



Voter Engagement Plan



Prepared May 2022

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 2022 midterm election, the College has re-assembled our Voter Education Team (VET) to develop and implement 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 goals, bearing in mind that midterm participation is usually lower. A summary of major goals are presented below, with more numerous and detailed information in the Goals/Strategy section later in the document:

1. Increase percentages of pre-registered voters and voting rates from 2018 election:
 - a. Student registration rate: 87% (increase of 3.7%)
 - b. Voting rate of registered students: 75% (increase of 4.5%)
 - c. Overall student voting rate: 70% (increase of 11.4%)
2. Grow voter turnout for Black populations and Asian populations by 10% over 2018
3. Host an early polling location on campus, with help from Nicollet County elections officials and LeadMN

Many of the elements in this action plan have already begun and will continue through the 2022 election. We will implement this plan through the leadership of the Voter Education Team and the four student “Voter Ambassadors.” This group has met multiple times in the spring semester, will continue to check in over the summer, and will hit the ground running in late August when students return to campus. This Action Plan represents a snapshot in time and we pride ourselves on an ability to be creative and flexible.

Leadership

The Voter Education Team (VET) 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 VET. Again this year the Committee consists of individuals from the student body, the faculty, and the administration:

Student Voting Ambassadors:

Katie Allard '23, Sociology/Anthropology major, student government

David Eide '23, Political Science major, student newspaper

Madison Stokesbary '24, Biology major, varsity athlete

Maren Twedt '24, Psychological Science major, sorority member

Faculty:

Marian Broida, Visiting Assistant Professor in Religion

Hagar Attia, Assistant Professor in Communication Studies

One more TBD

Administrators:

Garrett Meier, Assistant 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

Coley Ries, Head Softball Coach*

James Nickras, Digital Collections Manager in Library*

Rachel McCarthy, Digital Content Specialist in Marketing and Communication*

**position added this year for the first time*

Our student Voting Ambassadors, selected in an application and interview process, will work 5-10 hours per week from present to mid-November. Some of their responsibilities include:

- Serve on one of the subcommittees: curricular, student life, communication, or athletics
- Review appropriate voting data specific to Gustavus students, using it to inform plans and decisions
- Work as a part of a team to implement the voter engagement plan
- Contribute creative ideas to existing challenges
- Be a campus liaison with one or more of the following state/national college voting initiatives: ALL IN, Ask Every Student, LEAD MN, Campus Election Engagement Project, Rock the Vote
- Register students to vote in general with special attention to National Voter Registration Day and Vote Early Day
- Plan and implement non-partisan voter education resources, programs, and initiatives

Historically, and continuing in the 2022-2023 academic year, the committee will also partner with voter officials from the City of St. Peter, including the League of Women Voters (Edi Thorstenson) and the County Elections Office (Jaci Kopet). The City partners with the College to actively invite Gustavus students to be trained as voter judges and polling location assistants each election and 2022 will be no exception.

A succession plan is key to making these efforts last longer than 2022. Our team will always be co-led by a member of our Dean of Students staff and our Director of Community Engagement. We plan to offer the paid Voting Ambassador fellowships every other year to work on voter engagement and will solicit these students (as well as volunteer voter education committee members) through a campus-wide email. If that does not provide a diverse and adequate yield, we will target student groups and ask for a representative from politically-purposed student organizations to serve as well as from our Student Senate. We will regularly ask for the Director of Dialogue & Debate to serve on our committee in addition to other interested faculty. Beyond this, we will ask Student Life employees who are interested, targeting Campus Activities and Residential Life and being open to others.

Commitment

The Gustavus mission statement promotes “educating students for a life of leadership and service.” Community and Justice are two of five core values that have guided the institution since its founding. Throughout its history, and especially in recent years, Gustavus has demonstrated a firm commitment to civic engagement in the student body.

We are currently in year six of a ten-year strategic plan, called Gustavus ACTS. The vision is: Gustavus equips students to lead purposeful lives and to act on the great challenges of our time through an innovative liberal arts education of recognized excellence.

“In order to prepare students to act on the great challenges of our time, we must ask fundamental and enduring questions. We must seek to understand complex issues in our world from a variety of perspectives. We must think deeply about root causes of these great challenges and the implications and consequences of possible solutions. In fact, we do not presume to know what the great challenges are or will be. Defining those challenges is, itself, part of the inquiry. A defining value of an excellent liberal arts education is considering how things are and how they could be.

Addressing the great challenges of our time demands more than critical thinking. It demands that we care. A Gustavus liberal arts education strengthens a student’s capacity to do so by providing spaces and opportunities to contemplate and deliberate. It inspires students to ask themselves how they will become people who continue to care, even when challenges cannot be solved in their lifetimes.”

One major way to achieve the lofty goals above is through civic involvement, including voting. This emphasis has translated to recent efforts to encourage voting, especially during the 2020 election. In the months before the election, our Voter Engagement Team and four student Voting Ambassadors encouraged members and the wider student body to vote. Moreover, academic departments have collaborated with organizations such as the ACLU, League of Women Voters, and a regional group, “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. This competition has been renamed the “Democracy Cup” and though Gustavus did not win in 2020, we were just a few percentage points short of the state (and national!) leader.

This commitment is also reflected in the academic requirements for students. In 2018, the faculty adopted a new “Challenge Curriculum” which went into effect for students entering in the fall of 2020. A description follows:

This curriculum demonstrates our conviction that a rigorous liberal arts education remains the best preparation for engaging enduring questions and addressing new challenges. In this curriculum, we encourage students to explore the liberal arts and sciences and, in so doing, to develop as critical thinkers, ethical actors, global citizens, and effective communicators--to become people able and willing to work increase knowledge about complex issues and strive for peace and justice in the world. The study of multiple disciplinary perspectives will prepare students to be responsible, reflective citizens who know how ethical, religious, and philosophical questions and issues related to personal, social, and global location arise in places as diverse as laboratories, government agencies, art studios, boardrooms, universities, and city halls. The curriculum also enables students to participate in the liberating potential of the liberal arts and sciences as they, in a culminating integrative project, address a significant question or challenge with their peers.

Likewise, the alternative Three Crowns Curriculum challenges students to address questions about ethics and society. Through these courses and commitments, Gustavus hopes to foster a spirit of civic engagement in the student body.

Our commitment begins at the top. President Rebecca M. Bergman is a signatory of the Higher Education Presidential Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation and supports our efforts wholeheartedly. In addition, one of the two primary campus contacts/convenors is an Assistant Vice President in Student Life, which provides executive access and decision-making authority to the group. Another recent example of commitment is from our faculty, who voted this spring in favor of creating an “amended class schedule” for election day, such that all courses will meet on an abbreviated schedule and the standard class day will end earlier, allowing students (and many employees too) more time and opportunity to vote in person at the polls if they so choose.

Landscape/History

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 the 2014 midterm election (19.1%). Voting rates rose to 74.3% 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 = 58.6%). 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.

In the 2020 election we exceeded even our lofty goals, with an 84.2% voting rate (9.9% increase over 2016). This is not far off of the national high of 89%. We are especially proud to have increased voting rates among racial and ethnic minority student groups by leaps and bounds (Asian = +29%, Black = +13%, Hispanic = +22%) over 2016 participation figures.

We benefit from Minnesota laws and landscape that allows for early voting, mail-in voting, and day-of registration and will encourage students to consider these alternative mechanisms for voting. We are currently in discussion with our county elections office personnel about hosting a satellite early voting location on campus during the week prior to the election. We are excited about this possibility as we believe it would increase our voter turnout (and the convenience of voting!) for our 2100 students as well as our 700+ employees.

NSLVE Data

Year	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
Registration Rate	73.8%	60.4%	84.7%	83.2%	92.3%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	84.4%	31.7%	87.8%	70.5%	91.2%
Voting Rate	62.3%	19.1%	74.3%	58.6%	84.2%

Even though numbers are up in almost every sub-category, our most recent NSLVE data indicates there is more work to do. Male students continue to lag about 10% behind their female counterparts. Our black student voters voted at a 30% lower percentage than their white student counterparts. Asian students are 20% lower. Our Voter Ambassadors have committed to working with student organizations and the Diversity Leadership Council to

increase this turnout. This will be a focus for us this year, with a goal of growing both percentages at least 10% over 2018 figures. Also, we will target efforts toward the two majors that actually went down from 2016, History (-13%) and English (-4%). Despite these reductions, they still show admirable numbers at 80% and 81% respectively. We're not sure what to make of these anomalies but will challenge the faculty in those disciplines to help us get out the vote among their majors. The lowest major was Business, Management, & Marketing at 78%.

We already have a majority of voters who exercised their alternate options in 2020, with 73% of our student voters not in-person on election day. Numerous variables could influence these stats in 2022, from COVID rates to whether or not we are able to host a polling place on campus.

Goals & Strategy

Because we believe that civic engagement is embedded in the fabric and mission of our institution, the Voter Education Team talked about the importance of setting aggressive goals for the 2022 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 2022 election cycle, using our 2018 statistics as our starting point:

Goals/Strategies for voter participation

- Student registration rate: 87% (increase of 3.7%)
- Voting rate of registered students: 75% (increase of 4.5%)
- Overall student voting rate: 70% (increase of 11.4%)
- Grow voter turnout for Black populations and Asian populations by 10%
- Involve multiple campus constituencies to increase student participation
 - Ask key offices (Residential Life, Community Engagement Center) and influential groups of students (Gustie Greeters, Peer Assistants, CAB) to sponsor or co-sponsor events
 - Train student leaders (Collegiate Fellows, Gustie Greeters, Peer Assistants) on how to help other students register to vote

Goals/Strategies for voter education, engaging across the political/ideological spectrum

- Develop a website for all of our voter education materials, including action plan
- Logistics and deadlines educational efforts
- Understanding our systems and civic engagement

- Disseminate a voter guide highlighting major issues and where the candidates stand on each issue
- Research and educate on local St. Peter ballot candidates and issues

Goals/Strategies for outreach and partnership

- Sponsor program/activities that highlight the college's commitment to the importance of voter education beyond the current student population
 - A communication e-mail will be sent to recent Gustavus alumni (ages 23-25) encouraging civic engagement and reminding them of the importance of voting. This communication will be signed by the Dean of Students and ideally the Student Senate Co-Presidents from their year as well as their Class alumni Representatives
- Work with Nicollet County to establish an early polling location on campus for the week just prior to the election
- Work with the City of St. Peter to continue student participation as polling judges and assistants
- Seek to host more candidates and debates on campus
- Partner with Minnesota agencies to facilitate voter trainings for interested students and Gustavus employees. Our county elections personnel have volunteered to do this

Goals/Strategies for removing logistical and knowledge barriers

- Host an early polling location on campus, with help from Nicollet County elections officials and LeadMN
- Utilize Civic Nation voter portal, already set up for Gustavus
- Resolve transportation issues
 - Provide shuttle service via college vans
 - Consider reserving local transit service for the afternoon once classes end early
 - Incentive to stay waiting in line (tea, hot chocolate station) at 3 Flags.
 - Have a tent with activities/incentives/swag for waiting students
 - Create a "Fast Pass" option for students with tight schedules, allowing students to sign up for a specific time to ride to the polling location without waiting in line
- Assist new and first year students with registration and voting
 - Have the First Term Seminar (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.
- Create a simple flow chart for all students with steps for voting options.
 - Include information and encouragement for absentee/mail in ballots and early voting options
 - Out of state student information and assistance via email, specific to state
 - Utilize resources from allintovote.org

Please see Appendix A: Tactics & Timelines for more detailed information.

Long-term Goals (beyond the Fall of 2022):

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

Reporting

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

- A comprehensive website for all of our voter registration and education materials with links to our NSLVE data and action plan.
- A poster infographic with main points and a QR code leading students to the above named website with more detailed information.
- An email to students with a link to the website mentioned above.
- Partnerships with political student organizations and professors/classes to link the website to their syllabus, their Moodle pages, and meeting materials.
- Granting permission for the ALL IN Challenge and NASPA (Voter Friendly Campus) to publish our data and action plan.
- Work with our Marketing/Communication office to create press releases about our efforts for internal and external use, as we did in 2020. We have added a member of this department to our VET this year in the hope of having a more direct link to their resources and expertise.
- Social media accounts specifically set up for voter engagement, and the “takeover” of other popular campus social media accounts (Student Senate, Campus Activities Board, Peer Assistants, Hill Crew, etc.) to disseminate information. We believe this will be much easier because we have added our College’s digital content specialist to the VET.
- Statistics and highlights will be shared with our faculty during a bi-monthly all-faculty meeting, as they were in 2020.

Evaluation

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

Increasing participation rate

- Track participation in fall programming using our ID card scanning technology
- Disseminate a short survey during/after initiatives assessing satisfaction and learning outcomes
- Engage students across the political ideological spectrum for programming
- Ask various political clubs to be involved and report count of their members
- Ask program audiences 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

- Track student participation rates at related events

Voter Guide

- Did we produce or make available a comprehensive voter guide?
- How many copies were distributed and/or downloaded?

Outreach to greater Gustavus and St. Peter communities

- Numbers affected/participated

Removing barriers

- Examine 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

Our plan will be continually evaluated and revised throughout the next few months as we get closer to election day in November. Following the election in 2022, our key leaders and contributors will do a more thorough and comprehensive review of this Action Plan and our efforts, making notes and revisions for future years.

Appendix A: Tactics & Timeline

Note: this document is a work in progress as of May 31, 2022

May-June-July

- Graphics request for items: flow chart for posters, door hangers, digital for website banner, social media
- Order branded products: table banner, stickers, buttons, t-shirts, temporary tattoos, etc.
- Ask Deb to create a visual cheat sheet for registration
- Create a “how to” video explaining flow chart and MN registration
- Send out registration instructions with housing assignments(?)
- Place an instruction sheet in parent folders for Gustie Gear Up summer registration days
- Develop a website with information, materials, events, contacts, etc. and connect it to the portal that was built for us by Civic Nation

August

- Ask key offices to sponsor or co-sponsor events with the VET: Rock the Vote, 100 Hour Challenge, etc.
- Become familiar with Civic Nation portal and allintovote.org and their uses
- Communicate with faculty about including election engagement in courses (Yurie Hong, Pam Conners, Kate Knutson, or Political Science department create a guide?)

September

- Offer voter registration during New Student Orientation
- Org fair table with “big draw” food or giveaway (ex: taco in a bag, succulents)
- Observe/promote National Voter Registration Day on 9/20. If you become a partner department you can get swag to distribute.
- Educational efforts around logistics and deadlines for pre-registration
- Seek out visit and debate opportunities with candidates
- First Term Seminar and 3 Crowns embed registration into their courses (offer video to show in class)
- Registration tabling
- Promote early voting opportunities, absentee or in person
- Social media campaign begins

October

- Observe/promote Voter Education Week October 3-7
- Observe/promote “Vote Early” day on 10/24
- Continue social media posts
- Big bulletin board with registration info. until deadline, then election/candidate info.
- Begin tabling once per week with some information or issue
- Educational event with ALCU, Indivisible, other interested community organizations
- Faculty member(s) present on the election at Family Weekend, like they do in the Arb series
- Distribute a voter guide, including local ballot issues & candidates. Ideally use CEEP guide and add local information.

November

- Shuttles on election day
 - Incentive to stay waiting in line (warm beverage station and/or giveaways)
 - Have a tent for shelter at pickup location, 3 Flags
 - Create a “Fast Pass” pre-registration option for students so they don’t have to wait in line
- Communication/reminder/encouragement to recent alumni

Miscellaneous ideas

- Social media daily blitz in the days just prior to the election
- Couch Parties: national program that makes a “party” out of training a group of volunteers to text their contacts (can be in person or virtual)
- Offer use of the Community Engagement Center’s shuttle at any time it is operating for early voting
- Use of “All in to Vote” tool as a one-stop-shop for all students despite their situation
- Special, targeted email communication to out of state students, individualized by state. Utilize the guides from Civic Nation.
- Long Conversation event – with students and staff from Communication Studies, English, Political Science, Economics, etc. Ask Dialogue & Deliberation fellows to coordinate

Key dates

September 2: new student move-in, Orientation begins

September 13: organization/involvement fair

September 20: National Voter Registration Day

September 23: online absentee ballot application opens, early voting period begins in MN

September 30: big board reservation begins
September 30 – October 2: Family Weekend
October 3 – 7: National Voter Education Week
October 18: pre-registration deadline
October 28: Vote Early Day
November 7: early voting period ends in MN
November 8: ELECTION DAY