



**Kent State University
2022 Voter Friendly Campus
Action Plan**

Executive Summary:

This Action Plan was developed by members of the Kent State Votes (KSV) coalition. Officers of Kent State's Undergraduate Student Government (which coordinates the coalition), including Director of Governmental Affairs Jessie Starkey and Committee Member Erik Gomez, worked in partnership with Community Engaged Learning staff members and fellow coalition members Craig Berger and Tiera Moore to develop the plan.

This Action Plan—with an immediate focus on the Fall 2022 semester—will guide the KSV coalition's efforts to coordinate voter engagement initiatives for the Fall 2022 election cycle on the Kent campus. The plan also lays the groundwork for establishing long-term voter engagement goals at Kent State for years to come.

While members of the KSV coalition will share responsibility for and will be guided by the contents of the plan, the Undergraduate Student Government's Director of Governmental Affairs and their committee will have primary implementation responsibilities.

Leadership:

The Kent State Votes Coalition consists of a multitude of representatives from campus and community constituencies and organizations focused on strengthening civic learning and democratic engagement among students. Representation includes:

Jessie Starkey (Undergraduate Student Government Director of Governmental Affairs)
Erik Gomez (Undergraduate Student Government Governmental Affairs Committee Member)
Avery Hall (Student, Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow)
Hannah Balash (Student, Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow)
Bethany Jordan (Student, Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow)
Craig Berger (Staff, Associate Director of Community Engaged Learning)
Tiera Moore (Staff, Coordinator of Community Engaged Learning)
Kara Robinson (Staff, Associate Dean of University Libraries)
Jasmine Jefferson (Staff, Research & Instructional Services in University Libraries)
Kate Medicus (Staff, Special Collections Cataloguer in University Libraries)
Lori Boes (Staff, Interim Director, May 4 Visitor Center)
Cassie Pegg-Kirby (Staff, Director, Women's Center)
Dr. Ashley Nickels (Faculty, Associate Professor, Dept. of Peace & Conflict Studies)
Dr. Barb Hipsman-Springer (League of Women Voters; retired KSU faculty)
Stacia Yaniglos (League of Women Voters)
Theresa Nielsen (Deputy Director, Portage County Board of Elections)



Commitment:

Kent State University is committed to facilitating civic learning and democratic engagement among students, staff, faculty, and the greater community and has taken steps over the past few years to begin to find links between various programs and initiatives, while also forming coalitions where appropriate.

The university continues to host a multitude of engagement initiatives and programs led by different offices and departments. Community Engaged Learning coordinates monthly service experiences, facilitates ongoing community-based leadership experiences between community partners and students, and designs and staffs immersive community engagement experiences for students through which students and staff travel to a variety of local, regional, national, and international locations and examine and tackle complex, wicked problems in society (e.g., immigration, disaster response, and environmental conservation). Additionally, the office administers the university's Experiential Learning Requirement, which requires each undergraduate student to complete an applied learning experience in order to graduate. Finally, Kent State's Flashes Fighting Hunger is a student-driven, volunteer-powered initiative on campus who fight food insecurity on campus and in the community. The effort recovers food from local supermarkets, operates an on-campus pantry and a mobile food distribution unit in the region, is an established satellite of the Akron Canton Regional Foodbank, and also engages student volunteers to prepare this food for homeless shelters and senior centers in the Kent region. The Center for Student Involvement has brought the "From Congress to Campus" program to Kent State, hosting two former Members of Congress and incorporating them into classroom discussions and pre-scheduled dialogues on sensitive topics. Additionally, our Women's Center has partnered with Running Start to bring Elect Her to campus, which empowers and equips women-identifying students to run for student government (with the long-range goal that they also run for office). The Kent State Votes coalition has supported this effort.

Additionally, students have begun incorporating voter engagement efforts into courses on organizing within the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, as students pondered how best to employ an organizing strategy to advance the goal of registering and turning out to vote an increased number of students. In the 2020 election, as the NSLVE report shows, we saw a significant increase in voter registration and mobilization despite the COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to continuing to advance our work in 2022, and we wish to once again be named a Voter Friendly Campus.

Landscape:

Trends:

Last Midterm Election – November 2018:

In the November 2018 election, 39% of Kent State students cast a vote, which was a 22.3% increase over Kent State's November 2014 rate, the previous midterm election. 75.6% students registered to vote in 2018 (as compared to 64.3% of the student body in 2014), and 51.6% of those registered voters turned out.

Here are some other noteworthy statistics:



- Method
 - 2.3% of Kent State voters (or 303 students) took advantage of Early Voting
 - 3.0% of Kent State voters (or 396 students) cast their vote on Election Day
- Year
 - 27.9% of Kent State first-year students cast a vote (9.4% in 2014)
 - 33.3% of Kent State sophomores cast a vote (11.5% in 2014)
 - 37.7% of Kent State upper-level students cast a vote (14.8% in 2014)
- Field of Study
 - Architecture saw the lowest voting rate by field of study in 2018 with only 24.8% of Kent State architecture students casting a ballot, followed by Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies students at 26.0%, and Transportation and Materials Moving at 28.4%
 - Library Science, Public Administration/Social Service Professions, and Interdisciplinary Studies were the three fields of study with the highest rates at 74.5%, 69.5% and 58.3% respectively.
 - Other larger colleges/programs with lower rates included Business (30.7% of 5,266 students), Health Professions (34.0% of 6,574 students), and Education (46.9% of 3,030 students)

Last Presidential Election–December 2020:

In the November 2020 election, 68.6% of Kent State students cast a vote, which was an 11.2% increase over Kent State's November 2016 rate, the previous presidential election. 84.0% students registered to vote in 2020 (as compared to 82% of the student body in 2016), and 82% of those registered voters turned out (as compared to 70% in 2016).

Here are some other noteworthy statistics:

- Method
 - 16% of Kent State voters (or 3,480 students) took advantage of Early Voting
 - 3% of Kent State voters (or 655 students) cast their vote in-person on Election Day
- Year
 - 60% of Kent State first-year students cast a vote (50% in 2016)
 - 66% of Kent State sophomores cast a vote (52% in 2016)
 - 69% of Kent State upper-level students cast a vote (55% in 2016)
- Field of Study
 - Physical Sciences saw the lowest voting rate by field of study in 2020 with 56% of Kent State physical sciences students casting a ballot, followed by Engineering at 57% and Computer and Information Systems students at 59%
 - Interdisciplinary Studies saw the highest voting rate by field of study in 2020 with 85% casting a vote, followed by Natural Resources and Conservation (78%) and History (76%).
 - Other larger colleges/programs with notable rates included Architecture (65% of 620 students, which was a 22% increase over 2016), Business (64% of 4,741 students, which was a 17% increase over 2016), and Public Administration/Social Service professions (66% of 107 students, a 22% decrease)



What does this mean for 2022?

- **Opportunity to “lock the vote”**

The 3% early voting rate at Kent State in 2018 in a year when the university saw a substantial overall voting rate increase from 2014 suggests a large opportunity. As previously described, early voting allows voting organizers time to assist students with any issues or obstacles that might arise, and it permits the Coalition with some simple, stable logistics to work around in regard to location.

If the Coalition can focus on raising awareness around the opportunity to vote early at the Board of Elections in Ravenna and then facilitate consistent, easy-to-use transportation to and from the early voting center, organizers could “lock in” thousands of votes, which would likely increase the overall turnout rate by itself.

- **Concentrated messaging to first-year and sophomore students**

While first-year and second-year students traditionally have the lowest voting rate at colleges and universities (Kent State was no different in 2018 and 2020), many of the system-level initiatives like course registration and KSU Kickoff programming are set up to communicate specifically to new students.

If the Coalition can find ways to communicate to broad swaths of first- and second-year students through systemic improvements as well as the stand-bys of tabling efforts and using social media campaigns, there’s a decent likelihood that it could further boost the overall turnout rate.

- **Integrating voter engagement work into specific colleges**

NSLVE data from 2018 and 2020 help us identify “hot spots”—colleges or academic programs with significant populations and relatively low turnout rates. The Coalition has an opportunity to focus its efforts on engaging colleges and academic programs and develop programming, allocate time and resources, and build relationships in these areas to boost registration and voting rates. Strengthening these rates, especially in colleges with large numbers of students, should positively impact the rates university-wide.

Goals

Statistics:

- **Increase the November 2022 voting rate of Kent State students to 50%, with 85% of students registered to vote and 70% of those registered voters turned out**
- **Increase the early voting rate to 12% of all voting Kent State students**



- **Achieve a 70% voting rate among first-year Kent State students**
- **Achieve a 75% voting rate among sophomore Kent State students**
- **Interact with and assist over 1,000 students by providing voter registration information through tabling and organization-focused outreach efforts**

Programmatic:

- **Broaden representation on the Kent State Votes coalition to include at least four faculty members, student organization representatives, graduate students, and a representative from either the Provost's or President's Office**
- **Embed voter registration opportunities in course registration and KSU Kickoff programming**
- **Leverage relationships with offices already planning and implementing civic learning and democratic engagement work and develop a series of events to assist with educating students on various issues represented on the ballot**
- **Update and easily share information regarding voter registration, early voting, and Election Day polling places with the student body**

Strategies:

- **The Coalition plans to identify opportunities to introduce voter registration opportunities into more university processes.** In university life, processes like course registration and orientation programs are perfect opportunities to not only highlight civic participation as an institutional value, but they also offer opportunities to invite students to register to vote at those moments in time. With its broad membership our Coalition is constructed to be able to identify and leverage such opportunities while ensuring we are following all election laws and policies.
- **Work with Campus Vote Project to hire three Kent State students to serve as Democracy Fellows to implement this Action Plan**
- **The Coalition plans to staff tables at well-trafficked locations on campus like dining halls, the Library, and the Student Center, as well as academic buildings that align with majors and academic programs who historically have not registered or voted.** The tables will invite students to register to vote and provide information on when and where they can cast their ballot.
- **The Coalition plans to work with the Office of the Provost and the Office of the President to film a video that includes university leadership and underscores the importance of becoming an active contributor to our communities, starting with the act of voting.**



- **Enhance the Kent State Votes website to make it more attractive and easier to navigate to find critical voting information**
- **The Coalition also plans to arrange for transportation to be offered to help students travel to the Board of Elections in Ravenna, the county seat, for early voting.** Taking advantage of early voting is especially important for college students given their transient nature and the unique obstacles they face in participating in the electoral process. With the long early voting window that Ohio provides, focusing significant resources on organizing and coordinating the transportation of students to and from the Board of Elections is an opportunity to ensure that students cast their vote, travel to the correct place to do so, and/or have the time and ability to resolve any issues with their registration. Focusing efforts on turning out voters on Election Day is risky, as there is little to no margin of error for the variety of things that could go wrong.

Evaluation:

The Coalition will employ a variety of measures to evaluate our efforts to achieve our goals and our overall efforts to increase Kent State's voting rate and deepen its democratic culture.

Methods will include referencing 2022 NSLVE data when released, convening focus groups and interviews of student organization representatives, university administrators, faculty members, and students from specific academic programs, as well as Board of Elections staff and Coalition members.

All data will be collected and then provided for the Coalition and officers of the Undergraduate Student Government to review.