



Lewis University Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022-2023 Academic Year

I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Drs. Elizabeth Sturm and Justin Delacour, Co-chairs, Lewis University Committee for Civic Engagement, in consultation with committee members from the Lewis Committee for Civic Engagement, to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Lewis University. The planned in-person and virtual activities outlined here will be carried out over 2022-2023 Academic Year, on and around our main campus in Romeoville, Illinois.

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

- Undergraduate Students appointed by the Student Senate
- Faculty
- Student Affairs Staff

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 two-year plan, beginning at the start of the fall term, 2022 and continuing through to May 2025.

II. Leadership

Drs. Justin Delacour, Associate Professor of Political Science, and Elizabeth Sturm, Associate Professor of Education, the Committee for Civic Engagement (CCE) Co-chairs, will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be supported in this work by the members of the Committee for Civic Engagement. This committee reports to the Office of Mission and Identity.

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

- Professors from the following departments: Political Science, Sociology, Education, History, Theology, Philosophy, Social Work, and Nursing
- Campus offices: Community Engaged Learning, Library, Student Development and Leadership; Office of Study Abroad; Multicultural Student Services; Career Services; Academic Services; Office of Mission & Identity; Campus Ministry; Marketing & Communications
- Student groups: Pi Sigma Alpha, the Political Science Honor Society; and the Student Senate
- Senior university leadership

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:

- Representation from different parts of campus, including student leadership; Representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise; Trusted leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in the electoral process; Leaders who can help with outreach and empowerment by bringing more people across campus into our work

Our group plans to meet monthly online and/or in person and the calendar is determined in August during the first week of classes. Minutes and materials are housed in an online Teams group shared by all members. Every semester, invitations are sent via email and word of mouth to units and departments not currently represented on the committee. In addition, the Student Senate appoints students to serve on the committee, along with faculty inviting students to join.

In the event that our leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a succession plan in place. Currently the committee is chaired by two faculty members. 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 in the committee who also provide input on leadership issues. We are also partnering with the following organizations from the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition to support our efforts on campus:

- Democracy Works
- All in Campus Democracy Challenge
- Ask Every Student Program- We have just joined as a commitment campus.
- Turbovote

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 4 overarching learning priorities is:

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

Education for civic learning and democratic engagement is part of our General Education curriculum core. 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. Currently Lewis has 13 courses listed in the 2021-22 catalog. Civic engagement data are collected using key assignments in these courses, which are then assessed every 4 years in a juried assessment using a modified AAC&U VALUE Civic Engagement & Global Awareness Rubric.

We also have had a senior leader committed to civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus. After reviewing the December 2021 All in Challenge Campus Engagement Summary, we asked Lewis President, Dr. Livingston to sign the President's Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation, which he did. Another example of our senior leadership showing commitment is through the weekly Lewis YouTube discussions "Live at Stritch Hall". These are conversations between the University President, Dr. Livingston, and the Provost, Dr. Sindt, and guests. They discuss topics pertinent to the campus community, including civic and political engagement.

On campus, we have seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Voter registration tables
- Protests / rallies / walkouts
- Signage promoting Election Day

On campus, we have experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers
- Rides to polls
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- 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 society

We 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 2021 when our total student enrollment was 6183.

Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Graduate	Full Time	Part Time
63.20%	36.80%	32.70%	67.30%

In-State	Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Commuter
81.00%	8.80%	9.20%	16.00%	84.00%

Gender Demographics:

Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
45.00%	55.00%		

Age:

18-21	22-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50+
38.90%	22.20%	16.20%	12.60%	6.10%	2.80%

Racial Demographics:

Asian	American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	White	2 or More Races
5.90%	0.00%	6.30%	19.40%	0.20%	55.50%	2.20%

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.

Civic Engagement in the general education curriculum will be assessed in the 2023-24 academic year and then will become another data set for us to consider. The following general education courses include Civic Engagement outcomes.

Civic Engagement

<u>HIST-10400</u>	Interpreting the Modern World	3
<u>HIST-25000</u>	We Hold These Truths: A Civic History of the United States	3
<u>MATH-12300</u>	Modeling our World with Mathematics	3
<u>NURS-43200</u>	Promoting Healthy Communities	4
<u>NURS-43600</u>	Community Health Nursing	4
<u>POLS-10000</u>	Politics and Civic Engagement	3
<u>POLS-20000</u>	American National Government	3
<u>POLS-21000</u>	State and Local Government	3
<u>SOCI-10800</u>	Introduction to Women's Studies	3
<u>SOCI-25500</u>	Social Problems	3
<u>SOCI-27000</u>	Social Movements and Social Change	3
<u>THEO-25000</u>	Foundations of Peace Studies	3
<u>THEO-26700</u>	Practicing Faithful Justice	3

V. Goals

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration.

We know our campus faces the following challenges internally when it comes to get-out-the-vote efforts and registering voters:

- We do not have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We do not have sustainable or consistent funding.

We also know our campus faces the following challenges externally when it comes to get-out-the-vote efforts and registering voters:

- External messages that influence potential voters' ability to see that voting matters.

With that said, we know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- We have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- We use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is distributed throughout many offices and areas of expertise.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We can engage student leaders to help lead our initiatives.
- We have a working relationship with our local election office.
- We have working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement.

With this in mind, we have set the three goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

1. By the end of the fall 2022 semester, create a mission statement for the Committee for Civic Engagement.
2. During Welcome Week in August 2022, we will register 20% of incoming freshman/transfer eligible voters on Turbovote.
3. By May 2023, host 3 campus events that center on societal issues important to students.

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

1. Fully incorporate voter registration using Turbovote into first-year student and transfer Cornerstone courses by 2024.
2. By 2024, increase representation on the Committee for Civic Engagement to incorporate the 4 departments whose majors have shown a decrease in voting, as measured by the NSLVE report.
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.

VI. Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

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

- Posts on social media & campus digital displays with voting information, how to vote, voting deadlines
- Remember to Vote Signs in campus buildings with QR codes linking to campus Turbovote
- Turbovote is built into the Lewis Student MYLewis app
- Emails about Turbovote and voter registration/poll information

These are tactics that we **plan to do** in the **short term**:

- Voter registration at Welcome Week (Last week of August)
- Week of September 12 – Constitution Day event with the Library & Student Services, Library- hand out pocket Constitutions
- September 20 – National Voter Registration Day: Voter Registration Table
- Nonpartisan Voter Guides created by Dr. Nawara's Campaigns and Elections class and/or Pi Sigma Alpha
 - Encourage more sharing of these voter guides on campus
- Election Day Voter information table to answer student questions
- Ride to Polls
- Printing official letters confirming residency for on-campus students so they can register at the polls
- Write a mission statement for the Committee for Civic Engagement

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **short term**:

- Student-led Arts & Ideas event on issues affecting students and young adults in the 2022 Election
- Election Results Recap Party hosted by the Political Science Department

These are tactics that we **are already doing** for the **long term** (beyond the next year):

- Posts on social media & campus digital displays with voting information, how to vote, voting deadlines
- Remember to Vote Signs in campus buildings with QR codes linking to campus Turbovote. Turbovote is built into the Lewis Student MYLewis app
- September – Constitution Day event with the Library & Student Services, Library- hand out pocket Constitutions

These are tactics that we **want to do** in the **long term**:

- Voter registration at Welcome Week (Last week of August)
- Election Day Voter information table to answer student questions
- Ride to Polls
- Printing official letters confirming residency for on-campus students to they can register at the polls
- 2024 Election Results watch party

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **long term**:

- Student-led Arts & Ideas event on issues affecting students and young adults in the 2024 Election
- Election Results Recap Party hosted by the Political Science Department

VII. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2020. In 2020 our registration rate was 83.9%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased.

In 2020, our voting rate was 67.4% and our voting rate among registered students was 80.3%. During this year, our voting rate was higher than the national average.

The age groups 18-21 and 22-24 had significant increases in voting and tend to vote early or via mail. Most majors saw an increase in voting except for History, Law Enforcement, Natural Resources and Conservation, and Public Administration.

VIII. Reporting & Evaluation

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Email to members of our campus coalition
- Email to campus administration
- Email to the President
- Place on our Civic engagement website
- Discussing the plan during our first fall, and last spring committee meetings

We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Post on the campus website
- We have already shared highlights from the 2020 NSLV report and 2020 ALL IN Challenges in a press release and in social media and will do so with this report.

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Prior to submission for ALL IN feedback, we shared a draft with our committee members for additional suggestions and feedback.
- Submitting plan by May deadline to receive ALL IN feedback.
- We will utilize a cycle of continuous improvement with the following timeline:
 - Revisiting plan at our first committee meeting in fall to collect additional feedback on goals and strategies for the semester.
 - Revisit plan with our committee after the November election, collecting feedback on successes and challenges, then adjust plan as needed for the spring semester.
 - 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:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly- see timeline above.