



# Lewis University Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2024-2025

## I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Lewis University Committee for Civic Engagement members to communicate our strategy for increasing the registration and turnout rates of voters associated with Lewis University. The planned in-person and virtual activities outlined here will be carried out during the 2024-2025 academic year, on and around our main campus in Romeoville, Illinois.

The following groups will be leading this work at Lewis University to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Lewis University students who have expressed an interest in being involved
- Faculty members
- Staff members

We have set the four goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

1. Committee Formalization
  - By the end of September 2024, establish a standing committee meeting time
  - By the end of the fall 2024 semester, create a mission statement for the Committee for Civic Engagement.
2. Voter Registration
  - During September and October 2024, host an ongoing voter registration drive across campus utilizing TurboVote with the goal of reaching 250 students.
  - During September and October 2024, CCE members will visit Cornerstone classes to invite new Lewis students – both first year and transfer – to register to vote.
  - We are working on building Turbovote into the MYLewis portal.
3. Voter Engagement and Education
  - Host a debate watch party on Tuesday, September 10, 2024, for the presidential candidate debate.
  - Distribute non-partisan voter guides to the campus community about candidates' positions on key issues.
4. Relationship Development

- By the end of the fall 2024 semester, identify priority on and off-campus groups interested in democratic engagement
- Build relationships with on and off-campus groups to identify opportunities for collaboration

We have also set four goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

1. By 2026, fully incorporate voter registration using TurboVote into first year and transfer student Cornerstone courses by embedding it in course curriculum
2. By 2026, increase representation on the Committee for Civic Engagement to include more departments, student organizations, and off-campus organizations.
3. By 2025, include race/ethnicity data in data reported to the Clearinghouse so that it will be included in NSLVE, which we will then use to check for parity by race/ethnicity.
4. By 2025, develop a clear plan for engaging St. Augustine College at Lewis University and other Lewis campuses in voter registration and engagement.

This action plan will be revisited biannually at the first fall meeting and last spring meeting of the Committee for Civic Engagement so that adjustments can be made, and plans can be updated. The plan is a three-year plan, beginning at the start of the fall term 2024 and continuing through to May 2027.

## II. Leadership

The Committee for Civic Engagement (CCE) includes a variety of faculty and staff who are consistently involved. Undergraduate and graduate students also participate, with engagement from Student Senate leaders and interested individuals. Participants include the participants listed below. This committee reports to the Office of Mission and Identity.

A variety of groups, units and departments are represented in the CCE, including:

<b>Department/Units</b>	<b>Name, Title</b>	<b>Other Roles</b>
<b>ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS</b>		
Political Science	Dr. Steve Nawara, Professor, Political Science Department Chair	
Political Science	Dr. Laurette Liesen, Professor	Pi Sigma Alpha Moderator
Political Science	Dr. Justin Delacour, Associate Professor	Chair of the Committee for Civic Engagement
Sociology	Dr. Carlene Sipma-Dysico, Assistant Professor	
History	Dr. Mark Schultz, Professor	
Social Work	Dr. John Halloran, Assistant Professor	
Social Work	Dr. Lorri McMeel, Associate Professor, Department Chair	
Foreign Language Department	Rocio Rodriguez, Spanish Instructor	
<b>CAMPUS OFFICES</b>		
Community Engaged Learning	Laura Wilmarth Tyna, Director	
Library	Kelley Plass, Head of Library Instruction & Research	
Office for Student Engagement and Multicultural Student Enrichment (SEMSE)	Javier Rodriguez, Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Multicultural Initiatives	
Office of Mission & Identity	Margaret Martinez, Director	
Campus Ministry	Nia White, Coordinator of Peer Ministry and Service	

Marketing & Communications	Ramona LaMontagne, Executive Director	
Public Relations & Communication	Kathrynne Skonicki, Executive Director	
Business Office	William O'Brien, Senior Accountant	
SENIOR UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP		
Provost's Office	Dr. Anne Rapp, Associate Provost & Dean of SGPCE	
Academic Services	Dr. Kurt Schackmuth, Vice President for Mission and Student Success	
STUDENT GROUPS		
Pi Sigma Alpha, the Political Science Honor Society	Irena Ilic, Chapter President	Student Senate President
STUDENT MEMBERS AT LARGE		
Major: Theater	Mac Maher	
COMMUNITY PARTNERS		
Greater Joliet Area League of Women Voters	Georgeen Polyak	Member

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:

- Representation from different parts of campus, including student leadership;
- Representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise;
- Leaders who can help with outreach and empowerment by bringing more people across campus into our work.

CCE plans to meet monthly online and/or in person and the calendar is determined at the beginning of each semester. Agendas, notes, and materials are housed in an online Teams group shared by all members. During the first meeting of the academic year (August or September), the committee looks at the representation across all areas and commits to inviting underrepresented groups to join the committee membership. Invitations are sent via email and word of mouth to units and departments not currently represented on the committee. In addition, faculty and staff invite students to join the committee.

If leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a succession plan in place. Currently the committee is guided by co-chairs who may be faculty, staff members, or students. If one leaves, the committee meets to decide on the successor. The committee is large and includes a variety of skills, experiences, and perspectives, with many members also holding leadership positions across campus. There are former chairs on the committee who also provide

input on leadership issues. We are also partnering with the following organizations from the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, the All IN Campus Democracy Challenge, and TurboVote to support our efforts.

### III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state,

"At Lewis University, civic engagement is defined as working to transform our local, state, national, and international communities. Morally responsible and civically engaged individuals consider themselves to be active members of a larger community and agents of positive social change for a more just and democratic world. Our Catholic and Lasallian tradition invites us to recognize that all are made in the image and likeness of God. It inspires us to respect the dignity of all people and to promote a lifelong, personal commitment to work in solidarity for the common good. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to acquire civic, historical, religious, and cultural knowledge; to appreciate justice, equality, freedom, particularly in regard to the lives and experiences of the disenfranchised; to develop their critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills; and to take action within communities to address various policy issues."

In addition, the Lewis University 2022-2027 Strategic Plan includes a strategic priority for Distinctive Learning Experiences. Included in the four overarching learning priorities is:

- **Increase Social Responsibility**
  - Increase community engaged learning opportunities with a particular focus on addressing the economically poor.
  - Embrace sustainability initiatives.
  - Centralize and strengthen experiential learning activities (community engaged learning, volunteerism, etc.).
  - Promote civic knowledge and engagement activities.

Education for civic learning and democratic engagement is part of our General Education core curriculum. Our undergraduate General Education Program includes civic engagement in the definition of the Social Sciences component:

- Foster becoming an informed, engaged, and responsible citizen who appreciates our diverse and interconnected society.
  - Become an informed, involved, and responsible citizen of a diverse yet interconnected national and global community through a grounding in economic, political, social, and historical influences
  - Understand theoretical perspectives of individual, group, social, political, and institutional behavior
  - Develop the necessary skills to be civically engaged, such as written and oral communications, critical and analytical thinking, information literacy and conflict resolution
  - Understand and apply the knowledge and values of global cultures to address real world issues

Undergraduate students must complete a civic engagement designated course as a requirement for graduation. The university has a General Education committee that evaluates courses

proposed for this requirement. The committee includes discipline experts and all courses given this designation are clearly marked in the course catalog. Civic engagement data are collected using key assignments in these courses, which are then assessed every four years in a juried assessment using a modified AAC&UVALUE Rubric for Civic Engagement & Global Awareness.

Lewis University's senior is committed to civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.

On campus, we have seen:

- Sharing of voter education resources
- Active participation with the local community (i.e., volunteerism, collaboration, etc.)
- Engagement of political clubs and student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Voter registration tables

On campus, we have experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Speeches by political representatives
- Rides to polls
- Town halls
- Increased voter registration
- Civic holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
- Deliberative dialogues
- Election guides created by the Political Science classes and honor

societyWe can point to the above institutional commitments to support our work.



## IV. Landscape

The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of our campus. This information is based on data collected from Fall 2023, when our total student enrollment was 6636.

### Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Graduate	Full Time	Part Time
3,933 (59.2%)	2,580 (38.8%)	4,664 (70.3%)	1,972 (29.7%)

In-State	Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Commuter
4,731 (71.2%)	466 (7%)	1,386 (20.8%)	1,001 (15.1%)	5,635 (84.9%)

### Gender Demographics:

Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
3,281 (49.4%)	3,355 (50.5%)	N/A	N/A

### Age:

18-21	22-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50+
1,138 (17.5%)	1,290 (19.8%)	654 (10.0%)	252 (3.9%)	55 (0.8%)	16 (0.2%)

### Racial Demographics:

Asian	American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	White	2 or More Races
373 (5.6%)	6 (0%)	398 (5.9%)	1224 (18.4%)	6 (0%)	2978 (44.8%)	173 (2.6%)

Our institution has also utilized the following data gathering tools:

- Ask Every Student First Step Form
- Higher Education Research Institute and Cooperative Institutional Research Program
- Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement
- National Survey of Student Engagement

They help to inform our institution's civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. The data from these tools are examined by the Committee for Civic Engagement. These data are then utilized to drive programming and outreach. For example, the latest NSLVE data show that we have had a substantial uptick in campus members utilizing early voting and mail-in ballots. This has spurred our work to make sure information about both these ways to vote, including deadlines, is widely shared. Furthermore, we worked with our tech department to add TurboVote to the student campus app so that students can easily access voter registration and information.

## V. Goals

Prior to setting civic learning and democratic engagement (CLDE) goals, it is important to consider the current state of CLDE work at Lewis University. The campus faces the following internal challenges to voter registration, engagement, and education:

- There is not a professional staff member whose responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on campus.
- There is no dedicated budget for CLDE work, making funding unreliable.
- The CCE is an informal structure, made up of faculty, staff, and students who engage due to their personal interest in democratic engagement.

Despite these challenges, Lewis University also has a multitude of CLDE-related strengths, including:

- A diverse, dedicated coalition of people positioned to implement CLDE work on campus.
- A consistent voter registration process, which engages a significant percentage of students.
- Clear communication structures for dispersing voting information to students.
- Access to resources, such as campus and community partners, faculty expertise, and other tools which can help to develop and implement CLDE work on campus.
- A commitment to nonpartisan voter engagement efforts.
- Opportunities to bring additional student leadership into CLDE initiatives.
- A working relationship with our local elections office.

To reiterate, the four goals that we have prioritized for the 2024-2025 academic year are:

1. committee formalization;
2. voter registration;
3. voter engagement and education;
4. the development of relationships with off-campus groups interested in democratic engagement.

Additionally, we reiterate that four long-term goals over the next five years are to:

1. fully incorporate voter registration into first-year student and transfer Cornerstone courses;
2. incorporate additional campus student groups and community partners into our Civic Engagement Committee;
3. include race/ethnicity/gender data in data reported to the Clearinghouse so that it will be included in NSLVE, which we will then use to check for parity by race/ethnicity/gender; and
4. develop a plan to engage St. Augustine College at Lewis University and other Lewis campuses in voter registration and engagement.

## **VI. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)**

Lewis University's National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2022 demonstrates success in registering and engaging large numbers of students in voting; however, sustainability efforts are needed. In 2022 the student voter registration rate was 75.3%. This is down from 80.3% in 2020, which was a presidential election year and likely to engage more possible voters.

In 2022, the Lewis University student voting rate was 33% and the voting rate among registered students was 43.8%. During that year, the Lewis student voting rate was about 2.5% higher than the national average. Voting among individuals in all age groups dropped significantly from 2020, with modest declines compared to the 2018 election, the last non-presidential election year. Longer-term goals in this plan are based on these data.

Although Lewis has a high voter registration rate and turnout, since data about race are not currently collected, it is impossible to see if there is underrepresentation in any underserved groups. The CCE is committed to working with the Office of Institutional Research to include race, ethnicity, and gender in data reported to the Clearinghouse so that we can drill down into the data to see any trends in these demographic areas.

## VII.Strategy

Below is an outlined strategy, describing how CCE members can bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

These are tactics that **are already being done** in the **short term** (within the next year):

- a. Posts on social media & campus digital displays with voting information, how to vote, voting deadlines
- b. Posting "Remember to Vote" signs in campus buildings with QR codes linking to TurboVote
- c. Email communication to students, staff, and faculty about TurboVote and voter registration/poll information

These are tactics that are **planned** in the **short term**:

- d. Voter registration at Welcome Week (Last week of August);
- e. Voter registration tabling for the week Constitution Day, including distributing pocket constitutions;
- f. Voter registration tabling for both week of National Voter Registration Day and the following week;
- g. Creating and distributing non-partisan voter guides/How to Vote guides created by Dr. Steve Nawara's Campaigns and Elections class and/or Pi Sigma Alpha;
- h. Election day voter information table to answer student questions;
- i. Rides to polls;
- j. Printing official letters confirming residency for on-campus students so they can register at the polls;
- k. Writing a mission statement for the Committee for Civic Engagement;
- l. Identifying possible on and off-campus organizations and schedule meetings to begin relationship development; and
- m. Building Turbovote is into the MYLewis portal.

These are tactics that are **planned** in the **long term**:

- n. Meeting with representatives of on and off-campus organizations to discuss their goals and priorities related to voter registration and engagement
- o. Inviting on and off-campus organizations to attend CCE meetings and identify opportunities for collaboration
- p. Collaborating with the Office of Institutional Research to determine why racial identity data is not currently being shared and identify strategies to eliminate barriers to information distribution.
- q. Engaging with Academic Services staff to explore opportunities to integrate CLDE work into the Cornerstone Seminar.
- r. Identifying specific strategies for Cornerstone Seminar integration.

## VIII. Reporting & Evaluation

Sharing and evaluating this Action Plan is an important step in integrating CLDE work into the campus culture. As such, the following actions will be taken to make the campus community aware of CCE CLDE efforts:

- a. Distribute the final plan to CCE members
- b. Regularly discuss the plan during CCE committee meetings
- c. Share the final plan, and an executive summary, with campus administrators
- d. Distribute an electronic and hard copy of the final plan to the University president
- e. Post the action plan on the University's Civic engagement website
- f. Distribute the action plan to external partners via the CEL Connections newsletter, which is received by over 70 community partners

Feedback on the plan will be welcomed through the following outlets:

- g. Engagement of all CCE members.
- h. Submitting the complete action plan by the October 1st deadline to receive ALL IN feedback.
- i. We will utilize a cycle of continuous improvement with the following timeline:
  - i. Revisiting plan at our first committee meeting in fall to collect additional feedback on goals and strategies for the semester.
  - ii. Revisit plan with our committee after the November election, collecting feedback on successes and challenges, then adjust plan as needed for the spring semester.
  - iii. End of spring semester, collect feedback from committee on challenges and successes, and any data produced, and revise plan for next year

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- j. Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- k. Reviewing our university-wide assessment data that measures our undergraduate Civic Engagement Baccalaureate Characteristic (BC). This BC is assessed every four years and will next be assessed in 2023-24.
- l. Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly- see timeline above.