

Drexel University 2022 Action Plan
Developed by: Cara Scharf, Lindy Center for Civic Engagement

Executive Summary:

In 2020 Drexel University committed to a 5-year plan to deepen and expand its voter engagement work. The plan was developed collaboratively under the leadership of the Lindy Center for Civic Engagement and the Office of Government and Community Relations, and it has since been continued by an interdisciplinary working group called “Drexel Votes.” Through this group’s efforts to coordinate messaging and education across campus, as well as strong peer leadership efforts from students through the Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP – now Civic Influencers) and other student organizations, we were proud to see a significant jump in our 2020 voter rate (to 70.2% from 58.2% in 2016, as documented in our 2020 NSLVE report). To ensure we continue growing our voter numbers, even in non-Presidential elections, we plan to expand our support of student leaders who can provide education that meets students’ motivations and values as well as maintain cohesive, wide-spread messaging from the University to our campus community. We are particularly proud of Drexel’s Undergraduate Student Government Association (USGA) for advocating to the University to consider Election Day a holiday—in 2021 their efforts led to the University closing at 2 p.m. on November 2nd for Philadelphia’s municipal elections, plus they have plans to create a day of service on Election Day in future years. Visit <https://drexel.edu/ogcr/resources/drexel-votes/> for more information on Drexel’s voter engagement work.

Leadership:

Our leadership team includes the following: Voter engagement work on Drexel’s campus is led by the Lindy Center for Civic Engagement and the Office of Government and Community Relations. Cara Scharf, Assistant Director of Community-Based Learning in the Lindy Center and Brian Keech, Senior Vice President of Government and Community Relations are primary leaders of the Drexel Votes committee and drivers of the University’s strategy. Drexel Votes is comprised of over 30 individuals including representatives from University Communications, Student Life, multiple schools and colleges at Drexel, the Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships, and the Library. Student representation includes the Undergraduate Student Government Association (USGA) and Campus Election Engagement Fellows (CEEP). There are also various additional university staff and faculty who are interested in this important work. Visit <https://drexel.edu/ogcr/resources/drexel-votes/> for more information on the Drexel Votes committee on campus.

Commitment:

In 2010 during his first convocation speech, Drexel president John Fry expressed his aspiration for Drexel to be the “most civically engaged university in the country.” Since that time, the University has institutionalized this work through three major channels: academics, student and employee volunteerism, and strategic business practices that support our surrounding neighborhoods with economic, educational, and other resources. The University has been recognized as a leader amongst higher education institutions for our centralized, leadership-supported approach to civic engagement—one example is the CIVC 101 “Introduction to Civic Engagement” course that all Drexel undergraduate students are required to pass to graduate, and the presence of the Lindy Center for Civic Engagement that carries out both academic integration of civic engagement and co-curricular integration of civic

engagement into student experiences. A commitment to educating students about voting and encouraging full voter participation is inherent in this mission. We have signed the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. We commit to making sure all students are aware of elections and their ability and responsibility to participate, and have utilized the following methods to share this message: campus-wide emails, social media efforts, University intranet, peer-to-peer education from student leaders who are passionate about political engagement, and information disseminated through first-year gen-ed courses such as UNIV101 and the aforementioned CIVC101, which also acts a vehicle for inviting students to think critically about their role in making social change through many tools including political engagement.

Landscape:

We were extremely proud of our 2020 [National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement](#) (NSLVE) report which showed a large increase in all metrics that also exceeded averages at peer institutions:

- In 2020 - 83% of eligible students registered and 72% of eligible students voted.
- That is up from 2018 and 2016 numbers (in 2018 75.9% of eligible students registered and 43.6% of eligible students voted and in 2016 79.3% of eligible students registered & 58.2% of eligible students voted).

In terms of campus demographics, there are approximately 14,555 undergraduate students and 9,034 graduate and professional students on Drexel's campus, for a total of 23,589 students. Information about the makeup of the 2020 freshman class can be found here:

<https://drexel.edu/undergrad/apply/freshman-class/>, and we are aware that the 2021 incoming class has an increase of students from racial and ethnic minorities and students for whom they are the first in their family to go to college. Drexel consistently has a large international student population as well. All of these indicators mean that we will have to work hard to ensure educational efforts around voting include an acknowledgement of systemic issues and barriers and ways to motivate students for whom voting in the United States may not be top-of-mind for various reasons. One way to do this is to ensure that these educational efforts come from students' peers with guidance and support from administration. We also want to get more information about the demographics of our voting students to see if there are any gaps in particular types of students, which will help us better learn how to focus efforts in identity-based resources around campus (for instance, our Center for Black Culture or our campus Hillel). We hope that being involved with organizations like Campus Vote Project and ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge can help us figure out how to explore this information and strategize around it.

Goals:

The incredible voter numbers we had in 2020 are a huge motivator for our short- and long-term goals—though we know that the 2020 election energized people in ways that are difficult to replicate in other types of elections, we hope that through increased efforts to educate on the importance of ALL types of elections, and efforts to make voting accessible and a “norm” for all members of our community can help move us toward seeing those numbers more regularly.

Over the next several years, we hope to:

- Convene meetings of the Drexel Votes coalition at least twice a year, in the winter before May elections and in the summer before November elections, to discuss how we can be as cohesive as possible with campus-wide efforts to message the importance of voting and important voter logistical information, as well as encouraging different departments around campus (those represented in the coalition and those outside the coalition) to do targeted education and outreach to their communities that echoes campus-wide messaging.
- Continue to establish channels of support for student leaders who are doing peer education and turnout efforts through national nonpartisan organizations such as Civic Influencers and on campus through student organizations such as the Undergraduate Student Government Association and academic departments such as our Honors College and Political Science departments, who historically have done programming for students around nonpartisan political education.
- Ensure the focus of voter education and turnout efforts does not just include information on how, where, and when to vote but also education about the history of voting rights, major issues and barriers that exist in our current electoral landscape (such as gerrymandering, attempts to pass discriminatory voting rights legislation, etc.) and information about how elected officials on both local and national levels affect the everyday lives of people in our community. To do this, we need to partner with experts in these areas (ideas could include faculty, local experts, and resources such as Campus Vote Project) who can speak during panels, workshops, and other events, as well as sharing information about nonpartisan events already happening where students can learn these things.
- Work with the Campus Votes coalition to articulate learning outcomes by end-of-year 2023 for students that define how the above educational efforts will lead to higher student political literacy and motivation to participate in the political process, thus leading to higher numbers of eligible students registering and voting.
- Maintain or increase our 2020 numbers from the NSLVE report through the above efforts, with a particular focus on learning the demographics of our voting students and if there are particular ways we should target our efforts among particular student groups to boost voter participation amongst diverse groups of students.

Strategy:

We will accomplish our above-listed goals in the following ways:

- The Lindy Center will convene meetings of the Campus Votes coalition at least twice a year, starting in the spring of 2022 to share the above goals and help to facilitate discussions about how we can work together to meet the goals, such as articulating learning outcomes and cohesive, campus-wide messaging. As the 2022 Election cycle is a particularly important one in Pennsylvania, it is urgent that we up our efforts this year.
- Lindy Center and other campus partners (USGA, Office of Government and Community Relations, academic partners, student organizations, residence halls, etc.) will be called on to support students leaders in facilitating their own efforts across campus including:
 - In-person and virtual voter registration drives
 - In-person classroom presentations on upcoming elections and voting information in courses such as UNIV101 and CIVC101

- Virtual and in-person voter education events (e.g. film screenings, debates, lectures, workshops, panels, etc.)
- Generating and advocating for ideas that make voting more exciting, accessible, and universal such as having time off on election days.
- Lindy Center will use our outreach channels such as social media, our civic engagement database (called Galaxy), the Drexel events calendar, and our student organization portal (called DragonLink) to share out educational events with students and the general community. We will also be sure to capitalize on upcoming civic holidays such as National Voter Registration Day, as we know there are many resources for publicizing these opportunities. We are also excited to continue working with our Undergraduate Student Government Association (USGA) on their promotional efforts. For instance, in 2021 for November's Election Day the USGA promoted a Day of Service they called Octavius Catto Day of Service (named after a local civil rights leader). To support their efforts, we did a multi-post series on our social media channels sharing information about Octavius Catto leading up to the Day of Service. In 2022, we hope to help the USGA do a civic engagement fair and even more widely promote the Day of Service which will coincide with the November elections.
- Starting in 2022 the Lindy Center hopes to do an audit of our Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement opportunities around campus (including courses and co-curricular opportunities) to ensure that any definition and critical exploration of civic engagement includes mention of political engagement. Historically we have focused more heavily on direct service, activism, community organizing, and other civic engagement tools but it is important to make sure that political engagement is also listed as a critical tool so that students get used to talking about it.
- The Office of Government and Community Relations will maintain a voting location on campus for the (small) number of students who live here and more importantly, the local community who has become accustomed to voting on Drexel's campus. Luckily we have been able to do this in the past and we plan to continue doing it in the foreseeable future.
- We will work with national partners such as Campus Vote Project and ALL IN Democracy Challenge to dig deeper into our voting data and demographics of student voters on campus to see if we can better target our efforts with student groups that are less likely to participate in elections (whether that be specific majors, demographic groups, etc.). This effort should also include learning more about why certain groups are not voting as much, not just attempting to encourage them to vote without examining systemic barriers and attitudes that might exist.

NSLVE: Drexel University has authorized NSLVE.

Reporting: We will share our Action Plan on the University's Drexel Votes website (<https://drexel.edu/ogcr/resources/drexel-votes/>) which has acted as the central repository for disseminating information and cataloging efforts across campus. We will also share with the entire Drexel Community that the plan exists and where they can find it. More targeted outreach and engagement with the plan will happen amongst the Drexel Votes team and with stakeholders who are helping carry out some of the strategies (including student leaders such as our Civic Influencers and the Undergraduate Student Government Association's Civic Engagement Task Force). We will share results, such as highlights from our NSLVE report, Voter Friendly Campus designation, All In Campus Democracy Challenge Designations, etc. through campus-wide marketing channels such as our "Drexel Now" news site and social media.

Evaluation:

We will track the success of our efforts in the following ways:

- Using existing campus software and methods, we will track the number of election-related events hosted and attendance at these events. We will also compile a record of who puts on events—as oftentimes departments will host political engagement events that are not tied to our Drexel Votes coalition or are not advertised as part of the Drexel Votes cohesive efforts—and this will help us to grow the Drexel Votes coalition and encourage stakeholders around campus to include their efforts in our centralized repository, so our community has one place they can go to learn about all efforts around campus. In general, we can look at how our relationships with stakeholders in many areas (faculty, staff, students) grow with time as a measurement of our success. If we are developing more relationships with new people and strengthening our current relationships, it will be a sign that our efforts are becoming more widespread and that we are doing work that diverse people want to be a part of.
- We will use our NSLVE report as a benchmark of how well our efforts are doing, as it measures several metrics (eligible voters who are registered, eligible voters who vote, etc.) that will be useful to whether our efforts to educate and encourage political participation are working across campus. The Campus Votes team will do a deep dive into current and new NSLVE data to develop more targeted outreach strategies (ie potentially focusing on voter registration within majors or student groups that historically do not have high rates of participation).
- Throughout the year, our Campus Votes team meetings will also serve as a place to debrief and discuss efforts, and build relationships with evaluators and tools around campus such as our Office of Institutional Research and faculty doing similar work that may be interested in aligning with us.
- We are also reviewing our communications strategy and seeing what emails, social posts, etc. had the most engagement. This will help with future outreach strategies. Our communications department will help us with this.