

Executive Summary

Muhlenberg College's mission statement affirms our campus' commitment to developing independent critical thinkers who are engaged in civil debate, equipped with ethical and civic values, and prepared for lives of leadership and service ([Mission Statement 2019](#)). To support our mission and these values, BergVotes, in collaboration with the campus community, have created this Action Plan and strategies to increase political discourse and engagement on campus.

BergVotes is a non-partisan student movement dedicated to raising political and civic engagement on campus. Working in collaboration with BergVotes is the BergVotes Collective, comprised of faculty, staff and students to support voter engagement and education activities. The Voter Promoter Team through the Office of Community Engagement plays a pivotal role in voter education and infrastructural work on campus as well. These groups operate in an ongoing way, meeting weekly and paying attention to the elections that happen multiple times per year, not just in the midterm and presidential election seasons. The purposes of this particular action plan will pay mind to the 2024-2025 election cycle specifically, with denotations of activities that take place each academic year, and those specific to 2024.

Strategic Priorities:

1. Maintain the Muhlenberg College student voter registration rate of eligible students at 85-90%
2. Increase Muhlenberg College's student voter turnout rate from 90% in 2020 to 92% in 2024
3. Provide information and opportunities to discuss issues related to policies and candidates in advance of the general elections
4. Election Day will be a day full of activities and programs sponsored by multiple campus departments and BergVotes
5. Continue to engage with the Lehigh County Voter Registration Office and offer Poll Worker and Interpreter services

Leadership

- President Kathleen Haring- published an op-ed about the importance of student voting- <https://www.highereddive.com/news/president-speaks-muhlenberg-college-student-voting/639860/> Sends out messages each year.
- Allison Williams- Vice President for Student Affairs- contributed to the creation of this guide for dialogue surrounding the Election. Actively creates spaces for dialogue related to issues impacting the election and potential outcomes.
- Dr. Ross Dardani- Political Science- overseeing the Election Series events run out of the Political Science department and is part of Berg Votes Collective

- Beth Halpern- Director, Community Engagement (OCE)- oversees all student-focused, election-related activities, advises BergVotes and Voter Promoter teams, connects with Lehigh County Voter Registration, connects with all others to ensure sustainability of efforts.
- Dr. Erika Sutherland- Languages, Literatures & Cultures- recruits students to participate as Spanish language interpreters at the polls and has assisted with interpreter training historically.
- Dr. Christopher Borick- Oversees the Muhlenberg Polling Institute where national attention is given to their work. Students are involved in the polling process, exit polls, and more through the polling institute.
- Kabir Burman- President BergVotes- coordinates all student-focused voter registration and civic engagement efforts alongside other student leaders.
- William Skopal- Vice President BergVotes
- Alexandra Downey - Team Leader Voter Promoters
- Lehigh County Voter Registration- shares a list of registered students for cross-referencing purposes, follows up with OCE with issues related to student registration.

Commitment

As previously stated, Muhlenberg's mission is to develop independent critical thinkers who are engaged in civil debate, equipped with ethical and civic values, and prepared for lives of leadership and service ([Mission Statement 2019](#)). President Haring has signed the Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation, and we have twice been awarded the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. Students receive communications from the administration (both the President and Vice President of College Life) several times throughout the year related to student voting, and this upcoming year will be no different.

Parents/Guardians are also encouraged during their June orientation to campus prior to their student's first year to ensure that their student has a plan for voting. President Haring's op-ed further demonstrates her commitment to voter education and engagement.

Landscape

Muhlenberg is a small, liberal arts college in Allentown, Pennsylvania where particular attention is paid to both our swing state and congressional district.

Voter registration- Due to our size, we are able to give specific, individualized attention to students in the registration and information-sharing processes. Using the BergVotes instagram to answer student questions has worked quite well historically to ensure that students have the information they need. Tabling in our student union on a regular basis has ensured that every student on campus has been approached directly about voter registration. We have had success registering incoming students during orientation weekend as a part of the resource fair as the people they move in with often encourage them to register as well. While the idea of having people visit first-year seminars or personal and professional development classes (required for

first-year students) was a good one, we did not get much traction with actual registrations through that method historically.

Voter education- We have now had 3 issues expos historically that invited students from different clubs/organizations/teams and classes to host a booth to educate students about platforms for various candidates. We had great attendance and participation at a couple of them, and then less at the last one. The Voter Promoters in the OCE have created information about what's on the ballot for the past 8 years and people find the information very useful. Every student registered here on campus directly receives this information that they can use to better understand what will be on the ballot, and they also receive information relevant for first-time voters. Students appreciate direct, easy access to this information. For students registered in their home districts, we post reminders to mail their absentee ballots up and down the main thoroughfare of campus keeping in mind deadlines for each state, and post relevant data for them to gain information for their respective ballots.

Goals & Strategies

If anyone on campus would like to be involved, they can reach out to BergVotes on Instagram or contact the appropriate campus folks using the campus email system.

Strategies highlighted in yellow are used annually

Strategies highlighted in green are for presidential and midterm elections

Strategies not highlighted are for this year only

- Maintain the Muhlenberg College student voter registration rate of eligible students at 85-90%

In 2016 Muhlenberg College student voter registration rate of eligible students was 59.2% an increase of 5% from 2012 (NSLVE 2017). In 2018, our registration increased to 81% (NSLVE 2019), and in 2020, the registration rate hit a record 91.6%. We strive to maintain this high rate in 2024 through the following initiatives:

- a. Register incoming first-year students during Move-In Day and New Student Orientation;
- b. Table at Seegers Student Union during high traffic times of day to register students to vote at Muhlenberg and their home states on a weekly basis;
- c. Remind students to register before campus speaking events related to the election;
- d. Post voter registration information in the BergBulletin and the campus calendar;
- e. Post signs on academic row the first week of classes and the last week before the voter registration deadline in PA so that anyone walking will be informed about registration

- f. Collaborate with athletics, multicultural life, and greek life to achieve 100% registration within teams/orgs/clubs
 - g. Coordinate with Housing & Residence Life (HRL) to include RA's in their capacity to provide "To-Go" registration envelopes, help residents through registration if needed, and post flyers/posters/door hangers about important voting deadlines.
 - h. Collaborate with PPD classes to ensure that each first-year student has access to registering during this required course.
- Maintain Muhlenberg College's student voter turnout rate of 90% in 2020

To increase voter turnout, BergVotes & the Voter Promoters, in collaboration with campus departments and other student clubs, will:

- a. Inform/remind students about absentee ballot deadlines, particularly in PA, NY and NJ, and hang signs on academic row reminding people to mail in their ballots;
 - b. Hang door tags on each door of this residential college in the days prior to the November election.
 - c. ask students to sign voter pledge cards and place these cards in a public location prior to and on Election Day;
 - d. remind students through email, social media and campus webpage to vote and check that they are registered to vote;
 - e. work with the Muhlenberg Weekly to run articles about voting; and
 - f. use social media to publicize voting on campus.
 - g. Table on Election Day to answer any questions and provide a physical reminder to vote in addition to handing out stickers to increase awareness
 - h. Coordinate with HRL staff to have RA's post reminder flyers/signs on election days to remind students to vote.
 - i. Collaborate with Weekly/Office of Communications to produce a #WhyWeVote series highlighting students and their reasons for voting this November.
- Provide information and opportunities to discuss issues related to policies and candidates in advance of the general elections including:
 - a. Hosting an Issues Expo with other student clubs prior to the general election with involvement from across campus
 - b. Hosting a Candidate Expo for Lehigh County political candidates;

- c. Academic Departments will host Election Series and Center for Ethics series that address public policy issues connected to the election
 - d. Create local election information guide alongside League of Women Voters and/or the Committee of 70 to educate students on candidates and share information prior to Election Day
- Election Day will be a day full of activities and programs sponsored by multiple campus departments and BergVotes. Activities include:
 - e. BergVotes Information Table during Precinct operating hours (7am-8pm);
 - f. BergVotes will manage an Election Reflection room for students to share election day thoughts;
 - g. Students will serve as interpreters, poll workers and exit pollers
 - h. Social media will center voting across college platforms
 - i. Signage across campus will remind people to vote including digital signage around campus to focus on Election Day/Deadlines.
 - j. Campus debrief tbd.
 - Continue to engage with the Lehigh County Voter Registration Office and offer Poll Worker and Interpreter services.
 - a. Recruit students to serve as poll workers and/or interpreters and host training on campus as useful.
 - b. Connect with the Voter Registration Office to head off any challenges related to student voter registration applications.

NSLVE

Our NSLVE report is currently available [on our website](#) and will continue to be available. We have talked about the data with student organizers and across campus and there is a commitment to maintaining what we've been able to accomplish. Historically, we used NSLVE data to galvanize people to do better voter registration/education/turnout efforts on campus. Once we get the data from 2022 we hope to be able to use that as well.

Reporting

The NSLVE report will remain on the aforementioned website and when we receive the report it will be shared with administrators, faculty and students in multiple ways. The BergVotes and Voter Promoter teams will see how the data can impact future steps for the organizations. While we can track how many students are registered or connected with from various registration pathways, numbers alone will not dictate future efforts. We will continue to take note of the methods students use most for questions and information seeking.

Evaluation

We plan to evaluate the Issues Expo this year to see if it is still accomplishing the goals we set for it in terms of voter education. This will be accomplished through assessment of both booth participants and attendees. An effort is underway to revive the Campus Democrats and Republican groups, which both folded after the previous election cycle. While BergVotes has remained strong, we'd like to see these partisan groups re-emerge as well. If they are able to revive it will indicate greater general engagement. We will also intentionally take note of participation across campus this fall to see how broadly our efforts reach and if there are pockets that are missing. We have plans to engage broadly, but whether or not those efforts reach their intended audiences remains to be seen. Our campus also evolves as things come up, so we are sure that there will be items not contained within this plan that will be added and that we can add into the plan for documentation purposes.