



2022 Democratic Engagement Action Plan



## **Sauk Valley Community College 2022 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 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. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2022-2023 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:

- Academic and Student Affairs

### **II. Leadership**

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.
- Student Government Association

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 at 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.

### III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate 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.

Our president, Dr. David Hellmich, is committed to civic learning and democratic engagement. He not only teaches leadership courses to students on Fridays, but he also is the chair of the local Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program. Dr. Hellmich is highly committed to civic engagement and regularly writes articles for the local newspaper on the topic, as well the Vice President of Academics and Student Services, Dr. Jon Mandrell.

On campus, we've seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Voter registration tables
- Signage promoting Election Day

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)

#### IV. Landscape

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%		49.00%	51.00%

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%	

## **Integration of Democratic Engagement in Curriculum and Co-Curriculum**

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. The College Catalog and Student Handbook include voter registration information to increase the number of voters in our college community. SVCC's commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement in curriculum and co-curricular activities include, but are not limited to the following:

### **CURRICULUM**

#### **Adult Education:**

- GED Civics & Government
- Adult Education assists 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.

## **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 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.

**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. Due to the pandemic, the USHLI National Conference was presented in a virtual format on February 17-18, 2022, but as always, it included 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 Civic Engagement Activities table below.

Marketing efforts included: Web ads, marquee, social media posts, emails and text alert announcements to all students during key times, posters to advertise events and a web section that includes an online voting registration page and Illinois General Election important dates and deadlines.

## 2021-2022 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	Sept. 1, 2021 and April 20, 2022	Register voters.
Constitution day	Student Activities & SGA	Email, West Mall, and Virtual	Sept. 17, 2021	<p>To encourage students to develop habits of citizenship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email sent to all students with voting information links encouraging them to take part in the democratic process.</li> <li>• Informational table with non-partisan online resources for students to check their knowledge, take the citizenship test, play educational games, and explore the constitution. Students received a free folding constitution.</li> <li>• Virtual Constitution and Citizenship Day Bingo</li> </ul>
“Election Day is Every Day” non-partisan speaker presentation	Student Activities & SGA	Virtual	April 13, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage students to be more engaged in local, state or national elections or even just to vote in student government elections on campus.</li> </ul>
Online voter registration email sent to each enrolled student.	Dean of Student Services & Marketing	Email	Sent around midterm each semester.	Promote voter registration.

**Barriers to Success:** We serve five counties and are rural, so reaching all can be difficult when it comes to getting out the vote efforts and registering voters. COVID was also a barrier to student participation due to protocols that limited space usage and types of events. Students dealing with anxiety about being in large groups and students who had no history of attending in-person events also affected student engagement to the point that student clubs had the fewest members ever and the Informed Student Voter Coalition Club (ISVCC) was deactivated due to lack of student participation. While there was low student participation, we will use this as an opportunity to improve our efforts of civic learning and democratic engagement across the campus.



## 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.

## V. Goals

We know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan mention civic learning and democratic engagement.
- We have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is distributed throughout many offices and areas of expertise.
- We have sustainable or consistent funding.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.

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.
2. Host town halls.
3. Create new videos to increase democratic engagement interest.
4. Encourage the athletic department to participate in the athletic challenge and talk to their athletes about voting.

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

1. Transition voter participation efforts to the campus-wide working group.
2. Increase our hosting of elected officials and debates/town halls.
3. Increase our voter participation to above the national average.
4. Encourage student groups to devote one meeting per academic year to voter registration and education efforts.

## **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 regularly writes 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

## **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.

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 taking the following actions:

- Email to members of our campus coalition
- Email to campus administration
- Email to the President

We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Post on the campus website
- Release in a public statement

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect
- Integrating feedback collection into individual campus efforts

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