



2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan



Sauk Valley Community College

2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sauk Valley Community College (SVCC) is a public community college in Dixon, Illinois, United States. It was established in 1965 and was built on the Rock River between the cities of Sterling and Dixon.

The college offers an assortment of transfer degree majors (e.g., A.A., A.S.), career-technical degrees (A.A.S.) and certificates. It enrolls about 2,000 full and part-time students each semester. Sauk provides numerous opportunities for educational growth including programs in adult education (G.E.D. or E.S.L) and classes in personal and professional enrichment. Sauk's district includes portions of Bureau, Lee, Henry, Carroll, Ogle, and Whiteside counties.

The ALL In Democracy Action Plan was developed by Dr. Jon Mandrell, Vice President of Academics and Student Services to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Sauk Valley Community College. Dr. Mandrell also serves as an All-In Action Plan Reviewer. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2023-2024 Academic Year, on and around our campus in Dixon, Illinois.

The following groups will be leading this work at Sauk Valley Community College in order to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Shared Vision of Faculty, Staff, and Administration
- Community partners, including nonpartisan civic engagement partnerships
- Municipalities and County governments, including area chambers of commerce

As part of the creation of this action plan, the Strengthening American Democracy Guide (SADG) was used and all nine sections were applied.

II. LEADERSHIP

Dr. Jon Mandrell, Vice President of Academics and Student Services will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. He will be supported in this work by:

- Joe Strabala-Bright, Dean of Student Services
- Ana Salgado, Student Activities/Cross Cultural Coordinator.
- Ashlyn Hendrick, Student Government Association President
- The following community partners will be used as resources and invited to support our civic engagement efforts at Sauk Valley Community College: Sauk Valley Unites, the Dixon, Rock Falls, and Sauk Valley Area Chambers of Commerce, and Sauk Valley Keystone Group.

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus into our work. Our group plans to meet 3-4 times per year in the Student Life Area.

In the event that our leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a succession plan in place. The Dean of Student Services would continue in the role, as well as the Student Activities/Cross Cultural Coordinator. The Student Government Association is also key in our leadership of the plan. Those members include:

- Ashlyn Hendrick, President
- Sophie Terry, Vice President
- Chloe Coil, Student Trustee
- Samantha Feather, Treasurer
- Rosalinda Reyes, Secretary

Student Government presented to the college's board of trustees on 09/25/2023 on the topic of leadership, their goals, and student voter participation. An annual video is currently under development as we prepare for the 2024 elections.

We also plan to engage our community partners, such as local civic organizations and advocates, including "Action for a Better Tomorrow" that is active in the Sauk Valley and goals include increased voter participation through nonpartisan civic engagement. The organization's president, Sarah Bingaman, is also an adjunct faculty member at SVCC. The organization is a visible presence in our community for increasing voter participation.

III. COMMITMENT

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrates commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. As stated in our mission statement, Sauk Valley Community College is dedicated to teaching and scholarship while engaging the community in lifelong learning, public service, and economic development. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state, "Sauk Valley Community College respects the worth and dignity of all people; stands for integrity and fairness; and encourages responsibility, accountability, and persistence in a caring, supportive environment."

In addition, our campus has mentioned civic learning and democratic engagement in their strategic plan, stating College Health Metrics:

1. Academics: The College provides quality, contemporary, relevant educational opportunities to the community.
2. Student Services: The College provides quality, supportive services to students.

3. Financial Stability: The College uses its revenue conservatively. The College pursues and utilizes alternative revenue streams.
4. Campus Environment: College facilities and grounds are clean and updated. The campus is safe, secure and welcoming.
5. Human Resources: The College hires qualified employees and provides adequate benefits to attract and retain staff. College departments provide professional development opportunities for its faculty and staff.
6. Public Service: The College encourages and participates in regular public service.
7. Economic Development: The College partners with local agencies to encourage the economic development of the region.
8. Planning: The College conducts thoughtful, systematic planning to support future operations. Plans are updated annually or as necessary.

We also have senior leadership committed to civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus. Dr. David Hellmich, SVCC President, signed the Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation and has established a campus expectation that everyone at SVCC must support voter engagement. Through college staff meetings and electronic college updates, Dr. Hellmich encourages all employees to help direct students to registration information and informs them about the student voter participation rates that SVCC would like to achieve. New in 2024, Dr. Hellmich will write a series of articles and e-mails to students on the importance of voter registration and civic engagement. Additionally, Dr. Mandrell, VP of Academics and Student Services, moderates the local candidate forums that are hosted by the area chamber for those seeking electing office and the event is also streamed to our local community. Dr. Hellmich and Dr. Mandrell also provide bi-annual "All-In" updates to the college's board of trustees, providing them with copies of our action plan and updating them on our data and strategies.

On campus, we've seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Voter registration tables
- Signage promoting Election Day
- New relationships with community groups, such as "Action for a Better Tomorrow" and "Sauk Valley Unites."

On campus, we've experienced:

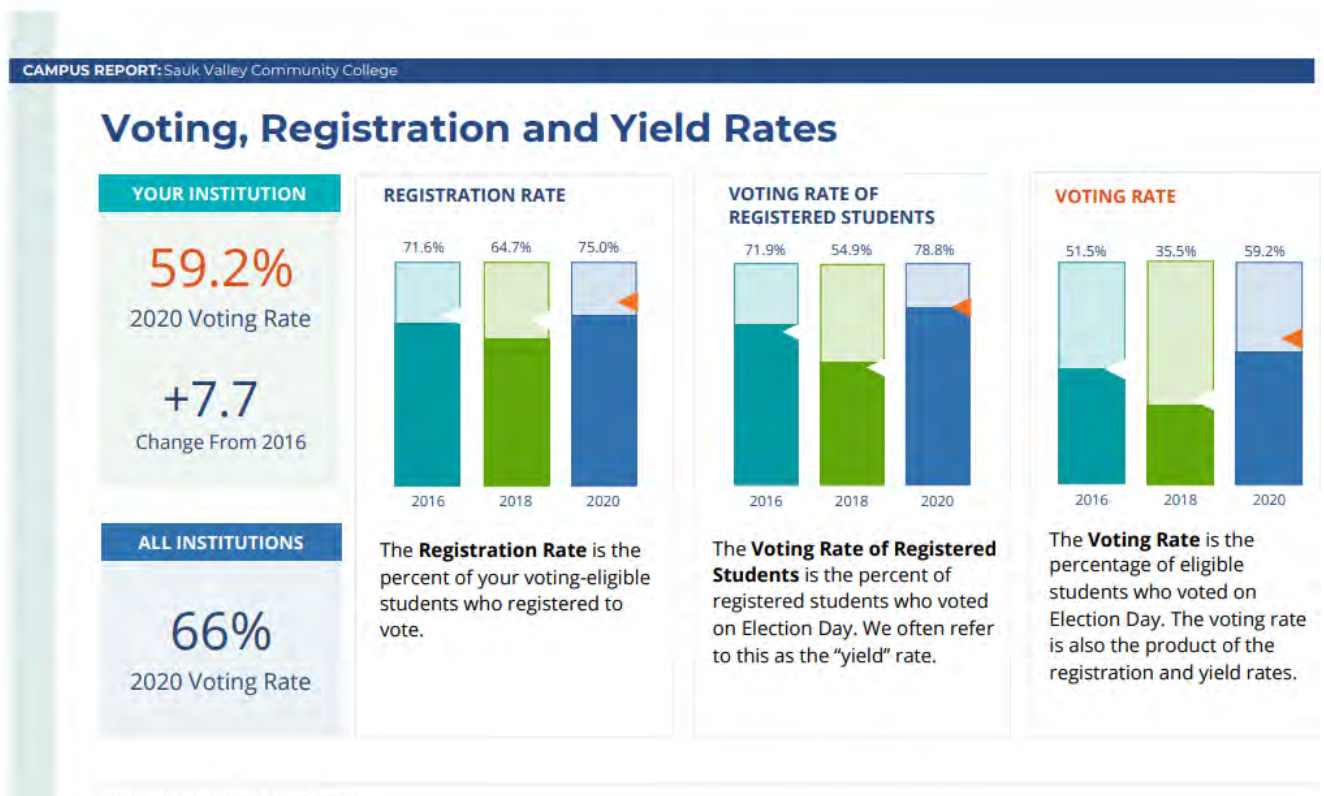
- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
- Presentations to civic groups about our efforts, including off-site presentations to Rotary Clubs and "Action for a Better Tomorrow".

In the classroom, we are currently planning to:

- Increase student assessments regarding civic engagement and voter participation
- **Create a new 3 credit-hour course on civic engagement and also civil discourse.** Two faculty are currently on sabbatical and creating its curriculum.
- Grow the honors projects opportunities for honors class credit relating to the above topics.
- Highlight classes that promote civic engagement and create videos of faculty to highlight the courses.
- Engage faculty in extra credit opportunities relating to voter registration and participation.
- Establish faculty QR code pins to be worn in the classroom that direct students to resources.
- Utilize two faculty members currently on sabbatical that are researching civil discourse and engagement to better inform our students and increase community outreach.

IV. LANDSCAPE

SVCC's voting rates as indicated in the [2020 NSLVE report](#), improved by 7.7% from 2016. The SVCC student voter participation rate in 2020 was 59.2%, and our goal is to surpass the 70% in the upcoming elections. ***Updated data will be provided upon release of the 2022 NSLVE report.**



The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of our campus. This information is based on data collected from 2021 when our total student enrollment was 1142.

Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Graduate	Full Time	Part Time
100.00%		51.50%	48.50%

In-State	Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Commuter
98.00%	2.00%	2.00%	0.00%	100.00%

Gender Demographics:

Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
40.00%	60.00%		

Age:

18-21	22-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50+
58.10%	9.40%	9.80%	12.10%	6.60%	4.00%

Racial Demographics:

Asian	American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	White	2 or More Races
1.00%		5.00%	15.00%		78.00%	

Sauk Valley Community College prepares students with critical thinking, communication, problem solving, leadership and teamwork skills that help students in every stage of their career. SVCC's commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement in curriculum and co-curricular activities include, but are not limited to the following curriculum and co-curricular opportunities:

CURRICULUM:**Adult Education:**

- GED Civics & Government
- Adult Education provides assistance for participants interested in obtaining their United States Citizenship. Consultation with a legal representative and relevant information for the U.S. test, citizenship interview, test taking skills are covered among other topics.

Political Science Goals:

- Provide students with knowledge of political and social institutions and the roles and functions of the institutions in society.
- Provide training in evaluating and understanding contemporary political and social issues, both domestic and international.
- Prepare and educate students towards civic engagement.

PSC 163 - American Politics and Government:

- Students will examine American constitutional foundations and democratic values, explore the role of public opinion and the character of the political process, and understand the role of the media and interest groups in policy-making. Students will gain an understanding of how the major branches of the federal government work and improve skills in evaluating and analyzing current public policy issues.

PSC 164 - State and Local Politics and Government

- This course is a survey of the institutions, politics and public policies of government in American states and communities. Special emphasis will be given to the State of Illinois and communities of the Sauk Valley area.

Sociology Goals:

- Provide students a body of knowledge about their social world, including scholarly understanding of the field of sociology.
- Provide our students with useful conceptual tools for analyzing, comprehending, and adjusting to societal and cultural issues and events they may experience in their lives.

SOC 112 - Social Problems

- A study of the nature of social problems including strategies for achieving social change. Students will participate in the selection and presentation to the class of the specific problems to be considered. Investigation of local communities will constitute an important aspect of the course.

FYE 101 - First-Year Experience

- The focus of this course is how to be successful in college. Study skills, goal setting, academic planning, time and money management, and information research skills are among the core topics included in this course. Within a supportive environment, students will share their college experiences and develop connections with fellow students and SVCC staff.
- The course now has opportunities to gain credit for voter registration and participation. Some instructors also wear QR codes that direct students to voter registration resources.

NEW ! CSS 112 - Constructive Dialogue on Controversial Issues (under development and launches in Fall 2024)

- The course covers critical topics for civic and social engagement, such as research-based methods for communication, understanding data, and evaluating media sources. Students will practice applying these methods to in-class dialogues on controversial issues, and become better equipped to understand and discuss local and national issues. This 3-credit course will be housed in the student success department, and will count towards students' personal health and development requirements for graduation.

CO-CURRICULUM:

Impact Program: an earned tuition program that provides eligible students the opportunity to earn tuition and fees for up to three years, or until they earn their certificate or degree at Sauk Valley Community College. The SVCC Impact Program harnesses the collective power of Sauk Valley partners and communities to create an effective, supportive, sustainable path for students to pursue a college education and achieve career success through lifelong learning, public service and economic advancement. Students participating in the Impact program must complete 20 hours of volunteer service in their community while in high school and at Sauk in order to qualify for the program. The cumulative result of this is hundreds of students completing thousands of hours of volunteer service in Sauk Valley area communities annually.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee: Sauk strives for a professional culture that values the strength of diversity and inclusion while promoting acceptance and respect for all members of our community. The diversity committee encourages faculty, staff, and students to learn more about and model diversity and inclusion at Sauk Valley Community College and across the entire Sauk Valley region.

Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program: a program that positively affects the economic vitality and civic wellbeing of our Sauk Valley communities through identifying emerging leaders, broadening their knowledge of our communities, and motivating them to become business and community leaders. One of the goals of this program is for participants to gain a better understanding of how public issues, local and state government, and civic issues impact the Dixon, Rock Falls, and Sterling communities.

SVCC Public Service: Sauk employees believe in our college mission. As part of that mission, employees endeavor to engage in public service that benefits the entire Sauk Valley area. More than two-thirds of all SVCC faculty and staff volunteer with at least one of 50+ local service organizations, non-profit boards, governmental units, faith communities, economic development groups, and other civic-minded organizations.

Student Activities: promotes active student participation through student organizations and events geared towards social responsibility, leadership, education, cultural, and civic engagement. Student Organizations enhance the college experience by offering meaningful

involvement opportunities where students can work with others, grow in leadership style and in respect and appreciation for human differences.

- **Association of Latin-American Students (ALAS):** provides a better scholastic, cultural, political and social life for students and to bring more Latino students to SVCC. Members sponsor programs that focus on promoting and understanding diversity. Every year, ALAS members attend the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute's (USHLI) National Hispanic Leadership Conference in Chicago. The USHLI conference gives ALAS members the opportunity to meet national policy-makers, university recruiters, and future employers so they can develop and/or strengthen their leadership skills. The USHLI's mission is to fulfill the promises and principles of democracy by promoting education and leadership development, empowering Latinos and similarly disenfranchised groups through civic engagement and research, and by maximizing participation in the electoral process. The 2024 USHLI National Conference is scheduled for February 15-18, 2024, and it will include nationally prominent high-powered speakers and interactive forums featuring top Latino experts in education, the public and private sectors, politics, the nonprofit world, and more.
- **P.R.I.D.E.** - Promoting Respect, Individuality and Diversity for the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Straight Allies Coalition that provides a supportive network, a positive social outlet and a caring environment. Educational programs and activities advocate fairness and respect for students, faculty and staff.
- **Rotaract:** a student club that is affiliated with Rotary Club International and local Rotary Clubs found in Dixon, Rock Falls, and Sterling. The Rotaract Club provides a unique opportunity for students to conduct local service projects. Club members can grow their leadership skills by interacting with local Rotary Club members and developing a professional network with local business, government, and educational leaders from across our community.
- **Student Government Association (SGA):** represents the student body to the administration, sponsors campus-wide activities, serves on college-wide committees, recognizes new student organizations, and allocates programming money to student organizations. SGA encourages civic engagement by offering voter information and voter registration activities.

Activities offered by Student Activities and SGA are included in the 2023-2024 Civic Engagement Activities table below. Marketing efforts included: Marquee signs, social media posts, ALL IN SVCC Votes logo used at the bottom of employees emails, posters and web ads with Illinois Primary and General Election important dates (pictured below table), emails and text alert announcements to all students during key times, posters to advertise events, and a Voter Registration [web section](#) that includes the Illinois State Board of Election voting registration page, NSLVE reports, and a link to the [ALL IN to Vote web page](#). In support of these efforts, First Year Experience online classes projected important dates onto the screen prior to the beginning of classes while students arrived and waited for class to start.

2023-2024 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY	INDIVIDUAL(S) RESPONSIBLE	LOCATION	DATE	PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY
Voter registration at Fall and Spring SaukFest	Student Activities & SGA	SVCC West Mall	Feb. 1, 2023 August 30, 2023 January, 31, 2024	Register voters.
Constitution Day	Student Activities & SGA	Email and SVCC West Mall.	Sept. 13 & 14, 2023	To encourage students to develop habits of citizenship: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Email sent to all students with voting information links encouraging them to take part in the democratic process. ● Informational table with non-partisan online resources available for students to check their knowledge, take the citizenship test, play educational games, and explore the constitution. Students received a free folding constitution.
Civic Engagement in the Sauk Valley Area	Student Activities & SGA	Riverview Conference Room	September 18, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A nonpartisan panel discussion with local civic leaders. Panelists described the challenges, actions and benefits of projects that they and others are developing to increase people's government and civic engagement in the Sauk Valley Area. Facilitated by SVCC Dean of Student Services, Joe Strabala-Bright..
Online voter registration email sent to each enrolled student.	Dean of Student Services & Marketing	Email	Sent around midterm each semester.	Promote voter registration.
2024 Primary and General Election Posters with important dates and deadlines.	Student Activities	Posted on all bulletin boards on campus, web ads.	January and August 2024	Promote voter registration and participation.

GENERAL

2024 ELECTION

DATES TO REMEMBER

Last day for the election authority to receive an application (either by mail or electronically) for a vote by mail ballot.	OCTOBER 31
Last day for early voting	NOVEMBER 4
General Election Day	NOVEMBER 5

To register or check your registration, visit: ova.elections.il.gov

GENERAL PRIMARY

2024 ELECTION

DATES TO REMEMBER

Last day for the election authority to receive an application (either by mail or electronically) for a vote by mail ballot.	MARCH 14
Last day for early voting	MARCH 18
Illinois Primary Election Day	MARCH 19
General Election Day	NOVEMBER 5

To register or check your registration, visit: ova.elections.il.gov

Barriers to Success: With so many varying ways to communicate with students, reaching them can be difficult and prove to be challenging. As a result, we market and promote efforts heavily through e-mail, social media, through our Learning Management System, with print materials, and also text messaging. Efforts are also made through digital messaging boards and in-class announcements.

Resources:

Sauk Valley Community College has a working relationship with our local election office and the following community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement:

- **Sauk Valley Unites** – a non-partisan partnership of organizations and individuals across the Sauk Valley calling communities to come together to seek common ground and discourage polarization, to advocate for everyone being a good neighbor and community member, and to promote peaceful elections and safeguard the democratic process.
- **The Dixon, Rock Falls, and Sauk Valley Area chambers of commerce:** consist of members from all sectors of the community - including business, education, agriculture, health care, private not for profits, faith communities, and government who are working to help the Sauk Valley Area continue to grow and thrive.
- **Sauk Valley Keystone Group:** a group of young adults, millennials and Gen Zers, from across the Sauk Valley who engage in community projects and important community redevelopment topics that affect daily life in our rural community.
- **Faculty Research:** Two faculty members are currently on sabbatical and researching civic engagement and also civil discourse. Their research, which will be completed in 2023, will be used in 2024 to educate students, faculty, and staff. This includes the new CSS 112 course on Civil Discourse that will launch in Fall 2024. Dr. Mandrell has already authorized the course for activation and the course will transfer to universities.

V. GOALS

We know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work. **While we await the 2022 NSLVE report** and will update more then, we aspire to reach the following benchmarks and goals:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan mention civic learning and democratic engagement. We hope to increase voter participation language in campus syllabi by 60%.
- We have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus and will represent us at 100% of the Student Government Association meetings.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students and we would like to reach 90% voter registration rates. In 2020, we achieved 78%. In 2024, we hope for 90% or higher.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students and we have hired a videographer that can assist with these efforts by creating 3-5 new videos for social media and our website.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is distributed throughout many offices and areas of expertise. We would like 100% of our offices to have materials and posters displayed.
- We have sustainable or consistent funding and will continue to increase that 3-5% each year.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan and two new local advocacy groups are hosting events each on campus, which we hope to increase those events by 50%.
- As mentioned above, we plan to update our goals when we received NSLVE data, but 59.2% of our students voted in 2020. Our goal in 2022 was 70% and we aspire to reach 75% in 2024.

- For voter participation by age and race, we hope to achieve the following in 2024:

Age	2022	2024 Goal
18-21	70%	75%
22-24	60%	70%
25-29	60%	70%
30-39	70%	80%
40-49	80%	80%
50+	85%	85%

(Source, NSLVE Campus Report, September 2022)

Race	2022	2024 Goal
Black	25%	30%
Hispanic	25%	30%
White	40%	50%
Asian	50%	50%
American Indian	0%	0%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%

(Source, NSLVE Campus Report, September 2022) - ***Goals are tentative pending the 2022 NSLVE Report.**

With this in mind, we have set the four goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

1. Establish a Student Voter Coalition Group that incorporates Student Government Association
2. Host town halls and candidate forums, all of which are in partnership with two bipartisan community groups.
3. Create at least 3 new videos to increase democratic engagement interest, one of which is Student Government Association. Former student Blerina Mimini recently completed one video and it appeared on All-In's 2023 Celebration. Mimini served as Student Government President in 2022 and has since transferred to Northern Illinois University.
4. Encourage the athletic department to participate in the athletic challenge and talk to their athletes about voting. The commitment document by athletics has been completed as well.
5. Utilize the faculty sabbatical research to educate our students on civic engagement, its value, and how to navigate difficult conversations as part.

We have also set five goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

1. Transition voter participation efforts to the campus-wide working group. This group will further analyze data and equity gaps, most notably age, gender, race, and full-time/part-time student status.
2. Increase our hosting of elected officials and debates/town halls by 15%
3. Increase our voter participation to above the national average and surpass 70% (Previously 59.2%)
4. Encourage student groups to devote one meeting per academic year to voter registration and education efforts. Dr. Mandrell and Dr. Hellmich will also participate in such meetings.
5. Adapt more civic engagement or voter participation directly into curricula, such as the First-Year Experience course and Political Science.
6. College President, Dr. Hellmich, will teach a leadership course in Spring 2024 to high school seniors for dual credit and emphasize voter participation as a primary outcome, as well as emphasize the Sauk Valley Community College culture of high civic and community engagement.

VI. STRATEGY

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

These are tactics that we are already doing in the short term (within the next year):
Running an "SVCC Votes" signature line in all emails as a campaign.



Also, our president will continue to write articles in the local newspaper about civic engagement and voter participation. Voter registration booths and regular reminders to students have been key.

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

- Create a student voter coalition and make this a more student-driven initiative. Encourage more students to be election judges locally. Also, we are looking to scale up Student Government elections and drive stronger interest in not only voting, but also running for an office.
- Bolster our learning outcomes in classes and encourage honors projects that focus on voter participation and civic engagement. These projects are completed each semester by students in every class that are willing to take on a bigger academic challenge and assessment.

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

- Create a polling place at our college, have more town hall forums with candidates, and see more faculty presentations on the topic.
- Host candidate forums in that are sponsored by “Action for a Better Tomorrow”, a local voter participation advocacy group.
- Increase the events of “Sauk Valley Unites,” a bipartisan community effort to increase civic engagement and responsibility.

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

- Strong electronic communications, created a strong website presence, and visibility on campus through booths and informational tables.
- Adapt civil discourse and dialogue trainings to the college campus, via our two faculty members that are on sabbatical studying the given topic.

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

- Create videos by students, both professionally and also through TikTok and social media.
- Add information about voting and SGA’s campaign efforts into student orientation.
- Increase our presence with dual credit students that are not on campus, but in high schools. This could be accomplished through visits and videos, one of which SGA recently created. As mentioned, Dr. Hellmich’s leadership course to high school seniors will play a vital role in advancing our civic engagement to dual credit students.

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

- Create more student groups that encourage civic engagement and political interests. Attract more elected officials or candidates for student and community town halls.
- Establish a partnership with our local newspaper to have a speakers bureau and guest column editorials from college representatives, which focus on civic engagement. A Speaker’s Bureau for the College was established in November 2023.

VII. NATIONAL STUDY OF LEARNING, VOTING, AND ENGAGEMENT (NSLVE)

Our campus has access to our [National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement](#) (NSLVE) data for 2020. In 2020 our registration rate was 75%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased. Despite not having the 2022 NSLVE report, we hope to maintain or increase the 75% mark.

In 2020, our voting rate was 59.2 and our voting rate among registered students was 78.8. During this year, our voting rate was lower than the national average.

In our NSLVE report, we had racial data for the following groups:

- Black
- Hispanic
- White

For the racial groups that have recent voter turnout data, we saw the following groups increase in voter turnout compared to four years ago.

- Black
- Hispanic
- White

Our enrollment is steadily declining, but our voter registration and participation rates are increasing.

VIII. REPORTING & EVALUATION

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete by emailing it to members of our campus coalition, campus administration, and to the College President. When complete, this Action Plan will be posted on the [Voter Registration web section](#). Additionally, we plan to present it to our student newspaper, our local newspaper, and also our Board of Trustees (presented annually).

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect
- Integrating feedback collection into individual campus efforts
- Working collaboratively with Student Government Association
- Dr. Mandrell currently serves as an All-In Peer Reviewer and will apply its rubric as part of a review.

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our [NSLVE](#) data and looking for improvements year over year
- Seeking out feedback throughout the action planning process from people outside of our action planning team
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly
- Attending All-In Action Plan Webinars, which have been helpful in the past.