

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics

All In Campus Democracy Challenge

2020 Action Plan

December 15, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This action plan was developed by Dr. Karen M. Kedrowski in conjunction with the Vote Everywhere Student Club, led by Ms. Hayat Sumael. This action plan describes Iowa State's goals for student voter engagement in the 2020 general election cycle and the strategies to achieve these goals.

Iowa State University is one of three public, four-year universities in Iowa and is the state's land-grant institution. The campus is located in Ames, Iowa.

This action plan was developed to chart a course for student voting engagement in the 2020 general election and beyond. This commitment to civic engagement is consistent with the University's commitment to "make Iowa and the world a better place"¹ and its goal to "...shape well-rounded citizens and informed thinkers needed in the 21st century."²

This action plan will begin in January 2020 and end in December 2020. The action plan lays out short term goals for the fall 2020 general election, and longer term goals, such as to build a campus coalition that will sustain voter outreach efforts in to future election cycles.

The lead organization to implement this action plan is the Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics at Iowa State University (ISU). The Catt Center is named after the famous women's suffrage advocate who also founded the League of Women Voters. In her spirit, the Catt Center is also dedicated to developing engaged and educated citizens. The Catt Center director is Dr. Karen Kedrowski, a political scientist who has significant experience in promoting civic engagement.

¹ Iowa State University Mission Statement. <https://www.president.iastate.edu/projects/mission>.

² Iowa State University 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, Goal 1. <https://strategicplan.iastate.edu/iowa-state-university-strategic-plan-2017-2022.pdf>. p. 4.

Iowa State’s long term goals are to increase the student registration and turnout rates by approximately 5 percent by 2026 and 2028 and to eliminate the turnout gap between STEM students and their peers by 2028. Short term goals for the 2020 calendar year include increasing the registration and turnout rates by two percent (2%), including racial/ethnic breakdowns in the institution’s NSLVE report, and establishing a campus-wide coalition focused on voting.

LEADERSHIP

Iowa State’s voter engagement efforts will be led by the Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics and its affiliated student club, Vote Everywhere.

Iowa State does not yet have a working group or coalition focused on student voting engagement. However, the time is ripe to create one. There are large number of student organizations, offices, and initiatives that share an interest in civic engagement, politics, or current affairs. Thus, one goal for the 2020 election cycle is to create a working group to coordinate student voter turnout efforts.

Potential working group members include:

Student Clubs: The Iowa State University web site lists 36 student organizations under the “political and activism” category. In addition to College Democrats and College Republicans,



these organizations focus on issues such as climate change, ethical eating, abortion opposition, and human trafficking; ideological groups such as the Young Socialists and the Young Americans for Freedom; and groups favoring political candidates.³

In addition, Student Government has a Civic Education Committee⁴ and the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Engagement has a civic engagement liaison that helps Greek

Organizations meet their community engagement and philanthropic goals.⁵ The Graduate and Professional Students’ Association is another outlet to reach students.

Student Media: Especially the *Iowa State Daily*, including the emailed daily summary, *The Daily Dose*.

³ For a complete list, visit the Student Organizations web page: <https://www.stuorg.iastate.edu/orgtype/17>.

⁴ For more information, see the Student Government web page: <https://www.stugov.iastate.edu/civic-engagement-committee/>.

⁵ For more information, see the Sororities and Fraternities web page: <https://sfe.dso.iastate.edu/organizations/civic-engagement>.

Student Affairs Division: Certain offices in Student Affairs, including the Dean of Students Office, Residence Life, and Orientation will be invited to participate. We hope that by building these relationships, we can set up voter registration tables at move in day, for instance.

Academic Units: Academic departments provide another avenue for possible engagement, especially those academic departments whose students are less likely to vote. At ISU these are majors in the STEM fields. These departments may be able to provide entrée to large-section courses and their associated academic clubs and honor societies. In addition, we will recruit coalition members from the Graduate School, which is able to reach a large group of students quite easily.

Extension: The Extension Division of the University, which works with local communities and organizations throughout the state, has a vigorous civic engagement initiative.⁶

Off-Campus Partners: Iowa State has a number of off-campus partners who are also interested in student voting engagement. They include:

- The Story County Auditor’s Office (responsible for election administration)
- The League of Women Voters in Ames/Story County (voter registration advocates)
- The Democratic and Republican Parties of Story County
- The Andrew Goodman Foundation

Dr. Kedrowski met with several campus administrators during the summer of 2019 and laid the ground work for this coalition. The coalition does need the support of a high-level administrator at the Vice Presidential level to give the coalition more credibility and gravitas.

The group will meet monthly starting in March 2020 to discuss strategies for voter engagement in the general election and by email as needed.

COMMITMENT

Elements of Iowa State University’s commitment to civic learning and engagement is present in its mission, strategic plan, the general education program, and other key documents.

First, Iowa State is one of three “Regents’ Universities,” public four-year institutions that are governed by a common board. The Board of Regents’ Mission Statement embraces, “Civic responsibility that enhances the quality of life.” The Board’s Core Values



⁶ For more information, see the Extension web page: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/civic-engagement-and-leadership>.

include “practices for transformative growth, which consist of “civil collaboration” and “inclusive discourse.” Another Core Value, Ethical Behavior, calls for “transparency;” “open and effective communication;” and “public accountability, stewardship, and service,” all of which speak to civic engagement and good government.⁷ This commitment is communicated to the public through its web site.

Second, Iowa State University’s Mission Statement is to “Create, share and apply knowledge to make Iowa and the world a better place.”⁸ This broad statement certainly includes producing citizens who think critically and participate actively in the democratic process. Similarly, the University’s Strategic Plan Goal One calls for the University to produce students who are “...well-rounded citizens and informed critical thinkers...”⁹ These documents are available on the Office of the President’s page on the ISU web site.

Third, Iowa State participates in the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative, the All In Campus Democracy Challenge, and the Big 12 Voting Challenge. Unfortunately, Iowa State dropped its membership in Iowa Campus Compact (ICC) in 2019 despite having several faculty and staff work with the ICC in recent years.

Civic engagement programs are assessed through the Campus Climate survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).

LANDSCAPE

Iowa State’s campus climate has several notable strengths and some important areas for improvement.

Resources Supporting Voter Engagement:

- **A History of Strong Student Voter Turnout:** One of the first strengths is that Iowa State students at higher than average rates. According to the **National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)**, 55.1 percent of ISU students voted in 2016, compared to 50.4 percent nationally, earning ISU a Bronze Shield from the All in Campus Democracy Challenge.¹⁰ In 2018, 40.6 percent of ISU students voted, slightly higher than the national average of 39.1percent. This was an 18percent point improvement over 2014 and the largest improvement of any participating Iowa college or university. These results earned ISU a Gold Shield from the All In Campus Democracy Challenge and an award from Iowa Campus Compact.¹¹

⁷ Iowa Board of Regents. *2016-2021 Strategic Plan*. p. 3.

https://www.iowaregents.edu/media/cms/StrategicPlan20162021_8DF57DE6E608A.pdf.

⁸ Iowa State University Mission and Vision. <https://www.president.iastate.edu/projects/mission>.

⁹ Iowa State University 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. p. 4. <https://strategicplan.iastate.edu/iowa-state-university-strategic-plan-2017-2022.pdf>.

¹⁰ Iowa State 2012 & 2016 NSLVE Report.

¹¹ Iowa State 2014 & 2018 NSLVE Report

- **Curriculum:** The general education program requires students to study disciplines that ask them to think critically about major questions confronting our society: 12 credit hours in the Arts & Humanities, nine credit hours in the Social Sciences, and one course each in US Diversity and International Perspectives.¹² This information is communicated to the public and students through the ISU web site and through its academic advising program. While no American History or American Government courses are required *per se*, they are popular offerings, enrolling about 800 students per year (300 in the two-semester American History sequence and 500 in American Government).¹³

In addition, Student Government generously funds a vigorous University Lectures program, which sponsors dozens of speakers who address topical issues, many of which are political in nature. For example, in Fall 2019 alone, University Lectures sponsored programs on communication and civility in democracy (two events), free speech (two events), battling xenophobia, gender on the campaign trail, domestic violence, urban planning, impeachment, national security, and the environment (three events). It also hosted town halls with Presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren and City Council Ward Four candidates.¹⁴

ISU faculty are generous in offering extra credit to students who attend and the ISU Lectures program has a system in place to “swipe” student ID cards to track attendance.

- **Co-Curriculum:** As noted above, there are dozens of student organizations that focus on civic engagement from partisan, ideological, and/or issue-based perspectives. This indicates that civic engagement is a key part of the co-curricular program. In addition, ISU has a commitment to sending interested students, faculty, and staff to the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE) each year and hosts a local version of this conference, ISCORE, on campus each year, which is open to all ISU students, faculty, and staff.



- **Administrative Actions to Support Student Voting:** Furthermore, the University has taken several steps recently to help students exercise their right to vote and/or enable them to participate in the 2020 Iowa caucuses. These include:
 - Distributing voter registration forms at the University’s ID Office;
 - Hosting an early voting location in the Memorial Union;
 - Adding a screen to the student portal, Access Plus, which lists the student’s local address. This screen or printout is accepted by poll workers as proof of address;
 - Adding an expiration date to student IDs so they can be used as proof of identification at the polls; and

¹² Iowa State University General Education. <https://las.iastate.edu/students/academics/general-education/>.

¹³ Data calculated by author from enrollment statistics available from Institutional Research.

¹⁴ University Lectures Program: <https://www.lectures.iastate.edu/events/all?page=1>.

- Issuing a statement in October 2019, that encourages faculty to excuse students who are absent from Monday night classes because they are participating in the February 3, 2020 precinct caucuses.¹⁵

Finally, ISU students comprise over half the population of Ames. The University cooperates with the Story County Auditor on precinct locations. Four polling places are located on the ISU campus, all in close proximity to residence halls, on-campus apartments, or fraternity and sorority houses. Similarly, eight Story County Democratic Party 2020 precinct caucus locations are on campus.¹⁶

- **Vote Everywhere and Financial Resources:** Iowa State has a relationship with the Andrew Goodman Foundation, which funds three student advocates and provides up to \$1000 per year to support voter engagement activities plus plenty of free giveaways. It also provides the my.VoteEverywhere portal that provides students with information about voting and elections.
- **External Factors Supporting Voter Engagement:** Iowa State enjoys a number of external factors that help encourage student voting engagement. They include:
 - An active local chapter of the League of Women Voters, which provides assistance with voter registration activities.
 - The First-in-the-Nation presidential caucuses brings presidential candidates and national and international media attention to Iowa. This is a ready-made lesson in civics for anyone with a passing interest in politics and government;
 - Iowa's nonpartisan commission to draw its congressional and legislative district lines, which means that partisan gerrymandering is minimized and the state has many competitive districts, including three of the four US House districts;
 - A vigorously contested US Senate race between US Senator Joni Ernst (R) and her three Democratic challengers. This contest will generate quite a bit of interest in the fall; and
 - Iowa's voting laws, which allow same day registration.

Internal and External Barriers to Success:

- **Student Engagement:** ISU participates in the **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)**, which queries college freshmen and seniors on their collegiate experiences. The 2016 NSSE administration, the most recent available, found that ISU students scored below their peers at other American Association of Universities (AAU) and Carnegie Class institutions on questions broadly related to civic engagement (see Table 1). These results imply that many ISU students are not engaged in the types of vigorous debate and exposure to different points of view that train for a lifetime of civic engagement.

¹⁵ Rob Schweers. "Plan ahead for caucus night classes." *Inside Iowa State*. October 24, 2019. <https://www.inside.iastate.edu/article/2019/10/24/caucus>.

¹⁶ For a complete list: <https://datastudio.google.com/embed/reporting/1bfsCMI-agXefspM6tNE811g-3oRO033Q/page/Wjex>. The Story County Republican Party is also hosting precinct caucuses. However, will be held off campus.

Table 1: ISU 2016 NSSE Results Related to Civic Education/Engagement¹⁷

NSSE Question	ISU Senior Responses (%)	Peer Institution Comparisons	
		AAU (%)	Carnegie Class (%)
Under “Reflective and Integrative Learning”			
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	51*	-10	-9
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	41*	-12	-9
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	64*	-5	-5
Under “Discussions with Diverse Others” (“Had discussions with...”)			
People from a race or ethnicity other than your own	61*	-16	-14
People from an economic background other than your own	70*	-7	-5
People with religious beliefs other than your own	64*	-9	-5
People with political views other than your own	72*	1	0
Under “Campus Environment” (“How much did the institution emphasize...”)			
Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (socioeconomically, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)	44**	-8	-8
Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues	44**	-2	-1

*Percentage who responded “often” or “very often.”

**Percentage who responded “very much” or “quite a bit.”

- **Apparent Lukewarm Support from Administrative Leaders:** Dr. Kedrowski has requested meetings with several administrative leaders to gauge their interest in helping with voter engagement. To date these meetings have been met with lukewarm responses. Similarly, ISU recently canceled its membership in Iowa Campus Compact, citing budget woes as the reason.

While the Catt Center and Vote Everywhere will continue to work on a campus coalition, doing so would be easier with the endorsement of administrative leaders. The reason for this apparent lack of enthusiasm is unknown.

- **Campus Climate:** Nearly three-quarters (75%) of the Iowa State student body identifies as non-Hispanic white. Students of color, including Latinx, African American, Asian, Native American, and Native Hawaiian, comprise about 11 percent of the student body. Students of color have long asserted that they confront a hostile climate on campus. These concerns have been reinforced by racist incidents on campus in recent months, including anti-Mexican and

¹⁷ National Survey of Student Engagement. “NSSE 2016 Engagement Indicators, Iowa State University.” [https://www.ir.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/PDF's/NSSE16%20Engagement%20Indicators%20\(ISU\).pdf](https://www.ir.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/PDF's/NSSE16%20Engagement%20Indicators%20(ISU).pdf)

anti-Semitic graffiti and threats of violence on social media.¹⁸ These incidents are dominating the campus conversation and are consuming a great deal of time and energy on the part of some possible coalition members in the Division of Student Life.



- **New Voter ID Law:** Iowa has now fully implemented its voter ID law. This law has the potential to depress student voter turnout if students do not know what forms of identification and proof of address they need to bring to the polling place. Communicating this to the campus community will be a challenge.

Additional Resources to Help Ensure Success: The Iowa State team has identified the following resources that will help it succeed in its voter registration and engagement efforts:

- **Securing Upper Administration Support:** An endorsement from a high ranking administrator will give the Vote Everywhere team some credibility when it seeks to collaborate with other offices and student organizations on campus. Advice about how to secure such an endorsement is most welcome.
- **Professional Development:** The team could also benefit from information sharing and best practices that focus on strategies for successful voter engagement on a very large campus.

GOALS

The Iowa State Vote Everywhere team has identified several long-term and short goals for its student voter engagement efforts.

Long Term Goals:

- By 2026, the ISU student voter registration rate will increase to 85 percent;
- By the 2028 Presidential election, the Iowa State student voter turnout rate will reach 60 percent;
- By 2026 midterm election, the Iowa State student voter turnout rate will reach 45 percent; and
- By 2028, STEM students will vote at the same rate as their peers.

Short Term Goals:

- ISU will have a student voter engagement coalition in place by Fall 2020;
- ISU will provide data on students' race/ethnicity to IDHE for inclusion in the 2020 NSLVE report;

¹⁸ Iowa State Campus Climate web site. <https://www.campusclimate.iastate.edu/>

- ISU student voter registration rate will increase by 1.4 percent to 82 percent in 2020;¹⁹
- ISU student voter turnout in the 2020 presidential election will increase by two percent (2%) over 2016, to 57 percent; and
- Student voter turnout in the disciplines of Computer and Information Sciences, Engineering, Mathematics and Statistics, and the Physical Sciences will increase by at least five percent (5%) each in 2020.

The Iowa State team will achieve its long term goals by focusing on incremental improvements for each election cycle. A key resource that the team needs to ensure this success is public support from the administrative leadership. If the Vice Presidents, Deans, and other administrators communicate that civic engagement and student voter turnout is an institutional priority, then people will be more likely to cooperate in engagement activities.

STRATEGY

The Iowa State team will pursue the following actions to achieve its goals in the 2020 calendar year.

Develop a Campus-Wide Coalition: Dr. Kedrowski and Hayat Sumael will lead efforts to invite student club members, advisors and representatives to join a voter engagement coalition to help spread information about student registration, voting, and caucusing activities. We target this initial meeting for March 2020.

Advocating for Racial Breakdowns in the NSLVE Report: Dr. Kedrowski and the Vote Everywhere team will meet with Registrar Dr. Jennifer Suchan to discuss providing students' racial/ethnic breakdowns in its data release to Tufts University. We target this meeting for January 2020.

Caucusing and Voting Publicity: Kara Dieke will draft student emails with information about caucus participation and locations in February 2020. We will use the Big Mail system to send these to all students. There is a modest charge for "Big Mail," which will be paid by the Vote Everywhere club. These messages will be the basis of similar emails that will be sent prior to the June primary and the November general election.

The Vote Everywhere team and the Catt Center will also use social media to share information as widely as possible.

Zach Johnson will work with the *Iowa State Daily* to provide information about caucusing and upcoming elections in a timely fashion.

The Vote Everywhere team will co-author with the Simpson College team an op-ed on the challenges and rewards of student voter engagement for the *Des Moines Register*.

¹⁹ Data are taken from the 2012 & 2016 NSLVE Report and the 2014 & 2018 NSLVE Report.

Publicize and Utilize my.VoteEverywhere: The team will develop and distribute information about this his resource from the Andrew Goodman Foundation. The my.VoteEverywhere site provides information about voter registration, absentee voting, voter ID laws and upcoming elections. AGF has an Iowa State site set up. It is a free alternative to TurboVote and worth promoting to Iowa State students.

Sharing NSLVE Results: Dr. Kedrowski asked Dean Beate Schmittmann for an opportunity to present the key findings of the NSLVE report to the seven academic deans to raise awareness of disparities in student voter turnout rates across the academic units. This request was submitted in December 2019.

Developing a Targeted STEM Student Strategy: Zachary Johnson will complete his survey of STEM majors to determine the reasons for their low voter turnout rates. These results will be used to develop a targeted strategy for STEM students in the fall of 2020.

Securing the Support of University Leaders: Dr. Kedrowski and the Vote Everywhere Team will solicit statements of support from key university leaders and work to ensure that this commitment is communicated to faculty and staff.

Voter Registration Drives: The Vote Everywhere team will host voter registration activities at:

- January 22, 2020 ACLU public address on campus
- February 14, 2020 19th Amendment Centennial Commemoration Kickoff Event
- April 2020 – Date TBA
- September 21, 2020: National Voter Registration Day



Early Voting Location: The Vote Everywhere team will work with University officials and the Story County Auditor to host an early voting location on campus for the 2020 general election.

Programming: The Catt Center and Vote Everywhere will promote an educated citizenry by sponsoring election season programming. These events will include:

- A public lecture by the ACLU on voting rights on January 22, 2020;
- Participating in the “Get Involved” portion of the 19th Amendment Centennial Commemoration Kickoff event with a Voter Registration table;
- With the League of Women Voters of Ames/Story County, organize possible candidate forums for state and federal races in fall 2020.

To achieve its long term goals, ISU needs to create a culture of civic engagement that includes vigorous advocacy of student voter engagement. This will require the support of departments and programs from across campus for assistance in reaching their student populations with timely, accurate, and targeted information. The precise strategies for this will be developed based upon the success the team achieves in meeting its short term goals for 2020.