

## **Ramapo College of NJ Campus Action Plan**

### **Executive Summary**

“Four years ago, Rihanna described voting as ‘the loudest way to make your voice heard!’ I cannot agree with her more. By voting, we take action in support of candidates and ballot measures of our choice, shape our communities, and uphold our nation’s democratic norms and values.”

This quote is taken from an email that Ramapo College President Cindy R. Jebb sent to Ramapo students 10 days before the 2022 midterm elections, and that email is indicative of the robust campus action plan that Ramapo has for ensuring that voting and political engagement are woven into the fabric of student life at the College.

Ramapo’s plan is coordinated by staff in the Civic and Community Engagement Center (CCEC), which is part of the Center for Student Involvement (CSI). Since the creation of the CCEC in 2011, dedicated support (both staffing and financial) has increased, and both anecdotal and quantitative data from NSLVE show significant growth (voter registration and voter turnout) during presidential election years (2020 over 2016) and midterm election years (2018 over 2014). The plan includes both short-term goals (leading up to the 2022 midterm election) and longer term goals (leading up to the 2024 presidential election). Goals include:

- Increase all metrics for the 2022 midterm election: Voter registration rate, % of registered voters who vote, and % of all students who vote. Specifically, our goal is for the overall voting rate among students to be at least 55% in 2022.
- Share messaging with the community from Ramapo President Jebb in connection with her signing the Presidential Commitment, and messaging from other campus administrators and staff.
- Educate international students on how they can play a role in the voting and election process although they are ineligible to vote in the US.
- Continue to move from a voter registration mindset to a more holistic voter education framework, especially actually voting.
- Increase the level of knowledge among students regarding political processes, especially locally.
- Increase the amount of civic engagement information as part of the curriculum

While support over the last 10 years for voting and civic engagement has been exceptional at the unit level and strong at the division level, a recent realignment of divisions (known internally as cores) along with the signing of the Presidential Commitment by the new Ramapo President indicates an increasing campus commitment to civic and voting engagement. In addition to division realignments and welcome involvement from Ramapo’s new President, there is also considerable momentum laterally across areas and within student clubs and organizations. The CCEC staff are working to build relationships with students, staff, and faculty throughout the campus. Although students are transient - remaining on campus for approximately four years,

through their involvement they leave behind seeds and fertile ground for culture change. This is what is now taking place at Ramapo College. It is palpable: the new President's dynamism and civic commitment paired with the Civic and Community Engagement Center's staff's dedication to relationship-building are coming together to create a campus environment where student civic involvement is expected and acknowledged. Much of the implementation will happen at the unit level using both institutional resources and external partnership funding and grants. Efforts to grow partnerships and communication from across campus will involve more constituents in implementing the plan.

## **Leadership**

### **Cabinet/Executive**

Cindy R. Jebb, President of Ramapo College

Patrick O'Connor, Government Relations Officer

Christopher Romano, Vice President for Strategic Enrollment, Outreach, and Engagement

Nicole Morgan Agard, Chief Equity and Diversity Officer and Vice President for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Compliance

Melissa Van Der Wall, Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Wellbeing

### **Staff**

Rick Brown, Director of the Center for Student Involvement

Edward Seavers, Associate Director of the Center for Student Involvement

Dylan Heffernan, Assistant Director of the We Care Program and Community Service

Karen Booth, Coordinator of Civic and Political Engagement

### **Faculty**

Aaron R. S. Lorenz, Dean, School of Social Science and Human Services

Susan Hangen, Dean, School of Humanities and Global Studies

Kristin Kenneavy, Associate Professor of Sociology

Regina Clark, Associate Professor of Journalism and Chair of Black Lives Matter at Ramapo College

Sangha Padhy, Associate Professor of Law and Sustainability

Mia Serban, Professor of Law and Society

Michael Unger, Associate Professor of Political Science

Jeremy Teigen, Professor of Political Science

### **Student Groups**

College Progressives

College Republicans

Democracy Matters

The Ramapo News

Sunrise RCNJ  
Student Government Association  
Civic and Community Engagement Center Student Staff  
Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassadors

### **Partners**

Andrew Goodman Foundation: Kaylee Valencia, Program Manager  
Bergen County Board of Elections: Richard L. Miller, Chairman  
John S. Hogan, Bergen County Clerk

### **Commitment**

Ramapo College's mission is providing students a strong foundation for a lifetime of achievement. The College is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. Our vision is to prepare students to be successful leaders for a changing world through developing the whole person – as scholars, creators, individuals, and most importantly as local and global citizens. These aspects are central to how we approach civic engagement and involvement.

### **The Civic and Community Engagement Center**

The Civic and Community Engagement Center is the core of our voter and political engagement programming. There are two full-time staff members and five student staff members who lead the work of the Center. Two additional managers have roles in supporting and promoting the work of the Center. The Civic and Community Engagement Center coordinates programming on civic holidays, including:

- Constitution Day
- National Voter Registration Day
- Voter Education Week

The Civic and Community Engagement Center also hosts voter registration, education, and engagement events leading up to the general election. Additionally, Ramapo College participates in New Jersey's Ballot Bowl, and the Civic and Community Engagement Center is responsible for all the related data collection and programming.

In addition to specific-voting related programming, the Civic and Community Engagement Center also offers Leaders in Service, an immersive civic leadership program for first year students. As part of their experience, students are asked to write to an elected official about an issue or topic important to them. The students who participate in Leaders in Service are challenged to think about what it means to be an active citizen. A similar program offered to Sophomores is titled, Sophomore Advancing in Leadership, also known as S.A.I.L.. Sophomore students can apply to participate in this leadership program, and if accepted, attend monthly workshops, reflection sessions, and participate in service in local communities.

The Civic and Community Engagement Center hosts themed weeks throughout the year - two of our biggest efforts are the promotion of Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week in the fall, and Civic Engagement Week in the spring. Throughout these weeks are presentations about topics related to food justice, housing and basic needs insecurity, as well other civic topics. Throughout all of these programs and events, voting and democratic participation are discussed in relation to addressing these issues.

### **Outside of the Civic and Community Engagement Center**

The College works to implement voter education across campus. Voting information is presented in the orientation material first year students receive prior to the start of their first semester. When they arrive on campus in late August, they already know that voting and civic involvement is core to the College's identity and culture.

The College's newspaper, The Ramapo News, is emerging as a site for civic information and involvement. In the fall 2022 semester alone, the newspaper has covered Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day, profiled a Civic and Community Engagement Center staff member, and published a full page ad encouraging students to vote.

The Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Services has for decades been regarded as the College's social justice space while the much newer Civic and Community Engagement Center has been seen as the space for volunteerism and political engagement. Given the state of the nation, and the openness and receptivity of newer staff members, these somewhat artificial designations are beginning to shift into a more collaborative dynamic between the two areas. The Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Services supported the Civic and Community Engagement Center's National Voter Registration Day event and the Civic and Community Engagement Center supported the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Services annual Pridefest. Plans are underway for collaborative efforts in Spring semester 2023.

With our new President, we have seen an increase in communication between the President's Office and the Civic and Community Engagement Center about programming related to current events. For example, President Jebb worked to organize a campus wide debriefing on the invasion of Ukraine as these events were unfolding. President Jebb has communicated in a timely manner related to civic and social issues impacting our nation. This exemplifies the President's commitment to civic engagement and open discourse.

The email from President Jebb regarding voting, an email from the Academic VP, and a third email from the Student Affairs VP- all sent to all students- is also emblematic of the leadership commitment to civic engagement efforts.

### **Landscape**

Ramapo College's dedication to voter registration and involvement is shown across the

campus, including our curriculum. Across our curriculum, you will find voting and civic education is central to what we teach. Our Political Science Major is framed around the process by which individuals make collective decisions, set goals and priorities, and formulate policies to pursue them, and offers courses discussing American government, campaigns, and elections.

We also offer the Civic and Community Leadership Minor that cultivates student engagement in civic, local, state, and international communities. The Civic and Community Leadership minor brings together coursework that engages students and graduates in the public work of building democracy.

Each year since 2020 Black Lives Matter at Ramapo College has hosted a colloquium on the topics related to “race, social justice and representation.” This year’s topic is voting rights. Five sessions will be offered throughout the fall semester. The colloquium is also offered as a one credit course for students who commit to all five sessions. The Coordinator for Civic and Political Engagement will be meeting with the colloquium chair to discuss collaborative efforts in the near term and beyond.

Topics of race, justice and society are discussed across all our academic programs. Civic engagement, in one form or another, is central to a Ramapo College liberal arts education. You can see below for a list of relevant majors, minors and concentrations.

- Curriculum
  - Political Science (Major)
  - Public Policy (Minor)
  - Civic and Community Leadership (Minor)
  - Environmental Studies (Major)
  - Ethnicity and Race Studies (Social Science Contract Major Concentration)
  - Gender & Sexuality Studies (Social Science Contract Major Concentration)
  - Human Rights and Genocide Studies (Major)
  - Journalism (Major)
  - Labor, Work, & Organizations (Social Science Contract Major Concentration)
  - Law and Society (Major)
  - Social Science (Major)
  - Social Science: Society and Culture (Degree Completion Program Concentration)
  - Social Work (Major)
  - Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies (Minor)
  
- NSLVE Results from Ramapo College
  - General
    - Ramapo College had a 15.1% increase in registration rate over a four year period (2016-2020). The rate had steadily increased over that period, starting at 71.9% and reaching 87% in 2020
    - Ramapo College had a 13.1% increase in Voting Rate among registered students over a four year period (2016-2020). This was 75.6% in 2016

- and then rose to 88.7% in 2020.
  - This information results in a 77.1% Voting Rate for all students, which is a 22.7% increase from 2016 and is 11.1% higher than the all-institution average.
- By Race/Ethnicity
  - The voting rate for Asian students increased by 26% percent over the four year period, starting at 34% and rising to 60%.
  - The voting rate for American Indian/Alaskan Native students increased from 71% to 75%, a 4% increase over the four year period.
  - The voting rate for Black students increased by 19% over the four year period, starting at 50% and rising to 69%.
  - The voting rate for Hispanic students increased by 22% over the four year period, starting at 51% and rising to 73%.
- Voting Method
  - Over a four year period, there was a monumental shift in voting method. In 2016, 85% of students voted in person while 9% voted not in person. In 2020, only 0.002% of students would vote in person, while 96% would vote not in person or provisional voting. (3% unknown)
  - This shift was primarily the result of the Covid-19 pandemic - this will be something to be aware of during 2022 efforts.
- Age Group
  - Ramapo College serves students from a variety of population groups. 92% of the college population falls between 18-29, with the largest group being 18-21, followed by 22-24, and then 25-29
  - These three groups would all see an increase in voting rate over the four year period of 2016-2020.
    - 18-21 would increase 28%, (49%-77%)
    - 22-24 would increase 17%, (57%-74%)
    - 25-29 would increase 18%, (59%-77%)
  - The population groups above 29, saw little to no change in voting rates over the four year period
- Sex
  - The college serves 3385 female students and 2336 male students as of 2020. 59.2% female, 40.8% male
    - The Female student population would see a 22% increase in their voting rate. They started at 57% in 2016 and would rise to 78% in 2020.
    - The Male student population saw a 24% increase in their voting rate. They started at 49% in 2016 and rose to 73% in 2020.

### **Additional Landscape Notes**

Very few students who are eligible to vote make Ramapo their permanent address, so on-campus voting and shuttles to the polls are not part of current or future plans. Vote by mail and early voting are prime elements of voter turnout efforts and education. Additionally, New

Jersey and Bergen County have few laws making voting challenging, and in-person long voter lines are rare to non-existent. In short, locally we have a favorable landscape for voter participation.

## **Goals**

RCNJ has the following short-term goals:

1. Increase all metrics for the 2022 midterm election: Voter registration rate, % of registered voters who vote, and % of all students who vote. Specifically, our goal is for the overall voting rate among students to be at least 55% in 2022.
2. Renew AGF Ambassador program to support voting initiatives from a student lens.
3. Ask every student to vote in the 2022 election.
4. Share messaging with the community from President Jebb in connection with her signing the Presidential Commitment.
5. Educate international students on how they can play a role in the voting and election process although they are ineligible to vote.

Other than #3, the other four short term goals all will be accomplished by November 7, 2022. Goal number 3 will be accomplished by 9/30/22. All 5 goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, inclusive, and equitable.

RCNJ has the following longer term goals

6. Continue to move from a voter registration mindset to a more holistic voter education framework, especially actually voting.
7. Increase the level of knowledge among students regarding political processes, especially locally.
8. Increase the amount of civic engagement information as part of the curriculum

Goals 6 and 7 are ongoing, but have an initial timeline of November 4, 2024. Goal 8 is contingent upon the timeline of the hiring process for a new Provost.

## **NSLVE**

Our work is, in part, evaluated and measured by our participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) conducted by the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE) at Tufts University's Tisch College of Civic Life. This data is essential for tracking Ramapo's voting rate and other valuable information pertaining to civic engagement on campus. The recent NSLVE Data compares voting rates from the 2014 and 2018 Midterm Elections as well as the 2016 and 2020 Presidential elections. 2014 to 2018

and 2106 to 2020 both show tremendous growth. Ramapo has submitted all recent NSLVE reports to ALL IN and they are posted on Ramapo's ALL IN page.

## **Strategy**

**RCNJ has the following short-term goals:**

**Increase all metrics for the 2022 midterm election: Voter registration rate, % of registered voters who vote, and % of all students who vote. Specifically, our goal is for the overall voting rate among students to be at least 55% in 2022.**

Ramapo College will increase our voting metrics through continued voter education and awareness campaigns. In person events including the Student Involvement Fair and National Voter Registration Day. Additional information will be shared in a poster campaign and in various digital spaces (social media, student engagement platform, email).

**Renew AGF Ambassador program to support voting initiatives from a student lens**

Ramapo had an incredibly strong relationship with AGF from 2016 through 2021, when changes occurred at AGF. We worked in a less direct way with AGF during the 21-22 school year, and with changes they have made, anticipate a return to a renewed and strengthened relationship for the 22-23 year. To that end, Ramapo intends to hire two AGF ambassadors for the 22-23 year after not having official ambassadors in the 21-22 year.

**Ask every student to vote in the 2022 election.**

With elements similar to the first short-term goal, with the assistance of materials provided by AES and other partners as well as internal communications, we will ask every student to cast their vote in the 2022 election.

**Share messaging with the community from President Jebb in connection with her signing the Presidential Commitment.**

President Jebb will send an email to the community, including students, to share her support of the Presidential Commitment. This email will highlight not only her belief in voting and civic engagement in general, as marked by her signature on the Commitment, but also will encourage students to vote in the upcoming election.

In previous years, the Dean of Students sent a message reminding students to vote before the general election. This practice will continue. The message includes:

- Information about deadlines and different ways to votes
- Encouraging messages about the importance of voting and one's civic responsibility

Going forward President Jebb will send an earlier letter to RCNJ students encouraging them to vote and engage in the electoral process. In following years, we can explore increasing message frequency by adding in another email prior to the primaries with similar messages of encouragement and information. These emails will be drafted in coordination with:

- The Center for Student Involvement

- The Civic and Community Engagement Center
- The Dean of Students & Vice President for Student Wellbeing
- President Cindy Jebb

**Educate international students on how they can impact elections without voting.**

Although international students cannot vote in US elections, the outcomes of elections impact their experience while in the United States. The CCEC will work with the Roukema Center for International Education to share information about the election and discuss ways in which they can impact the results, including, but not limited to, their encouragement of their peers to vote for candidates that have positions which will most positively impact their experience at Ramapo and in the US.

**RCNJ has the following longer term goals:**

**Continue to move from a voter registration mindset to a more holistic voter education framework, especially actually voting.**

Voter registration recently became even easier in New Jersey with online registration and automatic voter registration. To that end, we continue to shift from encouraging students to register (although we still do this), to working with them on making a plan for voting. Are they voting by mail or voting in person? If they are voting in person, are they voting early or on Election Day? How are they getting to the polls? If they are voting by mail, are they putting the ballot in the mail or are they returning it to a secure location in their town/city?

**Increase the level of knowledge among students regarding political processes, especially locally.**

This will be done through in person programs as well as “pop up” events across campus as CCEC staff “quiz” students about upcoming election dates and participation. Tabling in our Student Center is also a great way to share information on this topic.

**Grow the amount of civic engagement information as part of the curriculum**

The Director of the Center for Student Involvement will use formal (VP of Student Wellness, Provost, Deans) as well as informal (faculty colleagues) processes to determine the most effective path forward to infuse voting and civic engagement information into the classroom, and potentially the curriculum, beyond the courses noted in the *Commitment* section of the report above. President Jebb’s encouragement for growth in this area will be explored as well.

**Reporting**

Ramapo will share our action plan internally via email correspondence with key stakeholders across campus. This will include, but is not limited to: the President, Cabinet Members, relevant faculty and staff, and student groups. While these individuals and groups will be directly connected with the Action Plan, as noted below, it will be available for the entire community.

We will also make this action plan available for review on the recently revamped Civic and Community Engagement Center website. This will be listed among voter registration deadlines and information, civic holidays, our NSLVE report and other related resources. Our NSLVE report is currently available for review on our Civic and Community Engagement Center website and we have previously released our NSLVE data through a press release and will continue to do so with future reports. We also include a link to our ALL IN Campus Profile on our website, which includes links to previous actions plans and NSLVE reports.

The College has sent a number of press releases related to the voting participation accolades we have received and those releases are amplified via social media.

While some groups have access to certain information simultaneously, we share our accomplishments with our partners- especially those at the Andrew Goodman Foundation where we have developed strong relationships.

## **Evaluation**

In regards to our civic programming such as National Voter Registration Day, Constitution Day and other voting related activities, we track attendance, make note of specific observations, and feedback from staff, student staff and volunteers to better understand what activities resonate with students. One recent example was from the Voter Engagement event as part of Civic Engagement Week in April '22. There were more than 90 students who came out to the event, with food being the big draw. Some students engaged with the material, but others just hung out. One plan for future events is to provide a "free food" ticket at the voter material table. Students don't have to be registered or register to vote to get the ticket, but staff (student and full-time) can ask the questions. They can ask if they have a plan as to how they are going to vote. No one is forced to do anything in order to enjoy the free food, but it enables us to gather data on everyone who attends the event related to both registration and plans for casting their vote.

The NSLVE data is used for "norming" campaigns across campus to help students understand that in a Presidential election year, more than 3/4 of their fellow students are voting. At any of our events (in person, pop up, tabling) we can ask students whether they saw the campaign information to help evaluate whether they are seeing the voter participation numbers that are being shared across campus.

An example of an evaluation method in action occurred during the 2021 Gubernatorial election. During this election season, our Civic and Community Engagement student staff would work at a table in a high traffic area of the College and educate students on the upcoming election and how to get involved - registering to vote, learning where their polling place is and pledging to vote. While this was effective overall in terms of numbers engaged, our student staff saw that it was most effective during common hour periods (select hours with no classes) where students were already walking around. Outside of those hours, there was a significant decrease in pledges and student engagement. This prompted us to reevaluate how and when we reach out

to students and how we invest our resources (human and financial). We made the following adjustments:

- Make programming more active (an example is our *Paint and Pledge* event, where students were able to do some artistic work, while also learning about the upcoming election and pledge to vote)
- Put programming in high-traffic areas during common hours and in other locations which retain numbers during other hours (the commuter lounge stays busy even while classes are occurring)
- Have events be shorter and more focused, better utilizing resources in shorter bursts

An analysis of the results of the 5 short-term goals will be conducted following election day and the student AGF ambassadors along with the professional staff will discuss which goals we accomplished and what we learned from our 2022 efforts in order to impact voting efforts going forward.