



Democratic Engagement Action Plan 2024

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Prepared by the Saginaw Valley State University Cardinals Vote Team

Submitted by
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#CardsVote!



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Upon leaving the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention on September 18, 1787, Benjamin Franklin was asked by Elizabeth Powel, “Well, Doctor, what have we got? A republic or a monarchy?” Franklin’s famous response was “A republic, if you can keep it.” While this exchange’s veracity is highly suspect,¹ the larger implication is not: The American republic relies upon its current and future citizens to keep our constitutional system of governance functioning. As such, it is incumbent upon our nation’s socializing agents, including its institutions of learning, to help train the next generation of citizens to help keep the republic.

The #CardsVote! Action Plan represents Saginaw Valley State University’s commitment to keeping the republic; engaging students, faculty, staff, and community members in collaborative partnerships that enhance opportunities for nonpartisan voter registration; civic learning; and democratic engagement. Since 2018, SVSU has partnered with the Campus Vote Project and the American Democracy Project to enhance the University’s democratic engagement efforts, participating in the Voter Friendly Campus initiative and the ALL IN Democracy Challenge. Through these partnerships, the Cardinals Vote initiative (hereafter Cards Vote) helps SVSU students stand out as informed and engaged citizens in our national and global politics.

This action plan serves as a roadmap for the University’s civic learning and democratic engagement efforts rooted in its mission and vision statements and strategic goals. The action plan follows the framework provided in both *Strengthening American Democracy* (4th ed.), authored by the ALL IN Democracy Challenge, as well as Iowa State University’s 2024 action plan, authored by Dr. Karen Kedrowski. The plan begins on May 31, 2024, and runs through the 2024 presidential election cycle. It was developed by Dr. Kevin G. Lorentz II, Assistant Professor of Political Science & Cards Vote Faculty Coordinator, with input from previous Cards Vote Student Coordinators and interns, including Nikolas Baker, Dahlia Terry, Noah Johnson, Diva Patel, and Isiah Sageman. It uses previous action plans submitted by the former SVSU Center for Community Engagement and Experiential Learning (CEEL), National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data, and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) reports to help inform its goals and strategies. This action plan will be updated as needed throughout the implementation period. In developing this action plan’s goals, the Cards Vote team has consulted with various campus partners and assessment data to identify low-turnout groups, and will work to target these populations (see Section V, below) to ensure the University’s voter engagement efforts are equitable.

The action plan will be implemented on SVSU’s main campus in University Center, Michigan, as well as in the greater “tri-city” (cities of Bay City, Midland, and Saginaw) area and Great Lakes Bay Region communities. Implementation will primarily be coordinated by the Faculty Coordinator and student leadership (including the Cards Vote Student Coordinator and Democracy Fellows). Additional collaboration with on- and off-campus partners will also occur to implement specific strategies as detailed herein.

Questions pertaining to this action plan should be addressed to the Cards Vote Faculty Coordinator, Dr. Kevin G. Lorentz II, at kglorent@svsu.edu or 989-964-4378.

¹ See the Library of Congress’s manuscript collection of James McHenry’s journal, which regales this exchange: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/convention-and-ratification.html#obj8>

II. LEADERSHIP & WORKING GROUP

Working Group Members & Involvement

Cards Vote is led by Dr. Kevin G. Lorentz II, an Assistant Professor of Political Science and the initiative's Faculty Coordinator. Per the University's mandate, the Faculty Coordinator will oversee the initiative's activities and marketing, serve as the required contact person with internal and external civic partners, plan and execute programming for nationally recognized civic holidays, and collect data for the University's civic engagement reporting. A Student Coordinator (with a stipend provided through the University) will assist the Faculty Coordinator with planning and implementing this action plan and other Cards Vote initiatives.

Additional students – dubbed “SVSU Democracy Fellows” – will also work with Cards Vote throughout the Fall 2024 semester. These positions will be voluntary and designated by the Faculty Coordinator. In past years, several students have worked with Cards Vote in unofficial and unrecognized capacities; this designation is designed to provide formal recognition for these students.

This initiative is supported by the SVSU Office of the President, the Office of Student Life, and the Office of Academic and Student Affairs (including the Dean of Students and the Provost & VP for Academic Affairs offices). While Cards Vote originally was housed in the SVSU Center for Community Engagement and Experiential Learning (CEEL), the center was formally disbanded in May 2023. Cards Vote was formally reconstituted as a separate initiative housed in and supported by the Office of Academic and Student Affairs under the direction of the Associate Provost and a faculty coordinator. Dr. Lorentz was formally appointed Cards Vote Faculty Coordinator on May 9, 2024.

The Cards Vote Working Group is presently being reconstituted. As such, members are being actively recruited (as of mid-May 2024). Confirmed campus members include:

Office of the President

- John Kaczynski, Executive Director of Governmental and Community Affairs
- Dylan Hellus, Assistant Director of Community Affairs & Director of the Henry Marsh Institute of Public Policy

Office of Academic and Student Affairs

- Dr. Brain J. Thomas, Associate Provost
- Dr. Marie J. Rabideau, Associate Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students
- Jason Schoenmeyer, Associate Dean of Students for Student Life
- Jeremy Flood, Assistant Director of Student Life Center (RSOs & Greek Life)
- Haley Whitmore, Manager of Student Volunteer Services

Academic Contacts

- Dr. Julie Keil, Professor & Chair of Political Science
- Mark Nicol, Assistant Professor & Director of the MPA Program
- Dr. Amy Hendrickson, Associate Professor of Law & Assistant Dean, Carmona College of Business
- Dr. Peter Rose-Barry, Finkbeiner Endowed Professor of Ethics

Cards Vote Staff

- Dr. Kevin G. Lorentz II, Assistant Professor of Political Science & Faculty Coordinator
- Noah Johnson, Student Coordinator
- Teresa Stackhouse, Administrative Staff Secretary

Various registered student organizations (RSOs) will be asked to join the working group and/or participate in Cards Vote programming and activities. Given that the RSOs' leaderships have transitioned for the Fall 2024 semester, outreach will happen over the summer and early fall to invite these groups into the working group. (For more information, see "Recruiting Other Partners," below.)

Principal off-campus partners for Cards Vote include local election administrators and various national student civic engagement groups. For the former, the working group includes regional and local election officials from the Great Lakes Bay Region, specifically the "tri-county" area of Bay, Midland, and Saginaw counties.² These officials are important strategic partners in the Cards Vote initiative. In Michigan, municipal clerks (city, township, and county) are the chief election officials for their jurisdictions. Confirmed and invited election officials include:

- Katie Zanotti, Bay County Clerk (confirmed)
- Ann Manary, Midland County Clerk (invited)
- Vanessa Guerra, Saginaw County Clerk (invited)
- Kevin Machata, Kochville Township Clerk (Saginaw County) (invited)³

Cards Vote is also involved in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative, Campus Vote Project, the Students Learn Students Vote coalition, and the American Democracy Project.

Leadership Compensation & Reporting

Dr. Lorentz, in his capacity as Cards Vote Faculty Coordinator, reports to the Associate Provost. He performs his Cards Vote duties as part of his service obligations to the University. The Student Coordinator reports directly to the Faculty Coordinator. Other working group members report to various supervisory agents within the University. All faculty and staff members engage in Cards Vote initiatives as part of their regular responsibilities and service obligations and receive no additional compensation. The Cards Vote Student Coordinator is compensated through the Office of Academic and Student Affairs as a paid University student worker. Off-campus partners are compensated elected officials who have constitutional and statutory responsibilities for election administration.

Working Group Members' Strengths & Responsibilities

Once fully constituted (see below for additional working group members and partners to be invited), the working group has several strengths, including:

- Ability to access and communicate with a large number of students;
- Means to target messages and engagement activities to different subgroups of students, such as athletes, commuter students, and low-turnout populations.

² SVSU's main campus is nested in the geographic mid-point of all three counties and draws a plurality of its student base from here.

³ SVSU's main campus lies administratively within Kochville Township.

- Access to communication channels to provide the campus community with voter and civic engagement messages and information;
- Provide logistical support to ensure Cards Vote initiatives are successful and implemented; and
- Offer administrative credibility that student engagement in the electoral process and politics generally is a campus (and regional political) priority.

Recruiting Other Partners

As noted above, Cards Vote re-organized at the start of May 2024 following a near year's long abeyance. Consequently, Cards Vote is actively recruiting additional on and off-campus partners into the Working Group, including:

- Cards Vote Democracy Fellows: These students will help comprise the core leadership team for Cards Vote alongside the Faculty and Student Coordinators. These fellows will be designated by the Faculty Coordinator and will assist with being ambassadors to the various campus stakeholders and students themselves about the Cards Vote initiative.
- SVSU Student Association: In addition to being the student body's representatives, the Student Association can assist with both information distribution, event co-sponsoring, and lending its imprimatur to our voter engagement efforts.
- Office of Diversity Programs: Dr. Maime Thorns, Chief Diversity Officer, has emphasized the University's commitment to equitable engagement of all students in the political process. Her office serves as a means of connecting with historically under-represented and low-turnout populations.
- Office of Multicultural Student Affairs: This office can assist with engaging all elements of the SVSU student population, including groups that historically have been marginalized in the political process. Invitations will be sent to Robert Garcia, Director of the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, and Rowan Andrews, SVSU Pride Coordinator.
- SVSU Athletics Division: Student athletes are another core constituency to be engaged, and working with senior athletic administration (i.e., Athletic Director and deputy) and coaching staff (all sports) will help facilitate these efforts.
- Military Student Affairs: Another office to help engage all members of the SVSU community, including this vulnerable but historically engaged population. Bethany Alford, Director of Military Student Affairs, will be invited.
- The Valley Vanguard: SVSU's student newspaper will be invited, both for its ability to reach students and for the "fourth estate's" important role in American politics.
- Registered Student Organizations (RSOs): Many of the political-leaning student organizations have been a part of past Cards Vote working groups. We expect that these groups (e.g., the College Democrats, College Republicans, Pi Sigma Alpha, and Law Club) will be willing and eager partners for voter engagement. We also hope to engage with the various residential, affinity (e.g., Black Student Union, Palestinian Student Association, etc.), and Greek Life organizations that provide their members with both civic skill cultivation and engagement opportunities. These invites will be made as the fall semester approaches, once these groups have re-registered with the Office of Student Life and their leadership teams are established.
- Local Election Officials: Additional area clerks will be invited as the summer progresses, including from neighboring major population centers that house significant numbers of SVSU's student population.

- League of Women Voters: The tri-city area (Bay City, Midland, and Saginaw) has an active League of Women Voters. We will seek to engage with them as our own goals of voter and civic participation align with the League's.

While several of these potential partners will be contacted this summer, recruitment of student-led organizations will not commence until late summer/early fall when students return to campus and organizations are re-registered with the University.

Inclusivity

The working group includes members from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, disciplines, and social communities. As such, the working group can engage in both targeted messaging in addition to general calls for voter and civic engagement across the campus community. The inclusion of various support offices on campus permits Cards Vote to engage with diverse student groups, in the hopes of ensuring that a representative sample of SVSU's student population participates in this year's elections and activities.

SVSU Administration Support

SVSU's upper administration has expressed support for Cards Vote specifically and civic engagement generally. The reconstitution of the group was in response to Dr. Lorentz's outreach efforts, culminating in a formal re-instatement of the program and programmatic resources made available to support Cards Vote. As such, both Provost Dr. Deb Huntley and Associate Provost Dr. Brian Thomas are committed to cultivating a civic ethos on campus and bolstering student voter engagement. Dr. Marie Rabideau, SVSU Dean of Students, and Jason Schoenmeyer, SVSU Associate Dean of Students for Student Life, are also supporters of Cards Vote, and have committed their offices to support Cards Vote initiatives as able.

In March 2024, SVSU President Dr. George Grant, Jr. re-signed the ALL IN Presidential Commitment. His predecessor, Dr. Don Bachand, previously signed the commitment in 2020. President Grant joins other Michigan public universities presidents in publicly declaring their commitment to student voter engagement, and higher educational institutions' general mission of promoting civic learning and democratic engagement.

Other Necessary Partners

In addition to those partners listed in Guiding Question 4, other partners will include:

- University Communications (UCOMM) for marketing, promotional, and graphic design support.
- The Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning (CETL) for assistance in designing and distributing voter educational materials and faculty engagement in mobilizing students for voter registration and participation efforts.
- Office of Admissions for assistance in reaching new students during first year orientation.
- Website support elements, variously housed in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs and Informational Technology Services division.

Additional partners will likely be identified and contacted as the action plan is implemented and revised.

Meetings & Communication

The full working group is unlikely to meet formally as a whole. Instead, Dr. Lorentz and the Student Coordinator will meet with smaller groups of the whole as needed, particularly around specific events or activities. Updates on the initiative will be shared via email with all working group members, as needed.

Keeping the Working Group Engaged & Turnover

The Student Coordinator and Democracy Fellows will be supervised by the Faculty Coordinator and will complete specific tasks to maintain their affiliations. Other on and off-campus partners will be engaged as necessary to plan and execute events. If a stakeholder or representative is unable to continue working with the group, Dr. Lorentz will work with the relevant stakeholder to find a replacement or otherwise will work with the Student Coordinator to absorb the stakeholder's duties until alternative arrangements can be made (e.g., finding another stakeholder).

Leadership Succession Plan

Unfortunately, Cards Vote did not have a leadership succession plan in place when the previous campus unit housing Cards Vote was dissolved. Consequently, Dr. Lorentz has begun a more formal process of ensuring that should Dr. Lorentz no longer serve as Faculty Coordinator a transitional arrangement can be implemented. Talks are also ongoing with senior administration, including Associate Provost Thomas, about creating a more institutionalized "home" for Cards Vote to ensure that should a vacancy occur again that the program will not enter a period of inactivity. Particulars of this succession plan are still being negotiated and developed, given that Cards Vote re-started at the beginning of May 2024.

III. COMMITMENT

SVSU is committed to promoting its students' civic learning and democratic engagement. There are multiple ways this commitment is communicated to the campus and wider communities:

*Mission, Vision, Values, & Strategic Goals*⁴

SVSU's Mission and Vision Statements both advance the cause of civic engagement, albeit from a broader perspective. For instance, SVSU's Mission Statement notes transforming lives through educational excellence and dynamic partnerships, impacting the larger community and world. As such, bolstering students' abilities to engage civically in the world fits within the University's larger mission. The SVSU Vision Statement further reinforces this finding by emphasizing "innovative teaching" and "experiential learning," both which align with best practices for cultivating civic engagement and democratic capacity.

Within the broader mission and vision, the University's core values and strategic goals reflect a more specific commitment to civic-mindedness. The University specifically notes among its values *community engagement*, with the Strategic Plan noting that "our community engagement activities drive regional and institutional success both locally and worldwide." Concurrently, the University values diversity and inclusion as part of its values and aims to create a positive climate and culture that transforms lives. Collectively, these values and strategic goals align with the Cards Vote mission.

It should be noted that the University's mission and strategic plan are currently undergoing revision, with the last strategic plan concluding in 2020. As such, this Action Plan calls for Cards Vote to engage within that process to ensure the University's continued commitment to civic and community engagement (see below).

Administration's Commitment

President George Grant Jr. re-signed the ALL IN President's Commitment in March 2024. The previous president, Don Bachand, had signed earlier during his tenure. Moreover, Cards Vote was reconstituted in its present form with the support of several senior campus leaders, including Provost Deb Huntley, Associate Provost Brian Thomas, and Dean of Students Marie Rabideau. For more information about leadership's commitment, see Section II, above.

Civic Engagement & the Curriculum

The University's General Education program does not formally include learning goals or assessment measures that directly measure civic education or engagement.⁵ However, several categories (specifically Category 6 – Social Sciences, Category 7 – Social Institutions, and Category 8 – International Systems) include courses where civic engagement pedagogy and experiential opportunities (e.g., internships, service learning, etc.) are readily and frequently integrated. Indeed, many of these categories' student learning outcomes (SLOs) expect students to be able to appreciate the civic landscape, participate in their communities, and assess their own ability to

⁴ All documents mentioned in this sub-section are readily available on the SVSU Office of the President's webpage, which can be accessed here: <https://www.svsu.edu/president/missionvisionandcorevalues/>

⁵ See SVSU's General Education program category criteria here: <https://www.svsu.edu/academicandstudentaffairs/curriculum/standingcommittees/generaleducationcommittee/generaleducationcategorycriteria/>

engage in sociopolitical conversations. The foundations of the general education program – critical thinking, logical reasoning, and effective communication – coupled with the program’s communicative intensive course requirements means that the program is capable of cultivating the skillsets necessary for civic dialogue, engagement, and more generally democratic capacity.

A more formal, albeit somewhat indirect, assessment of SVSU’s civic engagement activities comes through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).⁶ Per the 2023 NSSE results, 86 percent of SVSU seniors indicated they had participated in at least one high-impact practice during their educational careers, a category that includes civic engagement focused activities including service learning and internships/field experiences, with 65 percent indicating they participated in two or more.⁷ Such impact appears to translate into civic action at least at the community and volunteering levels: approximately half (51%) of SVSU graduating seniors indicated that they spent at least one hour per week doing community service or volunteer work, with the bulk of students (40%) noting they volunteered 1-10 hours per week. This finding places SVSU ahead of its peer institutions both in Michigan (40%) and nationally (42%).

Previous Action Plans

SVSU has previously submitted action plans for the ALL IN Democracy Challenge, most recently in 2022. These plans indicate the University’s continued commitment to democratic engagement and cultivating students’ civic capacities.

⁶ Latest report available from the SVSU Office of Institutional Research. These reports will be posted on the redesigned Cards Vote website (see Section VI, below, for more information).

⁷ Sixty-two percent of SVSU seniors indicated they participated in at least one instance of service-learning and/or internships/field experiences.

IV. LANDSCAPE

SVSU has many strengths that promote Cards Vote's civic learning and democratic engagement objectives, but there are also barriers present. This section surveys the climate currently facing the Cards Vote initiative, focusing on the status of the curriculum regarding civic engagement, assessment data, and various internal and external barriers.

Student Body Demographics⁸

SVSU is home to just under 6900 students, with the vast majority (87%) being undergraduates seeking bachelor's degrees. Three-quarters (75.9%) of SVSU undergraduate students identify as non-Hispanic white. Students of color (Hispanic, African American, Asian, Native American, and Native Hawaiian) comprise about 15 percent of the student body. Almost 65 percent of students are female identifying. Most undergraduate students (83.1%) are under the age of 25, consistent with SVSU's profile as a primarily first-generation, first-time in college (FTIC) serving institution. Graduate students are older, with an average age of 32 years. Just over half (51.5%) of the student body major in STEM fields, with the rest divided between the liberal & behavioral sciences (19.5%), business & management (14.87%), and education (11.4%). Nearly 95 percent of students come from Michigan, with 97 percent hailing from the United States. These demographics help to inform the disparities in voting turnout rates discussed below, as well as our efforts to ensure equitable civic engagement for all members of the SVSU student body.

Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement Curriculum & Co-Curricular Efforts

SVSU does not have university-wide student learning outcomes beyond those found in the general education program (see Section III, above). Consequently, there are not learning outcomes linked directly with civic learning and democratic engagement that are applicable to all students.

However, the University's general education requirements, as noted in Section III, do lend themselves well to integrating civic engagement into various categories, including those requiring courses in social sciences and the humanities. The three overarching SLOs for general education – critical thinking, logical reasoning, and effective communication – do support the cultivation of civic skills, especially those that assist students with becoming well-informed, reasoned citizens who can participate, effectively, in civil dialogue.

At least three categories of the general education program included SLOs that readily support civic learning and democratic engagement, including the incorporation of high-impact civic pedagogies. These categories include:

- Category 6 – Social Sciences: Students in these courses will demonstrate the effects of culture and cross-cultural interaction on ideas and events, deploying techniques used by social scientists to assess human thought processes and interactions. Approved courses in this category include Introduction to Political Science (PS 118). As one of the instructors for this course, Dr. Lorentz routinely makes civic engagement a focus of the class, while focusing on cultivating students' civic skills through in-class deliberative techniques, among others.
- Category 7 – Social Institutions: In addition to understanding the historical contexts of social institutions, students also will understand the effects of culture and cross-cultural

⁸ All student body demographics can be found on the SVSU's Semester Facts Dashboard, available from the SVSU Office of Institutional Research: <https://www.svsu.edu/oir/semesterfactsdashboard/>

interaction on these institutions while appreciating the ways individuals' values and ethics shape and are shaped by institutions. Approved courses in this category include The American Political System (PS 123) and Introduction to Sociology (SOC 111). Instructors for both courses indicate they employ civic learning, including utilizing service-learning, experiential civic opportunities, social/political simulations, and other deliberative engagement strategies. PS 123 instructors also cover voting and similar political behavior from a substantive and experiential lens.

- **Category 8 – International Systems:** Students in these courses are tasked with stepping outside the constraints of their own society, to assess the role of individual values, ethics, and beliefs on global and non-American sociopolitical processes. Approved courses in this category include World Politics (PS 130) and Global Cultures (SOC 280). Instructors in both indicate they discuss civic engagement in a comparative perspective.

Taken together, the general education program offers a means to facilitate SVSU students' civic learning and democratic engagement. (See Section V for an additional conversation about more formally instituting and measuring civic engagement in the general education program.)

As noted in Section III, above, there are many student organizations and athletic teams on campus who can assist in a co-curricular role for advancing civic learning and democratic engagement. While many of these advance civic engagement through a partisan/ideological/issue-based lens, several others represent identity groups that correspond with NSLVE demographic groups who have lower turnout rates compared to the University's student population as a whole (see below). Collectively, these groups can assist with Cards Vote initiatives, simultaneously advancing their own group's civic engagement objectives.

Assessment Data: NSLVE

Given the lack of curriculum-specific assessment data for civic engagement, the primary assessment tool for student voting engagement at SVSU is the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). As of this writing, the 2022 NSLVE reports have not been released, so this Action Plan will use the 2020 NSLVE report. As reflected in Table 1, 67 percent of SVSU students voted in 2020, slightly better than the national average of 66 percent and better than the 65 percent average for peer institutions nationally.⁹ This represents an 18-point improvement from 2016, reversing the declines witnessed in 2018. It is our hope that 2022 data, when released, will reflect further improvement.

Table 1. SVSU Student Voter Registration & Turnout Rates, 2016-2022.

	2016		2018		2020		2022	
	% Reg.	% Voted	% Reg.	% Voted	% Reg.	% Voted	% Reg.	% Voted
SVSU	77	49	74	36	90	67	N/A	N/A
NSLVE	76	52	75	40	82	66	N/A	N/A

Source: Saginaw Valley State University NSLVE reports from the Institute for Democracy in Higher Education.

Of particular interest in the 2020 NSLVE report:

- Both white and Hispanic-identifying students were the student groups with the highest voting turnout, at 69 and 70 percent, respectively. Compared to 2016, both groups

⁹ Peer institutions are those categorized as masters-granting institutions.

registered significant improvements, with white students' turnout improving by 19 points and Hispanic students' turnout by 21 points.

- Meantime, non-white students turned out at significantly lower rates. Asian and Black-identifying students saw similar rates of turnout (56 and 55 percent), with smaller changes relative 2016 compared to their white and Hispanic-identifying peers (12-point improvement for Asian-identifying students and an 11-point improvement for Black students).
- While older students (those aged 40 years or older) followed the typical pattern of the highest turnout rates (67% for those aged 40-49 years and 77% for those 50+ years old), surprisingly the second highest turnout group was the 18-21 years old, turning out at a rate of 69 percent (a vast increase from 2016's 44% turnout rate). Those in the "middle" (aged 22-39 years old) had turn out rates between 51 and 59 percent.
- A gender gap persists between men and women, with 67 percent of women voting in 2020 compared to only 60 percent of men. However, both genders saw significant improvement on 2016 turnout (17 and 20 points, respectively), although the gap continues to persist.
- Reflecting the COVID-19 Pandemic's impacts on voting methods, a slim majority of students still voted in-person on Election Day (51%), down 30 points from 2016, with the remaining voting absentee.
- Finally, turnout rates remain fairly consistent across disciplines, although the liberal arts, social sciences, and humanities recorded the highest turnouts. The "lowest" turnouts occurred among the STEM fields. However, it should be noted that all fields (save interdisciplinary studies) recorded increased turnout rates from 2016, with all fields reporting at least 60 percent turnout. Thus, this report uses the University's average turnout (67%) to designate which majors performed at, above, and below par when examining which fields had the highest and lowest turnouts.

Collectively, these findings help to inform our outreach and engagement efforts. There is a need to focus on non-white students, those who are in the "middle" age bracket (21-39-year-olds), male-identifying, and those majoring in STEM fields.

Assessment Data: NSSE

SVSU's 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data provides another means of assessing SVSU students' civic engagement relative to other institutions nationally and within Michigan. Broadly speaking, SVSU students score above peer and Michigan public institutions on many measures (see Table 2, below). The few differences noted are small and statistically insignificant. Consequently, these results point to SVSU students being primed for a civic engagement disposition, especially relative other institutions.

Table 2. SVSU 2023 NSSE Senior Results: Civic Education/Engagement Measures

NSSE Item	SVSU (%)	Peers	Michigan Public
Reflective & Integrative Learning*			
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues.	65	+3	+5
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments.	59	+4	+6
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept.	76	+4	+5
Discussions with Diverse Others*			
People of races or ethnicities other than your own.	65	-2	+3
People from economic backgrounds other than your own.	71	+4	+3
People with religious beliefs other than your own.	66	+5	+4
People with political views other than your own.	60	+1	-1
Supportive Environment**			
Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (socioeconomically, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.).	54	-1	+6
Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues.	41	+1	+5

Source: Saginaw Valley State University NSSE report for 2023.

Note: Peer institutions are masters-granting institutions. Michigan public institutions exclude University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and Michigan State University

*Percentage who responded “very often” or “often.”

**Percentage who responded “very much” or “quite a bit.”

However, Table 3 (below) provides NSSE results for seniors over time (2017-2023), showcasing some concerning trends beneath the surface. First, there are several areas of noteworthy improvement since 2017, especially important to highlight given the COVID-19 Pandemic’s impacts. SVSU seniors indicated greater engagement with diverse perspectives, changing their understanding of a problem, and connecting their learning to societal issues, while also noting more contact between students with different backgrounds. However, large drops were witnessed in engaging in conversations with others from different religious or political backgrounds than yourself, a three-point and ten-point drop, respectively. Moreover, it should be noted that a minority of students (approximately 41%) attend events that address important social, economic, or political issues.

Collectively, these results suggest that students (and possibly faculty in their classrooms) are eschewing political discussions and avoiding events where politics features. Coupled with ongoing regional and national political animosity, it is likely that Cards Vote will find itself facing significant headwinds and potentially entrenched partisan and ideological echo chambers brought on by increasing democratic isolation (see also internal & external barriers to success discussion, below). However, these results also point to a student population that is being exposed to diverse perspectives and academic debate within their studies, providing opportunities for Cards Vote activities to tap into and cultivate.

Table 3. SVSU NSSE Senior Results: Civic Education/Engagement Measures, 2017-2023¹⁰

NSSE Item	2017	2019	2023	% Change, 2017- 2023
Reflective & Integrative Learning*				
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues.	59%	59%	65%	+6
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments.	52	50	59	+7
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept.	72	76	76	+4
Discussions with Diverse Others*				
People of races or ethnicities other than your own.	66	68	65	-1
People from economic backgrounds other than your own.	71	70	71	n/a
People with religious beliefs other than your own.	69	64	66	-3
People with political views other than your own.	70	68	60	-10
Supportive Environment**				
Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (socioeconomically, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.).	51	50	54	+3
Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues.	42	45	41	-1

Source: Saginaw Valley State University NSSE reports.

*Percentage who responded “very often” or “often.”

**Percentage who responded “very much” or “quite a bit.”

Internal & External Barriers to Success

Several challenges face Cards Vote, such as:

- **Lack of Succession Plan:** When the former Center for Community Engagement and Experiential Learning (CEEL) was eliminated, there was no succession plan in place for Cards Vote. Thus, there was no debrief or evaluation of last cycle’s action plan and efforts, and little time for preparation for the 2024 election cycle (including Michigan’s presidential primary in February 2024). Consequently, there is much work to do in advance of the 2024 Michigan primary and general elections in August and November, respectively.
- **Political Volatility:** While SVSU’s campus community trends welcoming and is conducive to voter engagement efforts, the regional and state political environment is volatile, reflecting increasing levels of partisan animosity. SVSU lies within Michigan’s 8th Congressional District, the median US House of Representatives seat; given its open seat status, the district is likely to feature competitive primary and general election contests. There is also concern on campus – from students, faculty, and administration alike – about the uncivil nature of political conversations, resulting in concerns about campus programming related to it. Thus, there are concerns regarding students’ and other campus community members’ willingness to engage in the political process.
- **Limited Financial Resources:** Cards Vote has a total discretionary budget of \$1000. This budget necessitates working with collaborators to ensure that programming happens. It also limits the kind of programming and activities that can happen given that more

¹⁰ Due to changes in NSSE’s questions, earlier administrations than 2017 are excluded.

resource-intensive activities become cost prohibitive. Our strategies and goals will need to reflect this limitation.

Internal & External Factors Supporting Success

However, other factors do support Cards Vote's success, including:

- **Motivated Partners:** The Cards Vote Working Group is composed of motivated individuals and organizations that want to see Cards Vote return to campus and engage the student population. Such ambition and motivation are necessary to re-start the group and further institutionalize civic engagement and learning in the University's ethos.
- **Michigan Election Laws:** Recently enacted election laws (following successful passage of a state constitutional amendment in 2022) have significantly altered the election space in Michigan, making voting more accessible to college students (and voters more generally). Among other changes, Michigan now permits same day voter registration, early voting (at least nine consecutive days prior to the Sunday before Election Day), no reason absentee voting, and permanent absentee voter lists. All of these changes have made voting more accessible for students living on campus or otherwise away from their home jurisdictions. Consequently, Cards Vote strategies will need to emphasize early and absentee voting deadlines and procedures as part of its voter engagement efforts.
- **Previous Successes:** Part of the improvement in the 2020 voting rate is due to the significant increase in the SVSU registration rate, which reached 90 percent in 2020. There has also been improvement from the 2016 and 2018 elections in terms of student voter turnout, too. Thus, there's a solid foundation from which to build upon.
- **Participation in National Organizations:** Cards Vote has previously been recognized with badges through the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative. Moreover, Dr. Lorentz is an active member of the Civic Engagement Section of the American Political Science Association, which includes several faculty members who engage in similar civic and voter engagement on their respective campuses.
- **Michigan's Political Environment:** While Michigan's political environment can be volatile (as noted above), it does also lend itself well to encouraging interest in students. Michigan is a presidential battleground state; the past two presidential elections have resulted in razor thin margins between the presidential candidates, cementing Michigan's status as a swing state. Moreover, SVSU resides within the 8th Congressional District, which is expected to be a competitive, open seat contest, generating interest on campus and within the larger, regional community. Finally, local and state elections in Michigan are also likely to be competitive across the board, especially for the Michigan State House that is narrowly divided between Republicans and Democrats.

V. GOALS

Cards Vote has identified several long-term and short-term goals. Given how Cards Vote is presently re-starting, these goals are tentative and are designed around ensuring that voter and civic engagement occur for the 2024 election cycle and further institutionalize Cards Vote and civic learning and democratic engagement.

Short-Term Goals (2024 Election Cycle)

- Update the Cards Vote website, with a redesign around voter and election information for the current election. The redesigned website should be launched by mid-August for the November general election.
- Participate in a pilot-program with the Bay County Clerk's office to recruit and train at least 20 student poll workers ("election inspectors") to work during Michigan's early election period for the August primary and November general elections.
- Celebrate the Civic Holidays (Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day, Vote Early Day, National Voter Education Week, and Election Day) with at least one (1) event each designed to encourage student voter registration and engagement.
- Maintain SVSU's student voter registration rate of at least 90 percent.
- Increase SVSU's student voter turnout rate to at least 70 percent.
- Decrease the voter turnout rate gap between minority-identifying and white students by at least five (5) percentage points.
- Encourage passage of resolutions supportive of civic and voter engagement by the SVSU Faculty Association and the SVSU Student Association.

Long-Term Goals (Post-2024 Cycle)

- By May 2025, have Cards Vote contract renewed and have civic engagement incorporated into the University's new strategic plan.
- By December 2025, have in place a student poll worker recruitment program, partnering with local election administrators, based on the feedback from the 2024 pilot program with the Bay County Clerk's office.
- By January 2026, have developed a more formalized print, web-based, and social media communication and marketing strategy for civic learning and democratic engagement.
- By 2026, begin to incorporate the Ask Every Student framework in the University's first year student orientation and first year experiences.
- By 2028, have a flexible attendance policy in place for Election Day, where students will not be penalized for not attending class sessions on Election Day due to in-person voting, working the polls, or otherwise engaging in electoral activities.
- By the 2028 presidential election, SVSU's student voter turnout rate will reach 80 percent.
- By the 2028 presidential election, SVSU's student voter turnout rate gaps between minority-identifying and white students will be reduced by at least 10 percentage points.

VI. STRATEGY

Short-Term Strategies

Cards Vote will implement the following strategies for the November 2024 General Election. Planning and early implementation continue throughout the summer months. Full implementation will begin in early August 2024.

- **Task #1: Democracy Fellows** -- These students will help comprise the core team for Cards Vote alongside the Faculty and Student Coordinators.¹¹ These fellows will be designated by the Faculty Coordinator and will serve as ambassadors to the various campus stakeholders and students themselves about the Cards Vote initiative. **(Evaluation Measure: Total number of Democracy Fellows. Target: 3 Fellows.)**
- **Task #2: Pilot Poll Worker Program** – In conjunction with the Bay County Clerks’ office, will recruit, train, and employ SVSU students to work the early voting period and Election Day in various Bay County precincts. The pilot will be conducted in two stages: one for the August 2024 primary election, and the other for the November 2024 general election. Cards Vote will work with the Bay County Clerk’s office to recruit students, with the Bay County Clerk training volunteers on SVSU’s campus and assigning them to work during the elections. **(Evaluation Measure: Total number of students recruited and who worked the election/s. Target: 20 students.)**
- **Task #3: Update Cards Vote Website** – Re-design and re-launch the Cards Vote website to reflect updated voter information for the 2024 election cycle, as well as voter information resources. The redesign will utilize an existing framework but also tap into new voter information resources from the Michigan Secretary of State’s Office, local clerks’ offices, and nonpartisan entities. We aim to relaunch the website by late August 2024. **(Evaluation Measure: Total number of site visits. Target: 100 unique visits/clicks.)**
- **Task #4: Passage of Support Resolutions** – Cards Vote will petition the Student Association and the Faculty Association to pass resolutions supporting the University’s civic and voter engagement efforts. The Faculty Coordinator will work with the presidents of both associations to draft language. **(Evaluation Measure: Passage of resolutions. Target Date: October 1, 2024.)**
- **Task #5: Election-Related Campus Programming** – Cards Vote will work with coalition and other campus partners to produce election programming related to voter registration and engagement. At a minimum, programming will be held for Constitution Day/Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, Vote Early Day, and (November) Election Day itself. Moreover, candidate forums will be held on campus in the style of the 2022 cycle when two candidate forums were held for the Michigan U.S. House 8th District and the Michigan State Senate 35th District. Additionally, Cards Vote will co-sponsor already planned election-related programming being planned by other campus organizations. Finally, a mock election event will be planned with local clerk’s offices to showcase how an actual voting precinct looks.¹² **(Evaluation Measure: Total attendance at each event. Target: At least 35 people in attendance for each event.)**
- **Task #6: Voter Registration Drives** – The Cards Vote team will distribute voter registration and absentee ballot request forms campus-wide beginning in late August 2024. Target areas

¹¹ Hereafter, “Cards Vote team” refers to the Faculty Coordinator, the Student Coordinator, and the Democracy Fellows.

¹² Further planning of these events will occur during summer 2024 for fall implementation.

will be on-campus housing, RSO meetings, and high-traffic areas throughout campus. In addition, Cards Vote members will host in-person voter registration tables in September and October 2024. **(Evaluation Measure #1: Number of forms distributed. Target: 150 forms distributed. | Evaluation Measure #2: Number of days for tabling. Target: At least 3 tabling days.)**

- **Task #7: Engage with SVSU Athletics** – Cards Vote will partner with the athletics department for at least one voter registration and engagement activity, with a late September target date. It is hoped that athletics will partner with Cards Vote in other activities listed herein. The Faculty Coordinator will work with the Athletic Director to facilitate cooperation. **(Evaluation Measure: Activities with athletics. Target: At least one event.)**
- **Task #8: Campus Messaging** – Efforts to inform the student and campus community will occur in September and October 2024. The Faculty and Student Coordinators will lead this initiative, working closely with University Communications. The overarching goal of the messaging campaign is to inform campus generally about voter registration, absentee balloting, and the early voting period. However, more specific messages will also be shared with campus entities that request it, including the University’s social media team. Finally, an ad campaign will happen with the *Valley Vanguard*, SVSU’s student newspaper.¹³ **(Evaluation Measure: Number of messages & ads. Target: At least 5 messages & ads in various outlets directed towards the campus community.)**
- **Task #9: Pilot Competition System** – Cards Vote will attempt to “gamify” election-related programming to encourage participation by instituting a campus-wide competition between athletic, Greek Life, and other registered student organizations. Groups will earn “points” for participating in events and for making pledges to vote, etc. Prizes will be awarded to the winning groups. We hope that this system will permit us to target affinity groups that include low-turnout student groups identified through the assessment data above. **(Evaluation Measure: Number of participating groups. Target: 15 groups.)**

Budget for May 2024-May 2025

Cards Vote has been given a \$1000 discretionary budget in addition to a summer stipend (\$2000) for the Faculty Coordinator and the stipend (\$5000) for the Student Coordinator (work during the summer/fall/winter semesters 2024 @ 10 hours per week).

Long-Term Strategies

To achieve its long-term goals, Cards Vote will pursue the following strategies, starting immediately following the November 2024 elections.

- **Task #1: Renew Cards Vote for 2025 and Beyond** – The current Cards Vote contract expires in May 2025. It is hoped that this Action Plan will help to ensure that Fall 2024 programming demonstrates to university leadership that Cards Vote should be renewed indefinitely and become an ongoing initiative as part of the University’s civic engagement efforts. The Faculty Coordinator will undertake this conversation with the Associate Provost in conjunction with the new Provost.
- **Task #2: Debrief re: Pilot Poll Worker Recruitment Program** – Debrief the pilot poll worker recruitment program with the Bay County Clerk’s office. Using this experience, the program

¹³ Messaging parameters will be established and messages drafted during summer 2024 in preparation for fall deployment.

will be transformed into a formal recruitment effort, starting with the 2026 state and midterm elections (August and November 2026). We would also try to partner with additional clerks.

- **Task #3: Engagement Programming During “Off” Election Years** – Cards Vote will continue to engage in civic engagement programming that promotes civic skill cultivation and lifelong democratic engagement, especially during off years. The focus will also be on local elections held during these periods, too.
- **Task #4: Focus on Voter Mobilization Efforts** – In addition to voter registration, Cards Vote will also focus on activities that help to motivate students to actually vote during elections beyond simply registering. Promoting early and absentee voting is one strategy to pursue, but the Cards Vote team will engineer additional strategies for the 2026 cycle that will help promote voter turnout.

VII. NSLVE DATA

NSLVE data is used throughout this report, as noted above. Past efforts by Cards Vote and University offices have led to a significant increase in SVSU student voter registration rates. There is also forward momentum in improving student turnout rates, especially compared to 2016 and 2018. Given the disparities in voter turnout noted above, Cards Vote will continue to focus on demographic groups that fall below the student body's average voting turnout rate, working in conjunction with campus and external partners.

NSLVE reports are not widely shared on SVSU's campus through typical channels. Going forward, the reports will be readily available on the Cards Vote website, shared with relevant campus offices beyond the reporting units (i.e., the Office of the President, Office of Institutional Research, and the Office of Academic and Student Affairs), and shared with relevant external partners.

In addition to NSLVE data, the University's National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) reports is also used in informing this action plan's landscape assessment, goals, and strategies.

VIII. REPORTING

Sharing the Action Plan & Associated Data

This Action Plan (and accompanying NSLVE & NSSE data reports) will be posted on the Cards Vote website, shared with SVSU administration (including the Office of the President, the Office of Academic and Student Affairs, and the SVSU Board of Control, as well as their various subsidiary units), and will also be submitted to ALL IN and the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative (with permissions to display on their respective websites). As part of the goal of institutionalizing Cards Vote, more frequent sharing of Cards Vote activities, events, and information pertaining to student voter engagement will be posted in various outlets, including the weekly SVSU Today campus-wide newsletter, the Cards Vote website (which aims to become a more dynamic and comprehensive collection of webpages), and other appropriate mailers issued by University units.

Additionally, the action plan will be shared with the SVSU Strategic Plan Committee, which is (as of May 2024) beginning the initial stages of developing the University's next strategic plan. It is hoped that the Action Plan can engage the committee's attention to continue the commitment to civic and community engagement found in SVSU's mission and vision statements (see above), as well as to further cement voter registration and engagement initiatives into the University's formal strategic priorities and commitments. Such inclusion will assist in further institutionalizing Cards Vote.

Sharing the Action Plan with the Working Group

The Action Plan serves as a basis for planning seasonal election activities for the Cards Vote initiative and will become the main planning document for the working group. Going forward, the Faculty Coordinator, in conjunction with the Student Coordinator, will work to plan, execute, and evaluate the Action Plan's activities and objectives, collaborating with working group members and Cards Vote partners as necessary. The Action Plan will also serve as a framework for a post-election evaluation (see next section) and for drafting the next cycle's action plan (next one due December 2025).

IX. EVALUATION

Historical Process

The primary assessment tool to evaluate Cards Vote initiatives is the institution's NSLVE reports. Additional assessment data is collected through the institution's NSSE data as well as the Office of Institutional Research's semester profiles. Additional information is also provided through the University's participation in the Carnegie Community Engagement recognition, which SVSU will be undergoing renewal next year.

Future Process

However, the hope is that additional evaluation metrics can be created and used starting with this Action Plan. As noted in Section VI, various assessment measures will be used to gather data about the efficacy of the strategies used this cycle for voter engagement; all are designed to be measurable and doable, ultimately assisting in a post-action evaluation. This data will be useful in assessing efforts and using them to give context and greater meaning to the more formalized data sources noted above.

Consequently, the Faculty Coordinator, assisted by the Student Coordinator, will engage in a debrief exercise post-election 2024. This will likely occur during the winter 2025 semester (January-May). This debrief will be designed to assess available data on the strategies employed, comparing them against NSLVE and NSSE reports as they become available. The debrief will make initial determinations about whether benchmarks set above were met, and whether the Action Plan's short-term goals were met, as well as noting progress towards achieving long-term goals. This process will be deliberative in nature, engaging with working group members, campus leadership, and other collaborators, as necessary, to ensure results are shared and diverse perspectives are able to analyze results and share feedback. This process will help inform and serve as the foundation for the next Action Plan to be submitted in December 2025.

As Cards Vote continues to rebuild, the evaluation process will become more refined as the working group and other collaborators come onboard. It is hoped that such data produced through this Action Plan and debrief will be widely shared with campus and external partners and become part of the SVSU Office of Institutional Research's informational repository.

X. CONCLUSION

Cardinals Vote aims to provide SVSU students with ways to engage in our electoral and civic processes while cultivating their democratic capacity. This Action Plan serves as a foundation for achieving these objectives: encouraging students to register to vote; providing the motivation and information necessary to cast a ballot; and providing opportunities for students to engage in civic activities on and off campus. Achieving these goals not only allows SVSU to achieve part of its strategic mission and vision, but also to cultivate and empower the next generation of American citizens.