

Simpson College: Campus Action Plan 2023-2024



vote everywhere

THE ANDREW GOODMAN FOUNDATION



| Executive Summary

Executive Summary:

Simpson College is a small, private liberal arts institution located in Indianola, Iowa, twelve miles south of the state capitol in Des Moines. Founded in 1860 and affiliated with the United Methodist Church, Simpson College had a total enrollment of 1,200 students as of Fall 2023 (traditional undergraduates plus continuing and graduate students). In-state students from Iowa account for 82% of total enrollment. Non-Hispanic White students represent 78% of Simpson's total enrollment.

Simpson College has been an Andrew Goodman Foundation campus since the inception of the program in 2012 and has also participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) since 2012. Simpson makes both its NSLVE reports and this annual Campus Action Plan available to the public.

This campus action plan was developed by three undergraduate Andrew Goodman Foundation (AGF) Vote Everywhere Ambassadors at Simpson College with guidance and support from their Campus Champion, who serves as director of the nonpartisan Culver Public Policy Center at Simpson. The three AGF Ambassadors also serve as co-chairs of the Culver Center's Voter Engagement Committee, which includes several more undergraduate Culver Fellows who assist the AGF Ambassadors with civic engagement and voter registration presentations and initiatives on campus.

| Landscape

This action plan sets specific goals for Simpson College student civic engagement along with specific tactics and strategies to be implemented during the 2023-2024 academic year. It seeks to further institutionalize civic engagement in campus culture and continue to improve student registration and turnout rates in elections. This plan was developed to further engage populations of students that may not have in the past. It seeks to ensure that voting and civic engagement are institutionalized within the revised general education curriculum of Simpson College. The Voter Engagement team seeks to establish voting as the norm among students. The strategic plan was developed in late spring and early summer of 2023 with an eye to the upcoming 2023-24 academic year. The plan will be updated and reevaluated between semesters. The implementation of this plan is to be carried out by the campus' Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors, student leadership within the Culver Center, and other Culver Fellows.

1. **Leadership:** The Simpson College voter engagement team, led by students Kylie Banouvong as the Lead Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassador along with Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors Kyle Werner and Abby Meyer, is housed under the John C. Culver Public Policy Center as a subcommittee of undergraduate Culver Fellows. The Voter Engagement committee includes Culver Fellows from diverse student life backgrounds, including student-athletes, Greek life members, first-years, and students pursuing a broad range of major fields of study. The committee members will gain valuable experience and should show strong passion in voter engagement that can take over for one of the Ambassadors if needed. First-year members will also then be able to understand the roles and responsibilities to hopefully move into those Ambassador leadership positions later in their college careers. We then plan to pull in assistance from campus leadership, community members, and the Warren County Auditor's Office to assist with our mission as needed.

In keeping with Simpson College's mission and strategic plan, the voter engagement team prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion through open and accessible outreach initiatives that encompass the entire campus community and ensure that students from diverse backgrounds have equal and ample opportunities to engage in the political process. The Voter Engagement team partners with Simpson's office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to ensure that civic and democratic engagement initiatives are

meeting the needs and expectations of diverse student populations. The campus champion is the Director of the Culver Center, Seth Andersen.

The voter engagement team partners with Simpson College President Jay Byers and his Cabinet to highlight civic and democratic engagement programs through a modified class schedule on Election Day that gives students a two-hour block around lunchtime to vote if they haven't already cast ballots. President Byers also sends messages to the entire campus community regarding the importance of voting and the many steps that Simpson takes to enhance student voter registration and turnout. He has signed the ALL IN President's Challenge and strongly supports the voter engagement team's successful initiative to incorporate civic and voter engagement presentations in all first-year Foundations I seminar classes.

2. **Commitment:** Simpson College requires civic engagement as part of the general education requirements for all students. As part of the changing curriculum, all first-year students are required to take a Foundations I seminar class that focuses on civic engagement and includes common texts. The voter engagement team makes hour-long presentations on civic engagement and voter registration to all Foundations I classes during the first half of each fall semester. In addition to curriculum engagement, Simpson has also adopted an altered class schedule on Election Days that gives all students two hours off around lunchtime to vote. Simpson President Jay Byers has signed the ALL IN Presidential Commitment and the college participates in the Iowa College Voting Challenge. For many years, Simpson College has been a hub and popular venue for presidential candidates campaigning in the Iowa Caucuses. Simpson has hosted most of the major presidential candidates in both political parties for several decades, providing unrivaled access for students to hear directly from presidential hopefuls.
3. **NSLVE:** Simpson College achieved significant improvements in voter registration and voter turnout rates in the 2018 and 2020 elections compared to previous cycles. In 2018, Simpson had the highest voter registration rate (87.4%) and second highest voter turnout rate (50.2%) of Iowa private colleges. In 2020, Simpson's voter registration rate improved to 92.4%. Simpson was also recognized for having the greatest improvement in student voter turnout among Iowa private colleges from 2016 to 2020, with an increase of 14.7% – from 60.6% in 2016 to 75.3% in 2020. Simpson's yield rate, or voting rate of registered students, jumped from 68.5% in 2016 to 81.4% in 2020 - an increase of 12.9%.

Simpson College has not been able to report aggregate student demographic data to the National Clearinghouse for the past two election cycles due to staffing and resource constraints, so our NSLVE reports do not include demographic breakdowns on student voter registration and voter turnout. But the voter engagement team is working with the Institutional Research office to resume reporting of demographic data to the National Clearinghouse so that we can again have demographic breakdowns in our 2022 NSLVE report.

4. **Partnerships:** Key campus partnerships include: John C. Culver Public Policy Center, Student Government Association, SC Democrats and Republicans, Simpson Foundations (first year seminar program), Student Development Office, Residence Life,

Greek Life, Career Development, and First-Year Orientation. Key state and local partnerships include: Iowa Campus Compact, Warren County Auditor, Warren County Democrats, and Warren County Republicans. Key national partnerships include: Andrew Goodman Foundation, Campus Election Engagement Project, ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, National Voter Registration Day, TurboVote, IssueVoter, Voter Friendly Campus designation, and VoteSmart.

5. **Resources:** Activity budget funds from the AGF Vote Everywhere program, #VoteTogether, the Culver Public Policy Center, and other sources are held in a separate account managed by our Campus Champion (the Culver Center director).
6. **Institutionalization:** Simpson College has a branded TurboVote site (simpson.turbovote.org) that is embedded in SC Connect, the College's internal website for students, faculty, and staff. We always have a presence during mandatory welcome week activities for first-year students and optional activities for upper-class students, where we usually see big success in registering people. The voter engagement team makes presentations on civic and voter engagement to all First-Year Foundations classes as a permanent part of the curriculum. We also maintain a frequent tabling presence in the Kent Campus Center and a growing social media presence.
7. **Programming:** Tabling, mock caucuses during presidential election years, "Scooping Up the Votes" with ice cream, voter registration parties with s'mores at the campus fire pit, partnerships with Residence Life and Greek Life to inform students about how to register and update their registration each time they move on campus, and Culver Center programs, lectures, and panel discussions on political and public policy topics.

Simpson College historically has nurtured a campus climate of political awareness and activity that is reinforced by frequent appearances by presidential candidates, national media covering the Iowa Caucuses, and prominent national speakers delivering the annual Culver Lecture. Every two years, students in an upper level political methods class conduct a survey of the student body on political attitudes, ideology, voting patterns, and other measures of political and civic awareness and engagement. Those surveys demonstrate a consistent and growing student body interest in civics and politics.

8. **Achievements, Challenges, and Opportunities:** Our **achievements** from the past two years include: hosted 11 presidential candidate events on campus during the Iowa Caucus campaign that drew significant student attendance; recognition from the [ALL IN Iowa Campus Challenge](#) for highest voter registration rate (87.4%) among Iowa campuses and second highest voter turnout rate (50.2%) of Iowa private colleges in 2018. In 2020, Simpson's voter registration rate improved to 92.4%. Simpson was also recognized for having the greatest improvement in student voter turnout among Iowa private colleges from 2016 to 2020, with an increase of 14.7% – from 60.6% in 2016 to 75.3% in 2020. Simpson's yield rate, or voting rate of registered students, jumped from 68.5% in 2016 to 81.4% in 2020 - an increase of 12.9%.

Simpson has also received [Platinum Campus recognition](#) from ALL IN Challenge for breaking 50% student voter turnout in 2018 and Gold Campus recognition for 75.3%

student voter turnout in 2020; recognition in [Washington Monthly](#) magazine as one of America's best colleges for student voting; participation in the ALL IN Challenge [Presidential Commitment to Full Student Voting Participation](#); secured approval from Simpson's presidential cabinet for our proposal to create an altered class schedule for biennial general elections; successfully hosted two mock caucus trainings prior to the 2020 Iowa Caucuses; leaders of voter engagement team staffed check-in tables on Caucus night and assisted precinct chairs and secretaries with procedures and head counts.

Historically, our main **challenge** has been reaching all returning students to explain that they must update their voter registration address each time they move to a new campus residence. We also have experienced challenges in expanding our social media presence among students.

Challenges posed by the pandemic have also provided **opportunities** to expand our social media presence and further institutionalize TurboVote and other digital outreach to students.

| Goals

1. Long-term goals:

- a. Increase our campus to a consistent 90% voter registration rate, 70% voting rate in presidential elections, and 50% voting rate in midterm elections
- b. Increase voting rates for male students, athletes, STEM and business majors
- c. Make voting even more a part of the campus culture by implementing more required institutionalized civic engagement lessons and changes by 2025.

2. Short-term goals:

- a. Increase our presence and following on social media platforms for all @SimpCoAGF channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok) by posting weekly voter engagement facts, information, and updates through the November 2023 Municipal and School Board elections
- b. Successfully present on voter registration and civic engagement in all 18 Foundations I courses by October 2023
- c. Engage students in the November Municipal and School Board elections through educational programming and 2 tabling events monthly from August to November to turnout students for the Municipal and School Board Elections
- d. Educate students on new Iowa voting laws by updating voter engagement powerpoint and through social media posts throughout Fall 2023 semester
- e. Further utilizing the SimpleTexting services to provide urgent election information to students leading up to the 2023 Municipal and School Board Elections

| Strategy

1. Long-term Goal Strategies:

- a. Host tabling and programs for voter registration and voter education, experimenting with new events to host voter registration tables. Connect with a student liaison in each student organization that can register their members to vote.
- b. Collaborate with Greek Life and the athletic departments on campus.
- c. Collaborate with existing campus institutions to decrease barriers to voting.
- d. Increase conversation about the history of voting rights on campus and continue the “I Vote Because” campaign.
- e. Increase social media presence on and off campus to engage students throughout the calendar year.

2. Short-term Goal Strategies:

- a. Encourage other colleges in the American Rivers Conference (NCAA Division III) to join the ALL IN Athletic Conference Voting Challenge in 2023.
- b. Provide information to students about absentee and early voting in local elections.
- c. Engaging the Culver Fellows Voter Engagement committee more effectively in voter registration initiatives.
- d. Maintain an altered Election Day schedule for the local elections.
- e. Partner with new director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for programming on civic engagement and voting.
- f. Work with Foundations Faculty to engage students in Foundations I classes.
- g. Continue educating students on new Iowa voting laws through tabling and pizza and policy events.
- h. Delegate among ambassadors who will be responsible for certain social media posts. Work with other department social media pages to build our presence.

| Tactics and Timeline

1. **Events:**

- Host tabling periodically in Kent Campus Center and at lectures or forums held on campus.
- Host forums on important voting information, such as Iowa's Voter ID law.
- Hold educational programs about contacting your representatives and issue-based advocacy.
- Host candidate forums for local elected office.
- Host a s'mores and registering to vote event at the campus fire pit.

2. **Actions:**

- Contact Foundations facility and coordinate class presentations on voting.
- Creating a set of new short videos on voter registration to share on social media channels. Focus on creating Instagram stories to share videos.

3. **Meetings:**

- The Vote Everywhere team will plan to meet at least once every other week with the voter engagement working group at the Culver Center to coordinate upcoming events. Communication about events will be maintained between meeting times.

4. **Digital Communication:**

- Campus-wide emails to spread voter information to all students.
- Maintain Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook pages with content regarding events and important news.
- Ask campus staff that frequently sends campus-wide emails to include voter registration information and TurboVote link in email signature and potentially ask faculty to include it in their syllabi.

| Reporting

1. **Sharing Your Plan:** Plan will be shared with the voter engagement committee as well as relevant external voter engagement partners.
2. **Publishing Your Plan:** We will share our plan with the All-In Campus Challenge and make it available to the public through social media and the Culver Center page at: <https://simpson.edu/academics/centers-and-services/culver-center>.
3. **Reporting NSLVE Data:** The Culver Center will host programming to report on NSLVE data.

| Monitoring and Evaluation

1. **Meetings:** Maintain a group chat and meet at least once per month to discuss ongoing monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness of campus action plan. Create a survey to collect more data from first year students on their experience in the foundation class. The survey will be sent out a week after the presentations.
2. **Event Reports:** AGF Lead Ambassador will be responsible for our tracking.
3. **NSLVE:** Simpson's Voter Engagement team will review past NSLVE reports to generate ideas to improve voter registration and turnout rates.
4. **Research:** The team will continue to monitor best practices for student engagement.
5. **Continuous Evaluation:** In regular meetings we will look over and re-evaluate the campus action plan.