



## **State University of New York at Oneonta Action Plan for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2024-2026**

### **Executive Summary:**

In coordination with the State University of New York's system-wide efforts to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on its campuses, this action plan is tailored to the unique shape and potential of SUNY Oneonta's campus and community to foster nonpartisan participation in the process and spirit of democracy by developing informed, reflective, and engaged members of our nation's civil society. Our action plan has the goal of **tripling** voting participation rates on our campus for this year's election, from 16.2% in 2022 to 50% in this year's election. We also seek to increase our voter registration rates from 73.7% in 2022 to 85% in this fall's election. Longer term, we hope to increase our voting rates to 75% by 2026 and our voter registration rates to 100% in the same time span. Arguably of equal or even greater importance, we hope to transform our campus by suffusing the principles of civil discourse and democratic participation into each aspect of our university's purpose—in the classroom, on the athletic fields, on the quad, in the dorms, and in our community. We are working to instill in our university community the values of democratic citizenship. By 2026, we plan to have built out a robust infrastructure that supports, encourages, and reflects the principles that make democracy possible and worth defending. Above all, we recognize that while voting is an essential and necessary part of democracy, we know that being an engaged participant in democracy goes well beyond the voting booth. It requires an ethos of fairness, empathy, critical reflection, tolerance, collective purpose, and at times, self-sacrifice for the greater good. It is our belief that our action plan will develop this ethos in our community.

### **Leadership:**

While our campus has an appointed person to organize, implement, and communicate our efforts for civic learning and democratic engagement, the administration has made it a priority to formulate, devise, support, and carryout our action plan. Most notably, we have organized a campus coalition of stakeholders to convene regularly and cultivate the ideas that will enliven our action plan and assess the effectiveness of our endeavors. Made up of a wide swath of our university community, this coalition models the process of democratic engagement by giving each sector of our community a voice in how we implement our action plan and how we potentially change it, since it is a living document that ought to reflect the nature of the community it serves.

In many ways, the coalition is the embodiment of a history of efforts on our campus, which continue, to animate the values of democracy. Starting with our Center on Volunteerism and Community Engagement, the PLACES Institute, and our Common Read, to our work on restorative justice and healing circles, interfaith panels, and myriad faculty and staff workshops and dialogues meant to expand the engagement of our campus—our past efforts culminate with our coalition. The coalition is now working to finalize our events, workshops, dialogues, speakers, and co-curricular activities for this fall’s election season and beyond.

### **Commitment:**

SUNY Oneonta’s stated mission is to foster inclusivity, service, and sustainability as a community. Each of these mission-points reflects the principles of democracy and the ethos of a democratic nation, as they rely on the values of empathy, fairness, critical reflection, collective purpose, tolerance, and self-sacrifice. Further still, “SUNY Oneonta will challenge the status quo, test assumptions, and ask difficult questions about relevancy and impact,” to enhance, grow, and strengthen our democracy. Since SUNY Oneonta recognizes that “we entrust” in our students “the future” of our democracy, we commit to an action plan that develops our students into good stewards of our democracy now and leaders of our democracy in years to come.

### **President’s Commitment:**

SUNY Oneonta’s President, Dr. Alberto Cardelle, has signed the ALL IN Campus Challenge, and has stated—publicly, no less—to doing all that is necessary to meet the demands of the challenge and to see that SUNY Oneonta is a benchmark in this area for other institutions of higher learning to follow. Our institution is developing life-long learners who will be valuable members of their current and future communities. We commit to redoubling our efforts to make our community a space where the values of democracy, and the principles of civil society, are lived, not just studied. Furthermore, our institution has committed to infusing the curriculum with a competency in civil discourse and the values of a civil society—in the classroom, experientially, in co-curricular settings, and in our community, in general.

### **Landscape:**

SUNY Oneonta is a public 4-year university serving a student population of roughly 5,500 students, which is 62% female and 38% male, and 4,900 of whom are undergraduates, with the remainder graduate students. SUNY Oneonta signed and joined the ALL IN Campus Challenge in Spring 2024.

Our university’s demographics are reflected in the two following illustrates, taken from the enrollments for Fall of 2023:

## Fall 2023 Student Profile

### Characteristics of Degree Seeking Students

| GENDER | FRESHMAN | UNDEGRAD | GRAD  |
|--------|----------|----------|-------|
| FEMALE | 60.7%    | 59.4%    | 82.1% |
| MALE   | 39.2%    | 40.5%    | 17.9% |
| OTHER  | 0.1%     | 0.04%    | 0.0%  |

| RACE              | FRESHMAN | UNDEGRAD | GRAD  |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|
| AMERICAN INDIAN   | 0.3%     | 0.2%     | 0.5%  |
| ASIAN             | 2.3%     | 2.1%     | 0.8%  |
| BLACK/AFRICAN AM. | 6.8%     | 5.8%     | 1.8%  |
| HISPANIC          | 18.2%    | 17.1%    | 8.9%  |
| NATIVE HAWAIIAN   | 0.1%     | 0.1%     | 0.0%  |
| NRA               | 0.0%     | 0.1%     | 0.2%  |
| TWO OR MORE       | 3.4%     | 2.5%     | 1.5%  |
| UNKNOWN           | 1.6%     | 2.1%     | 3.4%  |
| WHITE             | 67.2%    | 70.0%    | 82.9% |

| RESIDENCY     | FRESHMAN | UNDEGRAD | GRAD  |
|---------------|----------|----------|-------|
| IN STATE      | 97.0%    | 97.7%    | 95.5% |
| OUT OF STATE  | 3.0%     | 2.2%     | 4.5%  |
| INTERNATIONAL | 0.0%     | 0.1%     | 0.0%  |

**FIRST GENERATION** 41.4% 37.7% 14.1%

**EOP** 8.1% 5.0% 0.5%

### Student Enrollment

|               | DEGREE SEEKING | NON-DEGREE | TOTAL        |
|---------------|----------------|------------|--------------|
| UNDERGRADUATE | 4,820          | 84         | 4,904        |
| GRADUATE      | 597            | 13         | 610          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>5,417</b>   | <b>97</b>  | <b>5,514</b> |

| UNDERGRADUATE             | FULL TIME | PART TIME | TOTAL |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| <b>DEGREE SEEKING</b>     | 4,757     | 63        | 4,820 |
| FIRST YEAR                | 1,319     | 0         | 1,319 |
| NEW TRANSFERS             | 317       | 0         | 317   |
| CONTINUING                | 3,121     | 63        | 3,184 |
| <b>NON-DEGREE SEEKING</b> | 3         | 81        | 84    |
| HS STUDENTS               | 0         | 58        | 58    |
| NEW                       | 3         | 3         | 6     |
| CONTINUING                | 0         | 20        | 20    |

| GRADUATE              | FULL TIME | PART TIME | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| <b>DEGREE SEEKING</b> | 198       | 399       | 597   |
| NEW GRADUATE          | 49        | 109       | 158   |
| CONTINUING            | 149       | 290       | 439   |

**NON-DEGREE SEEKING** 2 11 13

**CROSS REGISTERED** 0 15 15

Nearly all our students come from within New York State, and increasingly, we serve a student population comprised of first-generation college students. Additionally, our student population is growing rapidly more diverse, with approximately 33% of our student body self-identified as non-white. This continues to rise as New York State's high school graduates are also increasingly BIPOC.

Most of our students are full time, degree-seeking students. Approximately ¼ of our student body is first year students. Most of our graduate students are part time.

### Data from NSLVE:

Our voting rate in 2022 was 16.2%, which was an increase of 1.8% from 2018, but well below the voting rate of all NSLVE institutions of 30.6%. However, our voting rate in the last presidential election year, 2020, was 66.3%. Our voter registration rates rose from 58% in 2014 to 83.9% in 2020 but dipped in 2022 to 73.7%. Our voting rate of registered students (or yield) was 7.8% in 2014 and increased to 79% in 2020 but fell to 22% in 2022.

## Goals:

Our campus democratic engagement goals are:

- 1) Increase voting participation rates from 16.2% to 50% in 2024 and then to 75% by 2026.
- 2) Increase voter registration rates from 73.7% to 85% in 2024 and then to 100% by 2026.
- 3) Develop course curricula around civil discourse competency by Fall 2025.
- 4) Develop experiential learning experiences, including internships, co-curricular opportunities, and course-oriented work by Fall 2025 with an increase in number by Fall 2026.
- 5) Develop, forge, and articulate connections with the City of Oneonta, culminating in experiential learning experiences, curricular and co-curricular opportunities, and alliances by Fall 2025.
- 6) Develop a survey and distribute it to evaluate the campus community's priorities related to civic learning and democratic engagement by Spring 2025.
- 7) Continue to develop a vigorous, well-defined infrastructure around civil learning and democratic engagement, including a proposal for an institute related to these efforts by Spring 2025.

## Strategy:

- **Constitution Day Events:** Given that we are working to robustly build out our campus's voter registration and information efforts, we have chosen to zero in on Constitution Day as the catalyst to jump-start our drive. We plan to hold campus-wide workshops, host speakers from within and outside the campus, and make this day a celebration of our democracy and the elements that make it the foundation of our society. The workshops will be held in multiple venues and give students access to information on the process of registering to vote; provide them nonpartisan information on candidates for local, state, and federal office; and teach them how one votes (i.e., where to go, how to read a ballot, and the restrictions and time limits on voting). The speakers will provide dialogue sessions on the democratic process and its importance to our society; give students a history of democracy and what can threaten its institutions; and remind them of the role that civil society and civil discourse play in democracy.
- **Internships:** Considering our broader institutional efforts to expand experiential learning, we want to marry the All-In Challenge with our internship programming and develop at least one internship for the fall that will lead to several in the spring. The fall intern will help to organize, plan, arrange, and facilitate programming on Constitution Day.
- **Materials/Hand-Outs for Convocation and Peer-to-Peer Education:** At the beginning of our fall semester, we will disseminate information to our resident assistants that guide them in encouraging civil discourse and enable them to provide information on voting registration and the coming elections for students in their buildings. On top of this, we will use Convocation as a central moment to provide new

first-year and transfer students with easy-to-access information on registration and voting along with the priority of civil discourse and interaction on our campus.

- **On-Going Efforts:** Given that we are engaged in a hard launch for the All-In Challenge and seeing as we have a steep hill to climb, we will need ongoing efforts throughout the fall to allow our students access to the democratic process. This includes frequent workshops to make information available to students on the more technical aspects of voting; bringing in outside speakers who can reinforce our efforts from Constitution Day; and curricular development to align with our long-term efforts to weave civic learning and democratic education into our general education and campus curriculum. To address the voting participation rate disparities by race and ethnicity we see on campus, we will place special emphasis on reaching students from underrepresented populations by working with the Office of Equity and Inclusion and diversity, equity, and inclusion-focused student clubs.
- **Institute Proposal:** In late summer 2024 into the fall, a proposal will be drafted, reviewed, and sent to SUNY requesting the formation of an institute on campus dedicated to civil society and education, with particular focus on fostering the ethos of democracy on our campus and in our community and region.
- **City Council Connections:** Working with the key stakeholders of the campus, SUNY Oneonta will forge alliances with the City of Oneonta to develop experiential learning opportunities as well as prospects for new programming around civic learning and democratic engagement between the city and the university.

#### **Evaluation:**

- All workshops, speaking events, and dialogue and information sessions will assess one or more attributes outlined in the AAC&U Rubric and NACE Career Competencies assessments.
- Surveys after events like workshops and guest speakers will be conducted.
- We will also utilize a polling function in our student portal to intermittently collect and assess student opinions on civic learning and democratic engagement topics.
- The internship will be measured using the hosting department's student learning objectives and outcomes.
- Pre-and-post surveys will be developed to distribute to participants and leaders of the various workshops, sessions, and speaking events to compile pre-and-post event assessments. The results will help us measure students' understanding of the democratic process, the importance of civic engagement, voter registration, voter turnout, constructive dialogues, etc.
- NSLVE data will provide a comprehensive data set to evaluate our goals for voting participation rates and voter registration rates.

#### **Reporting:**

Our campus action plan will be available on the ALL IN Campus Challenge website for public review. Additionally, the action plan will be distributed, discussed, and referenced by the University Senate, all academic departments, residence life, athletics, community engagement, student services, admissions, and university development, as well as the Common Council of the city of Oneonta. We have also given NSLVE and ALL IN permission to publish our campus data.