

Hamilton College Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates for 2020-2021

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Executive Summary

This Hamilton College Action Plan to increase civic learning, political engagement and voter rates outlines the core goals, priorities, and structure for the HamVotes Executive Committee (HVEC).

The HVEC is responsible for the creation and implementation of this plan, directly reporting to the President's Chief of Staff, Gillian King. The HVEC is comprised of representatives from various campus constituencies from Student Activities, Levitt Public Affairs Center, Faculty, Residence Life, First Year Student Experience, Days-Massolo Center our diversity and inclusion center, and student representatives. The HVEC leadership is constructed of an elected full-time campus member co-chair structure mirroring the student organization structure (HamVotes).

The Hamilton College Action Plan in coordination with the HVEC and HamVotes structure is informed by the resources provided by the All In Campus Democracy Challenge, NESCAC Votes, Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV) Coalition, and the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NLSVE).

The plan is intended to guide Hamilton College's work in voter engagement, education, and ballot access as we transition into a critical time and prepare for the 2020 elections and beyond. The plan is inclusive of strategically coordinated programming, communication, and outreach initiatives to increase Hamilton College's voter registration and voter turnout.

Institutional Context

History & Mission

The Hamilton College mission statement reads, "Hamilton College prepares students for lives of meaning, purpose, and active citizenship. Guided by the motto "Know Thyself," the College emphasizes intellectual growth, flexibility, and collaboration in a residential academic community. Hamilton students learn to think independently, embrace difference, write and speak persuasively, and engage issues ethically and creatively. One of America's first liberal arts colleges, Hamilton enables its students to effect positive change in the world."

Hamilton College joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in fall 2017 with the intent of using ALL IN its jumping off point to increase civic engagement for our students through a four-piece plan focused on:

1. voter registration
2. voter education
3. ballot access
4. getting out to vote

We believe that political awareness, dialogue across different political views, and voting in elections is an integral part of developing Hamilton College students to live lives of meaning, purpose, and active citizenship as avowed by our mission.

Organizational Structure

In 2017, the NESAC Votes and ALL IN Challenge was approved by College President David Wippman and was to be based out of the Days Massolo Center, with oversight by at the time Interim Director. After one academic cycle, the HamVotes and HamVotes Student Ambassadors, assessed and reestablished the organizational structure, mission, and strategic plan to reflect the present HamVotes Executive Committee structure outlined below.

Leadership Process: The leadership structure consists of two co-chairs who will serve 4 co-chair semesters and one semester as chair-elect. The primary responsibility of the co-chairs is to manage all aspects of the HamVotes Executive Committee including, but not limited to, scheduling executive committee meetings, serve on the NESAC Votes/All-In Challenge conference calls, update and submit the annual Hamilton College Action Plan, manage NLSVE data and report, and manage HamVotes Executive Committee vacancies.

Executive Committee: The HamVotes Executive Committee is made up of representatives from the following areas of campus with the primary responsibilities:

- Residence Life: voter registration and education for students in the residence halls.
- Student Activities: Support the development and maintenance of the HamVotes student organization. Provide logistical support to the HamVotes Executive Committee.
- Days-Massolo Center: To raise the profile and engage campus in matters of diversity, equity and inclusion when it comes to voter education, registration, and ballot access.
- HamVotes Student Organization: To lead student based non-partisan programming for voter registration, education, and ballot access.
- Government Department: Assist HamVotes Committee (HVC) with faculty engagement and promotion of voter registration, education and ballot access.
- Levitt Center for Public Affairs: Assist HamVotes Committee (HVC) with faculty engagement and promotion of voter registration, education and ballot access.
- First Year Experience: Voter registration and education targeted at first-year students.
- Community Member/County Elections Clerk: Verify work and assist us in remaining in compliance with Federal and State laws; access to voter education and legislative changes
- Communications: Develop a comprehensive communication plan and schedule to promote HamVotes work to campus and greater communities.
- Athletics: Liaison and engage athletes in voting activities and conversations.

Goals

- To increase voter registration by 3.7 points to 90% in 2020-2021.
- To increase voter completion by 11 points to 51.4% in the 2020 Presidential election.

Strategy

This action plan is centered around our voter engagement efforts as they relate to the 2020 Presidential election. We have strategically identified areas of focus for the fall spring 2020, fall 2020, spring 2021, and fall 2021 semesters.

During the spring 2020 semester, we aim to provide our campus community with information about upcoming deadlines for registering to vote and selecting your desired party affiliation so that our students can vote in upcoming caucus votes and primary elections in the various states within which our students are registered to vote. We will continue voter registration efforts and will also work to educate voters on candidates, debate viewings, and platform topics. We are also hoping to apply to earn a Voter Friendly Campus designation this semester.

In the fall 2020 semester, we will continue our voter registration efforts, with an additional emphasis on registering our incoming first-year students. We will host a voter registration party for National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) and will additionally work to host debate watch parties and other educational dialogue-based events to get students talking about political platform issues important to them. For the 2020 Presidential election, we will sponsor shuttles to and from the local polls and will also hold a “party at the mailboxes” to support absentee voters.

The spring 2021 semester will be a transition semester for the HamVotes Committee leadership and will be a time to reflect and debrief our pre-election efforts from spring and fall 2020. We will start to assess our efforts and hope to hold a series of dialogue-based events in partnership with the College Democrats, College Republicans, and Bridge (non-partisan club) to engage students in political discourse and encourage students whose candidate didn’t win the election to stay involved and invested in the being politically informed and engaged. Our campus is starting a sustained dialogue program as a pilot in spring 2020, so assuming the pilot is successful, we’d love to partner with this program to facilitate conversations across differing political views.

As we move into fall 2021, we will continue our voter registration and education efforts. There is not a primary or midterm election during this semester, so we will probably have a fairly low-key semester. We’d like to prioritize student ambassador selection and training during this down-time and also work to ensure our resources, website, and social media are updated and active.

The following list outlines the specific tasks and projects we hope to accomplish during each semester within the categories of voter registration, ballot access and turnout, voter education, and institutionalizing our efforts.

Voter Registration

- Spring 2020
 - Must do:
 - Voter registration tabling at January orientation

- Table at the Clubs & Organizations Fair (in January)
 - Review our NSLVE data with our Institutional Research office to better understand our data and determine areas of opportunity as we move into the 2020 Presidential elections - use what we learn to inform our registration efforts for spring 2020 and fall 2020
 - Revamp our marketing to promote TurboVote use on-campus
 - Table at different residence halls and dining halls - do this at least weekly for at least 1 month
 - Work with senior staff to incorporate voter registration into the class registration/Blackboard site
 - Hold voter registration drive specific to graduating seniors to help them renew their voter registration for their new address (maybe during Senior Week, C&C Awards, Senior portraits day, or work with Career Center to find a major event specific to Seniors)
 - Renew our TurboVote annual contract (in July)
- Want to do:
 - Create voter registration competition/challenge for athletic teams in collaboration with Athletics (to be launched fall 2020)
 - Create an online form on our HamVotes website where faculty/staff/club leaders can request HamVotes ambassadors hold a voter reg table at their event/class
 - Table at the Campus Activities Board (CAB) sponsored “Stand Up and Vote” Comedy show (in April)
 - Host a Brunch & Ballots event at Opus, targeting specifically student populations that have lowest turnout per our NSLVE data
 - Host at least 1 other voter registration drive at an unrelated, yet popular event on campus (FebFest, HamTrek, VCLS, SpeakEasy, TEDx, BLSU Block Party, etc)
 - Come up with a plan to integrate voter registration info into the process for Student Government elections (would be implemented for next SA presidential election in fall 2020)
- If we have more time:
 - Create a voter registration competition/challenge for Greek Life or Residential districts (north side, south side or grey side) (to be launched fall 2020)
- Fall 2020
 - Must do:
 - Voter registration tabling at Matriculation during first-year orientation
 - Table at the Clubs & Organizations Fair (in September)
 - Hold an NVRD voter registration event
 - Host at least 1 other voter registration drive at an unrelated, yet popular event on campus (Great Names, SpeakEasy, Late Nite, CAB show, etc)

- Have College President send out campus-wide email about the importance of voting
 - Have Student Assembly President send out campus-wide email about the importance of voting
 - Table at different residence halls and dining halls - do this at least weekly for at least 1 month
 - Ask faculty to remind students to vote after each class the week leading up to Election Day
 - Execute the athletic competition created in spring 2020, and after execution award prize for top-registered team
 - Continue to promote TurboVote
 - Want to do:
 - Execute on the plan created in spring 2020 to promote voter registration in the SA Election (held in December)
 - Work with Residential Life to incorporate voter registration into floor meeting agenda
 - Work with faculty to incorporate voter registration into syllabi
 - Implement on plan developed in Spring 2020 to incorporate voter registration in the class registration/Blackboard site
 - If we have more time:
 - Execute on the voter registration competition/challenge for Greek Life or Residential districts , and after execution award prize to top-registered group
 - Plan and host a large-scale event centered around voter engagement (concert, food trucks, BBQ, silent disco, etc)
 - Coordinate HamVotes ambassadors to do “class raps” (with professor’s permission, the ambassador speaks for ~5 mins about voting and helps students in the class to register)
- Spring 2021
 - Must do:
 - Voter registration tabling at January orientation
 - Table at the Clubs & Organizations Fair (in January)
 - Table at different residence halls and dining halls - do this at least weekly for at least 1 month
 - Host at least 1 other voter registration drive at an unrelated, yet popular event on campus (FebFest, HamTrek, VCLS, SpeakEasy, TEDx, BLSU Block Party, etc)
 - Continue to promote TurboVote
 - Have Student Assembly President send out campus-wide email about the importance of voting
 - Hold voter registration drive specific to graduating seniors to help them renew their voter registration for their new address (maybe during Senior

Week, C&C Awards, Senior portraits day, or work with Career Center to find a major event specific to Seniors)

- Renew our TurboVote annual contract (in July)
- Fall 2021:
 - Must do:
 - Voter registration tabling at Matriculation during first-year orientation
 - Table at the Clubs & Organizations Fair (in September)
 - Hold an NVRD voter registration event
 - Table at different residence halls and dining halls - do this at least weekly for at least 1 month
 - Host at least 1 other voter registration drive at an unrelated, yet popular event on campus (Great Names, SpeakEasy, Late Nite, CAB show, etc)
 - Continue to promote TurboVote
 - Have College President send out campus-wide email about the importance of voting

Ballot Access & Turnout

- Spring 2020
 - Must do:
 - Work with Campus Vote Project to understand and promote student voting rights in NY state and common states our students are registered to vote in
 - Create “pledge to vote” cards, including an option on the card for volunteering/joining HamVotes (to be implemented in fall 2020)
 - Research voter fraud and voter access issues our students may face in the fall 2020 election and prepare information to distribute about these issues
 - Want to do:
 - Create bulletin board content about ballot access for RAs to put up in residence halls
 - Create social media campaign to showcase what issues students on our campus care about
- Fall 2020
 - Must do:
 - Create, print, and post fliers and information promoting the upcoming election
 - Include information about voter fraud and ballot access issues students may face
 - Takeover the Hamilton College social media accounts to talk about voting
 - Social media campaign the week leading up to NVRD and the week leading up to Election Day

- Implement the pledge to vote cards campaign
 - Put the “pledge to vote” cards made in spring 2020 into every student’s mailbox
 - If they fill them out and turn them in to HamVotes, they get a treat;
 - Then we can hang them all up somewhere visible to show our campus’ commitment to voting
 - Host a “party at the mailboxes” with #VoteTogether to encourage and help absentee voters submit their ballots, complete with envelopes and stamps for students to use
 - Coordinate and run Jitney (shuttle) service to local polls for Election Day
 - Want to do:
 - Decorate the dining halls for Election Day, including making table standee informational signs
 - Invite Alex Ham mascot to participate in NVRD and/or Election Day events
- Spring 2021
 - Must do:
 - Create additional bulletin board content regarding voting access for RAs and/or update previous bulletin boards
 - Create social media campaign to showcase what issues students on our campus care about
- Fall 2021
 - Must do:
 - Create additional bulletin board content regarding voting access for RAs and/or update previous bulletin boards
 - Create social media campaign to showcase what issues students on our campus care about

Voter Education

- Spring 2020
 - Must do:
 - Update content on our HamVotes website with upcoming deadlines, voter reg info, and our team bios
 - Create a nonpartisan voter guide featuring FAQs tailored to student voters
 - Promote and host debate watch parties
 - Promote and host a State of the Union watch party
 - Want to do:
 - Work with DMC & Levitt Center to host lunch & learns about issues affecting our community

- Host a “circle of voices” discussion where international students share their political experiences from their own countries with peers
 - Work with *The Spectator* to launch a series of articles about youth voting
 - HamVotes Ambassadors write and post blog articles/content for HamVotes website
 - Promote and host a speaker series featuring candidates running for office
- Fall 2020
 - Must do:
 - Distribute the nonpartisan voter guide created in Spring 2020
 - Promote and host debate watch parties
 - Have *The Spectator* feature articles about the 2020 Election and important deadlines and resources for our students
 - HamVotes Ambassadors write and post blog articles/content for HamVotes website
 - Want to do:
 - Work with DMC & Levitt Center to host lunch & learns about issues affecting our community
 - Host a “circle of voices” discussion where international students share their political experiences from their own countries with peers
 - Host a student-led debate on political platform hot topics
 - Work with local election clerk to recruit students to work the polls on Election Day
 - Student ambassadors create and implement presentations for local K-12 classes about the importance of voting and civic engagement
- Spring 2021
 - Must do:
 - Work with DMC & Levitt Center to host lunch & learns about issues affecting our community
 - Host a “circle of voices” discussion where international students share their political experiences from their own countries with peers
 - HamVotes Ambassadors write and post blog articles/content for HamVotes website
 - Want to do:
 - Work with *The Spectator* to continue the series of articles about youth voting from spring 2020
 - Organize a “lobby/advocacy day” to support student-friendly voting laws
 - Coordinate trips for students to attend city/town council meetings to learn more about local politics
 - If we have more time:
 - Organize and host a NESAC summit to share best practices for engaging student voters

- Fall 2021
 - Must do:
 - Work with DMC & Levitt Center to host lunch & learns about issues affecting our community
 - Host a “circle of voices” discussion where international students share their political experiences from their own countries with peers
 - Update and distribute the nonpartisan voter guide created in Spring 2020
 - HamVotes Ambassadors write and post blog articles/content for HamVotes website
 - Want to do:
 - Coordinate trips for students to attend city/town council meetings to learn more about local politics

Institutionalize this Work

- Spring 2020
 - Must do:
 - Submit ALL IN democracy challenge plan for 2020-2021 (due in January)
 - Review this plan with the HamVotes ambassadors and restructure their student e-board and g-board positions to effectively implement this plan
 - Finalize the new HamVotes committee structure, fill all seats on the committee, and meet monthly
 - Get a local county clerk to participate
 - Start the conversation with administration and Dean of Faculty about class attendance on Election Day
 - Apply for NASPA Voter Friendly Campus designation
 - Link our HamVotes site to the Hamilton website and update so it can be found (currently it’s unlinked)
 - Create new logo branding for HamVotes and order HamVotes ambassadors shirts to wear at their initiatives
 - Participate in monthly calls for NESCAC votes
 - Send out a news release to announce we received medal from All In in 2019
 - Work with FYE to incorporate democratic engagement information and resources in the transition packet for first-year students
 - Develop and implement hiring/election plan for HamVotes ambassador e-board
 - Want to do:
 - Participate in monthly calls of the Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV) Coalition
 - Work with senior staff to try to have Election Day added to the college calendar

- End of year thank you/debrief lunch for student ambassadors with President Wippman
- Fall 2020
 - Must do:
 - HamVotes committee meet monthly
 - College President send out emails about our past year successes, NSLVE data results, NESCAC votes participation & goal, and commitment to our work
 - Participate in monthly calls for NESCAC votes
 - Prepare for one co-chair to transition out and on-board incoming co-chair
 - Want to do:
 - Promote and host an info session for students who are not eligible to vote so they can be involved in the conversation as well
- Spring 2021
 - Must do:
 - HamVotes committee meet monthly
 - Develop and implement hiring/election plan for HamVotes ambassador e-board
 - Re-apply for NASPA Voter Friendly Campus designation
 - Send out a news release to announce we received medal from All In in 2020
 - Work with FYE to incorporate democratic engagement information and resources in the transition packet for first-year students
 - Want to do:
 - End of year thank you/debrief lunch for student ambassadors with President Wippman
- Fall 2021
 - Must do:
 - HamVotes committee meet monthly
 - College President send out emails about our past year successes, NSLVE data results, NESCAC votes participation & goal, and commitment to our work

Evaluation & Reporting

Evaluation of the Hamilton College Action Plan to increase civic learning, political engagement and voter rates will be an inclusive work of HVEC. The HVEC will work to develop qualitative and quantitative metrics to assess students. The evaluation methods will be grounded in the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. The evaluation methods, desired outcomes, and delivery mediums will be established come the culmination of the spring 2020 academic term.