

Lasell University
Lasell Votes Action Plan
May 2020

Executive Summary

The Lasell University Campus Voter Education and Engagement Action Plan was developed by members of the newly formed Lasell Votes Initiative.

Lasell Votes is a nonpartisan initiative created to support the development of democratic participation as a core value of Lasell University through strengthening civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation. Though Lasell University has a rich history of civic engagement and community service, there has not been a formal structure in place to support student voter engagement. The National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) data for Lasell University showed an overall voting rate for the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections to be 39.4% and 47.8%, respectively. The overall voting rate for the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections were 12.4% and 28.3%, respectively.

This plan sets the direction and plan to guide Lasell’s present and future support of student’s electoral engagement. Using available campus resources, the Lasell Votes initiative will work in collaboration and partnership with campus and community stakeholders to promote and support student’s electoral engagement. This plan acts as a framework and guide for initiative efforts and actions towards utilizing best practices and creative ways to engage students in the electoral process, improving student voter registration and turnout rates, and integrating civic learning and action, as well as democratic engagement, throughout the institution.

The Lasell Votes initiative will build and mobilize the various stakeholders who will be involved in developing and implementing this action plan. The near- and short-term measures will cover the period of Fall 2019 – Fall 2020. The longer-term objectives will set the foundation for integration into the University’s institutional multi-year strategic plans.

Leadership

The Lasell Votes Steering Coalition is comprised of a diverse group of campus members from various functional areas.

The Action Plan was written by:

TD Byrd Hughes, Associate Director of the Center for Community-Based Learning
Anna Sarneso, Library Director
Donnell Turner, Director of Career Development Center
Greg Cass, Writing Instructor

Steering Coalition Campus Functional Areas Representation

Donahue Institute for Ethics, Diversity, & Inclusion

Lasell Village
Office of Institutional Research
Office of Residential Life
Office of Student Activities
Registrar's Office
RoseMary B. Fuss Center for Research on Aging and Intergenerational Studies
RoseMary B. Fuss Teaching & Learning Center / Curricular Innovation
Student Government Association

Commitment

We are committed to encouraging and supporting an interest in and action towards political engagement.

Lasell University Mission Statement: We immerse students in experiential and collaborative learning that fosters lifelong intellectual exploration and social responsibility.

Lasell Votes Mission Statement: Lasell Votes is a nonpartisan initiative that aims to support the development of democratic participation as a core value of Lasell University through strengthening civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation.

Civic and Community Engagement (CCE) is a primary component of the University's Core Curriculum. In order to hold true to the interdisciplinary spirit of the Core Curriculum, this CCE outcome is interwoven throughout many courses and experiences for our students. Indeed, no specific, stand-alone course is dedicated to developing this outcome. Instead, through common activities, readings, and assignments in various different disciplines and at various different stages in their education, students have multiple opportunities to participate in civic engagement. The learning outcomes for this component are as follows:

Foundational Knowledge

- Articulate an informed understanding of the 'common good'
- Distinguish among civic engagement, justice, and service
- Identify resources that can be tapped to address societal challenges

Skills

- Increase civic agency by developing a "public self"
- Develop and demonstrate bridge-building across differences (empathy?)
- Acknowledge and advocate for populations outside one's own
- Engage in collaborative decision-making and deliberative processes

Direct Action

- Participate in public problem-solving through and with diverse partners
- Directly contribute to community, government, non-profit organization(s)

Landscape

Lasell University

Founded in 1851, Lasell University is a private university located in Newton, Massachusetts that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees through a curriculum of connected learning across our five academic schools. Approximately 80% of our undergraduate population lives on our all-ages campus, that includes a daycare (the Barn), Rockwell Preschool, and Lasell Village, a senior living community focused on lifelong learning. In 2019, we welcomed a total student body of 2,092, with 1,650 undergraduates and 442 graduate students. The majority of our students hail from the New England region, but we also have robust international student populations, as well as representation from all across the United States.

Historic Perspective

Lasell University has an enduring commitment to civic engagement that can be seen across our illustrative history. From our earliest days, as the Lasell Seminary for Young Women, students held mock elections, despite that, as 18 year old women, the students were excluded from voting in the actual elections. In the early 20th century, students led a vibrant Suffragette society that worked to change that, and then in the 1970's they led an active campaign in support of the 26th amendment to lower the voting age to 18. Since that time, Lasell students have been actively engaged in local and national politics, committed to their society and country.

Programming at the School

In 2016, in preparation for the Presidential Election, the University sponsored a Spring Speakers series to promote education and understanding of the issues facing the nations and represented on the ballot. The series, created by President Michael Alexander, was themed "Educate your Vote," and featured distinguished guests, such as Congressmen Joe Kennedy and Jim McGovern speaking on topics such as the refugee crisis, public education, environmental policy, and economic policy.

Ahead of the 2016 election, students and residents of Lasell Village teamed up to educate voters and raise turnout rates in a collaborative "Get out the Vote Drive." Students and residents tabled outside the library, dining hall, and commons spaces at Lasell Village to help voters register to vote on campus. Additionally, the group created a poster campaign, e-mail messaging, and stickers to promote voter turnout.

Core in the Curriculum

As noted in the commitment section above, Lasell University' core curriculum, required of all students contains multiple requirements linked to civic engagement including:

- Articulate an informed understanding of the 'common good'
- Distinguish among civic engagement, justice, and service
- Identify resources that can be tapped to address societal challenges

Community-Based Learning

Lasell University has a long-standing commitment to active citizenship in our community in Newton, Greater Boston, and the United States. On campus, this work is supported by the Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL). Lasell's Center for Community Based Learning provides support and opportunities for students, faculty and staff to engage with community organizations on mutually beneficial projects. Beyond the long-term projects, such as those with the Newton Public Schools, Lasell students also participated in several one-time community service events for a total of 1,653 hours involving 643 student attendees, over the last academic year.

The Donahue Institute for Ethics, Diversity, & Inclusion

On campus, The Donahue Institute for Ethics, Diversity and Inclusion promotes social justice and global consciousness. The Institute fosters community and discourse on diversity through a wide range of events including lectures, discussion forums, films, theatre, and more. By promoting diversity and ethics on campus, the Donahue Institute fosters cross-cultural awareness and educates students to the issues faced by minority communities throughout the country and world.

Student Voter Data

Traditionally, Lasell University has seen voting rates just below the national average, with a much higher rate during Presidential Election years. According to the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE), Lasell University had a 47.8% voter turnout, which was up 8.5% from the previous presidential election in 2012. This turnout percentage placed us just below the national average of 50.4% for all institutions, but was also boosted by the high turnout of Lasell Village residents, who are classified as part time students.

In 2018, NSLVE found that Lasell University students had a much lower turnout for the midterm elections, with only 28.3% participating. While this was up 16% from the previous midterm election (2014), it is well below the national average for all institutions, which was 39.8% in 2018. Once again, these numbers were boosted by Lasell Village residents, while students aged over 50 had a 66.7% turnout, students age 18-21 only saw a turnout rate of 20.5%. These statistics have earned Lasell University a Bronze Seal from the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, but we are looking to improve further on that achievement.

Goals

The three main goals of Lasell Votes are to utilize best practices and creative formats to engage students in the electoral process, to improve student voter registration and turnout rates (informed by the institution's NSLVE data), and to institutionalize civic learning and action, as well as democratic engagement, throughout the institution.

These goals will be pursued through short, medium, and long-term objectives and measures. This action plan will serve as a living document to be evaluated and updated on an annual basis.

Short-term (1 -2 years)

For 2020 presidential election, increase registration rate to 80% and participation rate to 55%

Increase access to information regarding elections

Focus on voter registration and primaries

Medium-term (3-5 years)

By 2024, increase voting rate to 60% for presidential elections and voter participation in 18 – 21 age range to 45% and in the 22-24 age range to 50%

Long-term (6-10 years)

By 2026, increase voting rate to 45% for midterm elections

Create open, inviting, and supportive campus climate and culture for civic learning and political engagement with multiple opportunities during and beyond elections

Strategy

Voter Registration

- 1) Awareness
 - a) Every classroom visit has ended with information about registering to vote and deadline dates
 - b) Tabling across campus to let people know that they need to register and deadline dates
 - c) Presentations to Faculty and Staff on the importance of talking about voter registration
- 2) Engagement
 - a) Lasell Votes committee members will learn how to register students to vote in a training with the Newton City Clerk
 - b) Tabling to register students to vote through the school year
 - c) A link to voter registration on the form students fill out when they start the semester
- 3) Evaluation
 - a) Counting the number of tabling events
 - b) Counting the number of students registering at events
 - c) Using NSLVE data to see any rise in percentage of students registered

Voter Education

- 1) Awareness
 - Presentations to faculty and staff on Professional Development days
 - Roundtable at college's Symposium event
- 2) Engagement
 - Lasell Votes classroom visits

- Forums held before and after elections
 - Lunch and learns to highlight specific issues and how they relate to our students
 - Mock Elections in the Library
 - Debate Watch parties
- 3) Evaluation
- Number of classroom visits each semester
 - Number of students in attendance at events
 - Number of students who vote in mock elections

Voter Ballot Access

- 1) Awareness
- a) Advertise deadlines for absentee ballots on campus
 - b) Tell students they can register with their on-campus address
 - c) Reminders to mail in absentee ballots
- 2) Engagement
- a) Tabling to help students submit applications for absentee ballots
 - b) Tabling to help students change their registration to their college address
- 3) Evaluation
- a) Number of students who register on campus
 - b) Number of students who use tabling to submit for an absentee ballot
 - d) Using NSLVE data to see any rise in percentage of students registered

Voter Turnout

- 1) Awareness
- a) Promote early voting at Lasell Village
 - b) Tabling to advertise “Making a Plan” to students to vote in person
- 2) Engagement
- a) Welcoming table at Lasell Village early voting to encourage turnout
 - b) Walking groups of students over to Williams School to vote
- 3) Evaluation
- a) Number of students who walk to the Williams School to vote
 - b) Number of students who vote early at Lasell Village
 - c) Using NSLVE data to see any rise in percentage of students voting

Reporting

The committee will present their findings annually to the President, Provost, and other members of the Senior Management Team of the University. This plan will live within the Center for Community Based Learning. It will be available on Canvas and SharePoint to all members of the Lasell Votes committee, and the Lasell Votes committee will work the University’s Communication and Marketing department to distribute the information when appropriate. Additionally, it will be available to the public on the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge website.

Evaluation

Voter Engagement across Campus

- Number of students, faculty, and staff who volunteer with the initiative
- Number of campus partners who work with the initiative

Voter Registration

- Counting the number of tabling events
- Counting the number of students registering at events
- Using NSLVE data to see any rise in percentage of students registered

Voter Education

- Number of classroom visits each semester
- Number of election engagement related events
- Number of students in attendance at events
- Number of students who vote in mock elections

Voter Ballot Access

- Number of students who use tabling to submit for an absentee ballot
- Using NSLVE data to see any rise in percentage of students registered

Voter Turnout

- Number of students who register with the University address
- Number of students who walk to the Williams School to vote
- Number of students who vote early at Lasell Village
- Using NSLVE data to see any rise in percentage of students voting
- Using data from a post-election survey

In conclusion, during Lasell University's inaugural year participating in national campus election engagement challenges, the Lasell Votes initiative will work to accomplish the goals outlined in this plan through collaboration with students, clubs/organizations, faculty, staff, administration, local government and national organizations to establish a successful foundation upon which we can continue to build.