

Owens Community College 2024 “ALL IN” Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Developed by: Owens Community College Voter Engagement Team

I. Executive Summary/II. Leadership:

This nonpartisan democratic engagement plan was developed by the Campus Voter Engagement Team at Owens Community College. (<https://www.owens.edu/ie/quick-facts/>) This team was established in late 2023 and will serve as an advisory panel for all voter engagement activities being organized on campus.

Team members include:

- Krista Kiessling – Director, Campus and Community Connections, Enrollment and Student Services
- Carrie Heller – Dean, Student Life and Deputy Title IX Coordinator, Student Affairs
- James Zeller – Coordinator, Student Life, Student Affairs
- Megan Kerr – Professor, Social/Behavioral Sciences,
- Robert Thomas – Assistant Professor, Broadcast Technology, Fine and Performing Arts
- Steve Culbertson – Professor, Communications/Humanities
- Jeffrey Schmucker – Coordinator, Marketing
- Michael Pfahl – Associate Vice President, Academic Affairs, Academic Services

The purpose of this plan is to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter registration, education and turnout in every election cycle (i.e., local, state and national). Put simply, we believe that our elections should reflect every member of our community. Our students, faculty and staff represent a diverse sample of our local region. Given that most of them will remain in the region to live and work, we strive to provide every opportunity possible to be active, engaged and educated citizens.

Our plan is grounded in the College’s strategic plan and mission statement, which states:

Owens Community College is the conduit to changing lives for the better in northwest Ohio. Through affordable, accessible, high quality education and training and connecting with business and industry through relevant programs, we create pathways to a better quality of life and progress for the region.

Our campus values (below) provide a more tangible and practical application of this mission statement:

- *Inclusive:* Every student, employee and member of the community is treated with respect and has a home here. We serve our communities, and we remove barriers so that high-quality education and training are accessible to everyone. Our team will work daily to nurture empathy and meet the needs of all types of learners, employees and visitors.
- *Transformational:* We change lives: those we touch, and those we may never meet. Beyond our students and our employees, transformation reaches to their families, employers,

neighborhoods and broader community. The meaningful interaction, the critical learning, the care and understanding that is inherent in our relationships transforms lives and positively impacts the entire region.

- *Intentional:* We are connected to the community and deliberate with our choices to expand, grow and change such that our institution is positioned and ready to succeed. We live for today, with an eye toward the future.
- *Adaptive:* We encourage creativity and collaboration to allow our team to develop forward-thinking solutions for our students and partners that ensure not only relevance and sustainability, but a flourishing, prosperous institution for the community.
- *Empowering:* We foster opportunities for our entire college community to help them create paths and determine “what’s next” in the way that best suits them.

We will implement this plan within both of our campuses (Toledo-area and Findlay-area). We will include the Office of Student Life, various members of the faculty, academic and student service units from across the campus (e.g. the Owens Libraries), and other co-curricular/external partners. It is our hope to extend these efforts to include both our in-person and online student populations.

Regarding the intended duration of the plan: this plan will be revised and amended at the beginning of each academic year (starting in the Fall semester) and will exist as a living document that considers the changing climate of the collegiate and political climates.

The Center for Campus and Community Connections:

The Center for Campus and Community Connections (CCCC) is the “home” for this work while collaborating with as many other campus stakeholders when possible and relevant. The CCCC serves as the connective tissue that brings together campus and community. The Center also serves as the Basic Needs Resource Hub for Owens Community College. It provides referrals to on- and off-campus community resources to enrich and support the lives of our community members. These resources include a campus food pantry, career closet, community garden, FREE store, Student Connection mentors, community benefits referral, and support and opportunities for volunteerism and community engagement. All activities are funded through our institutional budget and enhanced with grant funding and donations.

Every effort of the CCCC is tied to community-building and social justice, and ultimately the democratic process. When we receive questions such as, “Why are there students struggling with food security” or “Why are some social service benefits limited for college students”, we tie our answers to the need for civic engagement, education and advocacy on behalf of these issues. All our work is tied to democratic engagement and building active citizens as graduates of Owens Community College.

Further, the CCCC is guided by director Krista Kiessling and the Resource Stability Team to uphold the following campus basic needs statement:

“Owens Community College recognizes that reliable and consistent access to affordable food, housing, transportation, technology, familial care and health care is a central condition for learning. The purpose of the Resource Stability Team is to ensure coordination of student resources across the College to best support students in a holistic way during their academic journey.”

The committee will achieve this purpose through the following objectives:

- To identify obstacles to student success related to basic needs instability to meet the changing needs of our campus community
- To propose solutions for overcoming obstacles
- To share information related to our specific areas and basic needs supports
- To inform the campus community of our resource stability efforts

The CCCC has facilitated several activities supporting community, civic and voter engagement, including:

- Community Action/Resource Fairs – allowing local community partner organizations to educate students about their mission and share needs
- “All in to Vote” portal kickoff with “All in to Vote” t-shirts distributed to faculty, staff and students for voter engagement days:
 - National Voter Registration Day
 - Vote Early Day
 - National Voter Education Week
 - Election Hero Day
 - Election Day
- Candidate forums
- Webpage dedicated to student voter engagement (www.owens.edu/vote)
- Annual participation in the NSLVE survey
- League of Women Voters tabling events
- Constitution Day events in partnership with Student Life

The Office of Student Life is a key partner in this work, with the Dean of Student Life, Carrie Heller, acting as the secondary lead for Voter Engagement. Dr. Heller is also the Voter Engagement successor, should any institutional changes alter the responsibilities of the CCCC.

It is our vision to engage student leaders, clubs and organizations to join our efforts moving forward. At present, engagement from these areas is low as we get this initiative off the ground and move forward.

Our students, who are often non-traditional, juggle school, work and life responsibilities. They tend to visit campus to attend classes and then leave again. As we build a culture that is committed to active citizenship, we hope to engage more of our students as poll workers and will continue to research the option of becoming a local polling location. Currently, our priority is ensuring that every student has access to voter registration, updates, and education on issues and candidates.

While we do not presently coordinate with local election offices, we do regularly refer students to the most appropriate regional contact by utilizing their county of residence and our www.owens.edu/vote page. Since 2014, our NSLVE engagement rates have consistently increased, allowing us to hold the

bronze seal award for voter participation in the 50-59% range. Our progress is illustrated here: <https://www.owens.edu/vote/wp-content/uploads/sites/227/2022/09/NSLVECampusReport.pdf>.

III. Commitment/IV. Landscape

Owens Community College has experienced a significant transition during the past decade, including many changes in leadership. The College has also seen a marked decrease in enrollment numbers. Although these changes have stalled many of our efforts for sustainable democratic action, planning, and assessment, ultimately the changes have been for the better and helped to develop an agile framework. The current leadership team and Voter Engagement Team are committed to continuous quality improvement and meeting students' needs, including the enhancement of campus-wide democratic engagement.

Joining the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2022 has assisted in reinforcing the importance of this work in our campus culture. An opportunity we are pursuing is to track civic learning and/or democratic engagement as a specific learning outcome, and which departments and academic areas promote this work.

The College launched a new strategic plan in 2023; this continues through 2028. Each of the strategic objectives contained within is directly connected to the campus values listed above, and each could also be directly linked to the work of civic learning and engagement:

➤ **Building a Community of Belonging**

Become the hub of the Region where the institution is known for its caring, welcoming environment where everyone, regardless of background, educational experience and goals, employment skills, and comfort level in a classroom, bands together to enrich the Region.

- Executive Leadership Team members, guided by President Dione Somerville, help ensure that each area of campus considers our role in the community and how building active, engaged professionals adds to the overall social and professional capital of our college and enables Owens students to enrich the region. President Somerville encourages all campus employees to help direct students to registration information and reinforce the importance of student voter participation. Owens' new Vice President of Human Resources, Dr. Leslie Erwin, has agreed to work with the CCCC to develop a network of communication for employees and staff who can aid in facilitating this pursuit.

➤ **Expanding Our Partnerships**

Nurture and cultivate robust partnerships serving as the catalyst for growth and success, connecting northwest Ohio and beyond.

- Our community partners include the following supporters of prior voter registration efforts. These partners offered support through training, supplies, tool kits, voting guides and registration assistance, and we are working to confirm the partners' continued support and involvement moving forward.

- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
 - ALL IN Community College Community of Practice
 - Ohio Campus Compact
 - League of Women Voters
 - Campus Vote Project
 - Andrew Goodman Foundation
 - Non-profit Vote
 - Civic Influencers
- We have been able to leverage campus visits from local elected officials to highlight our commitment to advocacy. For example, in June 2024 we hosted 12 local legislators. They toured several areas of campus and concluded their visit to the College with a discussion about the importance of the Ohio Hunger Free Campus Bill.
- **Developing an Agile Framework**
Provide an agile framework, rooted in continuous quality improvement and based on a thorough understanding of the ever-changing student needs, which helps students to efficiently obtain their desired outcomes.
 - The campus Election Engagement team meets monthly to evaluate programs, track attendance and revisit areas of focus to best meet the needs of our students and campus community.
- **Deepening Employee Engagement**
Create organizational strength by fostering a culture of trust and community through shared leadership, recognizing individuals’ contributions and promoting lifelong growth.
 - We share a campus commitment through our “Owens is ALL IN to Vote” t-shirt campaign. Grant funds provided by Civic Nation have been used to purchase t-shirts to be worn by faculty, staff and administration on Civic Holidays throughout the academic year to provide a visible commitment to our students.
- **Ensuring a Sustainable Organization**
Promote high quality education and training built upon a sustainable fiscal model driven by strategic enrollment growth and balanced resource management.
 - In 2023, Owens brought onto the team a new Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. Dr. Blake Renner’s leadership has helped propel the College to exceed enrollment goals for multiple semesters. This drive to grow enrollment is coupled with a focus on enhancing the student experience to enhance retention and students’ civic- and community-mindedness.
- **Telling Our Story**
Thoughtfully communicate our story to strategically position Owens Community College as a first choice in education, partnerships and investments.
 - We value our partnership with the marketing team and align our campaigns to meet the strategic goals of the campus.

V. Goals (both Toledo-area and Findlay-area Campuses)

Action	Who is responsible	Where will it take place	When will it take place	Intended Audience
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Short-Term Goals				
Utilize Marketing to better inform Owens community of voting processes	Director, CCCC; Marketing team	Owens website, poster design, social media campaign	Beginning August 2024	Students, faculty and staff
Student Voter Ambassadors	Director, CCCC	CCCC	Volunteer recruitment will begin Fall semester 2024	Owens students
Distribute voter registration and education flyers through the Harvest Food Pantry	CCCC team	Owens Harvest Food Pantry sites	Beginning Fall 2024 whenever the college/pantry is open	Food pantry patrons (to include students, faculty and staff)
Why Should I Vote? presentation	Owens faculty (by invitation)	TBD by presenting faculty	Fall semester 2024	Students
Yard signs for students, faculty and staff	CCCC team and Marketing (with grant funding)	Region-wide	Fall 2024 (determined by funding options)	All
National Voter Registration Day Event	CCCC, Student Life and Marketing	Campus-wide tabling and activities	Fall semester (September)	Students, faculty and staff
Last Day to Register to Vote event	CCCC, Student Life and Marketing	Tabling and email campaign	Fall Semester (October)	Students, faculty and staff
"I vote because" visual display	CCCC team	CCCC	November 2024	Students, faculty and staff
NSLVE report out	CCCC and marketing	Via marketing portal	Upon receipt of NSLVE results	Students, faculty and staff
Long-Term Goals				
Assessment of efforts	Voter Engagement Team	Voter Engagement Team meetings	Monthly; Fall and Spring semesters	Report out to the Owens community
Weekly tabling	Connection Mentors	College Hall, Heritage Hall, CFPA	Fall and Spring semesters when	Students, faculty and staff

			classes are in session	
Welcome Week/ orientation tabling	Advising team with Connection mentor support	College Hall, Veterans Hall; other locations TBD	Fall and Spring semesters when scheduled	Current and prospective students
Increase student voter percentage by 10 percent	Entire campus community	On campus, via email, in classes	Fall and Spring semesters	Students especially; all potential voters
National Voter Education Week Kickoff and tabling	CCCC and Student Life	Aligning with Connection Mentor tables	Fall and Spring semesters	Students, faculty and staff
Class presentations	Connection Mentors in partnership with faculty	Within academic classrooms (by invitation)	Summer, Fall and Spring semesters	Students and faculty
Community Forum Board for Voter Engagement	CCCC team	College Hall 151 and EC Atrium	Fall 2024 (and during any election cycle)	Any passersby
Voter Engagement Social Media Campaign	CCCC team and Marketing	Online, email, social media and posters	Fall, Spring and Summer semesters	All members of the Owens community
Campus-wide email from the President's Office	College President	Via email	Beginning of each semester (at the President's discretion)	Students, faculty and staff

VI. NSLVE

Past campus demographic and voting data:

- Owens Community College has 7762 students
- Owens Community College has authorized NSLVE for 2023
- Our institution had a 79% voter registration rate in 2020.
- Of those registered students 70.5% voted in 2020

VII. Strategies (both Toledo-area and Findlay-area Campuses)

Many of our faculty are also supporting civic learning and engagement in classes and beyond. An opportunity we recognize is that, over the past several years, the tracking of faculty efforts has been sporadic. We project that through re-applying for the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement (previously awarded in 2015), we will identify many examples of such to be added to this plan next fall.

Internal barriers have included funding, faculty union negotiations, declining engagement in student life activities and fluctuating priorities for college leadership. Nevertheless, we remain committed to voter engagement and will work fiercely to improve moving forward.

VIII. Reporting

At present we collect the number of student registrations gathered at each event. Once the election cycle is completed, a report of voter registrations is shared with the Vice President of Enrollment and Student Affairs and then shared with the entire Executive leadership team.

Totals are also shared with the campus Voter Engagement team and events are reviewed and evaluated for next voting season.

The NSLVE is shared campus wide once published and share through our internal promotion channels as well as marketing publications.

IX. Evaluation

We intend to use this plan as a guiding tool for evaluation of our voter engagement efforts. The institution would like to see an annual increase in voter registration and campus voting rates. The number of events held each year is determinate of funding and administrative support.

One of the long term goals for evaluation is to have an “engagement report” to be published as a part of our campus impact materials.

As collection of activities, courses and projects increases, we hope to find opportunities to highlight student research, honors programs, internships and co-ops that work to support democratic engagement within academic programs.