

HamVotes 2024 Action Plan



Hamilton College's ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan 2024

Executive Summary

Hamilton College's 2024 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action plan was developed and written by Hamilton College's 2023-2024 HamVotes Student Coordinators: Anna Duarte, Alex Carducci, and Veronica Smolinski. HamVotes is a student run and institution supported non-partisan organization concerned with student voter participation, voter registration, and nonpartisan civic involvement. This action plan considers data from Hamilton College's 2020 NSLVE report, feedback from the 2020 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan, and a new understanding of civic engagement on Hamilton's campus.

The purpose of Hamilton's 2024 Action Plan is to:

- ✓ Solidify HamVotes' commitment to civic engagement on campus.
- ✓ Reflect on the successes and shortcomings of HamVotes' labor from 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023.
- ✓ Provide framework for programming and overarching goals for the 2024 election year.

To meet these goals, HamVotes will work mainly with the Arthur Levitt Center of Public Affairs, or the Levitt Center, and the Office of the President, in addition to other clubs, organizations, and associations on campus. These connections will be essential in not only increasing HamVotes' presence on Hamilton's campus, but also in understanding the needs and concerns of wider campus more generally.

Ultimately, with the new structure of HamVotes solidified in the 2022-2023 school year, the organization has a clearer understanding of how it fits into wider college-wide conversations regarding civic learning, voting, and political engagement. HamVotes hopes to continue the trend of increasing the Hamilton voting rate, which increased from 50.7% in 2016 to 66.8% in 2020. Specifically, HamVotes hopes to increase the voting rate to 68% in the 2024 election year. The organization will do this by increasing presence on campus, connecting with different campus

organizations, and maintaining a streamlined mode of communication between campus and HamVotes leaders.

Leadership

In the 2022-2023 school year, HamVotes officially restructured from a faculty-led organization with student volunteers to one fully operated by students. This restructuring occurred organically, as students showed interest in leading the organization and faculty looked forward to giving students more hands-on opportunities within the organization.

The current organization of HamVotes includes three student coordinators, who meet weekly and communicate regularly over email. Their labor mostly consists of the “background” work for HamVotes: reserving and preparing spaces for programming, connecting with faculty on campus, and filling out all necessary paperwork for the organization. Additionally, the coordinators frequently assist in more public-facing events and serve as the main point of contact for any individuals that have questions about HamVotes. The 2023-2024 school year coordinators are:

Alexander (Alex) Carducci, class of 2024

Anna Durate, class of 2026

Veronica Smolinski, class of 2025

To assist the coordinators in programming, campus engagement, and any other planning, student captains serve as the bridge between HamVotes and campus. Captains are responsible for maintaining the presence of HamVotes on campus by hosting weekly “office-hours” for students, working voter registration and information tables, and upkeep the HamVotes socials. In the 2023 year, the captains incorporated a research component into their roles by researching information of specific interest to Hamilton students - such as local elections and campus concerns - to be then incorporated into infographics for students and helpful reports for the coordinators. The 2023-2024 school year coordinators are:

Aeden Burke, class of 2026

Gabrielle (Gabby) Johnson, class of 2025

Catherine Vogt, class of 2024

Although student-led, HamVotes is largely supported by the Levitt Center and President of the Office. The partnership between the Levitt Center and HamVotes transformed the organization from a club with more institutional restrictions to an organization with more institutional support and a more defined purpose. The President of the Office graciously funds the programming and wages of the coordinators and captains involved in HamVotes and moreover cements the reputation of HamVotes. The following individuals have been incredibly helpful and supportive of HamVotes' work and mission:

Christina (Chris) Willemsen, *Administrative Director of the Levitt Center*

Chris serves as the main contact between HamVotes, the Levitt Center, and the President's office. She meets regularly with the organization to discuss progress, programing ideas, and help provide funds for any events. She has been critical in pushing for the restructuring of HamVotes and in maintaining the presence of the organization.

Rachael Clark, *Programming Coordinator for the Levitt Center and Community Outreach (COOP)*

Rachael helps with processing HamVote's funds and providing resources for the organization to purchase any necessary materials.

Janelle Perry, *ALEX Program Coordinator*

Janelle also helps with processing HamVote's funds and providing resources for the organization to purchase any necessary materials.

Zack Schuman, *Assistant Director of Community-Based Learning for the Levitt Center*

Zach helps maintain relationships between the local community and election officials and HamVotes. Zach is a key member in supporting the role of HamVotes beyond Hamilton's campus in regions like Clinton and Utica.

Frank Anechiarico, *Faculty Director and Maynard-Knox Professor of Government and Law*

Frank helps sustain relationships between the Levitt Center, HamVotes, and campus faculty.

David Wippman, *President of Hamilton College*

President Wippman has been supportive during HamVotes' transition from club to Levitt Center organization and meets with HamVotes coordinators to receive updates on the organization's progress.

Gillian (Gill) King, *Chief of Staff and secretary to the Board of Trustees*

Gill has been instrumental in maintaining the relationship with President Wippman and assisting HamVotes Coordinators through Chris, especially concerning budgetary questions and concerns.

Tanith Sherman, *Associate Director of Housing and Conduct*

Tanith has been very supportive of promoting HamVotes in dorms and other housing buildings. We have utilized her help to hang posters and door tags up in living spaces to promote our mission.

Kaity Stewart, *Assistant Director of Common Ground*

Common Ground is Hamilton's widely acclaimed multi-format program that helps prepare students for lives of active citizenship. Common Ground brings highly respected thought leaders to the Hamilton campus to participate in small classroom dialogues and large event discussions. HamVotes is expecting to partner with Common Ground to provide more spaces for nonpartisan political conversations.

We acknowledge as well our campus partners, who support us in funding, event planning efforts, and assisting us in spreading the word about voting. Each of these groups has contributed to HamVotes' work, both this year and, hopefully, in the future:

Student Activities Office

HamVotes has collaborated with the student activities office to make programming more accessible for students, as well as receive extra funding for any events.

Student Government Alliance

The Hamilton Student Government Alliance and HamVotes have teamed up to create successful events. The SGA has also been supportive in promoting HamVotes social media and materials.

Trivia Night

Hamilton Trivia Nights are a Hamilton tradition and happen every Tuesday in the on-campus pub. Every semester HamVotes and Trivia collaborate to curate trivia questions about voting, civic rights, and politics more generally.

Jitney Services

The Jitney is a fully student-operated shuttle service. The Jitney and HamVotes coordinate every election season to provide a shuttle service to and from the local polling station for those who are registered to vote in the area.

Commitment

As it says in its mission statement, “Hamilton College prepares students for lives of meaning, purpose, and active citizenship.” HamVotes is committed to making voting accessible and equitable to every voter on campus. As an organization, HamVotes wants students to understand that voting is not something that's explicitly for those interested in politics. Voting is for everybody, as one single vote can make momentous change that has a domino effect on policy and livelihood. HamVotes is also especially committed to being nonpartisan. Hamilton is unique in that despite being labeled a liberal arts school, it has students of varying political identities. HamVotes aspires to uplift every political identity by giving everybody an opportunity to vote and a purpose for why they're voting.

Landscape

Through Hamilton’s college motto, “Know Thyself,” the college actively encourages and “emphasizes intellectual growth, flexibility, and collaboration in a residential academic community.” Our motto encourages students to take an introspective approach to discovering one’s values and interests. With a student’s values comes their stance on important political and social issues, in which HamVotes aids in discovering. We believe that participation in democracy leads to a more knowledgeable and empowered citizenry that can be extended beyond the campus and into neighboring communities. Hamilton uses the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) to measure election participation amongst the students.

According to NSLVE, in the 2020 presidential election, Hamilton had a voting rate of 66.8%, a 16.1% increase from our voting rate in the 2016 presidential election, and .8% more than the voting rate across all institutions. Looking at our registration rates for both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, we find a 4.5% increase from an 83.3% registration rate in 2016 and an 87.8% registration rate in 2020. Lastly, looking at the voting rate of registered students, we find a 15.2% increase from a 60.9% voting rate in 2016 to a 76.1% voting rate in 2020.

Despite the increases in voter registration and voting rates, there are still some challenges that the Hamilton community faces. In spite of efforts to bring a polling place to campus to make voting more accessible for Hamilton students, we have run into problems with finding a space on campus adequate for a polling site. Because it is not possible to have a polling site on campus, many students prefer to vote using absentee ballots / mail ballots for convenience. This requires our organization to strategically plan events that accommodate every states registration deadline, absentee request deadline, and absentee return deadline. We have taken this fact into consideration and restructured our efforts as an organization to focus around mail in / absentee voter education.

Resources

HamVotes has a commitment to all Hamilton students to provide accurate and accessible voting information in a timely fashion. To achieve this goal captains and coordinators are both active on the HamVotes socials. Captains have created comma researched, and posted curated resources to Instagram that are relevant to Hamilton colleges geography and polarizing issues. These posts have also taken into consideration the varying locations that students are from, specialized posts dedicated to the most populated states have been created. The Instagram account is a space for students to share any comments or concerns they have, whether it be through the public comment section or via direct messages.

HamVotes also has an email account that has access to sending information to both students, faculty, and even wider campus. The email has been utilized to send updates about events, reminders about deadlines, and any other information that needs to be shared. students are encouraged to email any questions they have to the email and they can expect to receive a timely response.

At every HamVotes event there is a voting action card that asks voters to reflect on why, where, and how they're voting. This resource ensures that voters are not only informed about their unique process of voting, but also feel empowered and intentional with their vote.

Students that choose to vote by mail do not have to pay for postage. HamVotes has a relationship with the mail center on Hamilton's campus, fostered so that students never have to pay out of pocket. Instead the expenses are covered by the organization.

Strategy

Our strategy will focus on three main areas:

1. Rebuilding relationships with on-campus partners and enhancing support for student leaders.
2. Increasing voter turnout through increasing get-out-the-vote initiatives, focused on mail in / absentee voter education.
3. Teaching civic engagement and liberal democracy to students, with a focus on the shared governance framework as a recognized component of the institution's co-curriculum.
4. Organize discussions on race and voting, and create objectives to assist students of color on campus throughout election season.

Goals

1. Increase eligible student voter turnout rate 5 percentage points in the 2024 elections from the 2020 elections.
2. Reach out to and collaborate with 2 more organizations on campus to increase outreach.
3. Focus on reaching out to more corners of campus in a non-event context; zeroing in on various groups to personalize the experience and make the process easier.

Short Term Tactics

1. Create a “voting in Clinton” guide to help educate new Hamilton voters (both logistical info and candidate info).
2. Create a new logo by a campus artist.

3. Organize discussions on race and voting, and create objectives to assist students of color on campus throughout election season.

Long Term Tactics

1. Hold at least 6 voter registration and 3 educational events.
2. Send out email updates to students every two weeks to keep in touch with the community and to share news and information. Specifically in the fall semester, coordinators should send out information regarding absentee ballots.
3. Establish connections and close ties with community organizations (eg. Jitney services)
4. Write targeted state-by-state emails to be sent in the Fall prior to the election.
5. Integrating civic engagement initiatives in existing infrastructure. Numerous programming events annually take place on campus, such as orientation, summer programs, and Community Advisor (CA) programming, and it would be beneficial to incorporate civic engagement activities into these existing events.

Timeline

Fall 2024

August 15-23: Voter registration tabling (for at least days) and mandatory presentation on civic voting/important things to know in preparation for election year during new student orientation.

September 1: Table at the Clubs & Organizations Fair

September 19: National Voter Registration Day

October 2-6: National Voter Education Week; planned events include tabling for voter registration, Hamilton College instagram takeover, Hamvotes trivia night, posters/flyers across campus, and food trucks to mobilize folks.

Oct 18-Nov 8: Coordinate with mail center to provide free stamps in the mail center for students to send absentee ballots. Coordinate with student transportation to provide transportation to and from polling sites.

October 28: Vote Early Day; interested in collaborating student bands for concert and celebration.

November 7: Election Hero Day; hire a voter education speaker and host an event with college partners.

Spring 2024

January 15-16: Voter registration tabling at January orientation.

January 26: Table at the Clubs & Organizations Fair.

No Set Date Yet: Event partnering with Common Ground with a registration table and other information about relevant primaries.

No Set Date Yet: Watch parties as the debates begin, including snacks and resources to prepare for both the primaries and the general elections.