



Simmons University 2024-2026 Democratic Engagement Action Plan Developed by: Meghan Doran and Hannah Bini

Executive Summary:

Simmons University is an institution dedicated to professional preparation, intellectual exploration, and community orientation to prepare students for success. One important aspect of this preparation is ensuring that Simmons students leave campus as active and engaged citizens who have resources to foster lifelong civic engagement. By creating centralized messaging and activity about civic engagement, including voter registration, education and engagement, this plan will ensure that all campus voting stakeholders will work together to make the biggest impact on students possible.

This civic action plan was developed by Simmons University's London Center for Community Engagement and Social Justice with the input of a campus-wide civic engagement committee for the 2024 to 2026 US elections. The plan development was overseen by London Center director, Meghan Doran and assisted by graduate assistant Hannah Bini. . This is meant to be an iterative overview surrounding civic engagement at Simmons University, starting with the 2024 election to be reevaluated yearly for each election cycle, with special attention paid to national election years. Implementation of the plan will be overseen by the London Center. The plan includes three main areas of focus:

- Increasing our voter registration and education efforts through coordination with student groups, digital campaigns, and more on the ground points of contact.
- Building on our culture of civic and community engagement through campus wide programming and engagement opportunities
- Strategically increasing community-engaged learning opportunities within new university structures. This work is developing and in the strategic planning phase over the next year.
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Leadership:

Committee Members:

Meghan Doran, Director of the London Center for Community Engagement and Social Justice
Hannah Bini, Graduate Student, Graduate Assistant for Community-Based Programs and Partnerships
Leanne Doherty, Associate Provost, Academic and Faculty Affairs
Christy Lusiak, Assistant Director, Center for Student Leadership and Engagement
Nakeisha Cody, Vice President of Student Success and Diversity
Beth Grampetro, Associate Dean, Chief Wellness Officer
Laura Saunders, Associate Director of Simmons School of Library and Information Science

Abigail Ferrone, Undergraduate Student '25 Simmons University Newman Civic Fellow

Student Leaders Working Group*

Pre-Law Liaison President

Simmons Democracy Matters President

Political Science Liaison President

Student Government Association President

Student Government Association Vice President

Wellness Ambassador

Editor of Student Newspaper

Sunrise Simmons President

Bonner Community Leaders Representative

London Center Civic Engagement and Volunteering Office Assistant

*Names have been omitted for student privacy

Our campus works with the following non-profit partners:

All in Campus Democracy Challenge

Campus Compact

Civic Holidays

Students Learn Students Vote

Boston Election Commission

Committee Composition and Succession

Civic Engagement is part of the London Center for Community Engagement and Social Justice's mission and strategic goals and is written into the Director of the London Center's job description. The Director will thus manage the committee, including recruitment, succession and onboarding of members, with a focus on diversity of roles that include academic, and student affairs, and those that oversee DEI efforts on campus. Non-Student Committee membership will be monitored and renewed every two years, with interim recruitment as needed, through committee nomination. Student membership will be monitored yearly for turnover and recruited largely through student organizations with connections to civic engagement.

Commitment:

Since 1899, Simmons has offered a pioneering liberal arts education for undergraduate women integrated with professional work experience. Today, Simmons also encompasses the many benefits of a small university, including renowned coeducational graduate programs in health sciences, education, liberal arts, library and information science, management, and social work.

For more than 100 years, a Simmons education has integrated professional preparation, intellectual exploration, and community orientation, because all three approaches are necessary for success. At

Simmons, we value the many dimensions of identity — including race, class, ethnicity, ability, and sexual identity — and reflect that in our curriculum, affiliated organizations, and community partnerships.

Civic engagement is central to Simmons University’s Mission “to provide transformative learning with lifelong purpose.” This commitment is further reflected in President Lynn Perry Wooten’s stated strategic priorities including “a commitment to inclusive excellence and social justice” and “a philanthropic call to action.” This commitment is also reflected in each of the six schools mission/vision/value statements which each include a statement about social justice and the importance of engagement in the broader social issues of our world. Within the curriculum graduate, undergraduate and online students have access to designated service-learning courses as well as other experiential learning opportunities.

Finally, Simmons works with the Boston Election Commission to offer a polling location on campus for students and community members for every local and national election. As part of the university’s commitment to civic engagement, they have made election days meeting-free days. Our marketing department works closely with our London Center for Community Engagement and Social Justice to promote the work of the center and the university related to civic and campus community engagement.

Landscape:

Civic engagement happens across the curriculum in our graduate and undergraduate programs, both on the ground and online. Simmons has recently organized into six schools: the Gwen Ifill School of Media, Humanities and Social Sciences, the School of Library and Information Science, the School of Management, the School of Sciences and Health Professions, and the School of Social Work. Each of these schools has stated a commitment to social justice in their Mission, Vision, and/or Values, which is in term reflected in degree program curricula, though each looks different based on professional preparation and accreditation standards by discipline, particularly at the graduate level.

For undergraduates, our first year seminar includes a module on active citizenship in which students are encouraged to actively participate in and shape their on- and off-campus communities. As a part of the core curriculum, Simmons has identified Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice as a Keys Skills Area. All undergraduates must take one DEIJ-designated course which asks them to both “critically analyze social forces and systems and learn how to take some form of action to respond to these forces and systems,” with the goal being to “help students develop agency around understanding and challenging existent forces and systems”

(<https://www.simmons.edu/undergraduate/academics/general-education/how-plan-works>).

The London Center coordinates both curricular and co-curricular community-based learning opportunities and is the primary space for voter education and community and civic engagement on campus. The London Center oversees multiple long-term service opportunities through co-curricular programs on campus, including Bonner Community Leaders (a four year commitment to service in the Boston area), Jumpstart AmeriCorps (a one year Americorps program), Strong Women Strong Girls (mentoring in local schools), America Learns (classroom help and tutoring), and Alternative Spring Break.

The Center also supports service-learning courses across the curriculum (undergraduate, graduate, and online). This support includes a designation process, faculty training, and partnership development. Around 4% of undergraduate and graduate students take designated service-learning courses each year, in addition to required fieldwork, clinicals, and internships across majors. Service-learning offerings declined significantly during the pandemic years and are only slowly starting to rebound. Simmons has transitioned for the 2024 - 2025 academic year to a new university structure (from 4 colleges to six schools and has significantly revised its undergraduate core curriculum (called PLAN).

On the whole, Simmons students, faculty, and staff are highly engaged and deeply concerned about issues of social justice. According to the NSLVE, our voter registration rates are consistently above the national average. Simmons University joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2020 and has been a signatory to the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation since 2020. In 2024, Simmons received the award for the Highest Voting Rate among 4-year institutions in the Boston area for the 2022 election.

Our campus demographic and voting data:

Simmons University has 5,522 students. Approximately 29% of these students are undergraduates and 71% are graduate students. In 2022, 51% of students identified as white, 31% as ALANA, and the remaining as unidentified. Simmons has a small international population (<3%). Among our undergraduate population, approximately 62% were from Massachusetts and 19% from other New England States. Due to robust online graduate programs, our graduate students tend to be more dispersed across the country, 69% of our graduate students are in online programs and 30% are in on-ground programs. Amongst our undergraduate population, 38% were aged 18-19, 40% were aged 20-21, 10% were aged 22-24, 11% were aged 25+, and 1% were under 18 years old. Amongst our graduate students, 20% were under 25 years old, 31% were 25-29 years old, 17% were 30-34 years old, 11% were 35-39 years old, 14% were 40-49 years old and 7% were 50+ years old.

Simmons University has authorized NSLVE. Our institution had a 2022 campus voting rate of 41.2% and a registration rate of 82.8%. White, Multiracial, and Black students had the largest voting turnout (46%, 50%, and 38%, respectively), while Asian and Hispanic Students had the lowest voting turnout (22% and 26%). Turnout generally increased with the age of students, with our youngest students 18-21 voting at 27% and our older students 50+ voting at 68%. In line with this data, undergraduate students had a lower voting turnout at 30% compared to the graduate rate of 46%.

Our institution had a 2020 campus voting rate of 77.8%. Our institution had a 2020 voter registration rate of 89.2%. Our institution had a 2018 voter turnout rate of 54.5%. Our institution had a 2018 voter registration rate of 84.3%.

Our institution has been recognized by ALL IN with the following seals: 2020 Gold, and 2022 Gold.

Typically, Simmons has low in-person event participation and according to discussions with student groups and staff, there is a general difficulty in driving interest in programming. Recently, Simmons has transitioned to a Campus Groups platform to centralize activities, programming, and clubs. This new platform will hopefully drive interest and engagement for programming and will be utilized by the London Center and other civic engagement stakeholders to advertise programming and increase involvement.

Given this demographic and cultural data, engagement activities and programming will be focused on the general student population. Special attention will be paid to first-time voters and groups with lower voting engagement according to our NSVLE report. Because the largest gap is for our younger voters, outreach will be focused on undergraduate students. Future efforts will be made to connect with Asian and Latine Affinity groups on campus since we have also identified gaps among those racial/ethnic groups.

Goals:

I. Voter registration and Education

We will increase overall student voter participation for all of our students: both grad and undergrad, online and on-ground. As an institution that already has a strong voting turnout among students, we will work to strengthen this even further. We will provide students with resources so they will feel empowered to participate in the civic process and understand their rights, especially for students who belong to groups that traditionally face barriers to engagement and voting.

- a. We will create one [official Simmons guide to voting](#) per election cycle with resources and information about important dates and keep an up-to-date voting website with resources and information. We will update the guide in April before the fall election cycle and begin full marketing in September-November.
- b. We will digitally distribute voting information to 100% of the Simmons community - undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.
- c. We will increase overall voter turnout to 80% in 2024 and 65% in 2026.
- d. We will increase voting rates among 18 to 29-year-olds to 75% in 2024 and 60% in 2026, with targeted outreach to upperclassmen undergraduate students and graduate students.
- e. We will work with our Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion and our Center for Leadership and Engagement (which manages student clubs) to build relationships with cultural affinity groups to increase voter turnout.

II. Culture

We want to create a culture on campus of active and engaged citizens who take their commitment to civic engagement well beyond the walls of Simmons University. We will create and foster a culture of civic engagement on campus by creating campus-wide programming that engages the campus community.

- a. The London Center will increase our civic engagement programming by producing 10 social media posts related to civic engagement per year and holding at least 2 virtual or in-person civic engagement events per year, such as voter registration events, information sessions, or other targeted programs.
- b. We will establish a baseline for programming attendance in Fall 2024 and will increase programming attendance by 2% each semester.
- c. We will establish a baseline for social media engagement in Fall 2024 and will increase social media/digital engagement by 5% each semester.
- d. We will produce an ongoing “#SharksVote” campaign, and incorporate our mascot “Stormy” into civic engagement marketing
- e. We will launch a physical and digital exhibit on the history of civic engagement at Simmons in Fall 2025.
- f. Adapt Civic Action Scorecard from Miami Dade University for Simmons.

III. Curriculum

We want to increase our opportunities for community-engaged experiential learning rooted in best practices which promote values of civic engagement and social justice alongside building skills like communication and critical reflection. We have the basic infrastructure for this work in place but want to take advantage of new structures to increase offerings strategically

- a. We will develop strategic plans by school and within the revised undergraduate core curriculum to increase service-learning offerings where appropriate.

Strategy:

Voter Turnout and Education:

We will employ the following digital and in-person programming to increase voter participation and educate voters in our community.

Social Media:

- Digital media campaigns to educate students about voter registration in Massachusetts and nationally, including important dates and voting rights information. We will primarily use our center’s Instagram page to create engaging digital content, including graphics and videos to inform students about issues and how to vote.
- We will promote materials from partner organizations.
- We will tag Democracy Matters, Political Science Liaison, Pre-Law Liaison, and Here4Justice in all London Center civic engagement social media posts to share as they see fit.
- We will share broad/important messaging with the Simmons University social media accounts.

Voter Registration:

- In collaboration with student groups, we will host at least 3 voter registration drives annually in the lead-up to the November Election.
- We will employ between 1 and 2 Federal Work Study Students to hold voter registration office hours where students and community members can register to vote and get their voting questions answered.
- We will have voter registration materials at all events hosted by the London Center.

Voting Website:

- Creation of a voting page on our website to have a centralized online location for voting resources for students and signify the institution's dedication to educating students about voting and civic engagement.

Civic Holidays:

- In partnership with Civic Holidays, we will create a digital media campaign for campus-wide celebrations.

The London Center will work with civic engagement stakeholders, such as the student group Democracy Matters, to host a registration event for National Voter Registration Day.

Orientation and First Year “Explore” Course:

- In an effort to target first-time voters and foster lifelong civic engagement, we will provide registration and voting tools to new students attending orientation and again during their first-year Explore Course

Civic Engagement Newsletter:

- We will create and send four newsletters to all students, faculty, and staff with information about our wellness and civic literacy programming and voting resources during the 2024 and 2026 election cycles.
- We will create and send one civic engagement newsletter per semester out side of the election cycles.

Elections and Wellness:

- Working with Simmons Wellness Ambassadors we will create programming centered on wellness during the election season we will hold events both before and after the election for students to check in about their mental health and the election.
- We will provide voter education during these programs as well as how to focus on mental health during a period that can be stressful for young voters.
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Culture

Marketing Campaign:

- Work with Marketing and Communications to develop a #SharksVote brand with “Stormy” (our mascot) marketing materials

Civic Literacy:

- With the barrage of news and information surrounding any election students may feel burnt out and confused. Problems of dis/misinformation often occur during national election years and around social justice issues generally; to combat this we will work

with the School of Library and Information Science to provide students with the tools to combat political misinformation. We will create and maintain several resources, including videos and handouts about how students can combat misinformation, find reliable information, and have a healthy news diet.

ODEI Programming:

- The London Center will work with our Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) to establish regular programming related to diversity, leadership and civic engagement, with a goal of at least 2 programs a year

Post-2024 Election Cycle we will launch two projects driven by our civic and campus engagement student workers to continue to build a civic culture at Simmons

1. **History of Civic and Community Engagement at Simmons Exhibit:** We will utilize the London Center's Social Justice Gallery space to create an exhibit that chronicles the history of civic engagement at Simmons. Since Simmons is a women's-centered university we will focus on women's suffrage, prominent alumni who have been civically involved, and how Simmons students have been involved in their community.
2. **CivicAction ScoreCard:** We will work to adjust the Civic Action Scorecard created at Miami Dade University to the Simmons University context and integrate it into our new campus engagement platform, CampusConnect to create long-term and expansive opportunities for students to act and reflect outside of voting or some of our intensive volunteering programs. Civic Action Scorecard will be recognized by awards at our annual London Center award ceremony.

Curricular Efforts:

As the university is launching both a revised undergraduate program (PLAN) and six new schools, the London Center will work with Deans and the PLAN director to map out where community-engaged learning and civic education map onto the curricula across the schools.

Evaluation:

We will evaluate our action plan in the following ways:

- NLSVE will be the main tool for evaluating our success in our voter registration efforts
- We will measure student engagement in our co-curricular effort through:
 - tracking participation in our on-the-ground and digital campaigns,
 - elicit student feedback from events we hold.
 - Social media analytics will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of our digital initiatives to inform students about the civic process and provide them with resources
 - Annual Debriefs .
- We will measure the effectiveness of our curricular efforts through
 - Tracking the number of service-learning courses/students enrolled

- Surveys of students who participating service-learning courses
- Success at the curricular level will look like clear plans for growth where appropriate across the colleges.
- Several projects are in the design phase and will have evaluation and assessment built in as a part of this design:
 - Civic and Campus Engagement Gallery
 - Civic Action Scorecard

Evaluation of voter registration and education efforts will occur biannually after each election cycle to determine the effectiveness of programs and to inform future programming.

Evaluation of broader civic engagement efforts will occur annually at the end of the academic year.

Reporting:

Our campus action plan and NSLVE will be posted on our campus page on ALL IN's website:
<https://allinchallenge.org/campuses/simmons-college/>.

We will share our action plan and NSLVE data on our own web page as well.

Regular reporting on our Civic Engagement efforts will be made in the London Center's annual report which is distributed digitally to the entire campus community. Hardcopies are also available.