

Our Commitment to Democracy: 2020 Edition

Stony Brook University

This version of our 2020 action plan is in its earliest draft form and will receive considerable review and update in the months ahead. We expect a complete action plan to be published no later than May 2020. Please refer questions to Steven Adelson, Coordinator of the Center for Civic Justice at Stony Brook University, at steven.adelson@stonybrook.edu.

Executive Summary

Our Commitment to Democracy is a comprehensive report about efforts throughout the Stony Brook University community to cultivate, develop, and empower our students to make educated and informed decisions in upcoming elections. The development of a complete action plan will include representation from throughout the campus community, including students, faculty, staff, and senior administrators. We will also look to include members of our surrounding communities as necessary and appropriate.

The complete action plan will address three areas of voter engagement to support our students and their right to vote:

- Voter registration
- Voter education
- Voter turnout

With a majority of our students situated on our Stony Brook and Southampton campuses in New York, and with additional students pursuing online education throughout the nation and students studying abroad in the short and long-term, the complete action plan will address the unique needs of the individual student.

Stony Brook University has developed action plans for student voter engagement in past years, and we will seek to continue to demonstrate our commitment to our students and their right to vote through documenting our efforts. With the establishment of the Center for Civic Justice as a formal unit in August 2019, Stony Brook University has institutionalized its commitment to student voter engagement, positioning our students for even greater success moving forward.

The complete action plan will detail efforts that occurred during the first five months of 2020 (January through May), and will further detail efforts to follow during the seven months to follow (June through December). We will also look to include longer-term goals as part of the

complete action plan as necessary and appropriate. Furthermore, we will look to update the complete action plan at least one every three months moving forward.

At the moment, the Center for Civic Justice is responsible for the implementation of the complete action plan with support from throughout the campus community. Steven Adelson, Coordinator of the Center for Civic Justice, is the point of contact for the complete action plan.

Leadership

There are efforts underway to seek to intentionally bring together representation from throughout the Stony Brook University community to develop and implement this complete action plan. Representation to be sought may include, but is not limited to:

Academic Affairs

Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)/Advancement on Individual Merit (AIM), Graduate & Professional Education, International Education/ Global Affairs, Journalism, Political Science, Psychology, School of Health, Technology, & Management, School of Social Welfare, Sociology, Student Orientation & Family Programs, Study Abroad, Undergraduate Education

Student Affairs

Campus Residences (Undergraduate & Graduate/Professional/Families), Center for Civic Justice, Commuter Student Services and Off-Campus Living, Multicultural Affairs, Southampton, Student Accessibility Support Center, Student Community Development, Student Media, Veterans Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs & Dean of Students

Additional Campus Units

Advancement, Athletics, Community Relations, Employee Unions (CSEA, PEF, UUP), Government Relations, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), University Senate

Student Organizations

Graduate Student Organization, Student Political Organizations (College Democrats, College Republicans, etc.), Undergraduate Student Government

Community Partners

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Alliance for Youth Organizing, Andrew Goodman Foundation, Campus Vote Project, NASPA, Net Impact, National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, Up to Us, #VoteTogether, Vote Everywhere, Young Invincibles

Local Elections Office

We will seek to work with our Government Relations team to foster a meaningful and impactful partnership with the Suffolk County Board of Elections.

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Representation from throughout the Stony Brook University community is sought from the above campus units because each is positioned to meet the unique needs of individual students who they engage with on a regular basis. With support from the wider group, it is proposed that each campus unit will assume some degree of responsibility for implementing voter engagement initiatives to meet the unique needs of their individual students.

We are in the process of finalizing a vision for the wider group, at which point outreach will be conducted to the leaders of each of these campus units to identify appropriate representation. The wider group consider all of the different ways in which students interface with the institution, and as additional ways are identified, additional outreach for representation from such campus units will be conducted.

Before the wider group is formed and a vision is set, support from the highest levels of the institution are being sought. This will offer necessary legitimacy to the work being conducted and establish a greater sense of buy-in from throughout the campus community. Following confirmation of support, a frequency of meetings of the wider group, and a frequency of and set of methods of communication among the wider group will be determined.

Commitment

During our Interim President's State of the University Address in 2019, it was made widely evident that the success of our commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is apparent and needs to be continued moving forward. The Center for Civic Justice and its works to develop and implement successful student voter engagement was highlighted. Additionally, the establishment of the Center for Civic Justice as a formal unit in August 2019 is further demonstration of a longer-term commitment to these areas. The success of our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts are regularly communicated through internal and external channels (newsletters, news stories, etc.).

Our commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement has been largely co-curricular, but there is significant interest to explore ways in which to integrate within the curricular experiences of students and connect the curricular and co-curricular more effortlessly. There are some steps being taken to accomplish this in 2020, and will be further reported upon in our complete action plan in the months ahead.

Moving forward, we will look to articulate the ways in which civic learning and democratic engagement are included in a student's curricular and co-curricular experiences while being connected to the institution's mission, vision, and strategic plan. Given the recent prioritization of civic learning and democratic engagement at Stony Brook University, we will look to include these areas as a consideration in future strategic planning processes.

Landscape

As previously mentioned, we will look to articulate the ways in which civic learning and democratic engagement are included in a student's curricular and co-curricular experiences, which should include campus learning outcomes. This includes:

- Identifying courses that integrate civic learning and democratic engagement;
- Identifying courses that identify civic learning and democratic engagement as one or more course learning outcomes;
- Identifying departments that integrate civic learning and democratic engagement; and
- Identifying specific initiatives that focus on these areas.

Based on our understanding of our students and campus, there is a strong willingness and desire for democratic participation that requires integrated learning experiences, intentional outreach, and a culture shift.

Looking specifically at data as it relates to student voter turnout, and comparing such data to peer institutions from 2012 to 2018, Stony Brook University has shifted from being well below the average to at or above the average. Additional information about data will be provided in Section 7 of this draft report.

Historically, there were limited resources allocated to co-curricular civic learning and democratic engagement, with many of the initiatives fully supported by students, faculty, and staff as volunteer (secondary, tertiary) responsibilities. However, that changed with the establishment of the Center for Civic Justice as a formal unit. This includes one full-time employee, institutional space to conduct activities, and an institutional budget for growth and development, as well as sustainability of such activities.

In order to position our students for success moving forward, with our Government Relations team, we will explore ways in which to more closely partner with our local elections office.

Existing internal and external resources, both financially and rooted in expertise, are significant to the success of our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. At the moment, we are able to meet the needs of a significant percentage of our undergraduate students. Moving forward, in order to support the needs of our over 27,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, additional financial resources will need to be identified and secured.

Goals

From voter registration to voter turnout, the proposed long-term vision for our student voter engagement efforts is completely institutionalize voter engagement for all students while meeting the unique needs of the individual student. Civic learning and democratic engagement should be an innate part of the campus culture moving forward.

We want to position our students to be active and engaged citizens during their time at Stony Brook University, which will increase the likelihood of continuing such behavior upon graduation and moving forward with their personal and professional lives.

Examples of goals the wider group will consider include:

- By 2020, we will increase student voting rates to at least 65 percent, an increase of 11.8 percentage points from 2016.
- By 2022, we will intentionally integrate voter registration as part of the orienting experiences of all undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.

- By 2022, we will increase student voting rates to at least 50 percent, an increase of 13.2 percentage points from 2018.
- By 2024, we will increase student voting rates to at least 75 percent.
- By 2026, we will increase student registration rates to at least 95 percent.
- By 2026, we will increase student voting rates to at least 60 percent.

In our complete action plan, we will demonstrate that our goals are S.M.A.R.T.I.E. (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound, inclusive, and equitable).

As part of the process of the wider group, we will look to identify short and long-term goals, with short-term goals focused on institutional changes and long-term goals focused on outcomes around student registration and voting rates. We will need to consider existing and future resources as part of the goals development process.

Strategy

In order to support our students and their right to vote, our work will be focused in the three areas previously mentioned:

- Voter registration
- Voter education
- Voter turnout

The following are some of the proposed ways in which we might be able to address the needs of our students, and a wider group will consider these and other ways, which will be documented in the complete action plan:

Voter Registration

- Offer voter registration as part of orienting experiences for most new first-year and transfer students
 - Identify communities within these student populations not captured as part of new student orientation and partners with the appropriate campus units to meet the unique needs of such students
- Identify ways in which to offer voter registration as part of orienting experiences for new graduate and professional students
- Conduct follow up with students to check their voter status and ensure their voter information is current, and if it needs to be updated, support their needs

- Identify ways in which conduct intentional follow up in courses with support from faculty and instructors
- Send campus-wide emails, and through other mediums of communication, to students before elections with reminders about checking their voter status, identifying their polling locations, and reaching out with any questions they might have beforehand
- Maintain comprehensive website with student voter information
- Support 50-state voter registration model
- Identify ways in which to intentionally support absentee voting for students
- Identify ways in which to support voter engagement for international students seeking to vote in elections abroad

Voter Education

- Offer a robust series of curricular and co-curricular learning experiences focused on voter engagement
 - Create small and large-scale spaces to discuss issues affecting communities and the ways in which we can address these issues together
- Create accessible content to learn about candidates running for elected office at local, state, and federal levels and their positions on various issues

Voter Turnout

- Send campus-wide emails, and through other mediums of communication, to students before elections with appropriate reminders
- Identify ways in which communities within our student populations can be a nonpartisan method of increasing student voter turnout
- Host a celebration during elections to foster a sense of civic pride on campus
- Host debate, primary, and election watch parties

The wider group will seek to identify more specific activities and initiatives to address these voter engagement needs. As part of the process of the wider group, campus units will be identified to lead each activity or initiative based on their expertise and their ability to meet the unique needs of individual students who we are seeking to support through such efforts. Each activity and initiative will be intentional and have an intended purpose connected to the short and long-term goals for student voter engagement.

Based on the activities and initiatives identified, a comprehensive timeline and calendar will be created to ensure such efforts are complementary, not duplicative or in conflict. The timeline will include the conceptualization, development, and implementation phases of such efforts.

Moving forward, the wider group will seek to differentiate among short and long-term goals, with a primary focus on the months leading up to elections in 2020.

NSLVE as a Resource for Colleges & Universities

[2014 Report](#)

[2016 Report](#)

[2018 Report](#)

Reporting

The complete action plan will be made publicly available on the Center for Civic Justice website, and it is proposed to communicate the complete action plan as necessary and appropriate to students, faculty, staff, and other members of the Stony Brook University community. As of 2019, our 2014, 2016, and 2018 NSLVE reports are public on the Center for Civic Justice website.

As participating campus of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, our complete action plans and NSLVE reports are available on their website as well.

Evaluation

As part of our evaluation process, we want to ensure we are meeting the needs of our students, and the activities and initiatives offered to meet these voter engagement needs are indeed effective. The evaluation process will inform changes to our commitment, which will be reflected in future versions of the action plan.

Some of the things we will want to identify through our evaluation process include:

- Number of students engaged in individual activities and initiatives
- Impact of activities and initiatives on student voter engagement
- Feedback about activities and initiatives from students

Evaluation should focus on students, but there should also be an evaluation process for other members of the Stony Brook University community involved in the conceptualization, development, and implementation of such efforts.

Any evaluation process will need to be developed in partnership with our institution's institutional research area. The evaluation process should be intentional and ongoing, capturing the student experience in as real time as possible, and consider the institution's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Analysis of the data received should be shared through future versions of the action plan.

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