

Gustavus Adolphus College 2020 Voter Education Action Plan

Executive Summary

In the recent past, students at Gustavus Adolphus College have significantly increased their presence at the polls. Though the increase in the turnout among the student body is encouraging, we realize that the next step is not complacency. Looking ahead to the 2020 election, the College has assembled a Voter Education Committee to develop a plan to sustain this trend. In developing and fulfilling this plan of action, the committee intends to foster civic education and reduce the barriers to political participation in a non-partisan manner. The plan centers around the campus but also extends into the Greater Gustavus and St. Peter communities. We have several aggressive goals in mind:

1. Register 85% of students;
2. Increase the turnout rate to 90% of registered students, for an overall turnout of 80%;
3. Engage in non-partisan programming to increase voter education while developing a comprehensive guide for national, state, and local candidates;
4. Remove barriers to participation by assisting with student transportation to the polls and developing a flowchart to assist students with the registration process.

The action plan will begin during the spring of the 2019-2020 academic year and will continue through the 2020 election. We will implement this plan through the leadership of the Voter Education Committee for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year and then reconstitute the group with additional student representation in the fall of 2020.

Leadership

The Voter Education Committee represents a campus-wide constituency. This wide representation from across campus has served the institution well in the past, engaging students from many different corners of campus because those groups/areas have been represented on the Voter Education Committee. Again this year, the Committee consists of individuals from the student body, the faculty, and the administration:

Students:

Monali Bhakta '20 (Student body Co-President)
Chelsea Boyden '21
Hailey Concepcion '21
Ben Menke '22
Paige Patterson '21
Karrie Villarreal '20 (Student body Co-President)

Faculty:

Pamela Conners, Associate Professor of Communication Studies
Yurie Hong, Associate Professor and Chair of Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies

Katherine Knutson, Professor of Political Science

Administration:

Andrea Junso, Director of Campus Activities

Megan Ruble, Assistant Vice President for Student Life

Danny Sandberg, Assistant Director of Residential Life

Amy Pehrson, Director of Community Engagement

JoNes VanHecke, Vice President for Student Life

The committee recognizes that some elements of the action plan are contingent on efforts from the student body, both individuals and organizations, in the fall of 2020. As such, an element of leadership invariably falls on the student body to mobilize others with new ideas or informal social connections.

Historically, and continuing in the 2020-2021 academic year, the committee will also partner with voter officials from the City of St. Peter. The City partners with the College to actively invite Gustavus students to be trained as voter judges and polling location assistants each election and 2020 will be no exception.

Commitment

Throughout its history, and especially in recent years, Gustavus has demonstrated a firm commitment to civic engagement in the student body. Community and Justice are two of five core values that have guided the institution since its founding, and these are reflected in the academic requirements for students. Among other areas of study, the general curriculum includes classes in the areas of “Social Institutions” and “Global Cultures and Perspectives” as requirements for graduation. Likewise, the alternative Three Crowns Curriculum challenges students to address questions about ethics and society. Through these courses, Gustavus hopes to foster a spirit of civic engagement in the student body.

This emphasis has translated to recent efforts to encourage voting, especially during the 2018 election. In the months before the election, student organizations including the College Democrats, the Libertarians and the College Republicans encouraged members and the wider student body to vote. Moreover, academic departments have collaborated with organizations such as the ACLU and Indivisible to host registration and voter education events. Together, these efforts have been successful in fostering civic engagement. In both 2016 and 2018, Gustavus registered the most student voters of any private institution in the state of Minnesota, winning the first two “Ballot Bowl” competitions sponsored by the Minnesota Secretary of State.

Landscape

The civic engagement landscape at Gustavus is very encouraging. The College formed its first campus-wide Voter Education Committee in 2016 in response to low voter participation in 2014 (19.1%). Voter participation rates rose to 60.5% of the student body. While we understood that we also benefitted from a presidential election cycle, the committee was very pleased with the

dramatic increase in voter registration and participation. At that same time, the State of Minnesota sponsored the first ever “Ballot Bowl” competition coordinated by the Office of the Secretary of State and Gustavus was pleased to be announced as the winner, registering the highest percentage of student voters among the Minnesota private colleges.

In the 2018 election cycle, without the added benefit of a presidential election, the College once again employed the use of a cross-sectional campus committee to focus on voter education, registration and bolster voter participation. The results were a nearly 36% positive change compared to the 2014 election (voting rate: 2014 = 19.1% vs. 2018 = 55%). With 69% of the students registered to vote in the 2018 election, Gustavus was awarded the State of Minnesota Ballot Bowl cup for private colleges for a second time.

NSLVE Data

Year	2014	2016	2018
Student Voting Percentage	19.1%	60.5%	55%

Goals

Because we believe that civic engagement is, to a certain degree, embedded in the fabric of our institution, the Voter Education Committee talked about the importance of setting aggressive goals for the 2020 election cycle. We feel great about the positive strides we have made in increased registrations and increased voting but we also believe that with a committee organizing earlier than ever before and thanks to the structure suggested by All In, we are well positioned to set goals that stretch us. While we may not meet all of our goals, the committee decided it was appropriate for us to aim high. Thus, we have established the following goals for the remainder of the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic year:

Voter Participation Goals

1. Student registration rate: 85%
2. Voting rate of registered students: 90%
3. Overall student voting rate: 80%

Voter Education Goals

Engaging students across political ideological spectrum for programming by:

- Hosting debate watch parties
- Logistics and deadlines educational efforts
- Understanding our systems and civic engagement
- Voter guide highlighting issues and where the candidates fall on each issue
- St. Peter ballot issues (school levy, council, etc)

Outreach to greater Gustavus and St Peter Community education

Sponsor program/activities that highlight the college’s commitment to the importance of voter education beyond the current student population (Kids Vote, Recent Alumni outreach)

Goals for removing barriers

- Resolve transportation issues
- Create a “Fast Pass” option for students with tight schedules
- Assist new and first year students with registration and voting
- Create a simple flow chart for all students with steps for voting options

Additional Strategies for meeting goals:

Voter Education Goals

Engaging students across political ideological spectrum for programming by:

- Involve multiple campus constituencies increase student participation. Engage with all of the politically affiliated student organizations and ask them to name a representative to the planning committee. Seek to host more candidates and debates on campus.
- Work with the City of St. Peter to continue student participation as polling judges and assistants.
- Ask key offices (Residential Life, Gustie Greeters, Peer Assistants) to sponsor events
- Have the college President author a message to students about the value of being an engaged citizen.
- Explore participating in Democracy Shark Tank sponsored by LeadMN.
- Partner with Minnesota agencies to facilitate voter trainings for interested students/Gustavus employees.

Outreach to greater Gustavus and St Peter Community education

The following two goals are the college’s commitment to the importance of voter education beyond the current student population.

- Community Engagement Center will sponsor a “Kids Vote” Night (via Big Partner Little Partner Program, Gustie Buddies, local schools, employees’ children, etc. either on campus or at one of the city polling locations).
- A communication (email or letter) to recent Gustavus alumni (ages 23-25) encouraging civic engagement and reminding them of the importance of voting.

Goals for removing barriers

- Develop a website for all of our Voter education materials and action plan.
- Resolve transportation issues
 - Vans (reserve as many vans as possible from the Motor Pool, Safe Rides van).
 - Incentive to stay waiting in line (tea, hot chocolate station) at 3 Flags.
 - Have a tent with activities for waiting students.
 - Consider special transportation options for “remote” buildings (Arb, Chapel View)? Ride Share sign up or poster, Res Life CFs take it on.
- Create a “Fast Pass” option for students with tight schedules.
 - Send out a survey ahead of time if students need a ride and then email them back about the Fast Pass option.

- “Fast Pass” - sign up for a specific time to ride down to the Community Center without waiting in line.
- Assist new and first year students with registration and voting.
 - Helping First Years (and/or others) understand that they might or might not be registered.
 - Have the FTS (or Gustie Greeter/Peer MALT) and 3 Crowns directors embed Voter Registration into the FTS/3C curriculum (engaged citizenship).
- Utilize varied communication platforms to get information to all students.
 - Kipsu (via Res Life)
 - Social media
- Create a simple flow chart for all students with steps for voting options.
 - Absentee Ballot Day programming.
 - Out of state student information and assistance.

Long-term goals (beyond the Fall of 2020):

- Voter registration embedded in Gustie Gear Up, New Student Orientation and Housing move-in
- Voter registration connected to getting student IDs
- Voter registration associated with web advisor/portal
- Awareness for faculty to create a placeholder in their curriculum regarding voter/civic engagement

Reporting

We will utilize the following to make our plans, data, and reports public:

- comprehensive website for all of our Voter education materials and action plan.
- poster infographic with main points and then QR code leading them to a website with more detailed information.
- send email to students with a link to the website.
- partner with political student organizations and professors/classes to link the website to their syllabus and meeting materials.

Evaluation

The following are the strategies we will utilize to measure/assess how well we implemented our plans. Assessment strategies for:

Increasing participation rate

- Counting participants in fall programming - use id card scan for counting
- short survey asking was this valuable, what did you learn type questions

Engaging students across political ideological spectrum for programming

- ask various political clubs to be involved and report count of their members
- ask audience to indicate their political persuasion (could include in satisfaction survey)

Logistics, deadlines education

- pre/post survey asking if they know about deadlines and logistics
- incentivize participation in pre/post

Understanding our systems and civic engagement

- student participation rates at related events

Voter Guide

- did we produce a voter guide?
- how many copies distributed?

Outreach to greater Gustavus and St. Peter communities

- did we actually do this
- number affected/participated

Removing barriers

- actual participation rates to measure success

Strategies cross multiple levels of leadership

- evaluation from faculty activities (artifacts from courses)
- administration - discussion at cabinet level and at divisions about how to support and gather input from those groups