

## **Montclair State University Vote Friendly Campus Action Plan: 2023-2024 Academic Year**

### **Executive Summary**

Montclair State University is actively committed to empowering our students to meaningfully engage with community members and our society. We celebrate voting as an important step in being civically involved within our communities, as it grants us the power to choose decision makers who represent our needs and impact our everyday lives. Our mission is to ensure that every student's voice is heard, so our Democratic Engagement plan has been designed to be nonpartisan and inclusive.

This comprehensive action plan was developed by Warren Rigby, Graduate Coordinator of Civic and Voter engagement and Julia DelBagno, Assistant Dean of Student Engagement. The aim of this office and this strategic plan is to communicate our continuous strategies to increase both voter registration for commuter and resident students and to increase our overall turnout rates of voters at Montclair State University. The plan is set to be implemented in the 2023 – 2024 academic year with a heavy focus on the upcoming election. Its execution will heavily depend on the efforts of the Montclair States Voter Coalition Committee, a coalition comprising students, faculty, staff and community members. Our Democratic Engagement Action Plan focuses on peer-to-peer educational models with the goal of 1) Consistently communicating the importance of voting to the entire campus community, 2) facilitating voter registration, 3) offering educational resources to help inform new and current voters, and 4) fostering a culture of democratic participation. Some of the activities outlined here are to be completed on and around our campus located at 1 Normal Ave, New Jersey 07043.

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

- Student Affairs Staff
- Office of Civic and Voter Engagement
- Andrew Goodman Vote Everywhere Ambassador

## Leadership

Julia DelBagno, Assistant Dean for Student Engagement oversees our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. Within the Center for Student Involvement, there is a graduate coordinator (2023-2024 Warren Rigby) The Graduate Coordinator position plays a crucial role in leading voter registration, voter education, and Get Out the Vote efforts on campus, ensuring that students are well-informed and engaged in the democratic process. In addition to managing these initiatives, the Graduate Coordinator will also be responsible for developing and maintaining partnerships with campus organizations, community groups, and local government agencies to further the mission of civic and voter engagement. A succession plan has been put in place for the Graduate Coordinator position to ensure continuity and sustainability of the civic and voter engagement initiatives. This succession plan will involve identifying and training a qualified individual within the office or university community who can seamlessly transition into the role in April. The office is actively recruiting students who are a part of a BA/MA program to apply for the graduate coordinator position in political science or another major. In March 2024, a proposal was submitted to University Leadership to create a full-time Civic & Voter Engagement Coordinator within the Center for Student Involvement. Approval for that position is pending. Additionally, through our partnership with the Andrew Goodman Foundation we are able to recruit two ambassadors in late August to help achieve the office's yearly initiatives. The office and its ambassadors are supported in this work by:

- Warren Rigby, Co-Chair of the Montclair State Votes Coalition, Graduate Coordinator for the Office of Civic & Voter Engagement
- Dr. Birgid Harrison, Chair of the Political Science Department
- Bryan Murdock, Director of Community Engagement
- Maria Rodriguez Gregg, Director of Government Relations and Community Affairs
- Arnold Korotkin, Adjunct Faculty, Sociology
- Tara Mellor, Associate Director of Residence Life
- Lori Petrozzello, Program Associate, Sprague Library
- Pascale Lafountain, University Senate and Associate Professor, World Languages and Cultures
- Dr. Fanny Lauby, Associate Professor, Political Science and Law
- Michael Cerbo, Get out the Vote Ambassador Pre-Law Society
- Hannah Krall, Get out the Vote Andrew Goodman Ambassador
- Bobby Serrani, Marketing and Communications Coordinator

We believe that it is essential to have equal representation from all parts of our campus, including faculty, staff, and student leaders. This diverse perspective offers subject matter expertise and organization that aims to support historically underrepresented communities in our democracy. Our group meets monthly via zoom.

Montclair State University partners with the following organizations to support our efforts on campus:

- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
- Andrew Goodman Foundation
- Campus Vote Project
- League of Women Voters
- YWCA Montclair
- NASPA
- Office of the New Jersey Secretary of State

### **Commitment**

Strengthening Civic and Voter Engagement is the cornerstone of Montclair State University's vision and mission and continues to be a focus of this office as well as the University community. Located in three towns in Northern New Jersey, Montclair State University sits within three townships (Montclair, Clifton, and Little Falls) and within two state counties (Essex and Passaic Counties). In July of 2023, Montclair State University merged with Bloomfield College, a small private minority serving institution in Bloomfield, New Jersey, also in Essex County, allowing Montclair State University to span over two campuses. The 2024-2025 Action Plan was created by the Assistant Dean of Student Engagement and the Graduate Coordinator for the Office of Civic & Voter Engagement, who will also be responsible for updating the action plan throughout the academic year. The Montclair State Votes Coalition assists the Office of Civic & Voter Engagement and works to fulfill the efforts described in our campus action plan. With this Coalition, students, faculty, and staff develop and plan opportunities for the campus community to engage in programs rooted in voter education and action. Our Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors also assist in implementing the directives and goals of our action plan.

In addition, our campus has mentioned civic learning and democratic engagement in this strategic plan, stating Objective 1.5 Expand programs and services that improve students' opportunities for life-long success and engaged citizenship, and increase the University's commitment to their continued relationship as alumni

**On campus, our office along with collaborations provide:**

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- President Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation for the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge.
- Voter registration tabling
- Signage promoting Election Day

**On campus, we've encouraged:**

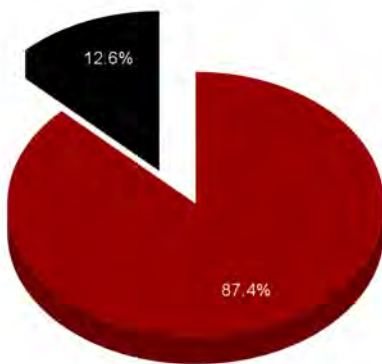
- Voting in The Student Government Association elections
- Political speakers
- Walks / rides to polls
- Registering/Pledging to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, Vote Early Day, and Election Day Hero)

The emphasis on civic learning and democratic engagement continues to be a key initiative in the work that we do on a daily basis at Montclair State University. While we do offer many in person events throughout the academic year, we also do interactive passive window displays to educate the community about those who fought to secure the voting rights we have today.

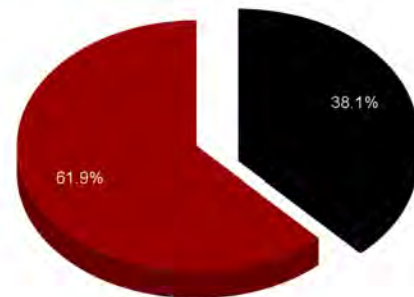
**Institution Landscape**

The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of our campus. This information is based on data collected from when our total student enrollment was 20,448

Enrollment Data:

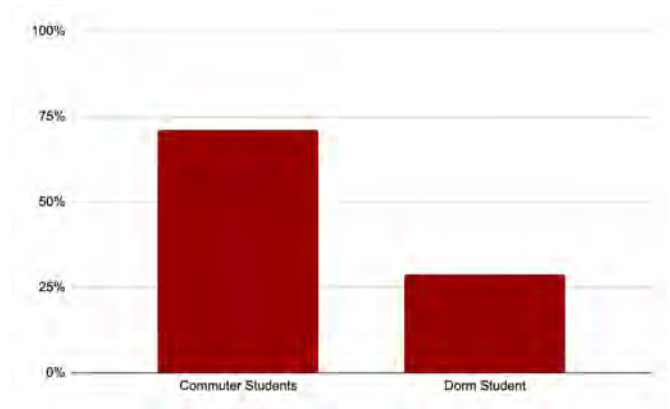
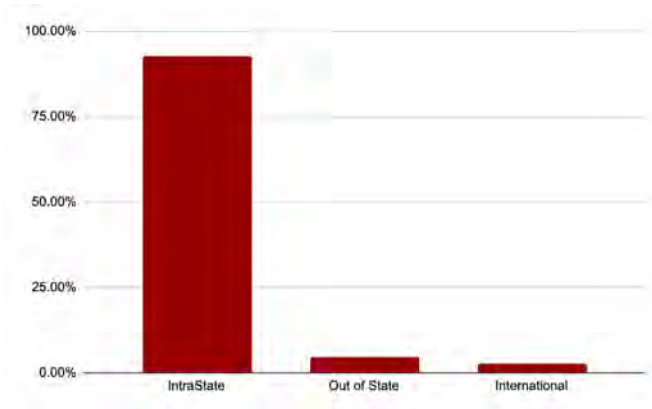


● UG Full Time ● UG Part Time

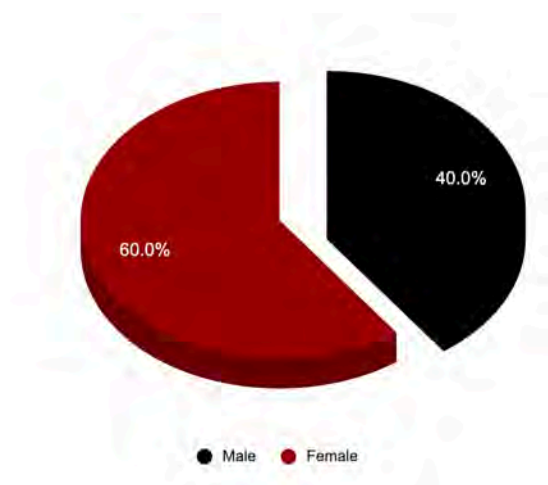


● Grad Full Time ● Grad Part Time

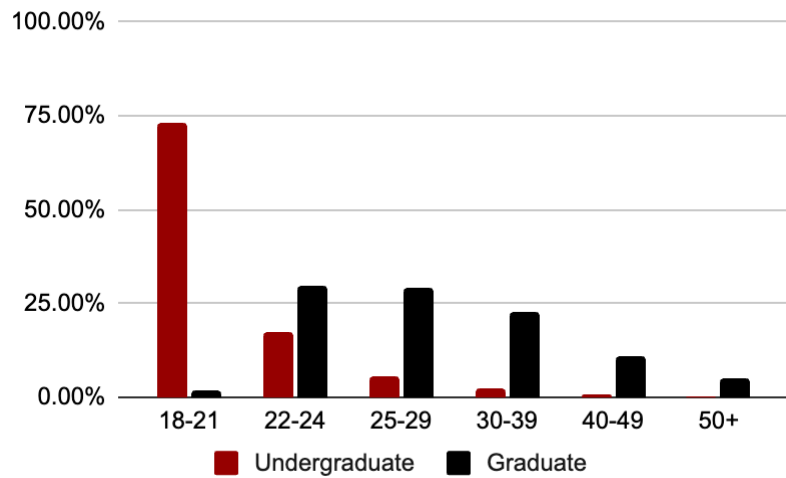
### Residency Demographics:



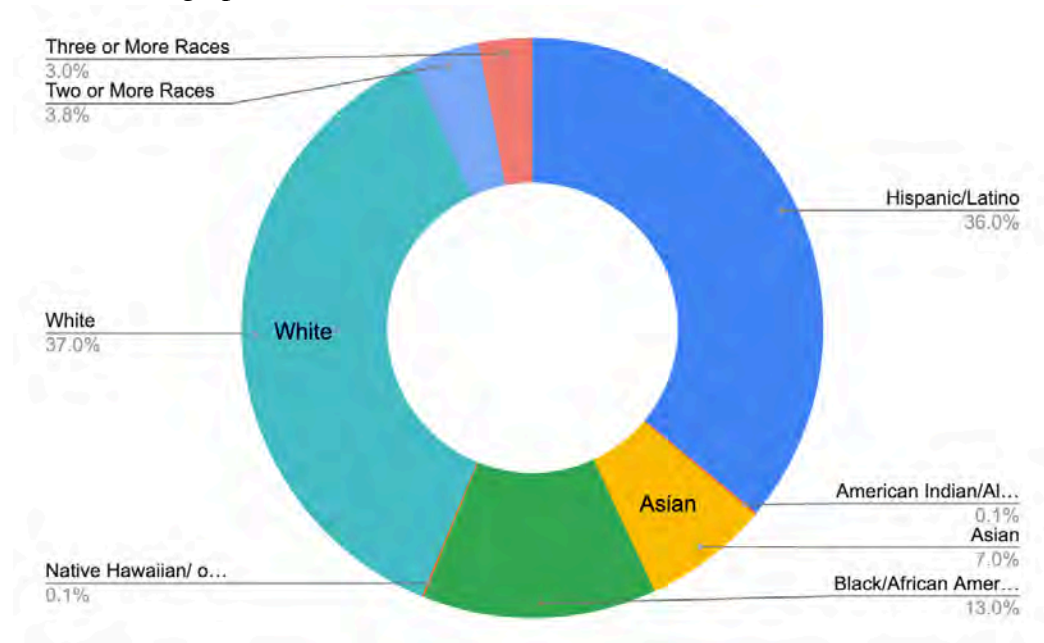
### Gender Demographics:



### Age Groups:



## Racial Demographics:



Our institution utilized the following data gathering tools:

- The National Study Of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE)
- Turbovote Admin Tool
- Montclair State University Admissions

The above data provides important insight for the Office of Civic and Voter Engagement, the University's voter coalition and the institution as a guiding principle crafting our future goals. For example, the enrollment data used within this action plan was prior to the merger with the Bloomfield College campus which has resulted in a higher number of both residential and commuter students. We need to engage with our university community in areas of focused education initiatives and programming. In addition to this, as a minority serving institution, we need to examine the language used when we communicate with the university community resulting in a need to expand and explore cultural barriers that our students may face to actively participate in our democratic process. Lastly, since 71% of our student population are commuter students we see a significant opportunity to engage this population.

## Goals

Due to the unique nature of Montclair State University there are some inherent challenges that we face when it comes to getting out the vote and registering voters. One of these obstacles would be that we have a larger percentage of our population that are commuters and they do not always attend our events. In addition to this, students seem to be disengaged with the current political landscape and that they lack knowledge on local and state elections versus federal elections. While these are just some of the challenges faced on our campus, there appears to be significant similarities across college and university campuses throughout the United States. Below we have outlined some of the short and long term goals taking these challenges into account.

### 1. Short-term goals:

We have created the following goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

- Host at least 7 voter registration events at varied campus locations to increase access, and before the voter registration deadline in October.
- Help students navigate the voting process through adapting tutorials video, in-person and/or online events, and infographic posters on campus.
- Increase team size by utilizing the Federal Work Study Program
- Increase student voter participation for the 2024 election by 15%
- Collaborate with Passaic and Essex County of Elections to bring a polling location back to campus.
- Meet with student leaders and clubs to provide them with important election information for them to pass on to their membership.
- Create consistent social media posts aimed at informing and reminding students and peers about the upcoming election and the importance of voting.
- Through events and tabling have at least 500 students make a pledge to vote in the November 2024 election
- Place in Second Place in the New Jersey Department of States Ballot Bowl in November 2024
- Establish a more robust classroom facilitation offering and partner with the orientation team to include voter registration during new student orientation.
- Establish a Civic and Voter Engagement presence on the Bloomfield College at Montclair State University campus.
- Create a comprehensive training program for new ambassadors and office volunteers to stay up to day with legislative and voting updates.

These are some of the tactics that we are currently doing as a part of our ongoing short term goals

- Host National Voter Registration Day event
- Participate in NJ Ballot Bowl Competition
- Plan social media and email awareness campaigns for the academic year.
- Present information about voting to classes.
- Host a voter registration workshop
- Coordinate with the Director of Government Relations and community affairs to plan of elected officials to visit campus and speak with our student

## **2. Long-term goals:**

We have carefully developed the following using the model specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound, innovative and empowering goals that we aim to achieve over the coming years:

- Encourage professors into taking a more active role when it comes to educating their classes on registration.
- Establish a budget for the office and aim to increase it by 5-10% annually to increase our initiative abilities.
- For the next midterm elections, our goal is to increase our voting percentages by 15%, a number based on the previous growth we saw from 2016 to 2020. We are currently working on developing and implementing processes to be able to increase voter participation and registrations through events, tabelings etc.
- We want to grow our working relationships with 5 new community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement. These relationships include but are not limited to our local election officials and other nonpartisan organizations.
- Increase voter turnout to 75% by the 2028 election.
- Keep both commuter and resident students up-to-date on the latest registration and polling information and coordinating transportation to these locations.
- Strengthen our relationships and grow our coalition membership by inviting external organizations to join to ensure that we have a diverse group from all areas of the university and surrounding community.
- Host town halls with Student Government to be able to identify key issues for the Montclair State University Community.
- Establish a full-time Coordinator position of Civic & Voter Engagement spring 2024 semester.
- Organize Visits to Trenton with the Director of Government Relations and community affairs, to provide students with an opportunity to speak with elected officials about concerns.



## Strategy

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

### Short-term Goal Strategies:

- Share resources from Andrew Goodman Foundation with students virtually by sending mass emails to students. We are working on implementing a resource hub for clubs so they can, in turn, discuss voter registration and stay up-to-date on related information.
- Cultivate a Professor Integration Program, where we focus on spreading detailed and correct voter registration information on our campuses and through our social media platforms to allow for students to stay informed of the upcoming election cycles.
- Continuously host informational events highlighting the vote by mail process and stress the importance of how all it takes is one vote to win and that it is an essential part of our democracy.
- Participate in more interviews with the Montclair State University Newslab, the Montclarion, and 90.3 WMSC-FM Radio to relay voting resources and information to reach a broader audience.
- Continue to offer workshops and voter registration throughout the year. Our office aims to grow our educational offerings by 2-3 to increase understanding and importance of civic and voter engagement.
- Host a speaker in honor of the National Constitution Day event with the Political Science Department. In addition to this, we will continue to work with the Director of Government Relations and community affairs to plan for elected officials to visit campus and speak with our students.

### Long-term Goal Strategies:

- We want to increase our focus on commuter students by actively engaging with them and hosting events in their designated areas for voter registration, such as parking lots or commuter lounges. We believe it is important for commuter students to feel included and represented in the campus community, and by focusing on their specific needs, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and involved student body.

- Provide polling and voting information via Engage, Red Hawk News and through our Civic & Voter Engagement newsletter. Additionally, we strive professors to incorporate any pertinent information and democratic participation into their course structure.
- Collaboratively work with the various communication teams at Montclair State University and the website administrators to incorporate voting registration and share the latest news updates and relevant information that could directly affect the university community.
- We are constantly enhancing our educational resources to facilitate better understanding and alleviate any barriers or stressors that students may face when registering and voting in during elections. Our plan involves implementing both online and in-person models, which can be presented during new student orientations, accepted student days, and open houses. This will enable us to engage with a captive audience before election cycles take place.
- Throughout the year we provide the university community with opportunities to communicate with their elected representatives. Letter-writing campaigns to elected officials are crucial in democratic societies. They provide a direct way for individuals to engage with their representatives, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered. Through these campaigns, constituents can express support for specific policies or initiatives and advocate for the changes they want to see in their communities.
- The Student Government Association elections take place in mid-March. We conduct tabling, social media posts, and classroom visits to enable students to participate in our democratic process. This initiative also helps first-time voters break down any existing barriers and encourages student involvement and shows them how easy the overall process can be.

**National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data has not been received.**

- Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2020. In 2020 our registration rate was 82.7. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased.
- In 2020, our voting rate was 85.9 and our voting rate among registered students was 71. During this year, our voting rate was higher than the national average.

## **Reporting & Evaluation**

Action plan reporting and evaluation is a pivotal process of monitoring, documenting, and communicating the progress and outcomes of the above action plan. The office of Civic and Voter Engagement believes that this report will play a crucial role in ensuring that our objectives and goals are achieved effectively and efficiently. We strive to do that this in the following ways:

- Email to members of our campus coalition to allow for feedback and to gain important insight that could be missed during the crafting of this action plan. Additionally, share with the university leadership team and the President to ensure transparency and to make sure goals and objectives follow the mission and vision of the University.
- Hold town halls to present to the university community to facilitate dialog on areas of opportunity and possible solutions.

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

- Post on the Civic and Voter Engagement Website and our Engage Page

We anticipate significant opportunities for The Office of Civic and Voter Engagement to collect ongoing feedback from the university community as a guiding principle in crafting future action plans to ensure our objectives and goals are changing based on the needs of the community. We aim to do this in the following ways:

- Regrouping with our campus coalition to debrief and reflect on ways to integrate the feedback collected as ways to improve campus efforts.

We plan to evaluate our success in achieving both short and long term goals at least two times year by:

- We will revisit our action plan and identify the goals that were achieved and those that were not. We will adjust our short and long-term goals accordingly, using the NSLVE data to identify opportunities for improvement.