festival, hosted by Hope Station, a local nonprofit, and the Northside Ride, an annual community biking event
  - At both events, Dickinson Votes provided voter registration forms and information about upcoming elections. Dickinson Votes hopes to continue this both as a means of increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and to also boost registration in Carlisle
- Continuing to emphasize the ease of voting in person while also making absentee voting a readily available option
  - With the local polling place directly across the street from campus, Dickinson Votes aims to emphasize the opportunity to vote in person, since this aids in voting as a social event, which has been shown to boost college voting rates

- Absentee voting will also be supported as a voting option, especially towards students who wish to remain registered in their hometowns

Goals for outreach and partnership include:

- Continuing and enhancing Dickinson's relationship with government agencies to the state level to evoke community engagement and resources for students and the community
  - These include partnerships with the Borough of Carlisle administration and borough council, the Cumberland County Commissioners 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 agencies and public offices aimed at improving access to voting for members of the Dickinson community
  - Enhancing these relationships ensures that Dickinson will always have support at the government level in voter education and participation efforts
- Creating a pipeline of Dickinson Votes volunteers who are prepared to take on the responsibilities of Voter Engagement Coordinator
  - Due to the number of students who study abroad at Dickinson, turnover is even more common, and a strong group of underclassmen volunteers would ensure that someone could become Voter Engagement Coordinator when the current person studies abroad or graduates
  - A diverse group of volunteers also ensures that the needs of every student can be addressed by the Voter Engagement Coordinator and several groups on campus will be represented, even if only one person holds the official title
  - This includes also recruiting faculty and students from underrepresented disciplines like biology, business, and math
- Continuing to utilize and enhance Dickinson's partnerships with voting organizations
  - Dickinson is already partnered with the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, and with liberal arts colleges and universities in and around the region. These partnerships and collaborations have enabled Dickinson to develop new resources and strategies for improving student voting
- Communicating Dickinson's commitment to full student voting participation
  - This will be done through the Dickinson Votes website and the CCLA Instagram
  - Dickinson Votes will also apply to the Campus Vote Project & NASPA Voter-Friendly Campus designation program
  - Sharing NSLVE data and plans for future engagement strategies will likely encourage students to volunteer with Dickinson Votes and generally increase engagement
- Targeting classroom visits towards majors that are underrepresented in the NSLVE data
  - Classroom visits are 10–15-minute presentations done by Dickinson Votes volunteers that highlight the need to vote, the ease of voting across the street from campus, the NSLVE data that demonstrates Dickinson students' commitment to civic engagement, and walks students through the process of filling out a voter registration form while providing the opportunity to register during the presentation
  - Targeting majors such as biology, business, and math also involves reaching out to professors in those departments and encouraging them to collaborate with Dickinson Votes to close the voting gap
- Holding Dickinson Votes information sessions at the beginning of each semester to encourage students, faculty, and staff to get involved

- These information sessions would include a demonstration of a classroom visit, how to walk someone through registering to vote, and what the goals of Dickinson Votes are and how the committee plans to achieve them
- All would be welcome at these information sessions, but recruitment would be done as necessary to encourage men, people of color, and underrepresented disciplines to join the committee
- For faculty, these sessions would also have opportunities and guidance for putting civic engagement and voting into their curriculum

## Strategy

While many of Dickinson Votes' goal outlines include the preliminary strategies the committee plans to use, there are also some overarching ways that Dickinson Votes plans to achieve its goals. First is the continuous refinement of the Voter Engagement Coordinator position and reporting structure to maximize impact. The Voter Engagement Coordinator holds two positions simultaneously: a member of Dickinson Votes, which reports to the faculty advisor, and a student worker for CCLA, which reports to the director of CCLA. Dickinson Votes and CCLA have equally important but different responsibilities in Dickinson's civic engagement efforts, making it sometimes unclear on who to report to and which sector is the best to use to accomplish specific goals. The Voter Engagement Coordinator, together with Dickinson Votes and CCLA, will work to specify the responsibilities of each entity and create a more streamlined reporting process that ensures both Dickinson Votes and CCLA are kept up to date and can do their jobs to their best ability. This, in turn, will also aid in other goals as the Voter Engagement Coordinator will know more about how to do their job and can work better within the Dickinson Votes committee.

When disseminating information, whether on the importance of voting, candidates, ID requirements, or any other knowledge necessary for election day, Dickinson Votes has utilized many different mediums on campus including the school newspaper, social media, and mass emails. This year and moving forward, Dickinson Votes plans to evaluate the viewership and impact of each medium, as well as look at other options such as opt-in text messages, to ensure that everything that Dickinson Votes volunteers put time and effort into has the greatest impact it can on the student body.

Currently, Dickinson Votes has a Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) representative on the committee. This has been helpful in establishing connections with the student athlete population on campus and ensures that communities as large as this one are getting involved in civic engagement. Dickinson Votes aims to have more representatives of larger student communities, such as a Greek life representative, to build stronger connections with these important groups on campus. These representatives would not only oversee outreach, but also organizing events such as a friendly registration competition to challenge each team, sorority, etc. to get the most people in the organization registered to vote.

Currently, Dickinson Votes meetings operate on an as-needed basis. Moving forward, the committee aims to have more regular meetings to keep students, faculty, and staff engaged and to make sure that the committee is always working towards the goals laid out in this action plan. This would also allow for new voices in the committee to offer ideas and programs that could enhance the civic engagement process on campus. With regular meetings, Dickinson Votes hopes to keep up engagement, which would progress many goals stated above.

Dickinson Votes will also partner with other offices and departments on campus, such as the Clarke Forum for Contemporary Issues, Student Senate, and academic departments to co-host 2-3 events each semester on the importance of civic engagement. Since the 2022 spring semester, the Clarke Forum and

CCLA have been housed in one building with the same director, leading to easier and seamless partnerships that Dickinson Votes can use to increase outreach. Dickinson Votes also aims to partner with the Popel Shaw Center for Race and Ethnicity for voter education and engagement programs, including the discussion group for voting anxiety as a person of color. In partnering with the Popel Shaw Center, Dickinson Votes hopes to encourage greater voting participation in students of color while also supporting their unique needs at the polls.

None of this can be accomplished without the use of Dickinson's NSLVE data to inform strategies and goals for the future. Dickinson Votes has taken a great amount of guidance for the 2022 midterm election from the 2020 NSLVE data and the committee plans to use the 2022 data to inform future Dickinson Votes endeavors, including populations that must be given extra support and encouragement and monitoring progress made.

### **Reporting**

Dickinson College will continue to give ALL IN permission to post the campus action plan and NSLVE reports on the ALL IN website. Dickinson Votes believes that full transparency will only aid in getting the campus community involved and aid in achieving the goals set out in this action plan. The action plan and NSLVE data will also be made available on the Dickinson Votes website, and data from the 2022 NSLVE report will be published on the CCLA Instagram once it is made available. In classroom visits, presenters use the NSLVE data from 2020 to demonstrate Dickinson's commitment voter engagement, and Dickinson Votes aims to keep the campus community updated on the progress the committee has made. Since this data comes out over the summer, posters and other graphics around campus cannot be utilized. However, since CCLA and Dickinson Votes both have direct connections to senior administration, it is likely that the report can be sent in the "Dickinson Today" daily email and posted on the official college Instagram, as well as on the college website.

### **Evaluation**

This semester, Dickinson Votes has collected data on how many people registered at different events, such as through first-year orientation and National Voter Registration Day. Since this year was the first time voter registration forms were included in first-year orientation packets, Dickinson Votes will compare the impact of this strategy compared to general voter registration drives that have been done in the past. Dickinson Votes also plans on using the NSLVE data to gauge how many students who registered turned out to vote on election day or voted by mail.

Dickinson Votes also plans on using post-voting surveys on how students got information about election day, including whether they registered through a classroom visit, found nonpartisan candidate information through Dickinson Votes, and if they noticed the "chalk the walk" initiative in which Dickinson Votes volunteers use sidewalk chalk across campus to direct students towards the polling location.

This evaluation of Dickinson Votes' effectiveness will be used to revise and refine the goals and strategies laid out in this action plan to further the civic engagement of both the Dickinson community and the greater community of Carlisle for future years.