



**CAMPUS  
DEMOCRACY  
CHALLENGE**

**Susquehanna**  
UNIVERSITY

## Susquehanna University 2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Developed by: Rolfe Peterson, Associate Professor of Political Science and Malcolm Derk, Chief of Staff

### **I. Executive Summary:**

Susquehanna University is a small, private, liberal arts institution with approximately 2150 undergraduate students. Our team began to develop practices and initiatives in pursuit of increasing Susquehanna's rates of voter registration and turnout. Our group and the accompanying social media campaign is entitled "Achieve, Lead, VOTE" (hereafter referred to as "ALV"). This slogan, coined by one of our own students—is an extension of our campus values which are achievement, leadership, and service—making ALV a campaign that is both unique and recognizable to Susquehanna University. Unique branding of the ALV campaign includes the use of Susquehanna's mascot, Benny the River Hawk, promoting voter registration and engagement. Our enduring outcomes have been the following;

- 1) To educate/inform the campus community about the voting process and the importance of voting.
- 2) To empower and encourage our students to actively participate in democracy and exercise their right to vote in each election which they are eligible.

Thus far, we have become partners with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Campus Vote Project, PennPIRG and a member institution of the Pennsylvania Student Voting Coalition (PASVC).

Our immediate short-term goals include:

- Connect with leadership from the Black Student Union about voter engagement in the fall semester to increase black student voting rate to at least 50% this voting year
- Tabling to get students to "pledge to vote" through studentvote.org to reach a voter turnout rate of at least 66% in this voting year
- Developing social media outreach techniques to incentivize students to vote in the 2024 Presidential election

- Connecting with student organizations and clubs to develop voter turnout competitions and awards amongst members as well as with other student organizations
- Develop a cross-campus outreach method on National Voter Registration Day to ensure students get registered
- Providing students with clear directions to existing polling places.
- Offering transportation to and from polling locations.
- Prior efforts included strong leadership from a single member of the university faculty. This year the key leadership team has expanded to include the VP for Student Life, Faculty lead, and Chief of Staff to further diversify the team and include membership from faculty, staff, and student focused offices. This will also help provide continuity in leadership in case any single key leadership role changes.

Our long-term goals include:

- Securing a polling place on campus or a single polling place for campus addresses (currently the campus straddles two polling locations).
- Provide institution-wide lenience to attendance policies on election day.
- Develop a Voter 101 course on Canvas in partnership with faculty and staff
- In partnership with Residence Life and RA's, incorporate voter registration training into orientation and training.
- Continue building and enhancing the ALV website to increase accessibility to voter resources

Ideally these initiatives will yield better rates of voter registration and turnout over time. Immediate micro improvements as well as institutional level changes are needed to eliminate the social and institutional barriers which currently hinder student voting. We hope that ultimately the work of ALV will shift campus culture, normalize and systematize voting as a part of the Susquehanna student experience, and cultivate a collective understanding that civic engagement is accessible to everyone, and a necessary aspect of one's growth and development into a productive and educated citizen.

The following plans and practices have been a collective effort of our ALV team and developed in partnership with the constituents and participants listed below.

- II. ALV has facilitated talks, watch parties, tabling sessions, open houses via zoom, lead non-partisan campaigns, and made other tremendous efforts since the time of its inception. These efforts are outlined in further detail below.

### **Leadership**

Our leadership team includes the following:

Francy Magee, VP of Student Life

Malcolm Derk, Chief of Staff

Rolfe Peterson, Associate Professor of Political Science

Meryl Czeponis, Student Coordinator and CVP Fellow

Margaret Bachman, Student Coordinator

Carrigan Honeyfield, Student Life

Noah Cassil, Student Volunteer

### **Leadership Training and Succession Plans:**

With the support of ALV Committee members, faculty and staff involved in leadership with the ALV Committee will independently seek alternative leaders to take on their role should they leave the institution, committee or take long-term leave.

Similarly, student leaders graduating or leaving the institution will conduct outreach to identify another qualified candidate to take their place whether within their student organization or curricular sphere.

All student leaders involved with the committee will engage in some form of formal training whether through the ACLU Voter Ambassador Training or in collaboration with leadership from Student PIRGS.

### **Commitment**

Our campus has signed the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. Susquehanna University's commitment to civic education and engagement is encapsulated in our Achieve, Lead, Vote motto. Our civic mindedness is set at the top of our campus with our President and runs throughout campus to our faculty, staff, and students. Resources are used to engage, encourage, and educate students from civic talks and programs to social media posts to signage and branding. The President encourages voter engagement in his Opening Convocation remarks to all first-year students and accompanied a group of students to Harrisburg for the PA Student Voting Summit. Additionally, the President emailed all students, faculty, and staff on Constitution Day/Voter Registration Day to encourage members of the campus community to register and vote in the upcoming election. SU is also committed to delivering or mailing all registration forms and mail-in ballots at no cost to our students.

Our campus has used the following methods to communicate with students about the election:

Email communications, posting on institutional social media channels, in campus newsletters, in classrooms conversations and visits, speeches during meetings, displaying content in a MyNest network "tile," as well as posters and signage on campus.

## Fall 2024 Engagement Events

- Activities Fair Registration Table (Aug. 28<sup>th</sup> )
- Presidential Debate Watch Party and Voter Registration (9/24)
- Constitutional Campfire: National Voter Registration Day and Constitution Day (9/17)
- Celebration of voter registration, the Constitution, and S'mores.
- [Vice Presidential Debate Showing and Voter Registration](#) (10/1)
- Voting Rights Dramatic Play and Voter Registration Event

**Oct. 2, 7 p.m.**

Isaac's Theater

Just before lockdown in 2020, *Pageant of Agitating Women* by Monica Prince and Anna Andes premiered at Susquehanna University to honor the centennial anniversary of the ratification of the 19th amendment, securing voting rights for women in the United States. But did everyone have the right to vote then? In *Do Not Let Your (Voting) Ancestors Regret You*, a 2024 micro reprisal, Prince and Andes bring together a few of the original performers to ground the historical importance of suffrage in America, followed by a voter registration drive. Come see some of the women who made it possible for all of us to vote—and celebrate over a hundred years of activism protecting this essential right.

- Presidential Debate Watch Party, Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day,
- **National Voter Education Week 2024 starts Sunday at SU with Lawn Games!**

Kick-off Event: Lawn games with the Johnson Center for Civic Engagement

Deg Lawn 1-3 (Rain location in Charlie's Lounge with a movie)

Voter registration available!

- **National Voter Education Week 2024 continues this week**

**October 7:** "Cheese, Don't Forget to Vote" sponsored by SAC in Mellon Lounge 12-3 p.m. Free cheesecakes (first 200), and voter registration available

**October 8:** "Sip, Sing, Vote" Mocktails, S'mores and Karaoke with SGA & Charlie's, 7 p.m. in Charlie's and on the Deg Lawn. Voter registration available

**October 10:** Study Night!! Get a start on your mid-term studying and enter a raffle for prizes, Charlie's Lounge 7 p.m. Voter registration available



**Landscape**

Our campus demographic and voting data: Our voting rates for 2014 and 2018 were 8.6% and 29.5 % respectively. While we saw a significant improvement between 2014 and 2018, we aimed to see the voting rate reflect the majority of our eligible students. In 2020 our voting rate increased to 74%, earning us the award for “most improved voter turnout in 4 years.” We have approximately 2,200 students living on campus during an ordinary year. Susquehanna is a predominantly white Institution with approximately 78% of our students being white. Our breakdown of male identified to female identified students is about even.

**Racial and Ethnic demographics**

American Indian/Alaska Native	5	0.23%
Asian	32	1.47%
Black/African American	153	7.04%
Hispanic/Latino	142	6.53%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	2	0.09%
Non-Resident Alien	27	1.24%
Two or More Races	69	3.18%
Unknown	110	5.06%
White	1633	75.15%

**Grand Total** **2173**

Minority 403 18.55%

	2022	2023	2024	Y/Y
Domestic First-Year	574	568	606	+38
International First-Year	4	10	4	(6)
<b>Total First-Year Students</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>+32</b> <sub>(+5.5%)</sub>
Domestic Transfer	36	45	33	(12)
<b>Total New Students</b>	<b>614</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>+20</b> <sub>(+3.2%)</sub>

Class of 2028 select demographics

- Twenty-one percent come from ethnically diverse backgrounds.
- Thirty-one percent are first-generation college students.
- Twenty-three percent are student-athletes.
- Thirty percent are Pell eligible, up 3 percent from last first-year class.

Upcoming Election Dates for the Fall of 2024 are posted on our Achieve, Lead, Vote website. We utilize resources from the PA Department of State directly on our website.

# 2024 General Election Important Dates



Last day to register to vote in the election.  
[vote.pa.gov/Register](https://vote.pa.gov/Register)



Last day to apply for a mail ballot.  
[vote.pa.gov/MailBallot](https://vote.pa.gov/MailBallot)



Election Day. Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
[vote.pa.gov/Polls](https://vote.pa.gov/Polls)



Completed mail ballots must be received by 8 p.m.  
[vote.pa.gov/County](https://vote.pa.gov/County)



Get ready to vote  
[vote.pa.gov](https://vote.pa.gov)

## Goals

Our campus democratic engagement goals are:

Short-term goals are to:

- Connect with leadership from student clubs and Greek life to increase participation.
- Tabling to for voter registration and getting students to pledge to vote
- Connecting with student organizations and clubs to develop voter turnout competitions and awards amongst members as well as with other student organizations with particular attention to diversity clubs.
- Develop a cross-campus outreach method on National Voter Registration Day to ensure students get registered
- Develop a Voter 101 course on Canvas in partnership with faculty and staff.

Long-term goals are to:

- Secure a polling place on campus
- Increase turnout in midterm elections to 40% (from 30.8% in 2022)
- Increase turnout in the general election to 80% (from 74% in 2020)
- Provide institution-wide support for students on election day
- In partnership with Residence Life and RA's, develop a training event each semester, such as the ACLU Voter Ambassador Training, with Ras to ensure they can provide voting resources to residents and students
- Continue building and enhancing the ALV website to increase accessibility to voter resources
- Utilize GivePulse platform and TurboVote to track and assess voting and civic engagement efforts
- Increase engagement with students and permanent connections to student groups to contribute to leadership
- Encourage engagement in the long term and not simply during election season for our students
- Embedding voter registration and civic education using long term strategies

### **NSLVE**

Susquehanna University has authorized NSLVE. Our NSLVE from 2022 shows a large disparity between midterm and general elections. For example, turnout in the 2022 midterm election for our campus was 30.8%. Conversely, our general election turnout in 2020 was 74.6%. While this is unsurprising given the natural variation of turnout between midterm and general election cycles across campuses in the study, it does provide a potential aspirational goal to increase participation in both election types. The report also shows disparities between racial groups on campus which prompts us to focus strategy to make voter participation more equitable.



## Voting, Registration and Yield Rates

### YOUR INSTITUTION

**30.8%**

2022 Voting Rate

**+2.8**

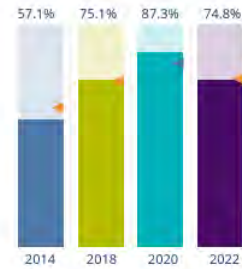
Change From 2018

### ALL INSTITUTIONS

**30.6%**

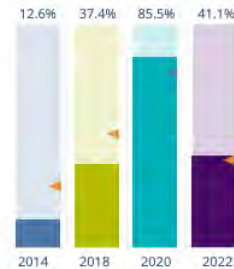
2022 Voting Rate

### REGISTRATION RATE



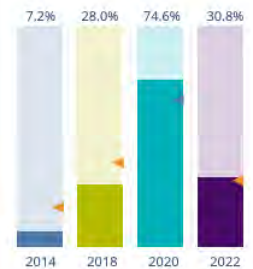
The **Registration Rate** is the percent of your voting-eligible students who registered to vote.

### VOTING RATE OF REGISTERED STUDENTS



The **Voting Rate of Registered Students** is the percent of registered students who voted on Election Day. We often refer to this as the "yield" rate.

### VOTING RATE



The **Voting Rate** is the percentage of eligible students who voted on Election Day. The voting rate is also the product of the registration and yield rates.

Our registration rates are strong (87.3% in 2020) and improving from lower registration rates in 2014 and 2018. Turnout rates between midterm and general elections usually show a sharp difference, and our campus also displays this trend; far more students turn out in the general election (2020) than our midterm elections. However, our voting rate in midterm elections is trending in a positive direction from only 7.2% in 2014 to 30.8% in 2022.

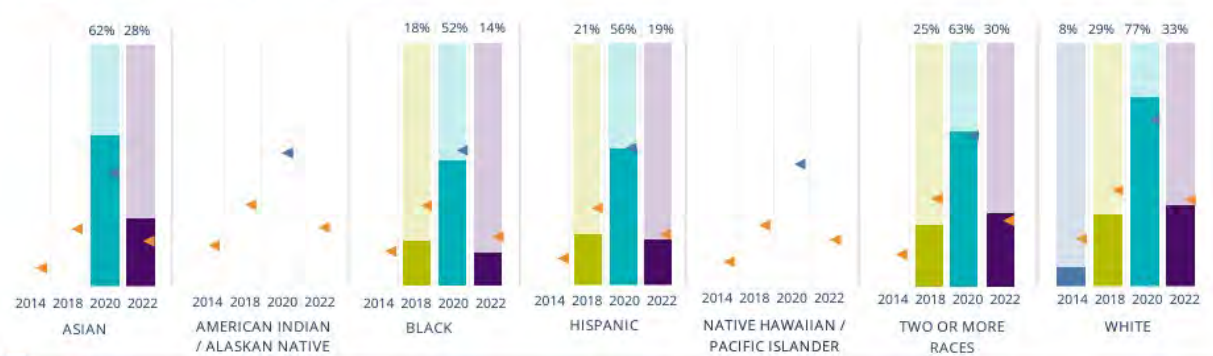
# Looking Closer

## Voting and Registration Rates

	2014	2018	2020	2022	2018-2022 Change
Total Student Enrollment	2,146	2,363	2,315	2,246	↓ -117
Age under 18/Unknown	49	52	25	69	↑ 17
IPEDS estimated non-resident aliens	35	36	24	-	-
Datasource	IPEDS	IPEDS	IPEDS	NSC	
FERPA records blocked	65	334	408	-	-
Non-Degree Seeking Students	27	29	-	-	-
Total eligible voters	1,970	1,911	1,852	2,177	↑ 265
Number of students who registered	1,125	1,435	1,617	1,629	↑ 194
Number of students who voted	142	536	1,383	670	↑ 134
Registration Rate %	57	75	87	74	↔ 0
Voting Rate of Registered Students %	12	37	85	41	↑ 3
Voting Rate %	7	28	74	30	↑ 2

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## By Race / Ethnicity



One area of future strategic importance is that our turnout rate of non-White students is substantially lower than our White student population (52% vs. 77% in 2020). This informs our strategy of increasing outreach and efforts to register and help students of color exercise their right to vote.

**By Sex**

	2014			2018			2020			2022			2018-2022	
	Enrolled	Voted	Rate (%)	Enrolled	Voted	Rate (%)	Enrolled	Voted	Rate (%)	Enrolled	Voted	Rate (%)	Change	
Female	1,115	80	7	1,127	344	30	1,083	831	76	1,253	451	35	↑	5
Male	890	62	6	820	192	23	794	552	69	922	219	23	→	0

Female students on our campus have increased their participation over the last few election cycles, while male participation has remained stable.

### Strategy

**Strategies and Tactics:** Our campus has used the following strategies and organized the following events as we will continue to do for the upcoming election periods. Our dominant strategy is to increase voter engagement through personal contact and campus events and conversation:

#### **Top Tier**

- In-person voter registration drives, In-person voter education events (e.g. film screenings, debate watch parties, lecture series on Voting 101, etc.), Classroom voter registration presentations and registration sessions led by faculty and voting ambassadors. Our classroom visits are particularly focused on First Year Seminar courses with students who are participating in their first election.
- Fall 2024 student organization “take the pledge to vote” tabling drive prior to November general elections
- Facilitated several Voter Education Week events (10/7-10/10) including multiple events across campus (see the “Commitment” section of this document).

#### **Second Tier**

- We have injected an online voter registration link into several existing processes including but not limited to new-student orientation and our SU Mobile app.
- National Voter Registration Day social media posts and Constitutional Campfire Engagement event
- ALV Interactive webpage (consistently being updated)
  - <https://www.susqu.edu/about-susquehanna/in-the-community/achieve-lead-vote>

- Canvas course for all students (currently under construction, will be published soon). This Canvas course will be accessible to all students, all year round, and will include resources and instructions for registering to vote, voting, why it is important to vote, and finally getting involved with ALV efforts on campus.
- We collaborate with our CVP fellows on campus as well.
- High involvement with ALV across many areas. Student leaders involved, athletics involved, and faculty involved. This is how we intend to move the needle towards institutional & cultural change.

### **Third Tier**

- We have added the registration link in several places on the Susquehanna website, on our SU mobile app, and on physical flyers in residence halls.
- Social Media Engagement, regularly posting, reposting relevant content, and advertising events.

### **Evaluation**

We will evaluate our action plan in the following ways:

We hope to see significant increases in our registration rates and voting rates for 2024. This data will be reflected and easily accessible through our 2024 NSLVE report. We also hope to see positive, institutional level changes and implementations for the long term. For example, we hope to have a polling place on campus at Susquehanna University, and university vans available to bring students to polling sites for the foreseeable future. Additionally, we eventually hope to conduct surveys, polls, and focus groups of students and their perception of the accessibility of voting information, the voter registration application, and accessibility to the polls.

Our primary metrics will continue to be registration and turnout numbers for our campus. However, we will also continue to use engagement activities themselves as signs and metrics that the campus is committed to civic engagement.

### **Reporting**

We will report our campus action plan and NSLVE reports in the following ways: Our action plan will be posted on our campus website and shared with the campus community. Our campus NSLVE reports will be posted on our campus website and shared with the campus community. We will also use our civic engagement and voter turnout numbers from the NSLVE on our Achieve, Lead, Vote website and various materials promoting civic engagement on campus. Our campus action plan will also be posted on our page on the ALL IN website.