

# **ShipVotes Campus Plan 2022**

## **Shippensburg University**

### **Executive Summary**

ShipVotes is an informal, nonpartisan coalition of faculty, staff, students, and university administrators working together to maximize Shippensburg University student voting in local, state, and federal elections. The current coalition is led by faculty members David Monaghan and Campus Electoral Engagement Project (CEEP) student fellow Nina Mitchell. Catherine Clay, an emeritus faculty who led ShipVotes until Summer 2020 upon her retirement, remains active in an advisory capacity.

The challenges faced by ShipVotes at the time of our last Action Plan submission (2020) have compounded. One of our two leaders, Eyoel Delessa, left SU for a permanent faculty position elsewhere and we have been unable to replace him. Three of our student fellows graduated, and we replaced them with one fellow. Interest in electoral engagement on campus waned dramatically after the Presidential election cycle, despite our remaining active to promote voter engagement in local elections. However, in the absence of formal organizational incorporation into the university, which we failed to accomplish, such waxing and waning is likely unavoidable.

This academic year we are presented with a higher profile election cycle. Pennsylvania has elections for governor and an open U.S. Senate seat, as well as statewide and national legislature races. We will take advantage of this to rebuild our organization and re-start our campaign for formal incorporation.

We will do so by maximizing visibility of voter registration resources through regular on-campus tabling, the production of posters and flyers with quick links to voter materials, and a social media presence. In Fall 2022, we will additionally engage students across numerous spaces and activities on campus, including but not limited to

student orientation and welcome week, the first year experience, library services, residence life activities, Greek life activities, and sporting events.

We remain committed to establishing ShipVotes as a permanent university committee. To do so, we will build support among the university administration, the Student Government Association and other student groups, Residence Life, APSCUF-SU, and Athletics. We will rebuild our presence on major social media platforms, through which we may share or amplify important voter registration resources, information, and deadlines.

Data collection and analysis will be central to evaluating our success. Shippensburg has, as of 2019, signed on to participate in NSLVE. We received a report from this organization for the 2020 election noting that SU's overall turnout rate, as well as the rate for most student subgroups, was above average for institutions of our class (public masters-granting universities). However, the turnout rate for African-American students at SU was below average. We will increase our efforts to engage with this critical constituency.

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- National and Local Landscape
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### **What is ShipVotes in 2021?**

ShipVotes is an informal, nonpartisan coalition of Faculty, Staff and Student leaders. Faculty, staff, administration, and students from all departments, offices, and organizations on campus are welcome to participate in ShipVotes. A leadership team

has written the 2022 plan and oversees the group's activities, arranges monthly meetings, oversees student Fellows and plans for the future of the coalition.

### **ShipVotes Coalition 2022**

Name	Email	Affiliation
David Monaghan*	dbmonaghan@ship.edu	Sociology; APSCUF mobilization
Nina Mitchell*	nm8260@ship.edu	CEEP fellow
Katy Clay*	cbclay@ship.edu	History (emeritus)
Luis Melara*	lamelara@ship.edu	Math/APSCUF
Jordan Windholz	jrwindholz@ship.edu	English; APSCUF social justice
Steve Burg	sbburg@ship.edu	1st Year Seminar Program/History
James Lohrey	jblohrey@ship.edu	Comm Journalism; APSCUF PR; SUTV
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Jennifer Milburn	jsmilburn@ship.edu	Residence Life
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Javita Thompson	jlthompson@ship.edu	Community Engagement
Kapri Brown	klbrown@ship.edu	Multicultural Students Association
Douglas Dieuveuil	dfdieuveuil@ship.edu	Success Center

\* Indicates leadership team

**Student Partner Groups:** Student groups such as: PanHellenic Council, Athletic Teams, Student Government Association, Slate (SU's newspaper), SU radio, Clubs such as Social Work Club, Poli Sci Club, etc.

**Faculty Partners:** Advisors of student groups, Faculty with In-Class Registration, 1st Year Seminar Faculty, Michael Lyman, Shari Horner, Robert Shafer, Ben Culbertson, Mark Hartman, Sam Forlenza, Amy May, Sharlene Herbert, Casey Brenneman, Matthew Shupp,

Tiffany Weaver, Jen Clements, Alison Dagnes. The faculty union (APSCUF) has endorsed formalization of ShipVotes.

**Outside Partners:** Campus Vote Project, Campus Electoral Engagement Project, New Pennsylvania Project

### **National and Local Landscape, 2016-22**

The 2020 election cycle saw the highest voter turnout rate nationally (66.8%) since 1992. Overall, turnout increased by over four percentage points over 2016, and it was higher among nearly every population subgroup by between 3 and 10 percentage points. Among young people (age 18-29), turnout increased by 8 percentage points, from around 45% to around 53%<sup>1</sup>. This is particularly remarkable considering that the election took place in the context of a global pandemic in which in-person voting was discouraged by public health officials. The outcome of this election was clearly perceived as extremely important by a broad swathe of the electorate.

According to data we obtained from NSLVE, voter turnout (that is, of registered students) at SU increased from 68.6% in 2016 to 81.9% in 2020. This increase of over 13 percentage points is considerably larger than the overall increase nationally or of the increase among young adults. SU students were registered to vote at a higher rate than four years prior (84.3% vs. 78.7%), and the total voting yield was fifteen points higher than in 2016 (69% vs. 54%). Also according to NSLVE, our students were both

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<sup>1</sup> Figures in this paragraph are from Frey, W.H. (2021), "Turnout in 2020 election spiked among both Democratic and Republican voting groups, new Census data shows". Brookings. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turnout-in-2020-spiked-among-both-democratic-and-republican-voting-groups-new-census-data-shows/>.

registered and voted at a higher rate than did college students nationally. NSLVE data reveals that most student subgroups also increased turnout. The exception was African-American students. Voter turnout for Black SU students was lower than the national rate of turnout for Black students. This is an area in which ShipVotes must improve our outreach.

Given the absence of clear counterfactuals, it is impossible to ascribe this increase to the voter turnout efforts of ShipVotes in 2020 with any degree of certitude. Our voter outreach efforts were considerable. We engaged with numerous student groups and held voter-registration events with student groups, athletic teams, and in first-year seminars. We got the university to create a ShipVotes web page with links to PA state voter registration sites. We placed large and visually-engaging posters (with QR code linking to our web page) in every academic building, dining hall, and dormitory on campus. We worked with Residence Life to get additional posters into dormitory elevators and common areas. We established and maintained a presence on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We tabled regularly in high-traffic sites on campus. Many faculty conveyed registration and election information in class and some gave extra credit for proof of voter registration (or proof of ineligibility). And Residence Life arranged for regular bus service from campus to the (off-campus) polling site.

However, we were considerably constrained in our ability to directly reach students. SU was largely online in Fall 2020, and only a fraction of students lived on campus. Even fewer came regularly to class (and therefore to campus). Though we were able to email the entire student body a few times, we are well aware that mass-

emails are not effective at reaching students. Despite these constraints, SU student voter turnout was impressive, as noted above.

We were able to harness enthusiasm built around the 2020 election to engage a very wide coalition of students, administrators, staff, and faculty. This enthusiasm did not persist in the aftermath of the election. Our coalition, which is informal and largely ad-hoc, dissipated after the end of the fall 2020 semester. Additionally, one of the two faculty leaders in 2020, Eyoel Delessa, departed SU for another local college.

ShipVotes maintained activity through the 2021 local election cycle. In the spring, we partnered with SUTV (the university's student-run TV station) to offer to produce informational videos for all local and county candidates (only one video was ultimately produced). In the fall of 2021, we organized a Zoom event that brought together a panel of eight local elected officials to talk about the importance of local government and how to get involved in local elections. But interest in local elections is low generally and was low this past year.

### **Commitment and Present Resources**

ShipVotes' institutional position remains unchanged from before 2020. In 2018, the Ship Votes Action Plan pointed out that civic learning and democratic engagement were not overall campus learning outcomes, and they had not been formally assessed on the Shippensburg University campus. Internal barriers, such as limited funding and staff have prevented growth in the formalization of civic learning and democratic engagement on campus, while external barriers such as confusion about polling places and local resistance to students voting have made gaining traction outside the university an uphill battle. In 2018, Ship Votes coalition concluded that "dedicated staff time, or at the very least a formalization of the ShipVotes working group, would be the

first step toward increasing the visibility and success of civic engagement on campus.” This assessment unfortunately remains accurate today.

Ideally, ShipVotes is a coalition of four equal partners from Shippensburg University: university administration, students, staff, and faculty. At present we fall far short of this goal, largely because we lack formal incorporation into the university that makes such participation from each constituency automatic.

Shippensburg University has made official formal commitments to securing and advancing its students’ civic involvement. But as of yet the University has made few practical investments in so doing. In 2020, the University’s Residential Life division arranged for bus service on election day, and the Student Union has offered ShipVotes shared office space and storage. But these came about through the individual motivation of specific administrators, not as a result of standard university policy.

The university has been complacent in regards to securing a polling site on or near campus (at present the site is over a mile away, down a busy street with no sidewalk). It has relied upon the endeavors of faculty and students to register voters. Therefore, it remains central and essential to ShipVotes to obtain formal organizational status within the university as a permanent committee.

Students have historically been primarily represented through ShipVotes fellows (i.e., CEEP and CVP fellows). Broader student participation is essential to success. Obtaining the involvement of the Student Government Association (SGA) other student organizations is essential to establishing continuity beyond this year. We also seek to organize an independent base of volunteers to spread information and encouragement through social media and in-person networks.

In 2020, Ship Votes was happy to include a number of university staff members in its coalition. We had active participation from the Women’s Center, Ceddia Union Building (CUB), the Student Success Center, and Residential Life. ShipVotes will seek to involve others from student affairs as much as possible, as well as the participation of staff unions formally in the ShipVotes coalition. We will seek to rebuild much of this support, which waned over the 2021 local election cycle.

Faculty have to date formed the backbone of ShipVotes. It emerged as an intermittent working group organized through APSCUF, the faculty union. APSCUF's Executive Committee remains strongly supportive of ShipVotes for this election cycle, and also has backed its demands for greater administration involvement. Nonetheless, faculty support at present is passive rather than active, and faculty can be better mobilized to reach out to students.

## **2022 Strategy**

ShipVotes' strategy this year is framed by three key principles of organizing: 1) Make student registration and voting as easy as possible; 2) The best influencers of students are other students; 3) Maximum visibility will encourage participation.

1. **Administrative pressure campaign.** ShipVotes will pressure the administration to:

- Incorporate ShipVotes as a permanent university committee with student, faculty, staff, and administration participants
- Participate fully as an equal partner in the ShipVotes coalition
- Incorporate voter registration into the formal program at Freshman Welcome Week
- Supply ShipVotes with an easily findable office in the Student Union building
- Make voter registration and mail-in ballot request materials available and visible at administrative offices

2. **Student organizing campaign.**

- Recruit and mobilize a broad network of student volunteers to spread information publicize participation, and encourage others to participate
- Secure participation from SGA and other prominent student organizations
- Develop a sophisticated viral social media campaign

- Encourage faculty to develop course materials that incorporate voter encouragement into curriculum, such as FYS (1st Year Seminars) and special programs, (I.E. Democracy Day)
- Recruit full roster of CEEP and CVP fellows

### **3. Visibility**

- Regular tabling at Student Union & Library (both Spring & Fall)
- Vote-encouraging buttons distributed to students (Fall)
- Distribute ShipVotes flyers widely to faculty and staff for prominent placement
- Voter registration drives with sports teams and in large classes

### **4. Social media/web platforms.** Maintain presence on:

- Ship Votes Website: <https://www.ship.edu/life/resources/shipvotes/>
- Ship Votes Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/ShipVotes/>
- Ship Votes Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/shipvotes/>
- Ship Votes Twitter: @shipvotes
- SUTV

### **Long-term Goals 2022**

- Establish ShipVotes as a university committee. This will help stabilize the organization's membership and leadership. It will create a more accessible model of University wide collaboration on registration efforts.
- Create a network of specific and targeted faculty, staff, and students that can extend their expertise or influence to spur registration efforts.
- Make use of social media and networking tools to create a civically engaged student body. The aim is to have students not only understand the importance of voting but also advocate voter registration to peers organically.

- Advance to more complex areas of Civic Engagement. Using tools and resources available to us, to not only continue our work to register and engage students to vote, but to also create opportunities for students to engage more deeply in the civic process in our local community, state and nation.
- Work with Shippensburg Township to place a voting site on campus. This will create an accessible and reachable voting site for students.

### **Reporting & Evaluation 2022**

ShipVotes members will collect record data after events. This data includes: number of people registered to vote, number of people registered for absentee ballots, number of people engaged, and total participants.

Using the collected data and contrasting it against voting data available to the public, ShipVotes and Shippensburg University, will shed light on trends in civic engagement amongst students, will quantify success of strategies, and will improve the impact of events. Events with high engagement and registration numbers, such as in-class presentations and registration assistance, can be repeated and improved whereas less successful events can be altered or abandoned altogether. Evaluating the data ShipVotes collects will allow it to be more efficient and optimize its impact on campus.

Our continued participation in NSLVE helps to establish areas in which we need to improve outreach. For instance, we learned that turnout among African-American students at SU was lower than the national average for this group, indicating that we need to increase our outreach in this area.