

SEWANEE

The University
of the South

Office of
Civic Engagement

2020 ALL IN CAMPUS DEMOCRACY ACTION PLAN

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Loring McDonald

lmcdona@sewanee.edu | 931.598.3201

Coordinator of Student Programs

Office of Civic Engagement

SUMMARY

The University of the South Office of Civic Engagement's vision statement is "Active global citizens advancing economic, social, and environmental well-being". In accordance with that vision, the OCE seeks to support students on their way to becoming "active global citizens" and understands civic participation as a crucial part of active citizenship.

During the last presidential election cycle in 2016, most of Sewanee's democratic engagement initiative's focus was on voter registration. According to Sewanee's NSLV data, the registration rate increased from 71.6% in 2012 to 78.0% in 2016 during the last presidential election. This is in line with the data we have from TurboVote, which shows that 446 of our 750 TurboVote users first logged in between January 1st and November 9th, 2016. Although these efforts were successful in raising student registration, they did not ultimately translate to a higher turnout. In fact, again according to NSLV, Sewanee's voting rate decreased from 39.1% in 2012 to 37.9% in 2016 putting Sewanee at 12.5% below all institutions surveyed. Our 2018 NSLV report reported that student voting on our campus was up by 22.7 percentage points in last year's election, **increasing to 31.2% in 2018 from a rate of 13.0% in 2014** and placing our voting rate only 6.7 percentage points from our 2016 rate. Though a lower turnout is to be expected during a midterm election, this increase in voter turnout out is a promising sign of an increased interest and momentum of our students, and we look forward to encouraging higher levels of voter engagement into the 2020 election.

OUR MISSION & VALUES

UNIVERSITY PURPOSE

The University of the South is an institution of the Episcopal Church dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom in close community and in full freedom of inquiry, and enlightened by Christian faith in the Anglican tradition, welcoming individuals from all backgrounds, to the end that students be prepared to search for truth, seek justice, preserve liberty under law, and serve God and humanity.

The College of Arts and Sciences is committed to the development of the whole person through a liberal arts education of the highest quality. Outstanding students work closely with distinguished and diverse faculty in a demanding course of humane and scientific study that prepares them for lives of achievement and service. Providing rich opportunities for leadership and intellectual and spiritual growth, while grounding its community on a pledge of honor, Sewanee enables students to live with grace, integrity, and a reverent concern for the world.

THE OFFICE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

VISION

Active global citizens advancing economic, social, and environmental well-being.

MISSION

To cultivate knowledge, resources, and relationships to advance the economic, social, and environmental well-being of our communities.

2020 GOALS AND STRATEGY

The aim of the 2020 Democratic Engagement Initiative, *Yea, Sewanee Votes!* (YSV), is to increase voter engagement and education among Sewanee students, faculty, and staff, and to foster a campus culture of civic responsibility that will keep students, faculty, and staff engaged even after the 2020 election.

GOALS

1. Increase student voter registration. Targets are 85% in 2020, maintaining this into the 2022 midterms
2. Increase student voting rate. Targets are 50% in 2020, and 40% in 2022
3. Build culture of democratic engagement on Sewanee's campus
4. Run regular, excellent events that promote democratic engagement and civics education

STRATEGY

INCREASING VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Make voter registration easy, accessible, and immediately available. Work with student Election Engagement Fellows to develop a voter registration tabling calendar that attempts to reach new populations (athletes, greek organization members, etc.)

Increase Access to Voting via Absentee Ballot. Sewanee's NSLV data indicates that a large number of students vote absentee. The number of students voting in-person on election day went down by 5% from 2012 to 2016, and we expect this trend to continue. As students come from further away geographically and have limited exposure to the surrounding community that makes up the majority of our campus's electoral district, absentee voting is appealing to many of our students. This insight shapes much of the strategy that follows.

- Publicize dates of primary elections in each state, as well as registration, request, and submission deadlines
- Publicize what support The Office of Civic Engagement can offer (helping students navigate the registration process, mailing help including free stamps)
- Create media schedule (emails, posters, social) surrounding dates for sending out emails about registration, and absentee ballots

Establish assistance with voting while abroad. Coordinate with The Office of Global Citizenship to ensure that students studying abroad in the Fall of 2020 have access to information about how to cast their vote.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND CIVICS EDUCATION

- **Develop Plan for DebateWatch Events.** Continue hosting DebateWatch events in collaboration with Sewanee's Center for Speaking and Listening and work to tweak the program to increase participation.
- **Congress to Campus for Spring 2020.** Work to host two representatives from the Congress to Campus Program and collaborate with courses and student groups to create program schedule
- **Support student driven events and programming ideas.** Leverage office resources to meet student demand for events and trainings related to democratic engagement. These events may include programming around voter suppression and trainings on how to be civically engaged beyond voting.
- **Bring speakers to campus prior to election.** Plan to bring relevant speakers to campus to enrich the conversation surrounding politics and democratic engagement into the 2020 election.

FOSTERING A CAMPUS CULTURE OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

- **Build a network of students, faculty, staff, and community members committed to Democratic Engagement.** Continue to create relationships with student organizations and University offices, such as student political organizations, The Bairnwick Women's Center, and The Center for Speaking and Listening, to expand YSV's network of individuals who are excited to champion political engagement.

- **Increase opportunities for engaging across political difference.** Work with Dialogue Across Difference Programs to create opportunities for students to thoughtfully engage across political difference.
- **Connect student leadership to civic action.** Help students make connections between their engagement on campus and the national political landscape by working with new student organizations such as student government, pre-med, and environment and sustainability majors to bring the issues they care about into our programming.
- **Increase campus presence of YSV.** Increase visibility of programs and normalize democratic participation by rebranding YSV and creating new logo and swag that students are excited to show off.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Office of Civic Engagement has partnered with the following groups and organizations:

- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
- Voter Friendly Campus
- CivicTN
- Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP)
- TurboVote

REPORTING AND EVALUATION

Yea, Sewanee Votes! will coordinate a meeting in the spring of 2021 to discuss how our 2020 efforts went and how to improve in the future. Our TurboVote administrator will look at TurboVote data to see which our campaign were most and least successful. We will distribute a survey after the election to discern how impactful our efforts were at students' decision to vote. Finally, when we receive our next NSLVE data we will review and compare it to the previous reports and use this insight to inform future plans.

During the Fall semester, we will collect data to determine the following:

- Number of student encounters at registration events
- voters registered through Turbovote
- voters registered by paper
- registered voters who voted
- attendees at educational events
- qualitative responses to surveys given out at each educational event
- results from the survey after the election to discern how impactful our efforts were at students' decision to vote