



2024 Action Plan for Campus Civic Engagement

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**CAMPUS
DEMOCRACY
CHALLENGE**

I. Executive Summary

The Illinois College Affirmation of Community Responsibility represents a guiding ideology for our work around democratic engagement. As this affirmation states, *to ensure that all members of our community live, work, and learn in an environment where they can thrive, we affirm four guiding virtues: commitment, curiosity, clarity, and civility.*

With this affirmation in mind, the Office of Civic Engagement and Student Leadership's goal in leading the campus voter and election engagement programming is to instill in students a *commitment* to democratic principles; the *curiosity* to pursue quality information; the *clarity* to engage with compassion and move towards collective justice; and the principle of approaching with *civility* those who may hold different political perspectives or ideologies.

This action plan is the work of the Office of Civic Engagement and Student Leadership's IC Votes initiative, which includes representatives across campus - staff, faculty, and students - with the sole focus of encouraging election engagement of the Illinois College student body. This nonpartisan initiative is charged with educating students on their voting rights, the democratic process, and the importance of engaging in that process. The goal of this initiative is to build on the past several election cycles and the ever-improving turnout of Illinois College student voters.

Prior to 2023, efforts to engage the campus fell primarily on the Office of Community-Engaged Learning, but with a revamp of the college's student life division and the founding of a new office - the Office of Civic Engagement and Student Leadership - there has been a renewed focus to expand the nonpartisan voter engagement work already happening and to engage more voices in the process. The IC Votes initiative was founded in the fall of 2023 - one year out from the 2024 presidential election - as a means of engaging additional voices. The initiative - led by the Office of Civic Engagement and Student Leadership - is able to reach across campus and accomplish its goals far quicker and more effectively than any one individual office can.

Moving forward, the IC Votes initiative will oversee the planning and implementation of campus programming, the assessment of initiative-led programs, and the evaluation of cross-campus work to turn out voters.

Illinois College has a long history of civic engagement. Founded by a band of Yale graduates in 1829 in Jacksonville, Illinois, the college took up the cause of abolitionism, with students, faculty, and a small group of local community members participating in the underground railroad. The first and second presidents of Illinois College, Edward Beecher and Julian Sturtevant, were very active in the local abolitionist movement. Edward Beecher is also the brother of the famous Harriet Beecher

Stowe, who authored the influential anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. Illinois College continues this commitment to social justice to the present day.

Graduates of Illinois College have a long history of public service. One of its first graduates, Richard Yates, would serve in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1851-1855, as Illinois Governor from 1861-1865, and in the U.S. Senate from 1865-1871. Another famous alumnus, William Jennings Bryan, also served as a U.S. Congressman, a U.S. Secretary of State, and ran on the Democratic Party's presidential ticket in 1896, 1900, and 1908. In total, the college has produced two U.S. senators, 20 U.S. congressmen, and six state governors.

The IC Votes initiative looks forward to building on this long campus history as we approach the 2024 presidential election, Jacksonville, IL's bicentennial in 2025 (which Illinois College is an anchor institution for), and Illinois College's bicentennial in 2029. This plan will guide the initiative's work through the 2024 presidential election with an evaluation post-election in preparation for the development of a 2026 action plan.

II. Leadership

The IC Votes initiative's coordinating committee is chaired by Ryan Flynn, Director of Civic Engagement and Student Leadership. Staff and faculty members are chosen to participate either for their known passion for student voter engagement or because they can bring valuable or underrepresented perspectives to better meet Illinois College students where they are. Student members are chosen based on their positions on campus with one member from Student Senate, one student representing Greek Life, and the last position for that year's Newman Civic Fellow (through Campus Compact). Additionally, one seat on the committee is reserved for a local community member, although this seat is currently vacant with the hopes of filling it in spring 2024.

IC Votes Initiative's Coordinating Committee:

First	Last	Department	Title	Affiliation
Ryan	Flynn	Center for Career Readiness and Experiential Learning	Director of Civic Engagement and Student Leadership	Staff
McKenna	Jacquemet	Schewe Library	Research Services and Information Literacy Librarian	Staff
Emma	Lantz	Center for Student	Assistant Director	Staff

		Engagement, Inclusion, and Belonging	for Student Engagement and Belonging	
Meghan	Roman	Athletics	Director of Athletics	Staff
Cameron	Sweatman	Center for Student Engagement, Inclusion, and Belonging	Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging	Staff
Paige	Walker	Student Senate	Student Senate President	Student
Dane	Wendell	Department of Political Science	Associate Professor of Political Science; Department Chair	Faculty
Phoebe	Williams	Newman Civic Fellowship	Newman Civic Fellow	Student
Vacant		Greek Life		Student
Vacant		Community Partner		Community

Due to Jacksonville, IL being such a small community, we were not able to achieve our goal of getting representation from the local election office, but we will be consulting with their office in a case-by-case basis when voter registration issues or questions arise. They are supportive, but do not have the capacity to play a role in our planning process.

III. Commitment

Since joining the All In Campus Democracy Challenge in 2019, the college has steadily ramped up its civic engagement programming to provide year-round engagement through the Office of Civic Engagement and Student Leadership.

A cornerstone program includes annual first-year seminar workshop offerings on the importance of voting, how to register if you're a first-time voter, and how to research candidates for office. These workshops provide a valuable opportunity to get this message to students within their first semester on campus, allowing us to build on its importance over the students' next three and a half years.

Starting with the 2021-22 academic year, the college has invested resources into maintaining a Newman Civic Fellow through Campus Compact. The Newman Civic Fellowship recognizes and supports community-committed students who are changemakers and public problem-solvers at Campus Compact member institutions. Through the fellowship, Campus Compact provides students with training and resources that nurture their assets and passions and help them develop strategies for social change. The yearlong program, named for Campus Compact founder Frank Newman, includes virtual learning opportunities and networking as part of a national network of engaged student leaders and an optional in-person convening. Illinois College's Newman Civic Fellows have been instrumental in expanding the role of students in the campus civic discourse, whether that be through implementing voter registration events, planning our annual Constitution Day trivia night, or even doing research on local civic organization documents - as was the case with our 2021-22 fellow, D'Ajahnae Croft, who researched a collection of donated records from the local League of Women Voters organization.

Illinois College's commitment to civic education is also reflected in the newly launched True Blue Toolkit, which is a customized version of a co-curricular transcript. The Toolkit allows students to work towards fifteen different transferable skills and provides students the language needed to articulate the work they're doing beyond the classroom. As part of the newly launched Toolkit are three earnable transferable skills: "systems literacy," "civic awareness," and "community engagement." Through work in these three skills, students are asked to commit to participating in community service, practicing civic discourse, and considering society through the lens of power and justice. Much of the work the IC Votes initiative will be conducting this upcoming year will filter through the True Blue Toolkit, which will better demonstrate to students the importance of civic engagement.

IV. Landscape

Background

Illinois College has been involved in promoting voting and the importance of voting for years, but it wasn't until 2019 that this was included in a position's job description. Often this was done through student organizations or the now-renamed Center for Student Involvement. It wasn't until 2020 that there was an attempt at creating an organizing committee for programming around the election - something that was not relaunched for the 2022 midterm elections. With the new IC Votes initiative and coordinating committee, the college hopes to regain the momentum it had before the 2020 election.

Local Engagement

While the college does not have a polling place on campus, students registered with their college addresses are able to vote at the nearest polling station, approximately half a mile away. During election day, the college also provides shuttles to the polling station, as well as shuttles to the local election office for same-day registrations.

Barriers to Students Voting

In the spring of 2024, IC Votes will be undertaking a research study to understand and attempt to remedy consistently lower voting rates amongst black and hispanic students compared to white students at Illinois College. The table below highlights the difference. Unfortunately, there is no reported data from the NSLVE report for black and hispanic students for 2014 or 2018. Through this research study, we hope to have data to inform programmatic additions for the fall semester to remove potential barriers for these demographic groups. This study will be wrapped up before the May report deadline. We'll include our findings in that report.

Election Year	White Student Voting Rate	Black Student Voting Rate	Hispanic Student Voting Rate
2012	37.5%	32.5%	n/a
2014	16.8%	n/a	n/a
2016	47.4%	37.4%	33.9%
2018	29.1%	n/a	n/a
2020	61.4%	50.6%	44.9%
2022	Waiting on the NSLVE report	-	-

Financial Support

The IC Votes initiative has dedicated funding from the Office of Civic Engagement and Student Leadership to implement programming with a guarantee to increase funding as needed, ensuring adequate support for the initiative. Additionally, funding has been found through an endowment and various partnerships between offices around the college. Thanks to the coordinating committee we have reason to believe more partnerships may occur during the 2024 election cycle, adding to the number of programs we'll be able to offer.

V. Goals

2024 Goals (Short-Term)

Goal #1: For the 2024 election cycle, IC Votes is aiming to match or exceed Illinois College student voting rates from the 2020 election:

1. The 2020 registration rate: 81.2%
2. The 2020 voting rate of registered students: 72.1%
3. The 2020 voting rate for all students: 58.5%

Below is our past NSLVE data. Illinois College, like many colleges, has seen an upward trend in civic engagement in recent years. We hope to maintain or expand on this upward trend with the 2024 election cycle.

NSLVE Data - Presidential Elections			
Year	Registration Rate	Voting Rate of Registered Students	Voting Rate of All Students
2012	70.6%	54.5%	38.5%
2016	76.6%	59.0%	45.2%
2020	81.2%	72.1%	58.5%

Goal #2: Complete a study of Illinois College student voting rates from underrepresented groups to inform strategies to remedy a gap in voting rates between white students and black and hispanic students.

Goal #3: Expand IC Votes' civic engagement efforts to include a focus on civic resilience, with an emphasis on developing and promoting opportunities focused on information literacy, campaign financing, and how to conduct ballot research.

Long-Term Goals

Goal #1: Achieve a 90% voter registration rate by the 2028 general election.

Goal #2: Achieve voting rate parity among key student demographics by the 2028 general election.

VI. Strategy

We will meet our goals by enacting the 2024 Campus Civic Engagement Action Plan and its intended activities over the 2024 calendar year.

Spring 2024 Strategies				
Strategy	Stakeholders	Key Dates	Purpose	Goal
Complete the nomination of the 2024-25 Newman Civic Fellow	Newman Civic Fellow nominating committee & Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership	February 9 (nominations due to committee); March 1 (nominations due to Campus Compact)	The 2024-25 fellow will help coordinate voter engagement activities during the fall 2024 semester.	Short-Term Goal #1
Integrate IC Votes programming into the newly launched True Blue Toolkit's "Civic Identity" competency	Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership / Student Life Division	January - May 2024	By integrating programming between these two initiatives, we can ensure proper coverage of all civic engagement topics we want to target, helping us meet the goals of this action plan	Short-Term Goals #1 and #3
Conduct a study of voting perspectives of underrepresented demographic groups	Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership / Center for Student Engagement, Inclusion, and Belonging	February - April 2024	To study what barriers may exist to explain the gap in student voting rates between students in several NSLVE-reported demographic groups	Short-Term Goal #2 (informing strategies for Long-Term Goal #2)

Fall 2024 Strategies

Strategy	Stakeholders	Key Dates	Purpose	Goal
First-Year Seminar Voter Engagement Workshops	Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership / First-Year Seminar Faculty	August - November 2024	Provide context and information on voting and elections for new students	Short-Term Goals #1 and #3
Constitution Day Trivia Night	Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership / Political Science Department / Office of the Dean of Faculty	September 16, 2024	Engage students in a fun, low-key event that encourages civic participation	Short-Term Goal #1
National Voter Registration Day Pop-Up Event	Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership	September 17, 2024	Register students to vote, help students check and/or change their registration	Short-Term Goals #1 and #3
Rides to the Polls	Center for Student Engagement, Inclusion, and Belonging	Election Day; November 5, 2024	Provide IC transportation for students needing to vote	Short-Term Goal #1
Election Week Student Supportive Activities	Various Offices in Student Life	Election Week; November 4-8, 2024	Provide whatever support is needed by students in case of another contentious election (in the past, this has included reminders for counseling services, stress relief grab-and-go bags, etc.)	Short-Term Goal #1

Long-Term Strategies

Strategy	Stakeholders	Key Dates	Purpose	Goal
Embed voter registration into the Welcome Week check-in process for first-year students	Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership / Admissions	Aiming for a 2024 Welcome Week start date, but may shift back to 2025	Better meet new students where they're at to help them register to vote, rather than hoping we catch them at a pop-up event	Long-Term Goal #1
Implement barrier-breaking programming focused on key demographic groups with lower than average voting rates	Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership / Student Organizations / Center for Student Engagement, Inclusion, and Belonging	Start in fall 2024, based on data collected in spring 2024; continue to review and revamp strategies with each incoming class	Find unique interventions and programming to target key demographics that are typically under-registered and have lower voting rates	Long-Term Goal #2

VII. Reporting

This action plan will be shared with Illinois College's Cabinet, Board of Trustees, and any other faculty/staff by request. In addition, the college makes our NSLVE data available upon request and the Office of Civic Engagement & Student Leadership sends out highlights to all faculty and staff when the report is released. The IC Votes coordinating committee will be working with our Marketing department to get the NSLVE report posted on our internal platform for student, staff, and faculty viewing.

VIII. Evaluation

Illinois College, like many colleges, has dealt with notable staff turnover since 2020 and the onset of the COVID pandemic. With this in mind, the launch of the IC Votes initiative represents an opportunity to capture the energy that comes with onboarding new staff, as well as provides an ongoing record of past efforts and maintaining institutional knowledge. Significant evaluation has not occurred in recent years due to these compounding factors, but is an important focus in the

work the IC Votes coordinating committee plans to complete in the lead up to the 2024 general election.

With an upcoming study on voting rates by underrepresented demographic groups - primarily black and hispanic students - we hope to better understand the barriers impacting participation and enact changes to better meet students where they're at. This research will dramatically impact the programming to be offered in fall 2024, as well as subsequent years. In addition to this research, the IC Votes coordinating committee will be undertaking qualitative and quantitative feedback gathering throughout the fall 2024 semester to make adjustments to programming in realtime. This includes adjusting drop-in hours for voter registration assistance or adjusting where resources are located.

An end-of-the-semester evaluation will be conducted by the IC Votes coordinating committee to collect initial feedback post-election, which will be used to develop our 2026 action plan.

IX. Conclusion

Building on the successful progress made on campus voter engagement in 2020 and 2022, Illinois College is committing further time and resources to continue that progression towards the 2024 midterms. The college affirms its commitment to increasing its student populations' civic awareness and voting rates. With the major importance of the 2024 general election, we are both energized and cautiously optimistic about the work getting ready to begin. We look forward to engaging students in civic discourse around tough conversations and providing opportunities for students to engage with each other as we approach this important election.