



Saint Mary's College of California Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022

I. Executive Summary

Using the Votes & Ballots Action Planning Form, this action plan was developed by Steve Woolpert, Professor of Politics, to communicate our strategy for increasing 2022 registration and turnout rates of students at Saint Mary's College of California, as well as building democratic competencies among our students. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out in 2022-23 on and around our campus in Moraga, California.

The following groups will be leading the work to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Selected Faculty
- Trained student GOTV Interns
- Student Life leaders
- Office of College Communications
- College Committee on Inclusive Excellence

The mission of our initiative is:

- To build on the College's excellence in student voting, expand public service internship opportunities for Saint Mary's students, and develop new academic initiatives that promote nonpartisan democratic learning.

Saint Mary's College received the All IN Democracy Challenge's Platinum Seal in both 2018 and 2020. Building on our success in these elections, we have set the three goals for the 2022 election:

- Establish a regular, systematic process for student voter registration
- Register every eligible student
- Increase voter turnout by 10% over the 2018 mid-term election

Our long-term goals are to:

- Promote nonpartisan democratic learning and practices.
- Foster respectful dialog among people with differing perceptions about the wellbeing of the nation and the world.

- Make common cause with organizations beyond the academic sector that contribute to a thriving democracy.

As in past elections, student GOTV interns, supervised by Prof. Woolpert, will play a critical role in direct voter outreach, education, and turnout activities.

II. Leadership

Steve Woolpert, Professor of Politics, will continue to organize and oversee our efforts to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. He will be supported in this work by the following:

- Faculty: Prof. Monica Fitzgerald, Justice, Community and Leadership Program; Professors. Zahra Ahmed and Patrizia Longo, Department of Politics; Prof. Marshall Perry, School of Education, Jason Jakatis, Department of Communication; Kathryn Koo, Department of English
- Staff: Jennifer Pigza, Director of the Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action; Anthony Garrison, Vice President of Student Life; Sandy Garcia, College Digital Communications Manager; Kathy Littles, Director of the College Committee on Inclusive Excellence; Cesar Ramos, Director of Student Involvement and Leadership
- Students: Students enrolled in Professor Woolpert's Public Service Internship course (these students receive stipends for their GOTV activities); the heads of student affinity groups and social action clubs (e.g., Black Student Union, Asian Pacific American Student Association, Green Gaels, Students for Life of SMC, Student Pride, La Hermanidad).

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of representation from different parts of campus, including student leadership, different perspectives and areas of expertise, and trusted officials who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy.

As in past election cycles, our group plans to meet as needed via Zoom and/or email.

Prof. Woolpert is approaching retirement. Professor Monica Fitzgerald is interested in succeeding him as the primary leader.

We are also partnering with the following organizations from the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition to support our efforts on campus:

- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
- The SLSV Coalition Listserv
- Ask Every Student
- Campus Takeover
- Diablo Valley League of Women Voters

Commitment

Saint Mary's institutional commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement is reflected in its values and traditions:

- Every Catholic University feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*).
- “Faculty members at Saint Mary's College are participants in an intellectual, social, and spiritual community... dedicated to developing students' capacities for... active citizenship.” (*Faculty Handbook*)
- The core principles of Lasallian education include: the dignity of all persons, diversity and inclusion, and pursuit of the common good.
- The College is a participant in AAC&U’s Advancing Evidence on Civic and Community-Based Engagement in Higher Education.
- Our President has signed the ALL IN Challenge President’s Commitment.
- The Politics Department has launched a new undergraduate Certificate in Practical Political Leadership. Participation in GOTV activities is one component of the certificate.
- Preparations have begun for a new Center for Engaged Democracy (CED). It will be dedicated to strengthening nonpartisan democratic values on campus and in the larger community. Its mission includes developing pedagogies and interdisciplinary curricular pathways that educate students for responsible membership in the communities where they live, learn, and work.
- The College is enrolled in the Voter Friendly Campus Designation initiative

On campus, we see:

- Links to online voter education resources, e.g., TurboVote, The ALL In Campus Democracy Challenge Toolkit, National Trends in College Student Voting
- Political clubs and student organizations, e.g., Campus Republicans, Young Democrats
- Campus leaders promoting voting (see *Supra*)
- Voter registration tables at campus events
- A ballot drop box located on campus

On campus, we’ve experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Students mobilizing around issues of diversity and inclusion
- A student forum on “Free Speech and the Inclusive Campus”, March 23, 2022
- A public, virtual town hall on “Healing Our Democracy in a Digital World”, April 20, 2022
- Deliberative dialogues across divergent perspectives on e.g., Surveillance and Privacy, the Partisan Divide; and Racial Tracking in the Criminal Justice System
- Activities recognizing National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day
 - On National Voter Registration Day, September 20th, 2022, the College will host a panel discussion on the clash between freedom of religious expression and equal treatment of LGBT persons.

[The emphasis on civic learning and democratic engagement should increase when the proposed Center for Engaged Democracy is formally launched (estimated in fall, 2023).]

III. Landscape

Saint Mary's is a Hispanic Serving Institution with a robust liberal arts tradition. Our most recent headcount shows 3166 students, of which 204 are Black, 34 are American Indian, 428 are Asian, 54 are Hawaiian-Pacific Islander, 1130 are white, and 805 are Hispanic/Latino. 1900 are female; 1266 are male. Our School of Education and School of Economics and Business Administration offer graduate programs for working adults. Their enrollment totals 867 students. Roughly one-fourth of our students are Pell Grant-eligible, and a similar proportion are first generation to College.

- The undergraduate core curriculum requires every student to demonstrate achievement of the following learning outcomes:
 1. *Analyze* aspects of social diversity (e.g., ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, ability, and political identity) and how they affect society in the United States of America; and *explain* how social categories and structures of power may affect the human person.
 2. *Analyze* the process of globalization by using different theoretical perspectives and debates on a broad range of issues (including issues of dependence and interdependence); or *demonstrate* an understanding of the world from a specific non-U.S. and non-Western European viewpoint.
 3. *Reflect and write* substantively on ways in which human beings find fulfillment in community; or *articulate*, in prose or through another communicative medium, a critical account of just social order; or *demonstrate* a capacity for coherent, principled analysis of concrete social problems.
 4. *Apply* academic methods and/or theories in a way that promotes collaboration and mutual benefit in a community setting; and *demonstrate* critical reflection throughout their experience; and *express* their understanding of the interconnections between their experience and their responsibilities as members of social or professional communities.

Civic learning and democratic engagement are most prominent in the following academic programs:

- Politics
- Justice Community and Leadership
- Ethnic Studies
- Women's and Gender Studies
- Communication
- History

Our institution uses the following data-gathering tools:

- National Survey of Student Engagement
 - The most recent survey showed that our freshman and seniors score higher than benchmarked competitors and have improved over time on NSSE constructs, most especially for Level of Academic Challenge, where our freshmen and seniors scored significantly above the average score of the top 10% of all schools submitting NSSE results. Our students scored significantly higher against several of our benchmark comparison groups on the other

NSSE constructs, though less well on the construct Supportive Campus Environment.

- Campus climate surveys of faculty and staff
 - Key finding: The most recent survey found only 35% of faculty agreed that the College places “a great deal of emphasis” on helping students learn how to bring about social change, a decline over the previous survey.
- Student course evaluation surveys

IV. Goals

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration.

- The biggest internal barrier to greater success is the lack of an institutionalized method of registering students to vote. [Conversations are underway with representatives from Student Life, the Business Office, Financial Aid, and the Registrar to identify options for addressing this problem.]
- The College doesn't have anyone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus, nor is there funding earmarked for such activity. The voter engagement work on our campus is largely overseen by Professor Woolpert as an individual initiative. [The proposed CED is intended to rectify this.]
- Low enrollments over the past 3 years have caused significant budget shortfalls. Consequently, the College has offered retirement incentives to senior faculty and staff, which will leave many units understaffed until enrollments rebound.
- Turnover at the top: This year we have a new President, a new Provost, a new Vice President for Communications, a new Vice President for Student Life, and two new Vice Provosts.
- In preparation for an upcoming capital campaign the College is developing a new strategic plan and branding campaign. The College is also in the process of converting its curriculum to Carnegie course units as well as revising its academic calendar and its core curriculum. These major undertakings have been center stage for faculty and academic leadership in the past year and will continue to be so in the coming year; student voting is not likely to be a top priority.

We also know our campus faces challenges externally when it comes to GOTV efforts:

- For the past 3 years, wildfires in northern California have caused severe air pollution on campus; they have also resulted in some faculty and students' families evacuating or losing their homes. In 2020 these dangers overshadowed messaging about elections and voting. Forecasts for this fall are for even greater fire danger.
- Many students are also under financial stress.
- Adult working students often feel overextended and disconnected from campus life.

That said, we know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- We have found ways to communicate voting information successfully to our students.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We have already engaged a cohort of student interns for GOTV activities this fall.

- We have a working relationship with our local election office, which resulted in a ballot drop box located on campus.
- We have working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement, e.g., Ask Every Student and TurboVote.

With this in mind, we have set the three election goals that we would like to achieve:

- By August 25th, the College will establish a regular, systematic process for student voter registration, in consultation with key stakeholders.
- By October 31, the College will register every eligible student.
- On election day, the College will increase voter turnout by 10% over the 2018 mid-term election.

[N.B. Success on goals 2 and 3 will depend to a large extent on the success of goal #1.]

We have also set three goals that we aim to achieve to set the stage for the formal launch of the Center for Engaged Democracy in 2023:

- The College will rebuild civic trust and democratic tolerance by providing regular opportunities for members of the campus and surrounding communities to think critically together about solutions to problems in a community setting.
 - Two public forums will be held in the fall of 2022, one during Free Speech Week in October and the other in mid-November. Topics will be determined later to allow for the emergence of unforeseen issues, but climate change is likely to be one of them.
- In the spring of 2023, the College will identify deserving student nominees for the Newman Civic Fellowship and similar awards.
- By the end of 2023, the College will establish ongoing partnerships with local public officials, councils, agencies, and non-profit groups.

Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** in the **short term**:

- The College is enrolled in the Voter Friendly Campus initiative
- We are publicizing our high achievement in student voting.
 - We received letters of commendation from our local, state, and congressional representatives for our 2020 turnout.
- The College staged two successful events in the spring of 2022 to showcase the promise of the CED:
 - A student forum on “Free Speech and the Inclusive Campus”, March 23
 - A public, virtual town hall on “Healing Our Democracy in a Digital World”, April 20
- Identifying likely recruits for CED’s external advisory board
- The Advancement Office has identified foundations that fund civic engagement work
- The College has applied to the Jack Miller Center for external funding for the September 20th panel on freedom of religious expression and LGBT rights.
- Professor Woolpert has recruited student interns for fall GOTV activities

- The College has enrolled in the Campus Vote Project and NASPA's Voter Friendly Campus initiative
- Initial partnerships have been established with the Diablo Valley League of Women Voters, the Berkeley-Oakland alliance of Braver Angels, the Village Square, Living Room Conversations, and the Institute for Civil Discourse.

These are tactics that we **plan to do** in the **short term**:

- By June 30, Professor Woolpert will apply for an implementation grant from Ask Every Student
- In the fall of 2022, the leadership team will work closely with the Asian Pacific American Student Association and our graduate programs for working adults to improve voting rates among these student subgroups [See SLSVE section below]
- At the beginning of the fall, 2022 semester, the Vice President for Student Life will canvass all new and returning students to ascertain voter registration status.
- By August 2022, Professor Woolpert will renew our contract for a customized TurboVote platform
- In early September 2022, Professor Woolpert will train his student interns to provide their peers with one-on-one assistance with online registration and voting by mail.
- In the weeks prior to the election, these student interns will also engage in "Intelligent Free Conversation" activities in the campus quad and other student gathering places
- By January 31, 2023, Professor Woolpert will submit our Voter Friendly Campus report
- The College has registered for National Voter Education Week and National Vote Early Day, for which we will schedule events

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **short term**:

- Prior to the election student interns will submit student-created videos on ballot initiatives to the College's digital media manager.
- The College will partner with the League of Women Voters, Braver Angels, and Heterodox Academy on our public forums in October and November.
- The College's Athletic Director will be contacted about engaging in the All Vote/No Play initiative
- Professor Woolpert will align the objectives of the proposed CED with the College's forthcoming strategic plan. E.G., the following objectives are from the December 2021 prototype:
 - "Develop innovative, in-demand undergraduate academic programs, including interdisciplinary programs that speak to the big problems and aspirations of the world."
 - "Ensure that all students have experiential and practical learning components in their academic programs."
 - "Expand and deepen external partnerships throughout the Bay Area to reinforce these educational opportunities."

- “Develop meaningful and mutually beneficial partnerships with Bay Area public, private, and non-profit sector organizations and entities and increase Saint Mary’s presence in the community.”

These are tactics that we **are already doing** for the **long term** (beyond the next year):

- Professor Woolpert is laying the groundwork for launching the Center for Engaged Democracy (CED) dedicated to strengthening non-partisan democratic values at the College and in the region. Estimated time for public launch is fall, 2023.

These are tactics that we **want to do** in the **long term**:

- Once established, the CED will:
 - oversee student voter registration and turnout.
 - expand public service internship opportunities and develop interdisciplinary pedagogies and curricular pathways that strengthen democratic values.
 - conduct “engaged democracy workshops” that include exercises in inclusive, depolarizing communication skills.
 - give honorary awards to exemplars of engaged democracy.

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **long term**:

- Garner external support to underwrite CED's activities through grants and gifts.

V. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

We have NSLVE Campus Reports for 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020.

- 1) **In 2020** our registration rate was 88.9%, an increase of 7 percentage points over 2016. Our voting rate was 80.1%, compared to 66% nationally, and a 20 percentage points increase over 2016. Our voting rate among registered students was 90% compared to 72% in 2016.

Comparison of 2016 and 2020 reports reveal the following changes in voting rates for specific student subgroups:

Race/ethnicity	
2) Asian:	+29
3) Black:	+13.
4) Hawaiian/Pacific Islander:	-9 [from 16 to 13 students]
5) Hispanic:	+ 24
6) 2 or more races;	+29
7) White:	+21
8) Race unknown:	+21

Turnout increased among all age groups. The biggest increase was among voters aged 18-24 (+27). The gap between female and male voters decreased from 13% to 7%. Students majoring in health professions, history, and communication had the largest voting increases (+30-35), but all groups showed big increases over 2016.

Asian Americans (75%) and those aged 30-39 (72%) were the groups that fell farthest below the overall voting average of 80%.

Disaggregated registration rates are not included; however, since 90% of registered students voted, increasing voter registration is the key to improving voter turnout

2) The 2018 mid-term NSLVE report showed a 50% voting rate, +30 over 2014. Turnout was notably higher among older students than among younger ones, among women than among men, and among Black, Hispanic, and white voters than among other ethnic groups. [The deepening partisan divide and other demographic trends since 2014 makes these comparisons less useful for planning purposes than the 2020 data.]

VI. Reporting & Evaluation

We plan to share this Action Plan electronically with members of our campus coalition and campus administrative leaders (President, Provost, V.P.'s for Student Life and Communication). We will share this Action Plan externally by posting it on the campus website. We will invite feedback on this plan from all recipients, particularly members of our campus coalition

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Checking periodically before the election to review our progress on the first two goals (e.g. TurboVote signups, attendance at events).
- Student interns will keep logs of all their contacts with peers, to be included in E-Portfolios of their internship activities and reflections
- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly