

Rice University Campus Action Plan: Preparing Students for the 2020 Election and Beyond

Executive Summary

Rice University's 2020 Action Plan is the work of RICEngaged, a coalition of Rice students, faculty, and staff. Our efforts this year have focused on building an engaged coalition of campus stakeholders that can lead a coordinated, strategic effort to grow, support, and sustain democratic engagement at Rice. Our current efforts build on past successes; eligible student registration rates have remained above 80% since 2016, and Rice student voter participation in the 2018 Midterm Election was three times that in the 2014 Midterm Election, nearly matching that of the 2016 Presidential Election. Past voter mobilization efforts on campus have been weighted toward increasing registration rates across the student body, followed by those encouraging students to turn out to vote. Our 2020 plan takes a more coordinated and targeted approach to voter registration and seeks to balance those efforts more equally with those around voter education and voter turnout. We anticipate that this strategy will help us achieve our five "Big Goals" for 2020, which include shrinking the gap between student voter registration and turnout, making sure students know when, where, and how to register and cast their votes, and motivating students to become informed and active citizens by helping them connect the issues and values that matter to them to the electoral process.

Leadership

This 2020 Action Plan was developed by RICEngaged, a campus coalition of student leaders, faculty, staff and administrators committed to increasing democratic participation at Rice University. The RICEngaged 2020 coalition includes:

Rice student leaders of campus clubs and organizations:

- Rice Young Democrats
- Rice College Republicans
- Rice Left
- Rice Federalist Society
- Civic Duty Rice
- Rice ACLU
- Rice Student Association
- Rice Graduate Student Association
- Rice AAUW
- Rice JOLT
- Pi Sigma Alpha (Political Science Honor Society)
- Baker Institute Student Forum (James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy)

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Community Partners

Harris County Clerk's Office

Mi Familia Vota

Rice University's 2020 Big Goals for Democratic Engagement

Using research and best practices from the All In Democracy Challenge, partner organizations, and our own campus experiences, and drawing on findings from the 2012/2016 and 2014/2018 Rice NSLVE reports, the RICEngaged coalition developed a three-pronged campus plan to support and grow democratic participation among our student body. This plan is structured around three key efforts:

REGISTER eligible students to vote

EDUCATE all students about election and voting processes, races, candidates, issues

TURN OUT registered students to the polls

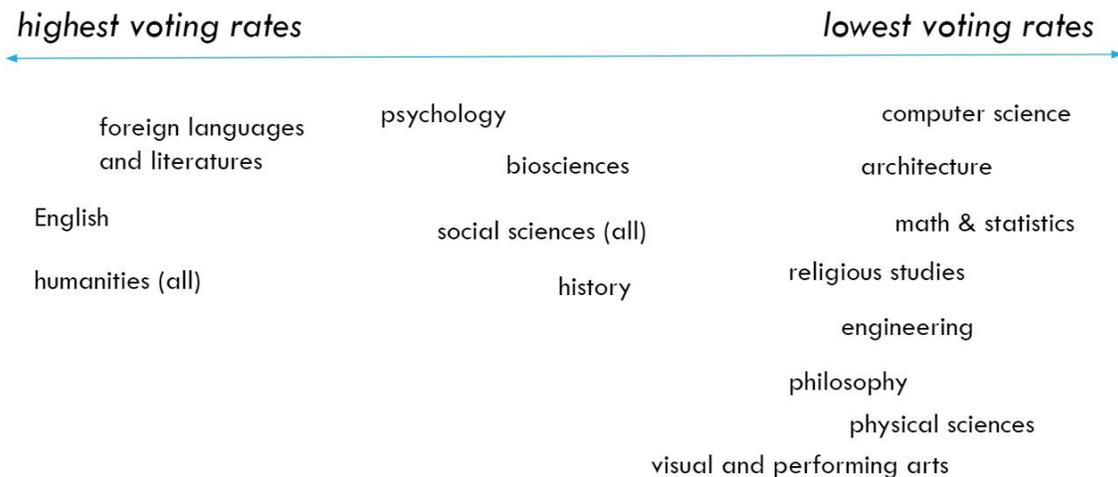
Over a series of meetings between spring 2019 and spring 2020, the RICEngaged coalition identified "Big Goals" for each of these three focus areas, as well as specific action steps we plan to implement to achieve those goals. Below, we discuss those goals and action steps with reference to past trends, recent successes, current challenges, and identified opportunities for growth of democratic engagement on Rice University's campus.

Voter Registration

Voter registration rates among Rice students have been consistently high, with 77%-82% of eligible students registered to vote between 2012 and 2018. Increased efforts to register students to vote before the 2016 and 2018 elections resulted in a 5+% jump in student registration rates from the previous Presidential (2012) and Midterm (2014) election years.

	2012	2014	2016	2018
Student enrollment	6136	6237	6803	7039
Total eligible voters	4413	4368	4811	5043
Number of students who registered	3376	3282	3970	4129
Registration rate	76.5%	75.1%	82.5%	81.9%

Our NSLVE reports from 2012/2014 and 2016/2018 revealed notable differences in terms of voting rates of students by year and field of study. Specifically, we found that, in the 2016 Presidential Election, voting rates among freshmen were nearly 10 points lower than those of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Similarly, voting rates among graduate students were 10 points lower than that of all undergraduates. Additionally, we found significant differences in voter turnout rates by field of study, with the highest turnout rates among humanities, social science, and bioscience students, and the lowest voter turnout rates concentrated among all other STEM fields, architecture, and certain humanities majors.



Highest rate by field of study between 2012-2018 was 60%; lowest was 6%

Although we do not have comparable demographic data for student registration rates, we hypothesized that those differences in voter turnout across our student body may be partly a result of differences in voter registration rates across those same student populations, and plan to focus our registration efforts accordingly. Additionally, research shows that low income, first generation, and historically underrepresented populations on campus often register and vote at lower rates than their peers. Although the NSLVE reports do not provide voter registration or turnout information about these student populations for our campus, our targeted student voter registration efforts will include these populations, as well.

Based on these findings and insights, our Big Goal for voter registration focuses on our target populations, while continuing to serve the needs of the entire Rice campus community.

Voter Registration Goal: Increase student registration rates, especially among target and lower-turnout populations of freshmen, certain majors/ fields of study, low income, first generation, historically underrepresented, and graduate students

To achieve this goal, we have proposed and/or initiated the following action steps:

Raise profile of voter registration during O-Week (freshmen orientation). In the past, a one hour block during a single lunch period has been designated for voter registration activities. We seek to increase the visibility of and opportunity for freshmen voter registration during O-Week. Our plan is to create a pre-O-Week introduction to civic engagement and voting online module, which will include TurboVote registration for students eligible to register. The module will be shared with all incoming students and incorporated into a voter registration and TurboVote sign up lunch during O-Week that will include voter FAQs and information about upcoming local elections.

Promote voter registration and engagement among low income, first generation, and historically underrepresented student populations. We will forge a strategic partnership with Student Success Initiatives and key student groups and clubs that will allow us to better understand challenges and opportunities associated with registration and voting among underrepresented student populations at Rice, provide voter information and registration services to students who may not otherwise seek them out, and encourage and support underrepresented student leadership and initiatives around voting and democratic engagement.

Provide graduate students with voter information and registration opportunities. Historically, graduate students at Rice have lacked formal or organized opportunities to register to vote; efforts have instead been championed by individual graduate students. Additionally, many graduate students come to Rice from out of state and may have questions about registration eligibility, rules, deadlines, and processes. Since graduate students have few common activities,

voter information and registration opportunities must be offered in shared spaces and through common channels. The GSA plays an important role in collective graduate student life at Rice, and has agreed to host a voter registration event at Valhalla, the campus graduate student pub, and to include voter registration and information as part of GSA sponsored activities, including the GSA Activities Fair. These public activities will provide opportunities for graduate students to register to vote, signup for TurboVote (which is of special value to graduate students who are registered in other counties or states), and get answers to questions they have about registration and voting. Additionally, links to digital resources, including voter FAQs, registration and election dates and deadlines, and TurboVote signup, will be made available to academic department GSAs, who are well positioned to serve as promoters and disseminators of voter information to their fellow graduate students.

Seek Presidential Support. In early April 2020, the Rice Student Association (SA) passed a Senate resolution, entitled, "[To Advocate Rice Becoming a Voter Friendly Campus](#)," which outlined a series of requests of upper-administration leadership regarding voting and democratic engagement at Rice. Following upon and in concert with those resolutions, the SA, with full support of the RICEngaged Coalition, will encourage President Leebron to sign the [Presidential Commitment](#) and to send a [message](#) to incoming students that identifies Rice as a voter friendly campus and calls upon them to participate in democratic processes, including voting.

Leverage TurboVote. In July 2019, the Center for Civic Leadership (CCL), with support from Civic Duty Rice and the SA, partnered with TurboVote to increase voter registration and turnout among Rice students. To date, TurboVote resources have been concentrated at the CCL, through trained staff and information about the app and registration access available through the [CCL's website](#). The CCL invested in TurboVote because it facilitates voter registration and education, provides election reminders, streamlines the absentee ballot process, and tracks student outreach. To launch this new service to students, the CCL made a "Rice Votes" logo and ordered stickers for distribution at voter registration tables during Orientation Week and on National Voter Registration Day in fall 2019. The CCL also worked with Civic Duty Rice and SA to run a weeklong TurboVote registration competition among the eleven residential colleges. Nearly 800 students registered for TurboVote at that time, and the winning college won a boba tea party. The CCL integrated TurboVote into the OwlNest platform run by Student Activities and initiated discussion with the Registrar's Office about integrating TurboVote into the freshmen registration process.

We recognize that the TurboVote digital platform has the potential to serve a much larger percentage of students and to be better integrated across the university's digital hubs. To better leverage TurboVote resources, Coalition members will work with stakeholders across campus to

integrate it into key digital platforms including course registration (Banner), course management (Canvas), and residential college, SA and GSA homepages.

We also see the special value that TurboVote can provide to students while Rice is operating in remote capacities. Those who sign up with TurboVote are able to register to vote, request an absentee ballot, and/or update an address, regardless of their current location. For students who are unable to register online (such as those seeking to register in Texas, where online voting is unavailable) they can use TurboVote to request pre-filled forms with stamped envelopes already addressed to the local election office. This resource will make it easy for students to register or change their existing registration in any US state.

Provide visible, consistent, and accessible voter registration on campus. In recent election cycles, campus stakeholder efforts have concentrated on registering students to vote. Although these efforts have resulted in an increase of eligible students registered to vote, they have not been as coordinated or efficient as they could have been. Often, multiple campus offices, student organizations, and residential colleges have organized independent voter registration efforts with their own VDVRs (Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrars), some of which overlap around registration deadlines. We appreciate these organic and self-driven efforts to maximize student voter registration, but seek to make in-person voter registration more visible, more consistent, and more accessible to the Rice community, while making more efficient use of stakeholder efforts around democratic engagement. Staff at Fondren Library have been central to past voter registration efforts on campus, and have developed a plan to offer consistent, convenient, and well-advertised opportunities for students and others in the Rice community to register to vote at Kelley Center Information Desk, located in the basement of Fondren Library. Eight Library staff members are trained VDVRs and will staff scheduled voter registration hours throughout the school year. Fondren Library is open from 7am-9pm most days, making it possible to provide regularly scheduled registration opportunities for students outside of class and severy meal times.

Additionally, a listing of active VDVRs across campus will be hosted on the newly created ricevotes.rice.edu website and updated by Civic Duty Rice, CCL, and Fondren Library staff. Communities on campus (residential colleges, academic departments, centers) will be encouraged to maintain active VDVRs among their members who can help with voter registration efforts. Although we anticipate that this network of campus VDVRs will provide opportunities for student voter registration, especially during special events and peak demand periods, the consistency of the registration services offered by Fondren Library staff will serve as an important contribution to our efforts to make Rice a voter friendly campus.

Expand National Voter Registration Day activities. In recent years, campus stakeholders, including the CCL, the Rice Vote Coalition, and Civic Duty Rice, have celebrated National Voter Registration

Day with a festive table in the centrally-located Student Center where students and others in the Rice community can register to vote, sign up for TurboVote, complete voter pledge cards, enjoy snacks, stickers, and other giveaways. This event has been an important opportunity to register students to vote--especially those who have not otherwise sought out the opportunity on their own.

To date, these activities have been relatively small and concentrated in one location on campus. We propose expanding the activities for National Registration Day to make it a larger, campus-wide event that includes activities in the residential colleges. However, we recognize that Covid-19 circumstances may require that the 2020 events be offered on a smaller scale and/or virtually.

Incorporate voter registration and election information into course syllabi. In the summer of 2018, The CCL provided faculty with a calendar of key voter registration and election information for the Midterm Election and invited them to include this as part of their Fall course syllabi. This tactic serves two purposes: it provides essential voter registration and election information to students in a timely and effective manner, since they consult their syllabi calendars for upcoming course deadlines. Second, it communicates to students that their faculty value democratic engagement and want students who are eligible to vote. We received positive feedback from students and faculty who participated in 2018, and will launch a similar effort in the summer of 2020. Special efforts will be made to identify disciplinary champions and encourage faculty in academic schools and departments with lower student voter engagement to participate. The Student Association's April 2020 resolution "To Advocate Rice Becoming a Voter Friendly Campus" has formally supported this plan with a request to the "Provost to...ask that faculty (1) make note of election days on their syllabi and (2) make announcements on election days to increase civic awareness..."

Additionally, we will reach out to all academic Deans, departmental undergraduate advisors, and democracy champions across the disciplines to ask them to encourage faculty and academic student clubs to support and participate in these efforts. We see such administrative and faculty recognition and buy-in as essential to our goal of expanding student voter education and participation across all fields of study, especially among underrepresented schools and majors.

Voter Education

We recognize two broad types of voter educational needs: (1) voters need to be informed about when, where, and how to register to vote and to cast a ballot in any election; (2) voters need to be knowledgeable about the candidates and propositions that appear on an election ballot and how those ballot options reflect issue positions and potential policy outcomes. Research and best practices in the field show that both types of voter education are essential for successful democratic engagement broadly and have strong impacts on voter turnout rates, especially among students, who are typically new to the voting process.

In past election cycles (2016, 2018), stakeholders across campus have contributed to both types of voter education. For instance, the CCL, Civic Duty Rice, the Department of Political Science, and the Rice Young Democrats club have all hosted debate watch parties; the CCL organizes a trip for students to the Texas Tribune Fest in Austin each fall; the Rice chapter of ACLU and the Kelly Center for Government in Fondren Library have each created and distributed guides on elections and voting that include nonpartisan information on candidates, issues, positions, and policies; the CCL, Fondren Library, and the Office of Public Affairs each host portals on their websites with links to nonpartisan external resources on voter registration, elections, candidates and issues; the CCL supports and hosts the University's TurboVote system; the Rice Young Democrats club has hosted talks with local candidates; and Civic Duty Rice hosts an annual, nonpartisan Youth Voting Conference that brings together college and university student leaders across the Houston area around campus voting education and mobilization efforts.

These stakeholder efforts will continue to be of great value to the Rice campus community as they provide a range of diverse but reliable opportunities and mediums for students to access information about voting and elections and to learn more about issues, policies and candidates. However, some of these efforts have been duplicative or overlapping and others have had limited visibility and reach across campus.

We have established two Big Goals related to these educational needs of our students, and recognize that our action steps to improve voter education may contribute to one or both of these learning needs, as discussed in the sections below.

Education Goal #1: Educate Rice students on when, where, and how to register to vote and cast a ballot, locally, or in their home state

As part of our 2020 Campus Action plan, we seek to create centralized, highly visible and accessible resources for students to learn about when, where, and how to register to vote and cast ballots through the following action steps:

Offer centralized, regular voter registration services at Fondren Library. Fondren Library has eight trained VDVRs who can provide students and other members of campus with accessible, in-person advice about registration deadlines, how to register to vote locally or in their home states, how and when to apply for absentee ballots, requirements and dates for upcoming elections, as well as the opportunity to complete voter registration in person (see above for more detailed description).

Expand National Voter Registration Day activities. National Voter Registration Day brings attention to voter engagement and the importance of registering to vote. Trained VDVRs provide students

and other members of campus with accessible, in-person advice about how to register to vote locally or in their home states, registration deadlines, how and when to apply for absentee ballots, requirements and dates for upcoming elections, as well as the opportunity to complete both voter registration and voter pledge cards in person. Our planned expansion of these activities will bring greater visibility and access to these resources across campus.

Raise profile of voter registration during O-Week (freshmen orientation). O-Week is an ideal opportunity to provide incoming freshmen with resources about voting and opportunities for registration. Our proposed online civic education module with TurboVote signup instructions will guide incoming students regarding voter registration and elections processes and deadlines, and will help establish a campus culture of voting and democratic participation before students arrive in August. During the O-Week voter lunch event, registered VDVRs can provide students with essential information about registration and elections, answer new student voter FAQs about eligibility, state residency, and financial aid status, as well as offer in-person voter registration and opportunities for students ineligible to vote in US elections to become civically engaged on campus.

Leverage TurboVote. Students who sign up for TurboVote will have personalized access to essential information about registration and elections no matter where they are registered, facilitated voter registration (such as having registration materials sent to them and returned, postage-paid, to the required addresses), as well as push reminders about upcoming deadlines, dates, hours, and locations of polling locations.

Messaging from the President's Office. The Student Association's April 2020 resolution "To Advocate Rice Becoming a Voter Friendly Campus" has formally recommended that "the President of Rice University (currently David Leebron) send out an email to the whole university (undergraduates, graduates, staff, and faculty) regarding voting information about polling dates, locations, and hours, voter ID requirements, nonpartisan voter guides, absentee voting ballots and deadlines, and transportation, if relevant." Research and best practices show that such top-level administrative support is essential to the development of a campus culture of voting and democratic participation.

Create and administer a single campus portal for voting and election information. Currently, the CCL, the Office of Public Relations, and Fondren Library all host voting and election information on their websites. Feedback from student leaders revealed a strong preference for a single campus portal for all voting and election information. In response, we have created a new, standalone university webpage with the URL ricevotes.rice.edu. The CCL has agreed to manage this centralized campus portal and to collaborate with RICEngaged and other campus stakeholders to provide timely, relevant, and comprehensive content. The new webpage will serve as a

“one-stop-shop” for the Rice community for information about when, where, and how to register to vote, including TurboVote registration, trustworthy, nonpartisan resources about issues, candidates, and policies, and information about relevant upcoming events on and off campus.

Education Goal #2: Increase opportunities for Rice students to learn about candidates, positions, issues, and policies

The following action steps will allow us to strengthen existing and provide new educational opportunities for students to become more informed democratic citizens and voters:

Highlight Campus Research and Teaching about Voting, Elections, Issues, and Policies. Faculty in Political Science, Computer Science, and Psychology consistently offer voting and election-related courses. The Political Science Department offers a wide curriculum of courses on voting behavior and political participation in the United States and elsewhere. This fall, the department is offering a 200 level course called *Elections 2020*. The course is capped at 99 students and has no prerequisites, so a large number of students will have the opportunity to follow the U.S. elections closely and learn about them in the context of political science research. *Election Systems, Technologies, and Administration* is an undergraduate research seminar taught by faculty from Political Science, Computer Science, and Psychology who also publish together and separately on these issues. The subject matter of this course is especially relevant for current and future elections, in light of both Covid-19 and election hacking concerns. Bringing broad attention to courses like these is an effective way to facilitate campus-wide awareness and conversation about current voting and election issues as well as Rice faculty and student involvement in addressing those issues beyond the classroom.

Relatedly, Rice faculty from several departments and staff from the CCL have developed partnerships with local election officials and voting advocates, including the Harris County Clerk’s Office and Mi Familia Vota, which have engendered sustainable collaborations around voter mobilization and the planning, execution, and assessment of elections. For example, a partnership was formed in January 2019 between the CCL, the Political Science Department, and the Harris County Clerk’s Office to assess a new county-wide voting system that aims to make voting in Harris County easier and more accessible to all eligible voters. With funding from The Laura and John Arnold Foundation, this research program is providing paid opportunities over a two year period for more than 100 Rice undergraduates to participate--at varying levels--in community-engaged research aimed at improving voter access. Along the way, these students learn about the voting process, election administration, and associated requirements and challenges. Additionally, faculty from Political Science, Psychology, and Computer Science and staff from the CCL are currently working with the Harris County Clerk’s Office to identify concerns and preferences among poll workers and voters regarding COVID-19 precautions in the

upcoming 2020 local and Presidential elections and to determine how best to design and conduct voting at in-person polling places. These researchers have received two grants to support this effort, which includes funding for student research assistants during summer and fall of 2020. Research shows that engaged research opportunities such as these contribute greatly to student civic learning and bolster civic engagement, interest, and sense of empowerment.

Additionally, the Baker Institute for Public Policy supports policy researchers and offers events on a range of public policy issues, including voting and elections. By coordinating with Baker Institute leadership and the Baker Institute Student Forum, we can bring student attention to the work of Baker Fellows and the Institute's special events as part of our larger voter education efforts.

To raise awareness about the focus and findings of these and other research efforts, we are planning:

- A campus forum in early Fall 2020 where students, faculty, and staff can learn more about the work of Rice students, faculty, and community stakeholders around voting and elections.
- Collaborations with Rice Media and the CCL to spotlight these collaborative efforts, and especially the community-based, engaged student learning and leadership opportunities.

Integrate voter education across the academic curriculum. Courses across academic schools, departments, programs, and centers enable students to learn deeply about social issues and democratic processes. Some of these make explicit connections between issues and public policy and/or highlight implications for the Houston area, including courses in Architecture, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Social Policy Analysis, Politics, Law and Social Thought, Poverty, Justice and Human Capabilities, the Center for Civic Leadership, Engineering, Biosciences, Earth and Planetary Sciences, Education, and Business. However, only some faculty and instructors teaching these and other courses make the added connection for students between issues and policy on the one hand, and candidates, voting, and elections, on the other.

We recognize the common sentiment among faculty that they don't have the time, resources, or space in their courses to make such connections. Drawing on [best practices](#) and [peer models](#), CCL staff propose to partner with the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) to create a toolkit of pedagogical techniques and strategies that faculty can draw upon to integrate learning into their courses in big and small ways. We are especially eager to encourage faculty who already teach issue- and policy-focused courses as well as STEM and Architecture faculty to incorporate some of these pedagogical tools into their classrooms. The former because they are already providing students with essential components of civic education, and the latter because of the opportunity

for STEM and Architecture faculty and their courses to educate students about how their fields are shaped by policies, voting practices, and election outcomes (see plan in Registration section about seeking buy-in and support from academic Deans, undergraduate major advisors, and disciplinary champions of democracy as a way to engage faculty and students across all majors, especially those less likely to vote).

Build out co-curricular and extra-curricular voter education opportunities and resources. The CCL provides intentional, community-based engaged learning programs and courses with the explicit aim of developing students as civic leaders who are knowledgeable about and engaged in democratic processes. The Center offers a tiered curriculum of programs and courses in which students from all academic fields of study learn the theory and practice of civic engagement, including issue-based advocacy, activism, policy and governance.

Building on their existing strengths in these areas, CCL staff have committed to making voting and elections a special focus in all of their 2020-21 academic year programs and courses, starting in summer 2020. All CCL staff will incorporate new curriculum into their existing programs and courses that will contribute to student voter education and that will promote student voter engagement and mobilization. Additionally, the CCL is planning to focus the entirety of certain programs on voting and elections to provide students with immersive experiences in which they work alongside faculty and community partners in this issue area. We anticipate that these efforts will have the two-fold effect of educating students in CCL programming directly regarding the processes and value of democratic engagement and creating a cohort of campus ambassadors who can bring their knowledge and motivation regarding voter participation to the larger campus community.

The program in Politics, Law, and Social Thought, the Center for Civic Leadership, and the Moody Arts Center have proposed a collaboration on a Fall 2020 series of events that employs humanistic pedagogies of critical reading, exhibition, informative speech and discussion to connect academic curriculum to experience and action, and history to present through the issue of voting rights. This series will include: a public talk by a high profile voting rights activist; a film screening and discussion of *Let my People Vote*, an award-winning documentary short film about the work of formerly incarcerated voting activist Desmond Reade to secure voting rights in Florida; and a book group reading and moderated discussion of *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, an award winning book by journalist Ari Berman. The series is designed to complement a Fall exhibition at the Moody Arts Center highlighting issues important to the 2020 Presidential election, particularly voting rights/turnout, immigration, and gun control. The events and activities in the series will be open to all interested Rice students, faculty, and staff and will be offered in virtual form, depending on campus circumstances.

Student organizations also play vital roles in voter education and democratic engagement of their peers outside the classroom. For example, following the 2018 midterms, the student group Rice Left held an educational panel that aimed to inform students about how they could become involved in grassroots civic/political organizing beyond electoral campaigns. The Rice Young Democrats regularly host campus visits and forums with local candidates. And the Rice Young Democrats and Rice College Republicans have held public issue debates among their members. Civic Duty Rice hosts an annual nonpartisan Youth Voting Summit in September that brings together student leaders and voting advocates from campuses across the Houston area to share ideas, strategize campus efforts, and build collective energy and motivation that can sustain throughout the academic year. These student-led events can be particularly effective in helping students link their values to issues, candidates, positions, and policies and encouraging students to stay informed and engaged in democratic processes between election cycles. We will encourage student clubs and organizations to continue these types of activities, help promote them to the broader student body, and frame them as a way for students to further their education as voters and democratic citizens using the new ricevotes.rice.edu webpage and other coalition resources.

Voter Turnout

Findings from our 2012/16 and 2014/18 NSLVE report revealed a significant gap between Rice student voter registration and voter turnout. Although more than 80% of eligible Rice students have been registered to vote in the last two national election cycles, only 60-66% of those registered students cast ballots in the 2016 and 2018 elections.

	2012	2014	2016	2018
Student enrollment	6136	6237	6803	7039
Total eligible voters	4413	4368	4811	5043
Number of students who registered	3376	3282	3970	4129
Registration rate	76.5%	75.1%	82.5%	81.9%
Number of students who voted	1805	718	2632	2480
Voting rate of registered students	53.5%	21.9%	66.3%	60.1%

Nonetheless, we have made significant strides in student voter turnout. In the 2014 Midterm Election, 75% of eligible students were registered, but only 22% of them turned out to vote. In the 2012 Presidential Election, only 53.5% of registered students cast ballots. Student registration

and turnout rates increased by almost 10% between the 2012 and 2016 elections, and student voter turnout between the 2014 and 2018 elections nearly tripled, surpassing national campus trends.

	All private 4 year institutions	Rice University
2014 registration rate	67%	75%
2014 registered turnout rate	27%	22%
2018 registration rate	76%	82%
2018 registered turnout rate	52%	60%

Despite these notable successes, we see potential to improve voter turnout among Rice students and have identified two Big Goals to do so:

Turnout Goal #1: Improve polling place accessibility for Rice students

The Rice Memorial Center (RMC) has been an Election Day voting location for many election cycles. Until 2019, only students registered to vote in Harris County at an on-campus address were able to cast ballots at the RMC polling site. Students registered in Harris County but with off-campus addresses had to vote at other locations on Election Day. During General Elections, Harris County offers early voting opportunities across the county beginning on the 17th day before Election Day through the fourth day before Election Day. There has not been an early voting location on Rice’s campus (the County Clerk’s Office notes that there is not adequate public parking and other amenities needed to serve an early voting location), and students who wished to vote early have had to travel to an off-campus early voting site. Historically, these sites have not been within walking distance of campus. As many students do not have access to cars, they have had to rely on public transportation, rideshare, or limited shuttle service provided by the university.

In 2019, the Harris County Clerk’s Office introduced county-wide Election Day voting in order to make voting easier and more accessible to all registered voters. Previously, Harris County voters who wished to vote on Election Day had to do so at their designated neighborhood precinct. For Rice students who lived on campus, that location was the Rice Memorial Center; for Rice students who lived off campus, that was a designated polling location in their residential neighborhood.

Under the new county-wide voting system, all Harris County voters can choose to vote at any open polling location in the county.

During the November 2019 municipal election, any Rice student, faculty, staff or community member registered to vote in Harris County could vote at the Rice Student Center polling location. Although this system greatly increased voting location convenience for members of the Rice community who did not live on campus, it resulted in long lines at the polls for all who chose to vote at that location.

We have developed the following actions steps to improve polling place access for Rice students:

Confirm a Rice campus Election Day polling location for the 2020 Presidential Election. Maintaining an Election Day campus polling location is of great importance to the RICEngaged coalition and to campus student leadership. However, given the increasing rates of Rice student voter participation coupled with the higher volume of campus voters resulting from the new county-wide voting system, we would like to consider whether there may be another location on campus that can house more polling machines and therefore support the even higher voting rates we anticipate for the November 2020 Presidential Election.

Provide regular shuttle services to off-campus early and Election Day polling places. The Student Association's April 2020 resolution "To Advocate Rice Becoming a Voter Friendly Campus" has formally encouraged "Rice administration to commit to pay for and advertise two shuttles to take students between the RMC and the closest early voting polling station for at least one day of early voting during all elections moving forward, assuming there is no polling station at Rice." Regular shuttle services will enable students who wish to vote early to visit off-campus early voting locations and can help address polling place congestion on Election Day by transporting students to less busy polling places.

Have Rice students serve as poll workers and judges at the campus polling location. In recent election cycles, Rice students have reported that the poll judge at the campus polling location has not been knowledgeable about or willing to uphold state laws regarding which forms of ID will be accepted from voters. Many students registered to vote in Harris County have out-of-state drivers' licenses and other forms of ID included on the State's list of approved forms of voter identification. In both 2018 and 2019, students and their advocates lodged complaints about numerous situations in which students were denied ballots despite appearing on the precinct voter roll and having appropriate ID with them.

In the past, Rice students were trained to serve as poll workers and poll judges. We will ask the Harris County Clerk's Office to allow students to again serve in these roles. We believe that

properly trained students will be more aware of State regulations regarding voter ID, especially as it pertains to college students with valid out-of-state IDs, and that having students serve as poll judges and poll workers will result in fewer students being denied the right to vote at their campus polling location. Additionally, we recognize that having students, faculty, and staff see their peers in these leadership positions will serve to promote campus awareness, motivation, and a sense of ownership and responsibility around voting, elections, and democratic engagement.

This goal is also part of the Student Association's April 2020 resolution "To Advocate Rice Becoming a Voter Friendly Campus, which urges "the Harris County Clerk's office to prioritize hiring students as the poll judges and poll workers at Rice's on-campus polling location to ensure that students have maximum autonomy and empowerment during the voting process and do not face voter suppression due to incorrect interpretation of state Voter ID laws."

Make voting an "excused absence." Busy class schedules, transportation issues, and long lines at the polls mean that students may have to choose between voting and going to class. While class attendance is important to student success, we believe that voting should be a priority and that accommodations should be made so that all eligible students can cast ballots.

The Student Association's April 2020 resolution "To Advocate Rice Becoming a Voter Friendly Campus" has formally asked the Provost to "set clear expectations for more lenient absence policies and extending assignment deadlines on election days to provide greater voting accessibility [and]...encourage the Faculty Senate to explore the possibility of election day being a day-off on future academic calendars, thereby evening out the number of Fall and Spring class days and increasing voting access."

Turnout Goal #2: Help Rice students connect their personal values and academic interests to candidates, elections, and voting

Research and best practices show that when students can connect their personal values and issue concerns to candidates and elections, they are far more motivated and likely to vote. We believe that many of the action steps outlined in this plan, especially curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular voter education opportunities and resources, will help students make these connections in ways that will lead them to cast ballots. In addition, we are proposing a media campaign that draws these connections in diverse, but personal ways.

Launch a "Why I vote" media campaign. Students, faculty, and staff will be featured in a multimedia series in which they make brief statements about why they vote. Such a series will highlight the many reasons why people are motivated to vote--from issues that impact their health, their safety, their livelihoods, the quality of their education or that of their children, their

careers, professions, or fields of study and research, people they care about, their futures, etc. The campaign will also serve as an important educational and motivational tool for students to become informed about and vote in local races (e.g., City Council, DA, local judges). Diverse student representation across campus can also help speak directly to student populations less likely to vote as well as to concerns among students that they may not know enough to cast informed ballots; “first voting experience” stories from students, faculty, and staff may be particularly effective in this regard. The campaign will also include “Why you should vote” spotlights of students who are themselves ineligible to vote in US elections, but who want to encourage their peers to vote. The series will likely include videoclips, posters, webpage spotlights, and social media posts and will be designed to reach the entire campus but also target--in their subjects and their dissemination--particular populations on campus that are less likely to vote. Additionally, encouraging faculty and staff to participate in the campaign will model for students-- who may be registered but have never cast a ballot--why it is so important that they do so. National [models](#) for these types of campaigns exist and could serve as blueprints or guides for our own.

Covid-19 Contingency Planning

As of late May, 2020, Rice University’s plan is for students to be back on campus by late August and for in-person classes and other campus activities to take place throughout the semester with some modifications in place (e.g., mask wearing in public, limits to event size, classes ending before Thanksgiving) to protect the health and safety of the campus community. Although we do anticipate that some of the action steps we have proposed (e.g., campus-wide National Voter Registration Day events, in-person voter registration services, and in-person early and Election Day voting efforts) will need to be organized with these restrictions in mind, we believe that the majority of our plan and action steps outlined here are feasible or easily modified under the University’s current Fall semester plans. However, we are prepared to further modify our action plan when and if the University’s fall semester plans change. We recognize that TurboVote and other digital resources such as Canvas, Banner, and office, center, and residential college websites will be essential resources, were our campus community to be virtual for some or all of the Fall semester.

Evaluation

This plan, along with previous NSLVE reports for our campus, will be available on our new ricevotes.rice.edu website and shared with a broad network of campus stakeholders, including administrators, academic deans and departments, campus centers and offices, and student clubs and organizations. In order to track our progress, we will ask all participating campus stakeholders and facilitators to provide attendance numbers and course and program enrollments, as well as other, more qualitative information about plan-related activities, especially regarding our target student populations. TurboVote will provide excellent data regarding

student voter registration, but we will also ask Fondren Library and other campus VDVRs to keep count of how many students they registered to vote before the November 2020 election deadline. Our County Clerk's Office can provide information about voting rates at our campus polling location. We will also receive more detailed information about our students' 2020 registration and voting rates from our upcoming NSLVE report. We recognize that circumstances related to Covid-19 may require that we adjust or redesign aspects of our plan and its assessment, and we will modify both as necessary.