



**Democratic Engagement Action Plan
January 2024-December 2025**

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Executive Summary

The St. Olaf College 2024-25 Democratic Engagement Plan was first drafted by Alyssa Melby (Program Director, Academic Civic Engagement, Smith Center for Global Engagement, and Campus Voter Coordinator) and Mazen Nour '24 (Civic Engagement Fellow & Election Organizer) in the Fall of 2023. This plan builds off the previous 2022-23 Democratic Engagement Plan, and will ultimately be adopted and implemented by the cross-campus Election Engagement Group, composed of students, faculty, and staff. The group is co-convened by Alyssa Melby (Academic Division) and Roz Eaton (Dean of the Students, Student Life Division). Feedback from the diverse constituents on the Election Engagement group and our Student Government Association was incorporated in November and December 2023.

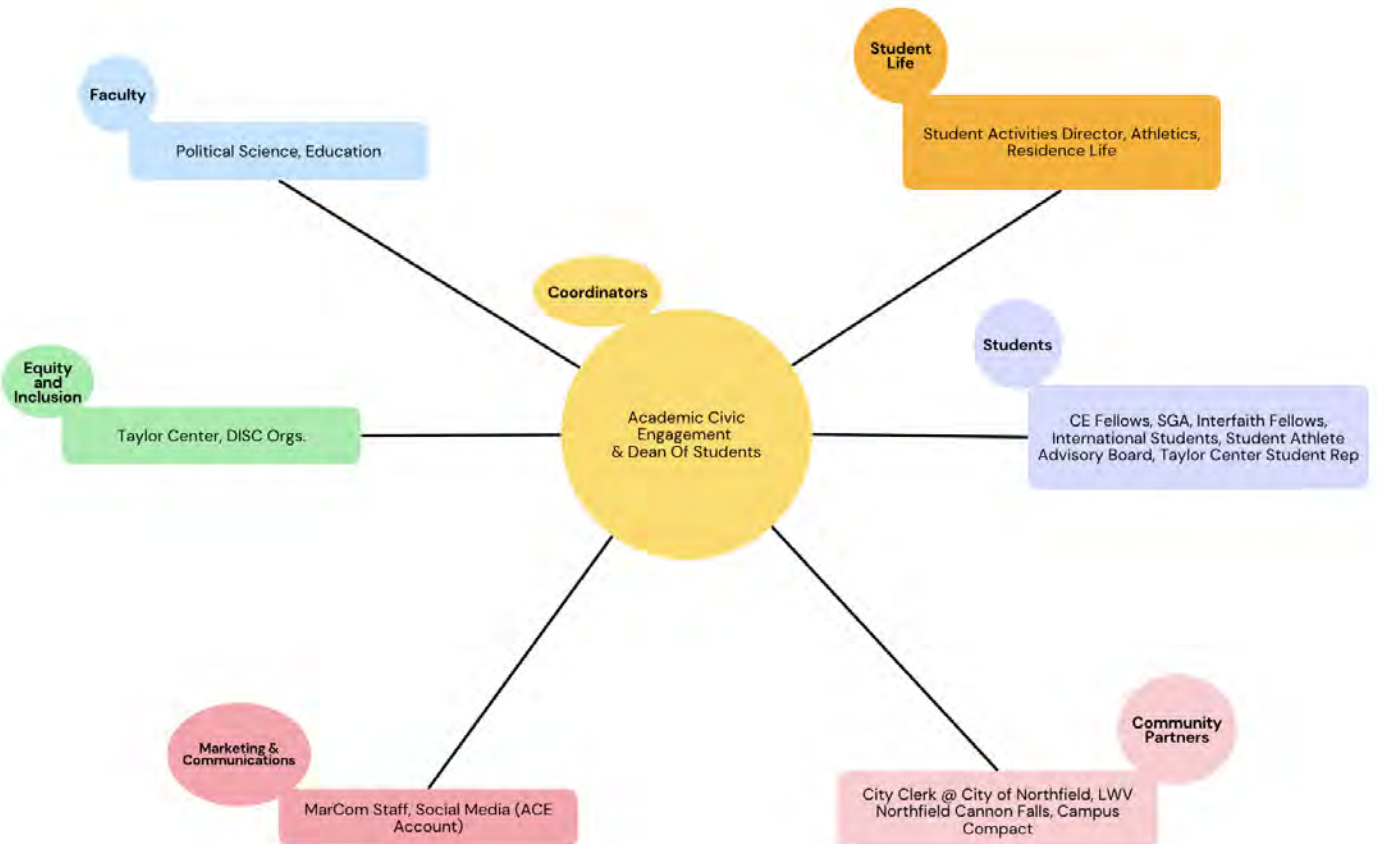
This action plan intends to comprehensively demonstrate existing and future actions, commitments, and priorities around democratic and civic engagement at the St. Olaf College campus in the 2024 and 2025 calendar years using the [Strengthening American Democracy Guide](#). This action plan continues to build on the demonstrated strong foundation of voting engagement within our community and works to deepen our year-round civic education and engagement activities. The activities within the action plan take myriad forms (virtual, hybrid, and in-person) as we attempt to increase access and meet students where they are at (which is often in digital spaces) and encompass both curricular and co-curricular programs for our short term goals of increasing voter registration and education and our long-term goals of deeper integration into the curriculum and fully closing the gap in voter turnout between our White and BIPOC students. In reflecting on what worked well in 2022-23, we continue to find areas for growth and future collaboration across various campus stakeholders and in the wider community. In addition, the 2023 MN State Legislature passed sweeping election law legislation (explained further in the Landscape section) that has consequential impact for how we conduct our election engagement efforts which will be noted throughout the report.

Respectfully submitted by
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Leadership

The Election Engagement Group started informally in 2019, primarily to coordinate logistics of the campus serving as a polling location. However, the group quickly morphed into a larger effort to consider student education and sustained conversation around civic engagement through the election and beyond.

The core group has regularly included staff and faculty representatives from the academic civic engagement office, student activities, Deans of Students, Political Science and Education departments, the Taylor Center for Equity and Inclusion, athletics, residence life, marketing and communications. In 2022-23, we added student representatives to the group and will continue to have representation from the academic civic engagement office (through the Election Organizer positions), the student government association (SGA), the Student Athletes Advisory Board, the Interfaith Fellow student organization, and the Taylor Center. While we don't have an active representative from our local elections office (City Clerk of Northfield) in our group, a group member is designated as a liaison to regularly communicate with them in the lead up to Election Day. Furthermore, Melby continues to serve as the St. Olaf College liaison on the board of the local League of Women Voters (LWV)-Northfield and Cannon Falls. This liaison role allows for regular communication and coordination of activities between the LWV and the campus community. A diagram of the group's composition by department/role is listed below, adapted from Inver Hills Community College shared at a LeadMN workshop in April 2022.



The vast reach of our working group members (8-10 regularly in attendance at meetings) within different divisions of the college allows for ongoing communication and engagement with a broader array of faculty, staff, and students. A major responsibility of all group members is liaising with others to invite them into the work. Further, our ability to have someone from our Marketing and Communications department allows us to consider messaging as it relates to larger college goals, branding, and social media efforts. Students also provide invaluable insight into relevant messaging and events that would appeal to their peers. The group will continue to meet monthly through January 2024, bi-weekly through August 2024, and weekly through November 2024. Monthly meetings will resume in December 2024 and continue throughout the rest of the 2025 academic year. Meetings are established via Google Calendar events that state the location (virtual or in person) of the meeting. As the group continues to coalesce, particularly in Fall 2024, we will break into working groups around the strategy areas listed below.

Some stakeholders are not currently involved that we have identified. In addition to the recent onboarding of student leaders from across the campus, the group is also actively working to recruit leaders from our DISC (Diversity Initiatives Support Committee) student organizations to continue to encourage and support affinity group get-out-the-vote efforts through an equity and justice lens. In addition, we are struggling to include more faculty in these efforts given bandwidth issues. We currently only have one faculty representative, but will work with the Provost to identify additional faculty who may have the energy and interest in serving.

The group is currently co-convened by Alyssa Melby (Program Director, Academic Civic Engagement and Campus Voter Coordinator) and Roz Eaton (Dean of the Students). They report to the Provost and Dean of the College (academic) and the VP for Student Life, respectively. The Provost, in particular, requests frequent updates on election-related activities in the six months leading up to the election.

If someone in the working group stops showing up and doing the work or needs to step away, we will first inquire of the person about their ability to continue, at what level they can commit to, and additional support we can offer. If unable to continue, we would then reach out to administrators in their division or organization and ask for other names of individuals who could step and carry the work forward.

Commitment

The St. Olaf College [mission statement](#) reads: “St. Olaf College challenges students to excel in the liberal arts, examine faith and values, and explore meaningful vocation in an inclusive, globally engaged community nourished by Lutheran tradition.” Our mission in practice statements expound on our mission where we work to “direct our skills and knowledge toward the good” and help students “help students envision their futures and develop their talents to address the needs of their many communities.” The concept of [meaningful vocation](#) underscores a key value at St. Olaf College, where vocation is understood as “Life on Purpose. For the Common Good.” Civic learning and democratic engagement are then embedded within

the idea of vocation and being civically involved in a “globally engaged community.”

Commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement are present in several aspects of our college-wide STO Goals, namely the [responsible interpersonal, civic, and global engagement](#) goal, whereby “students will develop knowledge, skills, and commitments for enhancing the well-being of peers, families, and communities” to, for instance, “participate responsibly and knowledgeably in public life.”

St. Olaf’s leadership is displaying a deepening commitment to this work. Our new President, Susan Rundell Singer, recently signed the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge’s Presidents’ Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation, which commits St. Olaf College to actively work toward the goal of full student participation in the 2024 election. This signing emphasizes the college leadership’s commitment to student participation in the electoral process and civic engagement. Additional resources were also allocated to support this work through dedicated student employment and staff funding as a result of the MN legislation changes, noted below. We anticipate that our Provost and President will continue to share information on voter engagement regularly throughout the upcoming election season to all members of our community--students, faculty, and staff--as was evidenced recently in the 2023 local elections through including voter registration deadlines in the weekly internal newsletter for faculty and staff.

In addition, while there is no explicit mention of civic learning and democratic engagement in the [current strategic plan](#), President Rundell Singer is embarking on a new strategic planning process in the 2024-25 academic year that centers on how we are “preparing solution seekers” to address the complex challenges of our time. There is explicit mention of civic and community engagement woven throughout the charges to the teams of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and Board of Regents who are working on the strategic plan, but it remains to be seen how this will unfold in new college goals and initiatives.

The general education curriculum at St. Olaf College, called the Ole Core Curriculum, was recently revised and began its inaugural year of implementation in 2021-22. While no Core attribute explicitly names civic learning and democratic engagement, there are multiple opportunities within the learning outcomes of various Core attributes where civic learning and skill development can occur and be woven into the curriculum, including:

- [First-year seminar](#), where students are “engaging with difference and different points of view,” “learning how to have difficult conversations,” and reflecting on “living in community.”
- [Power and Race](#), which has a specific focus on contemporary U.S. society where students should “demonstrate an ability to recognize and respond to different approaches to understanding cultures, as insiders or outsiders, which developing a sense of respect and humility,” and “practice skills and habits necessary for critical self-reflection and conversation, such as respect, recognition, courage, and cultural humility.”

- [Social Science](#), where students will “analyze social systems and human behavior within those systems.”
- [Ole Experience in Practice](#), where students will “evaluate skills and roles, including those that help them contribute to the community.”

Institutionally, St. Olaf College also belongs to several national organizations and coalitions who actively support civic and democratic engagement, including but not limited to [Campus Compact](#), [AAC&U](#) (and their new initiative, [Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement](#)), and [NASPA](#). We have and will continue to avail ourselves of resources and support from these groups as we implement this engagement plan.

How can we assess the efficacy of these commitments? Given the newness of the general education curriculum, no data is yet available for any of the attributes listed above, but as it becomes available, we will investigate where civic learning and skill development may be happening. A self-reported survey around perceptions of and growth in STO Goals, however, is administered to incoming first-year students prior to the start of classes, and to the same group of first-years and to graduating seniors in the spring semester. On the [most recent survey of seniors in Spring 2022](#), only 4% of respondents thought they had grown the most in the goal of “responsible interpersonal, civic, and global engagement,” and the subcategories within this goal were some of the lowest ranking in terms of the extent to which their St. Olaf experiences helped develop skills for responsible interpersonal, civic, and global engagement. Unfortunately, these numbers have not improved since the last time this survey was administered in 2019. The responses from this one survey invite us to consider ways in which other experiences at St. Olaf can be better framed and explicitly linked to this goal as well as providing more robust opportunities to engage in “responsible interpersonal, civic, and global engagement” through the activities of this democratic engagement plan and in other arenas.

Landscape

Nearly all 3,000 St. Olaf students are full-time, “traditional age” college students (ages 18-22). As of 2023, 22.8% of students at St. Olaf were students of color, and 66.8% were white. 9.9% were international students, with 96 countries represented. Of domestic students, 46.8% are from Minnesota. This geographic diversity leads to several considerations. First, with such a large international population, our engagement plan must include creative strategies to include students who, although unable to vote, are still afforded other opportunities to build their civic skills, habits, and mindsets. Second, as over half of the eligible students are from outside of Minnesota, our voting plan must include providing resources and support for students to decide between voting in Minnesota and voting in their home state.

College students in the state of MN are allowed to vote wherever they consider “home.” For those who do choose to vote in Minnesota, many external factors make it easier for our students to access the ballot. Individuals must have resided in Minnesota for 20 days prior to

the election (although they are allowed to register before the 20 day period has been met) and may pre-register to vote at least 21 days before Election Day or can register on Election Day at a polling place. One of our greatest assets is having a polling station on campus in our student commons combined with having a fairly small and highly residential campus. This results in the vast majority of students passing by the polling station on election day, significantly reducing the cost our student voters face of figuring out where and when to vote. Lines can be long, however, so in conjunction with offering the on-campus polling location, efforts also involve encouraging students to register early and vote early as they are able. For early voting, students must go to city hall which is a few miles away. Many students do not have their own modes of transportation, although there are a few public transportation options that students can utilize. There may be opportunities to consider incentivizing early voting to reduce wait times on Election Day.

In addition to these factors that were already in place for previous elections, the MN State Legislature passed sweeping legislation in 2023 to hold colleges and universities more accountable for encouraging students to vote and providing information in multiple ways. For instance, each campus must designate a campus voter coordinator (fulfilled currently by Alyssa Melby) to ensure that they are meeting all the new requirements, which include:

- Sharing voter registration information every fall and spring and, if done electronically, must be exclusively devoted to voter registration
- Maintaining a website with voter registration and voting information for both MN and other states
- Creating an voter engagement plan with goals and activities, resources to accomplish the goals and activities, individuals or key departments responsible for executing the goal and activities, and identification of the vote coordinator
- Reporting to the MN Secretary of State by November 30 each year on how and when voter registration information was shared with students

This democratic engagement plan takes into account these new requirements and points to the many ways in which we are exceeding them.

Many internal factors (in addition to the activities listed within the Commitment section) also make it easier from many different parts of the college who support election and democratic engagement efforts. Civic learning and democratic engagement is woven throughout many general education courses, but is most present in the work of:

- the [Public Affairs Conversation program](#), a one-year, two course sequence plus funded internship opportunity for sophomores, juniors, and seniors to pursue an interdisciplinary perspective on American public policy.
- the [Political Science department](#) which develops “the capacity to be knowledgeable, thoughtful, and effective citizens” to over 100 majors each year. The Political Science major requires at least one course in the subfield of “American Politics and Public Policy.” All of the 100 and 200 level courses in this subfield are open to both majors and nonmajors. Two of these courses, “Political Parties and Elections” and “The New Hampshire Primary and U.S. Presidential Politics” study away program, regularly have an Academic Civic Engagement component within the greater community.

- The [Social Work department](#) works with students throughout the major to “explore policies and programs that address social problems and enhance human strengths.” Each spring they offer a “Social Policy” course that looks at policies at the federal and state level and have regularly incorporated an ACE component of participating in the National Association of Social Workers-Minnesota chapter’s Day at the Capitol. In some iterations of this course, students also conduct letter writing campaigns on campus to share their thoughts about social policy legislation with elected officials.
- The [Environmental Studies](#) program regularly offers courses on “Environmental Policy and Regulation” and “Environmental Politics” which introduces many majors to the workings of policy with regards to environmental issues.
- St. Olaf recently approved a new and extremely popular concentration in [Public Health Studies](#) which “promotes a lifetime of informed civic engagement relevant to public health.” Students in the “Introduction to Public Health” are introduced to public policy and its impacts on public health and continue an examination of public policy through the capstone “Case Studies in Public Health.” Both of these courses have often carried an ACE component.

In the co-curriculum, St. Olaf maintains a robust Student Government Association that includes 150 students from all four years and with differing perspectives to make decisions and advocate for students on campus. Political Awareness Committee (PAC) and several nonpartisan and partisan political student organizations, including College Leftists, College Republicans, and Women in Law and Politics, that provide speakers, events, and other educational opportunities for their peers throughout the year.

Athletics has played an important role in encouraging voter engagement and participation both on and off campus at St. Olaf. In the 2020 election Ole student athletes were able to reach 100% voter registration (self-reported). Student athletes built excitement within the department and on campus using social media challenges, content and displays of pride. Student athletes worked polling events and wore “All Oles Vote” shirts on election day as leaders on campus. The department and coaches have also played an important role in supporting student athletes voting, taking the day off all mandatory athletic activity and by participating in and winning the ALL IN MIAC Votes conference athletic challenge during 2020.






Another avenue for both curricular and co-curricular civic learning occurs through the work of St. Olaf’s [Institute for Freedom and Community](#). The Institute maintains as part of its mission to “cultivate civil discourse with a liberal arts setting,” and does so through inviting nationally and internationally renowned speakers to share their ideas with the campus community, faculty seminars, and support of the [Public Affairs Conversation program](#). In addition, the Institute recently joined forces with [Constructive Dialogue](#), a research-based method for repairing civic culture by spreading the practices of curiosity, critical thinking, and constructive dialogue, across education systems and workplaces. The Institute is piloting this program in the Public Affairs Conversation program and several first year seminars with hopes of expanding use of this program during the 2024-25 academic year.

Despite these areas of strength, a few internal barriers have been noted from previous democratic engagement efforts. This shows up in that the election engagement group does not receive any explicit funding and relies fully on funds provided through the Academic Civic Engagement budget, other areas of the college, and/or grant funding. Furthermore, student leaders have shared that they have encountered a growing disillusionment with democratic engagement among their peers, particularly in recognition of the historical harms and injustices that have been committed by the same democratic system that we are inviting them to participate in. Student organizers are strategizing about messaging to invite further conversation around this reality and lived experience of their peers.

The college's encouragement to participate in civic engagement and the democratic process as seen in the commitment statements and its activities invites students to develop civic habits and see this as one of many roles that constitutes their own sense of vocation. A [2021 Higher Education Data Sharing \(HEDS\) Alumni Survey data](#) illustrates that 88% of our alumni say that St. Olaf helped prepare them for "social and civic involvement." Invitation, however, does not always equate to development as another data point conflicts with the HEDS Alumni Survey. When Seniors on the [National Survey of Student Engagement \(NSSE\)](#) were asked, "How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development" in "being an informed and active citizen", they scored significantly lower than all the other comparison groups. Furthermore, the college has room to grow in fostering a more inclusive political climate on campus. In a [report to the Board of Regents](#) in Fall 2021 that reported on the most recent data from the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE), (NSSE), Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), and HEDS Alumni Survey, found the following:

- There was generally a less supportive environment for those of different political affiliations than those of different sexual orientations, gender identities, and religious affiliations (2).
- Incoming first-year respondents expected more frequent discussions with students who differed from them (in racial/ethnic background, economic background, or religious or political beliefs) than they actually experienced during their first year. Senior respondents at St. Olaf, as [compared to respondents at other institutions](#), were also less likely to engage with people with different political views. This data is similar to previous administrations of these surveys.

The State of Voting: St. Olaf 2020 Election Results

1		Registered Voters	93.9% of eligible voters were registered to vote!
2		Voter Turnout	87.6% of eligible voters voted!
3		Racial Discrepancies	89% of eligible white students voted, while 81% of Black students, 82% of Asian students, 77% Hispanic students, 56% of multi-racial students voted
4		Registration Improvement	3% increase in voter registration
5		Voting Improvement	6% increase in voter turnout

St. Olaf won the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge’s award for highest voter turnout in the country in 2020. The question becomes: how can we keep this momentum going, address our gaps, and translate these successes to a midterm election?

The first consideration that needs to be kept in mind from our historical National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data is that the difference between registration rate and voting rate during midterm elections is much larger than during major election years.

In 2016, the registration rate was very similar to 2020, at 89.9% but the voting rate was 70.8%. There is a similar trend for 2020. *How can we close this gap between registration and turnout for all students in the midterms?* (We don't yet have 2022 data, but anticipate that some of the trends will remain. We will update our plan accordingly when we have received it.)

The second consideration our data illuminates is a discrepancy between voting rates for white students and voting rate for students of color. White students voted at 89% while Black students voted at 81% and Hispanic students voted at 77% in 2020. This difference was much larger in the last midterm election with black students voting at 48%, hispanic students voting at 53%, and white students voting at 74%. *How can we begin to close this gap, too?*

The third consideration, not listed above in the graphic but present in our NSLVE data from 2020, is that first year students voted the most. 22-24 year olds voted at a much lower percentage (61%) than 18-21 year olds (81%). This may be because 1) the vast majority of our students who live off campus (~200) are within this older age bracket, meaning that if they

choose to vote in Northfield, they cannot vote on-campus and must vote at another polling location in Northfield. 2) Nearly half of the Election Ambassadors came from the American Conversations program which is designed for first- and second-year students, and their networks are likely to more reflect their class year. *How can we do a better job of engaging older students?*

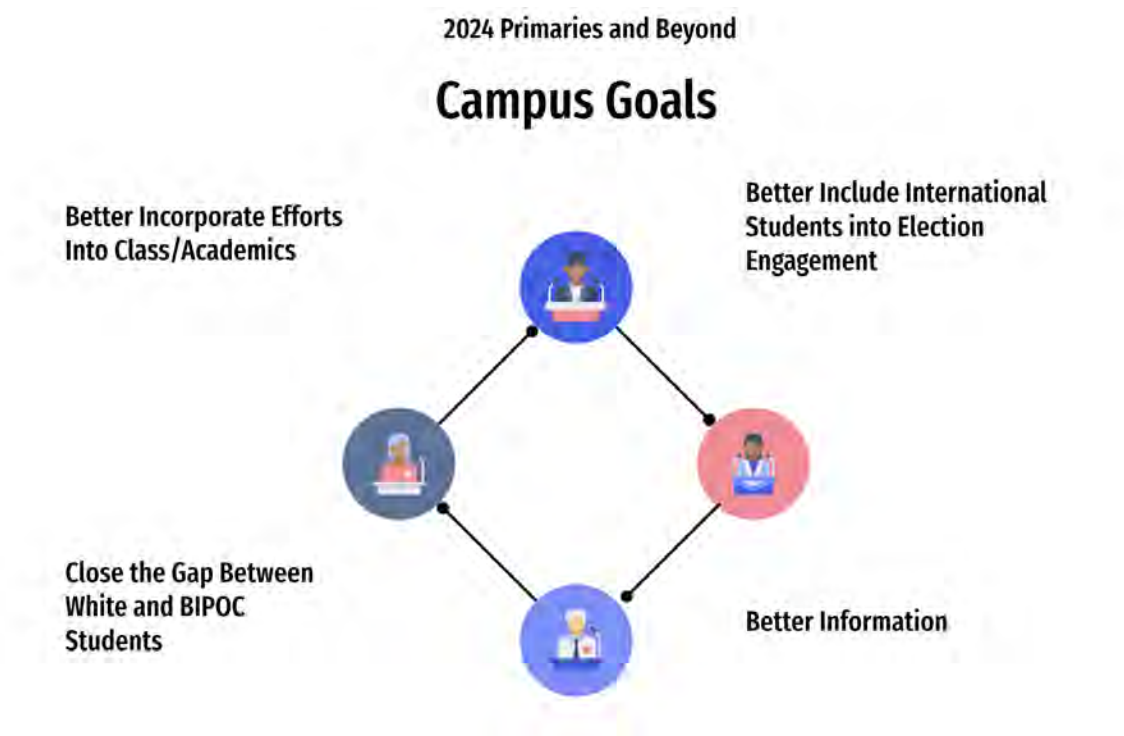
Goals

The Election Engagement Group identified the following long-term goals:

- By 2028, identify concrete opportunities in campus planning (including the new strategic plan), learning outcomes, academic departments, and funding for explicitly addressing civic learning and democratic engagement
- By 2032, fully close the gap between the voting rate of white and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) eligible students

The Election Engagement Group identified the following short-term goals:

- Better incorporate efforts into academics
- Offer more opportunities for international students in democratic engagement
- Close the gap between White and BIPOC students
- Better educate students about election engagement options, including where they can vote, how they can vote, and where to find information on candidates and issues



The ultimate measurable outcomes of these short-term goals is to:

- register 95% of eligible students
- have an overall voting rate of eligible students of 90% during the 2024 presidential election.

- close the voting rate gap between white and BIPOC students to within 8 percentage points for all disaggregated racial groups (percentage may change based on 2022 NSLVE results)
- design and develop at least two programs targeted towards international students' civic engagement
- have at least four additional academic departments or programs outside of Political Science, Environmental Studies, Social Work, Public Health Studies, and the Public Affairs Conversation program committed to election and democratic engagement work

Strategy

We commit to a variety of strategies involving many different groups, organizations, and individuals on campus in order to fully involve the entire student body in our democratic engagement efforts. The strategies will be largely spearheaded by various members of the Election Engagement Group and the student election organizers. Many of these strategies have been used successfully during the 2020 and 2022 election cycles, although refinements and improvements are listed below.

Core Strategy: Election Ambassador program

The crux of our strategy plan will center on implementing the successful peer-to-peer Election Ambassador program that invites eligible students to complete a voting plan and pledge.

In 2022, 63 trained “Election Ambassadors” collected over 950 Pledge to Vote forms (out of 2659 eligible voters on campus, a 36% response rate). Election ambassadors were recruited from two Academic Civic Engagement (ACE) courses as well as student leaders of athletic teams, music ensembles, and student organizations. They each participated in a 30-45 minute training prior to soliciting their peers to complete a Pledge to Vote form. In addition to 1-1 peer mobilizing, seven general tabling events were hosted throughout the fall that were staffed by ambassadors.

For 2024, we recently hired five students to serve as “Student Election and Democratic Engagement Organizers” to serve as the core students to spearhead strategy implementation. These election organizers will be charged with:

- ***Running the Election Ambassador program, including recruiting and training Election Ambassadors during the Spring and Fall 2024 terms.*** The Election Ambassador program will utilize our framework from 2020 and 2022 to discuss how to contact students in a nonpartisan way, inform them on the basics of voting (students can choose where--home or school, types, location, sample ballot), and walk through the “Pledge to Vote” google form. The training will also review expectations for follow-up between the ambassadors and their pledges on important dates, such as “Vote Early Day” and Election Day (if they have not already indicated that they voted absentee or early). We hope to maintain a similar number of election ambassadors (~65-70) as in previous years.
- ***Utilizing connections with other students organizations to recruit a diverse group of election ambassadors,*** such as DISC (our multicultural student org umbrella), music ensembles, and athletic teams, as well as through Academic Civic Engagement courses. In particular, by engaging with DISC organizations and intentionally recruiting BIPOC election ambassadors, we envision that we will be able to reach a larger network of students which will contribute to closing this gap. This recruitment effort will begin in March 2024. We hope to have a representative percentage of our ambassadors identify as BIPOC (~23%).
- ***Brainstorming creative outreach efforts.*** Election ambassadors will not only be encouraged to look within their current networks but encouraged to look just beyond

their immediate spheres in an effort to broaden their reach through in-person activities and social media. The election organizers will work with ambassadors to brainstorm creative outreach strategies, such as emailing everyone in the directory with the same first name (a successful strategy that was used in 2020 by one student!). In 2022, Election Ambassadors planned and executed a “Pledge to Vote Donut & Cider Social” on the campus quad area the morning of Saturday, October 8. This event provided much needed visibility to the work in a midterm year. The whole election engagement team was in attendance, and all remarked on how successful they felt it was in its energy and conversations it sparked with their peers. We plan to host another event similar to this one in Fall 2024.

- **Helping with other voter recruitment and education efforts**, along with the Election Ambassadors. These will likely include voter registration tabling events throughout the fall, including staffing a table at the co-curricular fair where we hope Pres. Rundell Singer and the SGA president can be in attendance; delivering class raps, or short 5-10 minute in-class presentations about registering to vote; and holding nonpartisan debate watch parties.

One thing we have noticed in the Election Ambassador program is that Ambassadors tend to stay very strictly within their own networks, which on the one hand is exactly what the program hopes for AND we know that there will ultimately be some students who are not asked. In 2022, in order to incentivize Ambassadors to go slightly beyond their immediate networks, they were given both t-shirts and tote bags to help promote voting across campus. As funds permit, Election Ambassadors will receive swag (t-shirts, stickers, buttons, etc.) to identify them as Election Ambassadors and as a thank you for their work!

Strategies for Education

Curriculum

First, over the summer, the ACE office will update information on the VOTE website that faculty can easily plug into their syllabi and/or coursework. If time permits, staff and organizers will create modules in Moodle, our classroom learning management system, and/or slide decks of information for faculty to use.

Second, in early August, the faculty representatives on the Election Engagement Group will send out an email encouraging faculty to commit to any number of actions in and through their classes to promote election engagement, including but not limited to:

- Discussing the “nuts and bolts” of voting with their class
- Discussing the election and/or public policy in general and how it intersects with topic(s) in the course
- Hosting a class rap (5-min. Student presentation on election and voting 101)
- Including important election related dates in syllabi and/or Moodle

- Including a link to the St. Olaf VOTE website and/or the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Platinum Ribbon in their email signature
- Incorporating Moodle modules and/or slide decks on voting and elections into their course
- Giving extra credit for attendance at any election education event
- Allowing students to vote during class hours if they indicate they have no other time to do so
- For first year seminar instructors, reinforcing the information they learn about voter registration in their complementary SOAR (St. Olaf Orientation to Academics and Resources) sessions with their peer mentor. The SOAR program has already committed to incorporating a module on voter registration into its program (pilot in spring 2024; fully implemented in fall 2024).

Third, faculty will be invited to host an election ambassador or organizer in their class to conduct a “class rap,” and simultaneously, ambassadors will be encouraged to ask faculty whom they are taking courses from for space to a class rap in that course. The class rap is a model from LeadMN for a brief but quick 5 minute overview of how to register to vote, how to find out your options for voting (home or school, absentee or in-person), and to encourage their fellow students to pledge to vote using their form (and increase the number of pledges they get for the incentive program). The ACE office will provide Election Ambassadors with a template for asking their faculty for 5-10 minutes of class time, as well as a script for the class rap. The organizers will also do intentional outreach with faculty in a department or program with a high percentage of BIPOC students, such as Race, Ethnic, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; Social Work, and Sociology/Anthropology, as another strategy for closing our demographic gaps in voter turnout.

In 2022, the “class raps” done by election ambassadors were executed in 29 different classes. Election ambassadors worked to get class raps in classes of majors that had a higher percentage of BIPOC student majors (psychology, art & art history, race & ethnic studies, social work, asian studies). Of 27 total class raps completed, 11 were in those majors listed above. In addition, two other faculty in these majors committed to sharing our VOTE website with their classes and another class rap was done for the executive council (student leaders) in the Taylor Center for Equity and Inclusion.

Fourth, to address some of our long-term goals of integration into the curriculum, the following strategies will begin to be implemented during this democratic engagement plan:

- Advocate for and find alignment with opportunities for civic and democratic engagement in the new strategic plan that the college is undertaking during the 2024-25 academic year. The plan will be unveiled once approved by the Board of Regents in May 2025.
- Map major/program intended learning outcomes with civic learning and democratic engagement during 2025. A gap analysis can then be conducted, conveyed to academic leadership, and subsequently changes can be advocated for within individual majors and programs.

Co-Curriculum

First, the election organizers and Election Engagement Group members will work together with staff from the Taylor Center for Equity and Inclusion on programming that directly invites participation from our international and non-US citizen students. For instance, in 2022, a hallway display was put up during National Voter Education Week to emphasize civic engagement for non-US citizens, as well as specific information showing how to vote in some of the top countries represented at St. Olaf College from the college. Through this hallway display, international students were interviewed to broadcast international perspectives on civic engagement both abroad and in the United States. This served to promote ways on how non-US citizens could be civically engaged, offer different perspectives on civic engagement, and provided information on how to absentee vote from the United States in other countries abroad. Additional programming will be co-created with student leaders from the international student organization groups.

Second, the ACE office and election organizers will commit to hosting at least three campus-wide educational events or initiatives around voting (its importance, the process, restrictions, etc.) in addition to those listed below in the “other strategies” section. Topics suggested by community members include how to look for and thwart misinformation campaigns, how to caucus, and what the Electoral College is, but may also include non-partisan candidate meet and greets or town halls to allow students to share what issues are of concern to them. This would serve as an informal opportunity for meeting and learning more about candidates as well. While the College Democrats and the College Republicans will likely do some of their own partisan campaigning on campus, these meet and greets would be nonpartisan in their invitation to and inclusion of all candidates for particular races. Related to this idea would be to focus on candidates for local offices to encourage students to learn more about the “down ballot” voting options.

A few events that are already in the planning process include:

- Caucus Training (early February)
- Student panel with NH Primary & U.S. Presidential Politics course attendees (February)
- Co-Curricular Fair tabling (mid September)
- National Voter Registration Day (Sept. 20) tabling
- League of Women Voters Northfield and Cannon Falls Candidate Forums (date early October; streamed from Northfield City Hall)
- Donuts & Democracy tabling event (early October)
- National Voter Education Week Hallway Display

Communication Strategies

Website

The primary source of communication will be the [VOTE website](#), which will serve as a central hub for information on all things election and democratic engagement. Faculty, staff, organizers, and ambassadors will be encouraged to link to the website in their email signatures and share through their networks.

The website currently contains the necessary requirements for the new state legislation, including information on registering to vote in MN and in other states, a timeline with deadlines for voting (registration, absentee, early voting, etc.) in MN and links for where to find that information for other states; and the Campus Vote Coordinator's information. In addition, there are sections of the website dedicated to our campus political policies, information for non-US citizens, and ideas for faculty who wish to incorporate the election into their courses. The website will also house this democratic engagement plan and the 2022 NSLVE data (once released).

Another big part of the website will involve the sharing of information about candidates for political office. In 2022, election organizers made a Zine that provided general information on where candidates stood on issues, as well as information on making the decision of where to vote- home or Northfield?, information on the timeline of the election season, and logistics for voting. The Zine ballot guide proved to be quite helpful to students, with tabling events hosted to distribute said Zine. In the fall of 2023, the St. Olaf Student Government Association was consulted on whether the Zine was helpful or not, and a consensus was arrived at that another one would be produced in 2024. Thus, in 2024, The Zine voter guide will be spearhead by the election organizers but require the collaboration of the two primary political student organizations, the St. Olaf College Leftists and the St. Olaf College Republicans. The Zine will again live on the VOTE website and, as funds permit, be printed and distributed on campus. To be as inclusive as possible the Zine's messaging will be informed by the [Intentional Voter Engagement Messaging while Addressing Systemic Racism](#) guide. If time and skills permit, Election Organizers will also create short "Voting/Election 101" videos to share via social media and on the VOTE website.

Emails

College administration will send general emails to update students on voter registration and upcoming elections. As required by new state legislation, every fall a general email will be sent on voter registration information to the all student alias. The email will be sent on one of the following civic holidays: September 17 (Constitution Day), September 19 (National Voter Registration Day), and during National Voter Education Week (first week in October). As required by new state legislation, every spring within the first week of spring term and before the pre-registration deadline, a general email will be sent on voter registration information to the all student alias. On any election day within the scope of the democratic engagement plan

(Presidential Primary, August Statewide Primary, November General Election, or and any special election day), an email from campus administration will remind students of the election and polling place requirements regarding political insignia.

Members of the Election Engagement Group will also send targeted communication to specific audiences:

- The ACE office will work with **Residence Life** beginning in January 2024 to send targeted email communications to students living off-campus about a) confirming their current off-campus address if they wish to be included in the housing list for election day registration (per the new state legislation), and b) where to find information about their polling location in Northfield.
- The **Smith Center** will send one targeted email per term to students studying abroad/away to inform them of key election information and how to vote absentee/by mail.
- The **Office of Student Activities** and **Residence Life** will send information about a competition between residence halls for the highest percentage of completed “pledge to vote forms” as was done in 2022. The winning res hall will have a party in November 2024 to celebrate.
- The ACE office will work with our **Marketing and Communications** office to share information with faculty and staff about election deadlines and HR policies related to voting, how to ensure visibility of the VOTE website on the St. Olaf website, as well as the overall communication strategy listed in this plan.

Social media

The organizers will be responsible for developing a social media strategy and engagement plan for the [ACE Instagram account](#). This will likely include leveraging social media campaigns from our many partners (ALL IN, SLSV, Ask Every Student, Civic Holidays, etc.) as well as devising more local content regarding deadlines and candidate information.

Other Strategies

St. Olaf is fortunate to have champions for democratic engagement in all corners of the campus.

The St. Olaf **Athletics** is a leader in our conference and in the nation for their dedication to civic engagement. The MIAC is a national leader in the “All-IN” Initiative, setting a standard for other institutions in the realm of athlete involvement and the number of coaches who pledge their commitment. Coaches will be asked to sign the ALL-IN MIAC Conference Pledge and assist with recruiting election ambassadors through their teams and/or the student athletic advisory board.

The ACE office will work with the **student government association** to gather feedback on voter registration efforts (per new state legislation), to ask student senators to share election deadline and education information with their respective constituencies (particularly the class senators and the disability and access senator), and to recruit election ambassadors.

Residence Life will assist with accurate collection of addresses of students who live off-campus to comply with new state legislation around the housing lists that the college must provide to the county. We are also investigating how we might encourage Resident Assistants to incorporate election info into floor events and use res hall bulletin boards to share election information.

St. Olaf's **Flaten Art Museum**, in collaboration with ACE, will host an exhibition around St. Olaf's long history in civic and democratic engagement will be hosted in Fall 2024. The exhibition, which also coincides with the college's sesquicentennial, will include enlarged reproductions of college archives photos of student election engagement, along with ephemera such as buttons, lawn signs, and Mess (college newspaper) issues. An open-call community art wall will invite creative submissions and posters around civic and democratic engagement, and a table filled with election information will be set up throughout the entire exhibition.

To further collaboration with other groups at St. Olaf, ACE will also work with the **Institute for Freedom and Community (IFC)** to bring forth a series of speaker events both pre-election and post-election 2024. Pre-election, the IFC will work to bring paired guests on a variety of topics including US foreign policy, abortion, and tax issues. The pre-election series will be held with the goal of finding nuanced perspectives to further engage democratic engagement on campus. The post-election series will bring about experts to speak about MN state politics and national politics. ACE will work with IFC to more fully implement Constructive Dialogues on campus and encourage the building of civic dialogue skills. The IFC has also committed to have their student staff serve as election ambassadors and offer "drop-in voter registration help" in their office.

Post-Election and 2025 Engagement Strategies

The aforementioned strategies all deal largely with the run-up to Election Day 2024, but we know that democratic engagement needs to happen all year round! In the post-election phase and through the remainder of calendar year 2024, we commit to the following:

- Monthly meetings of the Election Engagement Group
- Comparing data from MN voter rolls and Pledge to Vote forms to dig deeper into how our peer-to-peer networking program is actually reaching students and helping to close our demographic gaps in registration and turnout.
- Continued dialogue with, support, and collaboration of the various nonpartisan programs and activities of the Student Government Association and other nonpartisan student orgs, such as the Political Awareness Committee
- At least one educational event each term (guest speakers, panel discussions,
- Mobilizing and encouraging more active advocacy and observation of civic processes, including but not limited to:
 - Lobby Days, such as the Minnesota Private Colleges Council and other affinity- and issue-based days at the MN Capitol
 - Attending and observing local government meetings, such as Northfield City Council, the various boards and commissions with the City of Northfield, and the Rice County Commission

Reporting

The 2024-2025 Democratic Engagement Plan and NSLVE results will be publicly accessible on the [VOTE website](#). We will share our plan with key stakeholders in the following ways:

- In the email asking faculty in August to pledge to election engagement activities. The link will also live within the pledge form.
- An update from the Student Life Committee chair at the first all-faculty meeting in late August/early September.
- An all staff email or an update at the first all-staff meeting of the year in September.
- At all Election Ambassador trainings.
- As a link in the students' "Pledge to Vote" form.
- Shared on the [ACE Instagram page](#)

Evaluation

Evaluating our previous election and democratic engagement related data provided an essential foundation for the creation of this current plan. A similar assessment and evaluation process will be critical in informing future work. The purpose of our evaluation efforts in 2024-25 will be to better understand the following questions:

1. How effective were the core strategies--the VOTE website and the Peer-to-Peer voter mobilization program--at increasing knowledge about the elections and democratic engagement, at increasing student voter turnout, and closing voter turnout gaps?
2. How effective were other strategies at increasing knowledge about the elections and democratic engagement and at increasing voter turnout, and closing voter turnout gaps?
3. How might these efforts impact the political climate at St. Olaf in two key indicators: a) Having discussions with people across different political viewpoints, and b) Contributing to knowledge, skills, and personal development in being an informed and active citizen?
4. How did faculty help support election and democratic engagement efforts in their classroom?

Evaluation efforts will take multiple forms and involve various leads involved in the Election Engagement Group and others.

1. Ongoing, informal feedback will be requested from the election organizers in the form of a brief, four question reflection that they are required to complete at the end of each pay period. This reflection asks them to share what they completed in the past two weeks, what is immediately forthcoming, what challenges they faced, and how the ACE office can better support their work moving forward. This will also be an opportunity for them to share what they might be hearing and learning from the ambassadors about how the student body as a whole is responding to democratic engagement strategies.
2. We will continue to rely upon our colleagues in the [Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment](#) offices to send in our information to NSLVE and to administer the various surveys that touch upon political climate and democratic engagement, including BCSSE, NSSE, HEDS Alumni Survey, and the STO Goals survey, according to our assessment schedule. With results from these surveys, the Election Engagement group will continue to monitor quantitative data on aspects of questions #1-3 above. All of these institutional survey results will be shared publicly on the college's website.
3. Prof. Chris Chapp (Political Science) has again committed to in-depth analysis of our pledge to vote form data alongside MN voter roll information and NSLVE data (once available) to better understand if we are closing the gaps between White and BIPOC student voter turnout and the rate of registered but non-voting students and those who turn out to vote, in particular through our emphasis on hiring BIPOC election organizers in the 2022 election cycle. This project may again include student researcher(s) in the implementation. Analysis of results from the 2020 election were shared at the May 2022 [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Symposium](#) at St. Olaf College, and Prof. Chapp is planning on turning this research into an article in the near future to share with academic journals.

4. To address question #4, the faculty representatives on the Election Engagement group will send a brief survey to their faculty colleagues at the end of the Fall 2024 to inquire who engaged with the election through their courses and how.
5. A survey will be administered in early 2025 to the Election Ambassadors to assess the actions they undertook in the peer-to-peer mobilization process, the perceived impact of their actions, and their utilization of information and resources, such as the VOTE website.
6. When feasible, brief post or post-then-pre surveys will be administered at the end of class raps, election education events, and Election Ambassador trainings as an indirect measure of growth in election-related knowledge to address questions #1-2. When possible, the ACE office will work with applicable faculty and students in relevant courses in the design, implementation, and analysis of these surveys.

The Election Engagement Group will analyze findings from the other above sources and incorporate them as reference points as they work on creating the next democratic engagement plan in Summer and Fall 2025. The group will reference the long- and short-term goals within this plan and evaluate what goals were met or improved.