



# SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

## All In Action Plan

2024

### Executive Summary

On November 5th, 2024 the state of Texas will hold elections for Governor, Congress, and some state and local positions. The results of these elections will impact the state in many ways. Democratic engagement, manifest as higher voter turnout rates, is important for this and all elections. Southwestern University contributes to higher education's role in promoting civic learning and democratic engagement through coursework, cross-campus collaborations, community engagement, student leadership development, and diversity education.

Southwestern's action plan was developed by the co-chairs: Dr. Sarah Brackmann and Dr. Emily Sydnor.

The purpose of this plan is to:

- Identify strategies for institutionalizing civic learning and democratic engagement
- Increase voter engagement in local and state elections
- Increase students' self-efficacy in the context of politics and government

Initial programming will begin during new Student Orientation in August, 2024 and continue through voting day on November 5th.

### Leadership

The Office of Community-Engaged Learning, the Department of Political Science, and various Student Life Departments collaborate to promote curricular and co-curricular civic learning and democratic engagement. Our committee includes staff, faculty, and student representatives who collaborate with national organizations, community partners, and local election officials.

**Co-Chairs:** Dr. Sarah Brackmann, Senior Director of Integrative & Community-Engaged Learning and Dr. Emily Sydnor, Associate Professor of Political Science.

#### Partnering Campus Departments:

- Community-Engaged Learning (CEL)
- Office of Student Activities (OSA)
- Center for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)
- Marketing and Communications
- Mosaic

- Residence Life

**Off Campus Partnerships:**

- Annette Strauss Institute at the University of Texas at Austin (Texas Civic Ambassadors)
- Campus Vote Project (Democracy Fellows)
- Williamson County Elections Department

**Partnerships in Progress:**

- League of Women Voters of Williamson County

**Working Group Members** worked to develop this work plan during the Fall 2023 semester.

The following individuals were included in the development of this action plan:

- JEDI Center Student Representative
- Student Government Association Representative
- Southwestern Democracy Fellow

As we look to the next election, we have some work to do to ensure an effective transition among student leaders. SU Votes has been led by two fantastic students during the 2021 and 2022 elections, and both of those students graduated in May 2023. Much of our efforts in 2023 were devoted to identifying a new set of students who can step up and take on the leadership positions within the organization and to setting them up to be successful.

We will expand the committee in the fall to include these campus leaders:

- Director of Student Inclusion and Diversity
- Student Activities Coordinator
- Fine Arts Representative
- Natural Sciences Representative
- Student Athlete Representative
- Fraternity and Sorority Representative

## **Commitment**

Southwestern University's mission statement, "fostering a liberal arts community whose values and actions contribute to the well-being of humanity," prompts a community of scholarship and learning that facilitates social activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good. Our Paideia liberal arts curriculum encourages students to make connections between their academic coursework, other campus life experiences and broader social issues and problems, and Student Life's framework of Mosaic which focuses on the whole student and promotes global citizenship as one of its 5 areas. In addition, all students take at least one course that provides them an opportunity to understand how difference is used in the maintenance of structures of power and inequality, as well as activism in which people engage to promote social justice. Institutional surveys confirm that the connection between our academic curriculum and co-curricular opportunities are promoting meaningful experiences for students.

Academic Affairs and Student Life collaborate on programming to promote curricular and co-curricular civic learning and democratic engagement. The Center for Integrative Learning

(CIL), Office of Student Activities (OSA), Mosaic, and Center for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) also support civic engagement through their unique roles and programs.

Housed in Academic Affairs, the CIL supports students to understand global problems through



a variety of study abroad programs, research complex social issues and challenges through undergraduate research, and intern with local and national nonprofit organizations. In addition, the Office of Community-Engaged Learning strives to connect students in meaningful learning partnerships with the local community by offering differentiated educational and co-curricular experiences focused on thinking, creating, and connecting. Community-Engaged Learning is offered in a variety of courses with 64% of the class of 2020 taking at least one course before graduating. Dr.

Emily Sydnor's American Politics highlights the

connections between civic engagement and the academic experience. For the 2020 election, these students developed infographics, social media posts, and videos for the university and OCEL to use in education and awareness campaigns around voting and elections each year. Reflection on learning and one's role in social change is embedded in all community-engaged learning programs.

Student Life's co-curricular programming also promotes civic engagement and democratic learning. Student Activities advocates, educates, and mentors students by promoting leadership opportunities, advising student organizations, and facilitating student engagement. Specifically, OSA supports student leadership in organizations such as the College Republicans, College Democrats, Educators for Equity, Empire, JOLT, Latin-X Unidos, Progressive Students Alliance, Reproductive Justice Alliance, Student Labor Action Coalition, and SU Socialists in ways that foster political discussion across campus. Furthermore, the JEDI promotes diversity and social justice events on campus. In the past, they have hosted national leaders such as Dolores Huerta and Angela Davis, facilitated difficult dialogue circles, and hosted brave space training. Southwestern students engage in activism in the campus community, and within our local and regional communities.

Together, Academic Affairs and Student Life support the SU Votes! Coalition. This group represents a variety of campus departments, student leaders, and faculty. These leaders include students from political clubs, greek life, student activities staff, political science faculty and civically engaged students across campus. The group meets regularly to plan and coordinate election related programming. leading up to the election. As a result of voter registration and voting access efforts during the 2020 campaign, SU's voting rate was 71%, which was up 30.2% from 2012, when we first started tracking student voting.

***Other Departments/Initiatives Supporting Democratic Engagement:***

- The Center for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) promotes diversity and social justice events on campus. In the past, they have hosted national leaders such as Dolores Huerta and Angela Davis, difficult dialogue circles, brave space training, and social economics workshops that promote deeper civic learning on issues of power and

privilege. The ODE also advises the Coalition for Diversity and Social Justice which includes ten cultural, identity, and social justice based groups within the coalition: Pirates for Pride, E.B.O.N.Y., Kappa Delta Chi, Hispanics and Latinx Organization, SU NATIVE, Asian Student Association, Reproductive Justice Alliance. Students for Environmental Activism and Knowledge, and Muslims and Allies. Students in these groups engage in activism in the campus community, and within our local and regional communities.

- **The Office of Student Activities (OSA)** advocates, educates, and mentors students by promoting leadership opportunities, advising student organizations, and facilitating student engagement. Specifically, OSA supports student leadership in organizations such as the College Republicans, College Democrats, and Young Americans for Liberty in ways that foster political discussion across campus. They also help coordinate voter registration drives and polling locations on campus.
- **Assistant Professor of Art Ron Geibel’s “Art and Activism” First Year Seminar** investigates the role art plays in social and political change. Students in this course will examine the ways in which artistic and creative forms of activism—from protest signs to graffiti—draw attention to injustice and offer alternative approaches to making change on a local, national, and global scale.

## Landscape

In the fall of 2023, Southwestern enrolled 1,459 students. Of these students, they represented the following subgroups:

All enrolled students	N	%
Pell recipient this semester	351	24%
Ever Pell eligible	438	30%
First-generation	289	20%
Hispanic	413	28%
Female	801	55%
Underrepresented groups*	555	38%
Non-traditional (25 or older)	40	3%
From a transfer cohort	172	12%
Received any financial aid	1417	97%
From outside of Texas	208	14%
Number of states represented	37	
Number of countries represented	22	

\*Underrepresented includes Hispanic, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or multi-race if at least one of the races is underrepresented.

### **Civic Engagement at Southwestern**

In terms of civic engagement, 72% of students responding to the 2022 NSSE survey reported that their experience at Southwestern University contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in being an active and informed citizen.

Southwestern's Paideia liberal arts curriculum encourages students to draw connections between their academic coursework to other campus life experiences and broader social issues and problems. In addition, all students take at least one course that provides them an opportunity to understand how difference is used in the maintenance of structures of power and inequality, as well as activism in which people engage to promote social justice. Institutional surveys confirm that the connection between our academic curriculum and co-curricular opportunities are promoting meaningful experiences for students.

In addition to the democratic engagement activities described above, Southwestern regularly has students participate in the Newman Civic Fellows program, the Annette Strauss Institute's Texas Civic Ambassadors program, and the Campus Vote Project's Democracy Fellows. For each of these programs, students take responsibility for different components of our broader strategy for democratic engagement; past fellows have created literature on how to register to vote on campus, integrated voter registration into first-year seminars and run educational programming in the lead-up to different elections. These student leaders work collaboratively with the Office of Community Engaged Learning and the Political Science Department to implement evidence-based strategies as part of the SU Votes Coalition. In doing so, they increase their own sense of political efficacy, understanding of the campus' political context, and knowledge about local and national political issues.

## **Goals**

Southwestern's Core Values promote the following actions:

- Cultivating academic excellence
- Promoting lifelong learning and a passion for intellectual and personal growth
- Fostering diverse perspectives
- Being true to oneself and others
- Respecting the worth and dignity of persons
- Encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good.

In line with these core values, we have several long-term goals that we hope to accomplish by 2025:

1. Increase students' self-efficacy in the context of politics and government, as captured in a campus climate survey developed in conjunction with the Campus Vote Project.
2. Increase voter registration (of eligible students) to 100% — increase from 90.5% to 100%
3. Increase turnout of high-potential student groups who, according to our NSLVE report, are disproportionately non-voters. Specifically, we hope to bring each of these groups up to the voting rate for the campus as a whole (70.8% in 2020):
  - a. Athletes

- b. Liberal Arts/Humanities majors
- c. Psychology majors
- d. STEM majors
- e. Students of color

SU's short-term goals for the 2024 election include the following:

1. An overall voting rate of 75% (2016: 51%, 2018: 51.8%, 2020: 70.8%)
2. Increased collaboration with student groups on campus through "SU Votes"
3. A voter registration rate of 95%, with encouragement to register using campus addresses.
4. A 5% average increase in the voting rate of students of color (from 61.5% in 2020 to 66.5 in 2024).

## NSLVE

Once we receive our NSLVE report for 2022, we will meet as a coalition to go over the numbers and discuss what they mean in our campus context. We'll use this information to inform our short-term goals for 2024, but also to plan future programming, outreach, and initiatives. As we did for previous voter engagement efforts, we will draw on the demographic data around gender, race, etc. to figure out which groups should be more specifically and intentionally targeted by registration, turnout, and education efforts in order to make access more equitable and inclusive. These approaches could take a wide range of forms, like collaborative events with organizations like Alpha Kappa Alpha or the Center for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, or specific framing in campus-wide communication to draw in certain groups.

For now, we draw on data from the last presidential election in 2020 in crafting our goals and informing our strategy. We have seen voter registration and turnout among Southwestern University students increase over the past 9 years. According to Southwestern's NSLVE reports,

- Voter registration rates increased 12.5 percentage points from 78% in 2014 to 90.5% in 2020
- In 2020, 78.2% of registered students voted in the 2020 election (for an overall voting rate of 70.8%). Not only is this turnout an increase from the university's previous overall voting rate in 2018 (52.3%) but it is also higher than the national average (66%).
- In 2020, about 14 percent of students voted on election day, while the majority (71%) voted early. This change, likely a result of COVID-19 concerns, is a decrease in the percentage of students voting on election day, but an increase in the percentage who voted early.
- Students of color voted at lower rates than white students in the 2020 election. While 75% of white students were estimated to have voted, 65% of Hispanic students, 60% of Asian students and only 54% of Black students cast a ballot. This discrepancy fuels our goal of a 5% average increase in the voting rate for nonwhite students and the strategy discussed below.

In 2018 the Texas legislature passed a law preventing the use of "mobile voting" locations during early voting—a practice that allowed us to host a polling place on campus for a single day of early voting. In response, Southwestern now hosts a polling location on Election Day. We seek to increase election day turnout relative to previous years.

# Strategy

We've used past voting data from the NSLVE report, as well as evaluations from past work plans to draft the following strategies to meet our goals listed above:

## **GOAL 1: Increase students' self-efficacy in the context of politics and government, as captured in a campus climate survey developed in conjunction with the Campus Vote Project.**

### I. *Voter education:*

Long-Term Strategy: Incorporate voter education into SU student life experience.

Short-Term Strategy: Provide resources and host events promoting voter education.

#### Tactics:

- *American Politics Assignment*
  - After discussing federalism, the effects of voter ID laws, and Texas election laws, students in an American Politics class will design voter education materials for the campus community.
- *Purchase and disseminate League of Women Voter of Texas 2024 General Election guides.*
  - Share guides at the "Voter Registration Stations" across campus.
- *Utilize campus spaces to share voter information*
  - Concourse banner inside Student Center.
  - Flyers on campus messaging boards
  - Moodle module on voter registration, what's on the ballot, and making a plan
- *Update and share [Southwestern's voting website](#).*
  - Highlight resources most relevant to student voters. Provide information on voter registration, voter education, and ballot access.

### II. *Voter turnout:*

Long-Term Strategy: Develop voting habits that will continue beyond life at Southwestern University.

Short-Term Strategy: Message getting out the vote during early voting and on election day.

#### Tactics:

- Continue to partner with Williamson County Elections Department to host an on-campus polling location.
- *Collaborating with Campus Vote Project*
- *Make a Plan to Vote*
  - To encourage our community to make a voting plan, we will continue the "Make a Plan" contest, in which students could earn bragging rights



for their favorite student groups on campus and win an "SU Votes" swag item.

- On Campus Polling Place on Election Day
  - Arrange a competition for student organizations to get their members to vote
  - Host an Election Day party that includes entertainment, food, and election day giveaways.

**Goal 2: Increase voter registration (of eligible students) to 100% – increase from 90.5% to 100%**

*I. Voter registration:*

Long-Term Strategy: Institutionalize voter registration as a part of the First Year or Transfer Seminar.

Short-Term Strategy: Register first year students to vote on campus or in their hometown.

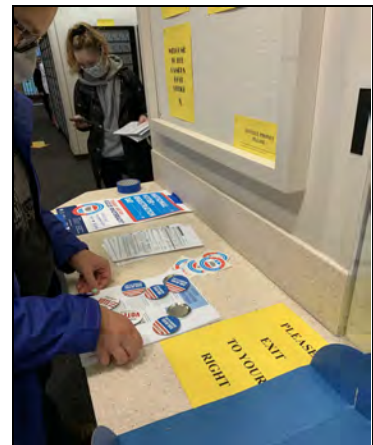
Tactics:

- Collaborate with the Welcome Week committee to include voter registration in First Year programming.
- *Register students to vote at the Fall Student Organization Fair.*
- *Present at the President's Welcome Dinner for first-years and register new students to vote.*
  - Update presentation to focus on 2024 Election
  - Collaborate with President's office to refine process.
- *Collaborate with Student Life.*
  - Pass out voter registration forms at Mosaic programs and events.
- *National Voter Registration Day:*
  - Register students to vote outside the student cafeteria.
  - Ask President Laura Skandera Trombley to send an email to all students urging them to vote. We believe this level of institutional support helped us achieve our goals and we will build on this support in future elections.

**GOAL 3: Increase turnout of high-potential student groups who, according to our NSLVE report, are disproportionately non-voters. Specifically, we hope to bring each of these groups up to the voting rate for the campus as a whole (70.8% in 2020).**

*II. Voter Education, Registration, and Turnout*

Long-Term Strategy: Use NSLVE report to identify high-potential groups and institutionalize a voting culture for this group.





Short-Term Strategy: Target outreach for Athletes, Liberal Arts/Humanities, Psychology, and STEM majors, as well as students of color.

Tactics:

- Continue to participate in NSLVE reporting.
- *Outreach to Natural Sciences, Humanities, and Psychology faculty and ask them to include voting information in their syllabus.*
  - Share sample syllabus language
  - Offer opportunities for students to visit classes to register other students
- *Host Taco Tuesday event to share information about voting and candidates.*
  - Collaborate with [MoveTexas](#) to provide voting resources
- *Collaborate with Athletics.*
  - Register voters at football games
  - Communicate voting information through coaches.
- Collaborate with the JEDI Center and CDSJ to increase awareness of on-campus registration and education resources.

## Reporting

Southwestern's Marketing and Communication Office will write a story showcasing the work of SU Votes! on the Southwestern University webpage. In addition, the OCEL will post about the coalition's effort's on their [campus website](#). Collaborating offices and departments will also share via social media. Southwestern's Action Plan and NSLVE reports will be posted on the OCEL website, as well as that of the All In Campus Challenge.

## Evaluation

Our short-term goals can be assessed easily through review of the 2022 NSLVE report, which will contain our overall voting rate and voter registration rate. To evaluate our success in increasing collaboration with a diverse range of student groups, we will track which groups (and how many) regularly send a representative to meetings of the SU Votes coalition throughout the fall semester.

We will track student efficacy and education through participation in the "Make a Plan" survey, and through other campus climate assessments. We will also continue to track how many students are registered by on-campus efforts and how many people from both Southwestern and the surrounding community use our on-campus polling location. This information is not only useful for the university, but can help us persuade the county that having the on-campus location is worth the resources expended.