



# **GVSU VOTES!**



## **GVSU Votes! Campus Plan (2023-24)**

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# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| I. Executive Summary.....                     | 3  |
| II. Leadership .....                          | 3  |
| III. Institutional Commitment.....            | 4  |
| IV. Landscape (Achievements, Challenges)..... | 5  |
| V. Goals.....                                 | 7  |
| VI. Strategy (for each Outcome Area) .....    | 9  |
| VII. Reporting and Evaluation.....            | 10 |
| VIII. Photo Gallery .....                     | 10 |

## I. Executive Summary

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) is a four-year, master's large public university established in 1960. With 22,000 plus students, two main campuses (one rural and one urban) and three satellite campuses, GVSU is an institution which holds civic learning and democratic engagement as core to our institutional mission and values. We recognize the central role of a public university in our democracy as a bastion for the free exchange of ideas, a place where students learn to think critically, are exposed to opposing viewpoints, and hone their skills of inquiry, dialogue and democratic engagement— all skills essential for the healthy functioning of a robust democracy.

After the fall 2016 election season, and in response to increased student interest in democratic engagement, the GVSU Campus Democratic Engagement Coalition (CDEC) was formed, initially by GVSU staff in the Office of Student Life, the Division of Inclusion and Equity and Student Senate, along with several faculty partners. Together, this group developed the 2016-2017 Campus Democratic Engagement Plan (CDEP) which sought to “create a campus-wide civic ethos to prepare our students to be informed, engaged and empathetic citizens who understand and exercise their civic rights and responsibilities.” We focused our efforts on creating a campus culture wherein students recognize the importance of dialogue across difference, the power of student organizing and of their own voices, the legacy of student leadership in social change and the importance of actively engaging in the public sphere. Currently, we have shifted the name of our coalition. We are now the GVSU Votes! Campus Coalition (GVCC), as a result of concerns and questions about political neutrality and to be more descriptive of the work of this group.

Over the past six years, the GVSU Votes! campus plan has informed the work of the GVSU Votes! initiative and the three outcome areas that the GVSU Campus Coalition (GVCC)

focuses on: (1) voter registration, (2) voter education and dialogue and (3) voter turnout. We view our annual campus plan as a living document that evolves to accommodate the ever-shifting dynamics of GVSU and the broader political landscape. Although the work of the campus plan began in 2016, it includes both short-term and long-term goals to be able to inform the work of the university for years to come.

In 2022, [Michigan as a state had the highest rate of student voter turnout in the nation](#) at 37%, and [GVSU did even better](#) with 70-79%. This is the same year GVSU's President Mantella signed the ALL IN Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. We will strive to continue these positive trends regarding voter turnout and civic participation in 2024 and beyond.

The GVSU Votes! campus plan will be primarily implemented by the members of the GVSU Votes! Coalition and the staff and students of the Office of Student Life and Campus Vote Project Fellows. Leading up to the February primary and November 2024 presidential elections, our team is focusing on doubling down on our current voter engagement efforts while seeking new and creative ways to meet students where they are at and support their development and engagement as active citizens and voters.

## II. Leadership

**The GVSU Votes Campus Coalition (GVCC) Core Team** includes:

- Melissa Baker-Boosamra: Associate Director, Office of Student Life
- Lukas Hartley: Democracy Fellow, Campus Vote Project
- Isabella Grunwaldt: Democracy Fellow, Campus Vote Project
- Dan Cope: Department of Integrative, Religious and Intercultural Studies, Affiliate Faculty

- Landon Myers, Campus Vote Project, State Coordinator - MI
- We are currently recruiting 1 additional CVP Democracy Fellow for Winter/Fall 24

The work of the GVCC is organized around **3 outcome areas and one area of administrative support**, each of which will be led by a member of the GVCC Core Team:

- **Voter registration:** Dan Cope, Professor, GVSU
- **Voter education and dialogue:** Lukas Hartley, Democracy Fellow
- **Voter turnout:** Isa Grunwoldt, Democracy Fellow
- **Communications / admin support:** TBD Democracy Fellow

The GVCC is supported by entities across campus, including representatives from the Provost's Office, the Division of Inclusion and Equity, Housing and Residence Life, Fraternity and Sorority Life and more. As part of our work this winter and early fall, we are in the process of updating our list of campus partners and will be reorganizing this group, with the ability for those interested in supporting GVSU Votes! having multiple levels through which they can engage (planning, execution, volunteering at events, promotion). We will be working to invite members of the following groups to engage with and support the work of GVSU Votes!, as we move toward fall:

- Allendale Township Clerk
- Alternative Breaks
- GV Athletics / Student Athletic Advisory Committee
- Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies
- College of Education and Community Innovation

- College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
- College Republicans
- College Democrats
- Young Democratic Socialists of America
- Division of Inclusion and Equity
- Fraternity and Sorority Life
- Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies
- Honors College
- Housing and Residence Life
- Ottawa County Bureau of Elections
- Student Senate

### III. Institutional Commitment

Grand Valley State University continues to be committed to supporting civic engagement efforts, as evidenced below.

- Civic engagement outcomes are embedded throughout the [2022-2025 Reach Higher Initiative](#). This strategic plan commits to building an inclusive and equitable community, which is achieved through democratic participation by all university stakeholders. Civic engagement contributes to the stated goal of “sustain[ing] a sense of belonging, promot[ing] diversity and respect, and address[ing] systemic issues” through participation in the democratic process. GVSU is further committed to fostering a climate in which interdisciplinary collaboration is enacted by “advanc[ing] the common good”

for our local, regional, and global communities, thus emphasizing the importance of civic engagement on campus and elsewhere.

- [All In Campus Democracy Challenge President's Commitment](#) - GVSU President Philomena V. Mantella was one of 160 college and university presidents to sign this commitment to 100% voter registration and turnout in April, 2020.
- Civic engagement work is supported through the [GVSU Office of the Provost, the Director of Civic Learning and Community Engagement](#). There are several other positions which are resourced throughout the institution, which support civic and community engagement work at GVSU, including one full time positions, one graduate assistant and four student employees in the [Office of Student Life](#); a full time position in the [College of Liberal Arts and Sciences CLAS Voyage](#); and positions throughout the colleges which have a portion of their time dedicated to civic engagement.
- The [GVSU Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center](#), in collaboration with faculty, staff and students, has developed a number of Student Learning Outcomes, based on the AAC&U LEAP Goals and VALUE Rubric for civic engagement. Those Student Learning Outcomes can be found [here](#).
- GVSU proudly celebrates campus recognition for student voter engagement efforts through University Communications. Recent recognitions include: 2019 NASPA Gold Excellence Award for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement; 2019 NASPA CLDE Collaborative Program Award; Campus Vote Project Voter Friendly Campus designation 2019-2023.

## IV. Landscape (with NSLVE data)

Institutional-level assessment data regarding the political climate and democratic engagement on campus currently includes the (1) [National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement \(NSLVE\)](#), (2) <https://www.gvsu.edu/ia/nssefsse-37.htm>. Student learning outcomes around civic learning and democratic engagement are utilized in various courses and co-curricular programs throughout the institution, but are not currently compiled in a systematic way.

When the GVSU Votes! initiative began in 2016, GVSU had a total overall voting rate of 44.9%, only a 0.7% increase from 2012 and lagging behind the 50.4% national student voting rate.

| <b>Overall Measures</b>            | <b>2012</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2016</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2020</b> |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Registration Rate                  | 66.3%       | 57.3%       | 77.3%       | 73.5%       | 91.2%       |
| Voting Rate of Registered Students | 66.6%       | 25.5%       | 65.4%       | 47.9%       | 79.0%       |
| Overall Student Voting Rate        | 44.1%       | 14.6%       | 50.0%       | 35.2%       | 72.1%       |

Data shows that in every area of voter engagement measured in the NSLVE, GVSU continues to see increases, most notably in 2020 with an Overall Student Voting Rate of 72.1%, a 21.6% increase from 2016 and 8.1% higher than the national average. Because of this high voting rate, GVSU was granted the [Gold Campus recognition award from ALL IN](#). We saw these trends continue 2 years later in the 2022 midterm elections; Michigan had a 37% youth voter turnout, which was the highest in the nation.

### **Achievements**



[Allendale Township Satellite Clerk's Office at GVSU](#) As a result of collaboration between the GVSU Office of Student Life, Student Senate and the Allendale Township Clerk, GVSU will now host a satellite office in the Kirkhof Center, the heart of GVSU's campus. This office will be open for 3 weeks leading up to all upcoming elections, with open hours throughout those weeks to serve our campus community with voter registration and early voting via absentee ballots. The office will be staffed by the Allendale Township Clerk team and members of the GVSU Votes! team. This is a huge accomplishment, removing the barriers of transportation and accessibility, which have historically made voting more challenging for students.

[Democracy 101](#): This program began in the fall of 2016 as a series of town hall discussions to help students navigate the political landscape we found ourselves in. Since then, it has flourished into one of GVSU's most successful programs. Every semester this program offers a series of interactive, co-curricular lectures, panel discussions and workshops focused on the idea and practice of democracy. Past sessions have included topics like "Democracy in Ancient Athens," "Why Democracy Needs the News," and "PFAS in Michigan." In recent semesters, the CSLC has partnered with Grand Valley TV, the student-run television network at GVSU, to film the Democracy 101 series in an attempt to make our series more accessible to all.

[National Voter Registration Day \(NVRD\)](#): GVSU will seek to partner with the MI Department of State to host the SOS Mobile Unit on our campus for NVRD and with local Township and County Clerks to offer in person voter registration on the GVSU Allendale and Grand Rapids campuses. GVSU has repeatedly outperformed campuses across the state of Michigan when the SOS Mobile Unit is present on our campus, regularly

registering more than 300 students in a 3 hour window. We aim to continue this trend in 2024.

**Voter Registration Drives:** Voter Registration Drives have been and continue to be an integral part of the GVSU Votes! initiative. These drives invite student organizations across campus to register students to vote and, when applicable, fill out absentee ballots. In 2019-21, Grand Valley registered 780 students to vote and assisted students with more than 200 absentee ballot requests. With automatic voter registration now law in Michigan, we will utilize voter registration drives to fill gaps, educate about voting options and continue to build a culture of civic engagement at GVSU.

### **Challenges**

- 1) **Sustaining engagement:** Student engagement has atrophied as a result of the impacts of COVID, across campus. Additionally, the highly polarized political environment, mental health challenges and a general sense of exhaustion all contribute to a challenging environment in which to engage students in the work of democracy. Our team continues to meet and strategize programs and initiatives to rebuild engagement across campus.
- 2) **Building and maintaining a broad and diverse coalition:** The GVCC core team is committed to creating a coalition that is inclusive of all students at Grand Valley and stretches across all campus divisions and departments, although this has proven to be a difficult task to achieve. We believe that a multitude of reasons have contributed to this, including a perceived lack of interest in the coalition from some entities across campus and scheduling conflicts. The GVCC remains persistent in finding ways to include these entities and ensure their voices are evident in our work.

- 3) Education regarding the registration and voting process: While the GVSU Votes! core team works diligently to continue to update and distribute accurate information to our campus community, we still face misperceptions and false information about student voting rights.

## IV. Goals

**Goal 1: Ensure that every GVSU student has the opportunity to register and to vote in an effort to increase overall voter participation from 44.1% to 100%.**

- **2018:** We recognized that we set a very lofty goal for 2016, we had the opportunity and responsibility to continue working to meet that goal for 2020. During the 2018-2019 school year, we registered 1,350 students to vote. On 2018 National Voter Registration Day, we registered 362 students, the most of any college campus in the state. Additionally, more than 200 students were provided with transportation to local polling places on Election Day through GVSU Voter Vans.
- **2019:** This work has continued into 2019. During our fall semester, we registered 589 new student voters through our National Voter Registration Day efforts and through partnerships with various student organizations, Ottawa County Elections Officials, and the Michigan Secretary of State's office. This work was made easier by the implementation of Proposal 3, which--among other things--changed the register-to-vote by mail deadline from 30 days to 15 days before Election Day and extended the in person deadline to Election Day, as well as enacting automatic voter registration and no-excuse absentee voting. Our work has additionally been impacted by the recent implementation of online voter registration in Michigan.

- **2020:** As we attempted to reach our lofty goal of 100% student voter participation, we reviewed our NSLVE data for both 2016 and 2018 with a coalition of campus partners and developed a coordinated strategy for reaching more students with our efforts. We additionally continued to work with GV campus partners and Ottawa County elections officials to create an on-campus polling location ahead of the 2020 election. Finally, we continued to adhere to the Michigan Secretary of State's office Collegiate Voting Task Force [recommendations](#), drafted by college students across the state as a part of the "Michigan Collegiate Voting Challenge" initiative.
- **2022:** As referenced earlier, the GVSU Voting Rate in 2022 was 72.1%. Since the last update (2020, above), GVSU has raised the bar to a goal of 100% of all student voter participation. We continued to work toward that lofty goal through a variety of programs, strategies and services in Fall 2022.
- **2024:** In primary season, the satellite office was open in Kirkhof Center to help register students to vote prior to the February 27th Election date, and to provide absentee ballots directly to newly registered voters or to other students who were not able to vote in person on election day. We still maintained the 100% registration goal. We also actively promoted early voting and absentee voting options through our three days of satellite office activity in the week prior to the primaries on the 21st - 23rd of February. In the Fall semester of 2024, GVSU will hold a big celebration for National Voter Registration day and ensure that students know where, how, and when to ensure they

have the ability to vote effectively.

**Goal 2: Provide opportunities for education and dialogue around public issues for the campus community during the 2016 election season and beyond.**

- **2018-19:** Students have continued to be provided multiple, diverse opportunities for education and dialogue around public issues. Through collaboratively organizing Democracy 101: A Series of Critical Conversations, the Community Service Learning Center podcast “Be the Change,” continued dialogue around media literacy and Elect Her, our campus community has had ample opportunity to explore and engage in dialogue around public issues.
- **2020:** Moving forward, we will continue to grow our civic learning opportunities. Democracy 101 has achieved prominence on campus, with regular attendance of 30+ students per session and high achievement of student centered civic learning outcomes. This program is an example of faculty-staff-student collaboration that provides an opportunity for campus dialogue about democratic values, principles and systems – and how we can and should participate therein. During the winter semester of 2020, Democracy 101 was centered around the theme “Deconstructing the American Dream.” The series tackled several topics debunking the myth of the American Dream, including sessions including [“Slavery and the American Dream,”](#) and [“The Mythology of the American Dream.”](#) We see this series as a way to move beyond just “voter registration” on our campus. Additionally, the “Be the Change” podcast allows for students to discuss the work they are doing around our campus to create change in our community, and our focus on media literacy empowers students to think critically about how media and

democracy interact in their day-to-day lives. We are developing a partnership with our student-led campus newspaper publication, the Grand Valley State Lanthorn, encouraging them to regularly host a civic engagement column that will feature relevant content and events happening on campus. Grand Valley prides itself on, and will continue to provide resources for, our positive relationship between student media and student-led civic engagement efforts.

- **2022:** Democracy 101 will focus on the theme “Vote Smart” in Fall 2022. Topics will include: First-Time Voter Workshop, What’s on Your Ballot? and more. Additionally, we are working with campus partners including Transitions New Student Orientation, the Promotions Team and University Communications to provide clear, concise, accurate information to students about how to vote and what they need to know to be informed voters.
- **2024:** For the Winter 2024 semester, Democracy 101 has a new set of 3 panel discussions for students set for January 31st (Democracy in Ancient Athens), February 28th (Young People Changing the World in History), and March 27th (Today’s Young People Changing the World). Additionally, fall semester events may include Reacting to the Past (RTTP) civic engagement opportunities led by campus professors, legislative coffee hours with our current officials of the downtown and allendale campuses, partnership with Common Ground and Wheelhouse Talk events with the Hauenstein Center, and possible deepening of partnership with civic clubs and organizations on campus as listed above under Leadership.

**Goal 3: Build a coalition of partners from across campus to grow and sustain an ethos of civic learning and democratic engagement at GVSU.**

- **2018-19:** The success of the GVSU Votes! effort has been in large part due to the broad and committed campus support of student voter engagement and civic learning efforts. This commitment is based on our institution's mission and values and has been cultivated through CLDE efforts, beginning in the Fall of 2016. Exemplifying the quality and effectiveness of this coalition building process, is our receipt of the 2019 NASPA Gold Excellence Award and the 2019 Silver Seal Award from the All-In Challenge. Additionally, our campus coordinated and hosted the 2018 Michigan Student Voter Summit with campuses across the state, and has previously been awarded the 2017 Outstanding Team / Project Award for GVSU Votes! Our coalition was developed and implemented by a wide representation of students, student organizations, faculty, staff, community partners and election officials.
- **2020:** Moving forward, we look forward to formally reconvening and growing our coalition in early January of 2020. We have a number of campus partners who have indicated an interest in serving as a part of this team and we will be convening to review our 2016 and 2018 NSLVE data and to begin planning for Fall 2020. During the summer of 2020 and into the fall, the core team will work to continue to broaden our coalition and continue to build relationships with Grand Valley's Black and Multicultural Greek Councils, the Panhellenic Association and faculty senate and invite them into our work. In addition, we are gratefully partnering with Campus Vote Project and Campus Elections Engagement Project to host three student Democracy Fellows to assist in the growth of our Campus Democratic Engagement Plan and its implementation.

- **2022:** We are working to rebuild capacity for Fall 2022, per previous comments in “Leadership” and “Landscape” sections.
- **2024:** As campus continues to build student engagement, we are looking to implement outside organization experiences. There are lots of potential partnership opportunities such as working with the Ford Leadership Forum and with the nonprofit 616. We will measure this by number of student attendants and retention or repeated interactions with the organizations and students. By the 2024 elections in November we will have begun interactions with both these organizations. Other scholarships and opportunities that we will work to promote within the Grand Valley community are the Washington Center program and the Paul B. Henry Congressional scholarship. These are both ongoing opportunities through GVSU’s political science department that are sorely underused. Besides continuing to build partnerships in our community, we plan to promote National Voter Registration Day 2024 on September 17th with a big celebration in Kirkhof Center and on the Clocktower lawn.

**Goal 4: Where do we want to be in 10 years from now?**

- **2034:** We will have achieved our goal of 100% voter registration, and will want to continue to work with campus partners, athletics, social justice centers, and more to ensure this 100% goal is maintained. We will continue to be recognized at the state and local level. We will have begun an online campaign that reaches every student’s email weekly, and have established a huge event at the culmination of a voter education week that matches the hype of the Kirkhof Kickoff parties at the beginning of Fall semester.



We will have a General Education course mandated for all students of GVSU to cover civic education. We will also have set up a satellite office for the Kent County downtown campus to help reach upperclassmen, STEM majors, and graduate students. We also will have hosted the Michigan Student Voter Engagement Summit multiple times and have proven an exciting campus to host it.

## **V. Strategy**

Please see the 2020-21 [CDEC Project List and CDEC Events](#) list for information on programs / initiatives and strategies for meeting goals in the three outcome areas of (1) voter education and dialogue, (2) voter registration, and (3) voter turnout. Our team is currently working to revise and update this spreadsheet, as we plan for Fall 2022.

### **Partnership with State and National Partners**

GVSU has partnered national organizations such as Campus Vote Project, Students Learn Students Vote, Campus Compact in addition to collaborations with state entities like the Michigan Department of State and the Ottawa County Clerk's office in an attempt to broaden the scope and reach of our work within and outside of the university. These partnerships are helpful in meeting goals in all three outcome areas as they have provided the university with a number of resources like on-campus Democracy Fellows and online and in-person professional development and strategic support in addition to opportunities to both host and attend state and national student civic engagement summits. These partnerships have been incredibly

helpful as resources to place and organize fellows, help situate our campus within the larger movement to increase student democratic engagement, and support Grand Valley resources that highlight our work within the context of the larger movement of student democratic engagement. We look forward to continuing to utilize and strengthen these relationships in the years to come.

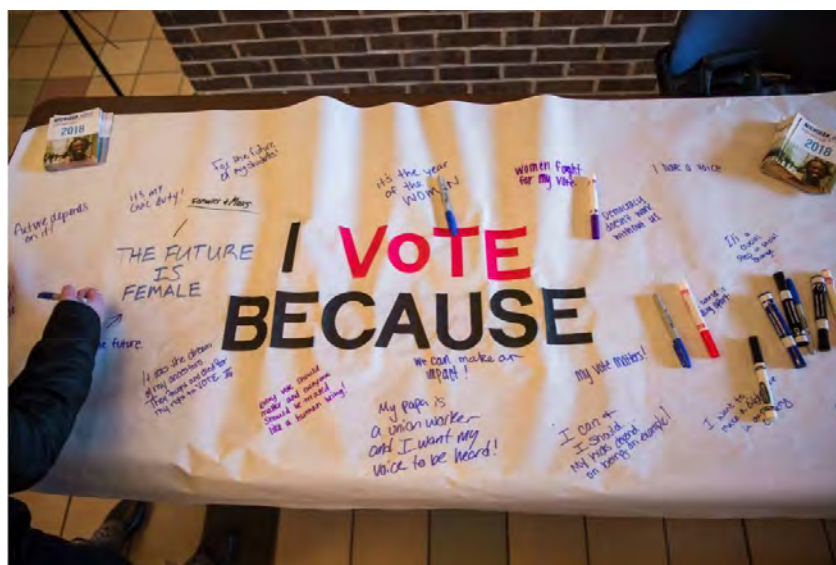
## **VI. Reporting and Evaluation:**

We will continue to assess the impact of our work against the goals identified and outlined above. We will utilize internally tracked data (number of voter registrations processed, participation rates at proposed events and programs, civic learning outcomes achieved, and number of students transported to the polls). Once we have access to the 2022 NSLVE data, we will share this information with the Campus Vote Project and the All-In Challenge, as well as with campus and community stakeholders.

## **VII. Photo Gallery**



Democracy 101: “Elect Her”, co-sponsored by Running Start, featuring six female-identified state, county and local elected officials for this informative and inspiring workshop, encouraging young women to run for office.



“Democracy Wall” interactive activity



Democracy 101: Youth Political Engagement panel



Democracy 101: "PFAS in Michigan"



National Voter Registration Day 2018



GVSU Votes! 2019



National Voter Registration Day 2019



National Voter Registration Day 2019



National Voter Registration Day 2019 with MI Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, reps from Campus Vote Project, Campus Elections Engagement Project, GVSU Votes and Louie the Laker



Michigan Student Voter Engagement Summit 2019

Hosted by GVSU, in partnership with Campus Vote Project, Campus Elections Engagement Project, Students Learn Students Vote, All In Campus Democracy Challenge and MI Department of State.