



LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY
APPLETON, WISCONSIN

Lawrence University Democratic Engagement Action Plan

September 1st, 2024
Lawrence University
Appleton, Wisconsin

Executive Summary:

This plan was developed and drafted by Eliza Peetz, the Center for Community Engagement and Social Change's Civics and Society Program Coordinator, in close collaboration with Michelle Buchinger, after consultation with various campus and community stakeholders. This action plan documents our goals and tactics for maintaining a demonstrated history of strong civic and democratic participation at Lawrence University, and will directly inform the implementation of a comprehensive student engagement strategy. This work will guide our efforts for the upcoming presidential election cycle and will be maintained through the end of the 2024-25 school year, thereby providing one cycle of National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data to leverage in our assessment. The implementation of the strategies outlined below will be led by the staff of the Office of Student Engagement, Activities, and Leadership, in concert with the partners and stakeholders listed hereafter.

Project Leadership and Collaborators:

Eliza Peetz, Civics & Society Program Coordinator, CCE
Dakota McKee, Director of Office of Student Engagement, Activities, and Leadership
Michelle Buchinger, Career Center & CCE Coordinator
Aaron Wojciechowski, Assistant Director of Student Activities
Brittany Bell, Dean of Students
Steph Konppa, Director of Residential Education & Housing
Kami Lynch, City Clerk of Appleton

We are also involved in ongoing partnership conversations with the following organizations to explore how we might better support and amplify each other's work:

Leadership of College Democrats
Leadership of Appleton Students for a Democratic Society
Lawrence University Government Department
League of Women Voters

Commitment:



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Per the Lawrence University mission statement, the institution is “devoted to excellence and integrity in all of its activities and committed to the development of intellect and talent, the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, the cultivation of sound judgment, and respect for the perspectives of others. Lawrence prepares students for lives of achievement, responsible and meaningful citizenship, lifelong learning, and personal fulfillment.” It is hardly possible to disaggregate “responsible and meaningful citizenship” from the active and ongoing cultivation of democratic and electoral participation on campus. This commitment to preparing students for lives of robust civic participation is reflected in our high voter registration and yield rates, our robust model of democratic and parliamentary student governance, and the near ceaseless presence of student advocacy groups. It is also reflected in the cocurricular space, in which both Residential Education and the Center for Community Engagement & Social Change embrace and amplify civic engagement in their respective learning outcomes. A commitment to active democratic participation is also reflected in the lives of our faculty and staff, many of whom have a history of organizing, advocacy, and policy work in the Fox Valley, and two of whom currently hold public office.

Landscape:

Campus Overview

Lawrence University is an undergraduate, residential college and conservatory of music. It was one of the first coeducational colleges in the country, and there were several women in the first graduating class. In 2021, the U.S. News & World Report and the Princeton Review ranked Lawrence among the best colleges in the country, with special kudos for value, sustainability, undergraduate teaching, and first-year experiences. Deliberately small, the college annually enrolls around 1,500 undergraduate students from nearly every state and more than 30 countries. Last year’s student body identified as 54% female, 12% international, and 26% domestic students of color. Roughly one-third of our students are Wisconsin residents, which provides an opportunity to incorporate a higher degree of local focus than institutions with a greater proportion of out-of-state students. The college offers 65 areas of study, and the most popular majors regularly include music performance, psychology, economics, English, and biology. With more faculty members per student than nearly every college in the country, Lawrence provides highly interactive classroom, lab, and studio environments. In fact, observers such as Colleges That Change Lives, Fiske Guide to Colleges, and the Center for College Affordability & Productivity have recognized Lawrence for offering not just an excellent liberal arts education but also transformational learning experiences. Lawrence operates on a trimester schedule that may affect the implementation of our democratic engagement strategies; with students returning to campus after Labor Day, efficiency and intentionality in the Fall term will be crucial to effectively mobilize students for general elections in November.

Democratic Engagement Efforts

Historically, the Dean of Students office has been responsible for organizing democratic engagement efforts on Lawrence’s campus. This has included:



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- Housing and promoting various voter registration resources on the Dean of Students’ website
- Organizing poll escorts for students who were interested in voting
- Coordinating with the City Clerk of Appleton to ensure that students were aware of their physical campus address

However, there has not been a comprehensive, collaborative approach to democratic engagement, voter registration, or voter mobilization at Lawrence in recent years. The Center for Community Engagement & Social Change began working with the Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) prior to the 2020 presidential election cycle, but that work largely subsided in the wake of the 2020 election and has yet to be re-established. Additionally, the Center for Community Engagement & Social Change created the Vikings Vote Initiative as a way to hold open, informal discussions and feedback surrounding campus voting processes and other civic details. These meetings are open to all students, faculty, and staff. We have included the voices of off-campus organizations as well, with the attendance of members from the League of Women Voters and Campus Vote Project.

The intent of this endeavor is to create a consolidated, collaborative democratic engagement strategy that will be housed in the Center for Community Engagement & Social Change, thereby creating a comprehensive, synchronized culture of electoral engagement efforts, and creating additional clarity for our students when it comes to identifying resources and opportunities pertaining to democratic participation.

NSLVE Data

We began participating in the NSLVE in 2013, and thus have access to voter registration and yield rates dating back to 2012.

	Voter Registration Rate	Voting Rate of Registered Students	Voting Rate	+/- Compared to the National Avg.
2012	70.4%	60%	42.2%	(4.7)
2014*	-	-	-	-
2016	90%	81.1%	72.9%	19
2018	86.5%	67.1%	58%	19
2020	89.5%	89.1%	79.8%	13
2022	83%	53%	44%	13.8



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*Unfortunately, we were unable to locate our data from the 2014 midterm election cycle.

This data was instrumental in determining our goals for maintaining a strong culture of democratic participation and voter mobilization. Unfortunately, we are unable to disaggregate voter participation data by demography, which may be obscuring differences in engagement behavior between student populations. Overall, Lawrentians have become more engaged in the democratic process, with a 19-point increase in voter registration rate and a roughly 30-point increase in yield since 2012. While these increases correspond with higher levels of democratic engagement nationally, Lawrence University has consistently outperformed the national average for Bachelor institutions. Given our incredibly strong turnout in the last two presidential election cycles, our focus moving forward will be maintaining engagement and turnout during presidential cycles while growing democratic engagement in midterm election cycles.

Goals:

1. Maintain voter registration rates of eligible students of 85% or higher
2. Maintain yield rates of 85% or higher in presidential election cycles; achieve yield rates of 75% or higher during mid-term election cycles
3. Create and implement a “Democratic Engagement” series, consisting of 3-4 educational events and/or forums throughout the academic year
4. Create and implement a community-focused voter registration and education program, specifically designed to support electoral participation in historically underrepresented communities in Appleton

Strategies for Success:

- 1. Intentional collaboration with the Dean of Students office and the Office of Residential Education.**

As the Center for Community Engagement & Social Change continues to lead the democratic engagement strategy at Lawrence, careful and close collaboration with the Dean of Students and the Office of Residential Education will continue to be critical for success, as these offices have historically been the touchpoints for democratic engagement and voter resources on campus. This is also important given Lawrence’s four-year housing requirement, which results in nearly 100% of our students living on-campus. Collaborations will include:

- Coordinating with Residence Hall Directors and Community Advisors (CAs) on tabling opportunities and hall programs that center civic and democratic engagement.
- Soliciting current housing reports from Residential Education to provide accurate rosters to the City Clerk’s office.



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- Developing communications plans that announce democratic engagement events, promote voter registration opportunities, and highlight campus resources like Voter IDs and election transportation.
- Promoting election transportation.

2. Continue to Consolidate and centralize online resources.

With the updating of our new website, we have been able to integrate a specific page dedicated to voter information for students' easy access. Moving forward, we will work to keep this information up to date, including a new implementation of yearly election date schedules, allowing students to plan ahead and create a cohesive active voting plan. Finally, we will continue to seek access to digital engagement and click data to determine the frequency with which these resources are being accessed.

3. Incorporate voter registration opportunities into orientation and other student activities at the beginning of the year.

Lawrence is also in the process of developing a new model for first year orientation, presenting an opportunity to integrate democratic engagement activities into the new student onboarding process. We will work with the City Clerk of Appleton to create opportunities and resources that we can promote aggressively at the start of each year, including a voter registration opportunity at the annual Community Engagement & Wellness Fair. We will also work with Student Life to explore opportunities for including voter registration as part of a new student "checklist".

4. Continue developing and promoting the Civics & Society VASE program through the Center for Community Engagement & Social Change.

The Center for Community Engagement & Social Change offers VASE (Viking Ambassadors in Service & Engagement) program each term. These programs reflect our core focus areas, the newest of which is Civics & Society. This 8-week co-curricular program provides students with opportunities to explore and discuss the importance of civic and democratic engagement. Unfortunately, we were not able to hold a program this year due to loss of leadership and lack of support, but plan to host one in the 2024-25 school year. As we continue to develop and codify learning outcomes and pedagogy for this program, it will become a powerful mechanism for promoting democratic engagement and creating allies for voter registration and mobilization on campus.

5. Election Transportation

Our polling location for the majority of students is located about a 20-minute walk from campus, which underscores the importance of a robust election transportation plan. The Center for Community Engagement & Social Change will continue to work closely with the Dean of Students and Office of Residential Education to provide regular shuttles and volunteer escorts to the polls on election day from the opening to closing



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time of polls. Starting in the academic year 2024, there will be 3 different polling locations for Lawrence University students.

6. Student Program Coordinators from the Center for Community Engagement & Social Change will collaborate with student government committees, Residential Education, the Diversity & Intercultural Center, the Government Department and off-campus partners to plan events.

Developing and implementing a new event series will require intentional collaboration with several campus stakeholders but will be led by student staff in the CCE. The specific focus of these events will necessarily evolve, but the core themes will include:

- What/Who is on the ballot?
- Where should I register to vote?
- Celebrating voting rights milestones
- Debate watch-parties

7. Continue exploring opportunities to support local organizers and off-campus partners in community-focused voter registration activities.

We will continue conversations with off-campus partners to determine opportunities to support local, nonpartisan voter registration campaigns, such as work begun with the Campus Vote Project and League of Women Voters.

Assessment & Reporting:

We will continue leveraging reports from NSLVE to monitor our progress on maintaining and growing democratic engagement behaviors on-campus. These reports will be shared internally with relevant stakeholders and may also be published to the Lawrence University website, pending approval from senior leadership. We will also continue to work with campus partners to review campus demography data, which may inform new strategies for voter mobilization. Lastly, we will ensure that each of our campus events has associated learning outcomes, which will allow us to qualitatively and quantitatively assess their efficacy in inducing voter registration and increasing campus yield. These summative and formative assessments will be used to improve future iterations of programs like the Democratic Engagement series, election transportation systems, and more. The Center for Community Engagement & Social Change will lead these assessment strategies and will produce biannual reports on our progress. These reports – and this action plan – will be made available to all campus stakeholders via SharePoint and will be made available to off-campus partners by request.