

Swarthmore College Get Out the Vote Committee 2022-2023 Action Plan

May 29, 2022

I. Executive Summary

This plan is the work of the Get Out the Vote (GOTV) committee of Swarthmore College, which includes representatives from the staff, faculty, and student body. We are a nonpartisan group charged with educating students (particularly first-time voters and traditionally underrepresented voters) on their voting rights and positioning them to participate in our democratic process. We do this, in part, by focusing on voter registration and voter turnout at all primary and general elections. Our aim is to increase participation in the voting process regardless of political party affiliation. Swarthmore was named a 2021 “Voter Friendly Campus” by the Campus Vote Project. One of 231 colleges nationwide to receive such a designation.

The GOTV committee was called to action by Swarthmore College President Valerie Smith in February 2018. President Smith believes in government by all the people. She appreciates the power of the vote as an expression of one’s individual voice within the democratic process. President Smith convened GOTV, in part, in response to a report from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) which showed that Swarthmore’s overall voting rate had fallen below the national average in the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections. This plan builds on and continues the work undertaken in plans from [2018](#) and [2020](#) and establishes a roadmap for 2022-23.

As we draft this plan, we are mindful of the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community. While the campus has returned to “normal operations,” the cumulative effect of the ongoing pandemic has left some students feeling overwhelmed and anxious — resulting in a (what we hope is temporary) dip in participation in co-curricular activities. And, as we refine our outreach strategy for the upcoming election cycle, the GOTV committee is also considering how the voting behavior of students may have been altered by their COVID experience (e.g., is the significant increase in mail-in voting an anomaly or a permanent change in behavior*) and how that might impact our approach. As we continue to navigate the uncertainties of this health crisis, we will adapt our activities for increased student voter engagement as circumstances warrant.

The GOTV committee will oversee planning, assessment, implementation, and evaluation of its goals in collaboration with our on-campus and off-campus partners. Because the committee’s work is ongoing, this plan is as well. It will be a “living document,” updated regularly throughout the 2022-23 academic year to reflect new opportunities, changes, and outcomes.

—Pam Shropshire, committee chair, May 2022

**According to NSLVE in 2016, 23% percent of Swarthmore students voted “not-in-person” with 71% voting in person. This compares to 63% voting “not-in person” in 2020 with 20% voting in person.*

II. Leadership

The GOTV committee is led by Pamela Shropshire, Special Assistant for Presidential Initiatives in the Office of the President. Staff and faculty members of the committee are invited to join based on their known passion for the cause and/or because they bring helpful insights generally, or specifically in the context of Swarthmore’s campus and culture. Student members are involved in democratic engagement as members of SwatVotes (a Swarthmore student voting group), as Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows, and/or as Inclusive Excellence Fellows from Swarthmore’s Office of Inclusive Excellence and Community Development.

The GOTV Committee

The GOTV committee coordinates efforts across campus to increase Swarthmore student voter participation. The committee meets in person eight times a year with additional planning and conversation in between meetings.

First	Last	Department	Title	Affiliation
Ben	Berger	Political Science/ Lang Center	Associate Professor of Political Science & Executive Director of the Lang Center	Faculty
John	Blanchar	Psychology	Assistant Professor of Psychology	Faculty
Nusaybah	Estes	Lang Center	Civic & Environmental Engagement Fellow	Staff
David	Foreman	Provost’s Office	Director of Institutional Relations	Staff
Roy	Greim	Communications	Assistant Director of Communications	Staff
Emily	Higgs Kopin	Library	McCabe Library Digital Archivist	Staff
Estrellita (Star)	Longoria	Dean’s Division	Director of Residential Communities	Staff
Jeremy	Loomis	Athletics	Head Women’s Tennis Coach	Coach/ Instructor
Frannie	Richardson	Class of 2023		Student

Pamela	Shropshire	Office of the President	Special Assistant for Presidential Initiatives of the Office	Staff
Gigi	Simeone	Dean's Division	Health Sciences/Pre Law Advisor	Staff

Campus Partners

Student Groups:

- SwatVotes

Faculty/Staff:

- Advancement
- Athletics Division
- Communications
- Dean's Division
- Department of Political Science
- Department of Psychology
- Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility
- Office of Inclusive Excellence and Community Development
- Office of the President
- Office of the Provost
- OneCard Office
- Registrar's Office
- Swarthmore College Libraries

Off-Campus Partners

- All-In Campus Democracy Challenge
- Ballotready.org
- Borough of Swarthmore
- Campus Vote Project
- Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Tufts University
- Pennsylvania Student Voter Coalition
- Students Learn, Students Vote
- Vote.org
- Voter Friendly Campus

III. Institutional Commitments

Swarthmore's commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is rooted in its Quaker history and values. Social justice, solving global problems, and supporting local communities are integral to the Swarthmore experience. Evidence of this tradition can be found today across campus in formal and informal settings and in the fulfillment of our mission statement which reads, in part, that students are encouraged to "*flourish and contribute to a better world.*" Specific examples of this commitment follow.

As Swarthmore College plans for the next chapter of our history, we are bringing members of our community together to begin the work of the College's next **strategic plan** — the first such initiative in more than a decade. One of the broad areas of focus for this plan is preparing our students to participate in a multiracial democracy. Through this process, the College is exploring how to equip students, faculty, staff, and alumni to lead and thrive in light of current and anticipated trends and growing threats to democratic institutions, in the U.S. and across the globe. This strategic plan will explore how disruptions in higher education, including changing demographics, growing inequality, heightened polarization, and emerging lessons from the pandemic, shape our understanding of Swarthmore's contributions to the common good. The plan will explore different ideas of leadership, the qualities essential during a period of great disruption and deep divisions, and ways we can remain open to and in conversation with diverse viewpoints within our communities.

The **Committee on Social Responsibility** is the College's only board committee composed of board members, students, faculty and staff. It is charged with reflecting upon the College's commitment, in association with the fulfillment of its institutional mission, to prepare and motivate students to engage issues of social responsibility facing our communities and societies and to set their own paths as responsible citizens toward sharing a more inclusive, just, and compassionate world. Through its ongoing programming — like the one featuring former US Attorney General Eric Holder on democracy and voting rights — the committee convenes important cross constituent conversations and engages our students on what it means to live and thrive in a multiracial democracy.

The **Eugene M. Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility** facilitates Swarthmore College's commitment to intellectual rigor, ethical engagement, and social responsibility by connecting curriculum (formal coursework and related research), campus, and communities. These communities include the proximate communities of Chester, Pennsylvania, and the greater Philadelphia area; more distant community partners around the country and globe; and the community of scholars and practitioners, including Swarthmore College faculty, who share knowledge and best practices regarding ethical action and civic engagement. The Lang Center connects the College's curricular excellence with engagement in all of those communities using an approach that builds upon Ernest Boyer's concept of "Engaged Scholarship." Building on the success of the Lang Center, the College's comprehensive campaign ***Changing Lives, Changing the World***, which concluded June 2020, raised \$98 million for programs that enhance Swarthmore's social impact in local and global communities. These programs include sustainability research and advocacy, socially responsible leadership and entrepreneurship, and deepening connections to our local community through programs.

Swarthmore is committed to fulfilling its federally mandated commitment to provide access to voting resources for all students. The 1998 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 included a mandate that required institutions of higher education to engage in certain voter registration activities during years when there are elections for federal office, governor or other chief executives within the state [HEA Section 487(a)(23)]. More recent legislation, enacted by Congress as part of the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act, revised the law to allow institutions to comply with the mandate through electronic distribution. The Registrar's Office took responsibility for ensuring that Swarthmore was in compliance with the law from 1998 to 2017. From 2018 to the present, the President's Office and the Swarthmore Get Out the Vote committee have ensured compliance and sought to creatively support students in ways that exceed these expectations.

IV. Landscape and Background

Background

Swarthmore College has offered registration and voting information (including absentee voting information) for years via the College website, emails to students, and distribution of paper voter registration forms. Several offices and student groups on campus have made efforts over the years to encourage registration and voting, including debate watch parties, and efforts among groups and individuals to drive students to the polls. These efforts had been informally organized and did not have a central guiding plan until 2018 when President Valerie Smith convened the Get Out the Vote committee.

Local Voting

There are two polling places that serve the Swarthmore campus. The specific polling location for students who wish to vote in the Borough of Swarthmore is based on the residence hall in which they live — not the general mailing address for the College. Over the years, Swarthmore students have shared their confusion about the Pennsylvania registration process. Some neglect to include their residence hall when submitting a voter registration form which renders their application invalid. Some neglect to update their voter registration when changing dorms which can result in them visiting a polling place on election day to which they aren't registered. This is further complicated when outside groups (without the proper knowledge) try to help Swarthmore students register.

The College has reached out to Delaware County officials over the years looking for various remedies to this issue (e.g., proposing the creation of a single voting precinct for all Swarthmore students, the hosting of a pop up voter visitor center on campus, etc.) with limited success. A recent communication from the Delaware County Office of Election Operations shared that *creating one precinct for all of Swarthmore College's students would result in a precinct with a number of voters that would far exceed state guidelines*. Despite this recent setback (and with modest expectations), the GOTV committee will continue to seek out and pursue connections and relationships with regional officials.

Research + Barriers to Voting

While the GOTV committee is encouraged by gains in student rates of registering and voting over the last few election cycles — particularly since the launch of GOTV — perceived barriers to voting are still held by some students.

Rates

Here's a snapshot of voting rates between 2012 and 2020 as provided by NSLVE. Please note that the registration rate, voting rate of registered students, and voting rate of eligible students are all up from 2018.

	Registration Rate	Voting Rate of Registered Students	Voting Rate of All Eligible Students	Voting Rate for All NSLVE Institutions
2012	75.9%	59.4%	45.1%	46.9%
2014	68.1%	24.8%	16.9%	19.1%
2016	81.5%	54.8%	44.7%	50.4%
2018	79%	49.6%	39.3%	39.1%
2020	88.8%	85.4%	75.9%	66%

Barriers

Understanding why eligible students don't register to vote or why registered students don't turn out to vote is of interest to the GOTV committee. Since 2018, the College has conducted two campus surveys exploring this issue.

In 2018 SwatVotes, a nonpartisan student group, launched a student survey to learn more about why the 2016 voting rate for Swarthmore students was below the national average. The survey outlined the four biggest perceived barriers among eligible Swarthmore students as follows:

- The distance to local polling stations
- The lack of information about absentee voting in their home districts
- Busy schedules
- Feeling that their votes would not make a significant difference

In 2020, GOTV disseminated a campus-wide student survey to further gauge Swarthmore students' attitudes on voting. The top issues that students shared as making it difficult to register or cast a ballot are as follows:

- Confusion about the registration process
- The lack of information on absentee/mail-in ballots
- Fear of COVID

Additionally some students indicated a "Bernie or Bust" sensibility contributed to their feeling that their votes would not represent their interests or would not make a difference.

The GOTV committee will continue to seek out student feedback about perceived barriers to the voting process and mitigate the impact of those factors as we are able.

COVID-19

As was referenced in our Executive Summary, COVID has significantly disrupted the operations of Swarthmore College and altered the lives of students, faculty and staff. We are mindful of the continuing impact of the pandemic on the community. While the campus has returned to “normal operations,” the cumulative effect of the ongoing pandemic has left some students feeling overwhelmed and anxious — resulting in a (what we hope is temporary) dip in participation in co-curricular activities. This has implications for the work of the GOTV committee.

Was the 2020 general election an outlier — or the new normal? As we refine our outreach strategy for the upcoming election cycle, the committee is considering how best to engage with students. During pre-pandemic election cycles, GOTV relied almost exclusively on in-person activities — with word of mouth among community members being a primary drive of engagement and action. When the College moved to remote learning in March 2020, our interactions were done almost exclusively through screens. Are students eager to return to pre-pandemic ways of interacting or have new rhythms and patterns set in? That is to say, do students prefer activities that are in-person, remote or a combination of the two? Having an understanding of these dynamics is central to our success.

Similarly, we are considering how the voting behavior of students may have been altered by their COVID experiences and how that shapes our response. As was shared, 2020 saw a significant shift from the majority of our students voting in person to a majority voting by mail. Is this an anomaly or a permanent change in behavior? Ideally, students’ preferred method of casting their ballots would guide our allocation of resources (which are limited in scope). That is to say, it would influence the percentage of energy directed towards supporting mail-in voting versus the percentage dedicated to supporting students with election day activities like arranging for transport to the polls.

As we continue to navigate the uncertainties of this new normal, the GOTV committee will closely gauge the preferences and needs of students and will regularly solicit feedback from our students, including those on the GOTV committee, to allow us to adapt our strategies and tactics as circumstances warrant.

Financial and Other Support

Though the GOTV committee does not have a dedicated budget from the College, the Office of the President may on occasion offer discretionary funds for specific strategies, as may other offices or departments on campus that have an interest in partnering with us.

The GOTV committee continually seeks out partnerships and non-financial support that amplifies our efforts and elevates Swarthmore’s reputation as a democratically engaged campus. As was mentioned in the Executive Summary, Swarthmore College was named a 2021 “Voter Friendly Campus” by the Campus Vote Project.

V. + VI. Goals, Strategies & Tactics

2022 Goals

Primary Goal

For the 2022-23 election cycle, GOTV is aiming to match or exceed Swarthmore students' rates from the 2018 general election:

- 2018 registration rate of **79%** refers to the percentage of voting-eligible students who registered to vote
- 2018 voting rate of **49.6%** refers to the percent of registered students who voted on election day
- 2018 voting rate of **39.3%** refers to the percentage of eligible students who on voted on election day (FYI this compares to the national voting rate of 66%)

Secondary Goal

As a secondary goal, GOTV will focus on engaging traditionally unrepresented and disenfranchised student voters — specifically Black, Latinx, Asian, low-income, transgender and non-binary students.

Voting Rates by Race/Ethnicity per NSLVE

	2016	2018	2020
Asian	41%	35%	44%
Black	56%	39%	53%
Latinx	66%	46%	68%
White	71%	61%	80%
Two or More Races	68%	55%	76%

Note: NSLVE data collection makes it difficult to discern the voting patterns of eligible Asian voters as it combines Asian American and Asian internationals in some instances. Also NSLVE doesn't track LBGTQ+ voters.

2022 Strategies & Tactics

Lessons Learned

The following feedback received from Swarthmore students will inform our work, as feasible. Students have asked that GOTV:

- Distribute information to them earlier in the process
- Simplify our messaging — making it less text heavy, more visual, and more focused on individual calls to action
- Highlight information on voting by mail and mail-in ballots
- Incorporate more video tutorials into our messaging

- Have a larger presence on social media
- Direct students towards information on the various candidates' positions — particularly as this relates to local elections
- Encourage senior administration to cancel classes on election day

Overarching Approach

The GOTV committee will focus on rolling out a simple and consistent call to action for students. The messaging will be crafted to breakdown the voting process for students making it easier for them to navigate what can feel like an overwhelming undertaking. Students will be encouraged to customize a step by step plan which highlights key decision making junctures and considers the following:

1. Am I eligible to vote?
2. Where should I register — at Swarthmore or my permanent address?
3. What are the key voting deadlines for my voting region?
4. Who/what's on the ballot?
5. How will I cast my ballot — in person or by mail?
6. Is vote by mail an option in my region? If yes, how does that work?
7. If I decide to vote in person, where's my polling place? When will I go and how will I get there? What do I need to bring with me?
8. What should I contact if I have questions or run into problems?

STRATEGY #1: EDUCATE AND INFORM

GOTV will...

- **Compile voting information and resources.** The College's website (www.swarthmore.edu/voter-information) includes a comprehensive list of information on registering and voting geared specifically for college students. A dedicated e-mail address (vote@swarthmore.edu) serves as a "hotline" for student voting questions and concerns.
- **Create a one-page voting checklist.** This involves designing and producing an infographic, bookmark or other piece (in both electronic and printed form) that students can use to navigate through the various steps involved in registering to vote and casting their ballot.
- **Register students during fall move-in days.** This includes confirming the registration status of students who say they are already registered and/or who may have changed residence halls and need to update their voter registration.
- **Provide ongoing voter information and registration assistance to students — particularly in the fall.** This involves creating and publicizing a set schedule (e.g., first Thursday of the month) for voter registration tabling at high traffic areas on campus (e.g., dining hall, Parrish Porch, Matchbox). Faculty members and other key influencers will be invited to help staff the registration table. (See training of influencers next.)
- **Offer comprehensive voter registration training for key influencers.** This includes reaching out to, engaging and educating resident assistants, academic administrative assistants, coaches/trainers, student leaders and other community members trusted by students on the voting options available to students and the voter registration process.

- **Deploy social media.** This includes using peer-to-peer outreach via social media to engage and inform students, recognizing that one of the best ways to encourage student voting is to create an environment where students recognize and support voting among their peers.
- **Submit for consideration stories and resources on voting to College publications.** This includes connecting with outlets like *Minding the Light*, the Colleges e-newsletter that serves the entire campus community including alumni, and *The Phoenix*, the campus's student-run paper.
- **Partner with student groups and other stakeholders across campus to disseminate information.** The GOTV committee will continue to prioritize our work with SwatVotes, a nonpartisan student group formed specifically to address student voting. The committee will also seek out partnerships with other groups such as SGO (Student Government Organization). GOTV will brainstorm on creative approaches to engaging faculty (e.g., presenting at faculty lunches).
- **Share regular communications from administration.** GOTV committee members and others will regularly send out emails to students with information on registration and voting deadlines.
- **New items:**
 - Explore a partnership with TurboVote which will allow GOTV to better support students voting outside of Pennsylvania.
 - Approach the Dean's Division about integrating voter registration into first year orientation and second year advising.
 - Create a mini campaign around the mechanics of voting by mail.
 - Share voting resources with eligible students studying abroad.
 - Create a Moodle (Swarthmore's online course management tool) unit on voting.
 - Connect with the Black Cultural Center, Intercultural Center and FLI (First-Gen/Low Income) program to better engage traditionally underrepresented student voters.

STRATEGY #2: REMOVE BARRIERS TO VOTING

GOTV will...

- **Focus on the creation of customized voting plans.** The GOTV committee will continue to encourage students to create individual voting plans that lift up key voting deadlines; outline where and how a student will vote (e.g., in person or by mail); and if in person, at what time and how they will get there.
- **Make getting to the polls easier on election day.** The GOTV committee will revert to pre-pandemic practices which involve organizing rides for students from campus to the local polling places on election day.
- **Work with the College's OneCard Office (Swarthmore's ID card office).** This involves working to ensure that transgender, non-binary, Asian American and other students whose preferred names may differ from their legal names have access to valid voting IDs that will mitigate potential barriers to in person voting. Additionally, based on research gathered by our Inclusive Excellence Fellow, GOTV has determined that working with existing student

interest groups to promote voting among traditionally underrepresented voters would be our most effective strategy for engaging these groups.

STRATEGY #3: GENERATE EXCITEMENT AROUND VOTING

GOTV will...

- **Make election day festive.** In addition to the resumption of organized rides to the polls, GOTV plans to host pop-up events on election day with food, music and other amenities for students — all with the goal of reminding students to take a break from their studies and exercise their right to vote.
- **Involve leadership.** The GOTV committee will help to craft and then share fun and encouraging messages from the President and the Provost on the importance of registering and voting.
- **Host special events and other engaging activities.** The GOTV committee is looking for fun ways to engage students on voting and the democratic process, this could include a voting registration competition between academic divisions, Quizzo parties on voting, mock debates, etc. This might also include bringing back our “Why I Vote” campaign which showcased personal voting stories from faculty, staff and students. For example a “video booth” station could be stationed at Parrish Porch to collect stories from community members.

STRATEGY #4: OTHER ACTIVITIES

GOTV will...

- **Build relationships.** The GOTV committee will continue to engage with groups both on and off campus to coordinate our efforts to provide education and resources to student voters. Of particular interest is deepening our connections with regional officials like the Delaware County Board of Elections and Delaware County Election Operations.

VII. Reporting

This plan and its previous versions are shared on the College’s voter registration website (vote.swarthmore.edu) which is also viewable by the public. Highlights for fall 2021 through spring 2022:

- Swarthmore was named a 2021 “Voter Friendly Campus.”
- New partnerships developed:
 - Internal:
 - Athletics Division
 - College Libraries
 - Office of Inclusive Excellence and Community Development
 - External:

- Pennsylvania Student Voter Coalition
 - Students Learn, Students Vote
- Key findings from a November 2020 Swarthmore student election engagement survey conducted by GOTV:
 - 654 students out of a student body of just over 1,400 responded.
 - Approximately 70% of survey participants indicated an awareness of the activities of GOTV.
 - Survey respondents self-reported a registration rate of 99.32%.
 - Survey respondents self-reported a voter turnout rate of 97.13%.

Regarding survey participants' voting behavior:

- 40% of students registered with a Swarthmore address, 60% with a permanent address.
- 32% of students voted in person, 65% of students voted by mail or ballot box, 3% of students voted "other."

Regarding survey participants' profiles:

- 44% of students resided on campus for the fall semester, with 50% studying remotely.
- 27% represented first year students, 27% sophomores, 26% juniors and 20% seniors.
- 1.52% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 21.8% identified as Asian, 7.95% identified as Black or African American, 10.32% identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 54.99% identified as White.
- 52.38% identified as female, 40.28% identified as male and 6.94% as non-binary or not disclosed .
- 27.63% identified as first generation or low-income students and 69.18% did not.
- 76% of participants are members of a political party.

- Excerpts from the 2021 Voter Friendly Campus Report:
 - THE GOTV committee met more than 20 times between January 2020 and December 2020.
 - GOTV sent out approximately 10 targeted emails to students between September and November.
 - GOTV joined the newly formed Pennsylvania Student Voting Coalition, an ad hoc group which emerged from the University of Pennsylvania, and made connections with schools across the Commonwealth.
 - GOTV brought on SLSV Student Fellow Katherine Capossela '21 who was integral to GOTV's social media footprint.
 - GOTV partnered with Athletics who pledged to reach 100% student-athlete voter recognition.
 - GOTV maintained its close partnership with SwatVotes, a student group formed specifically to address student voting.
 - Several faculty members invited GOTV student committee members to their classes for brief presentations on voter registration.
 - A GOTV committee member presented at a faculty meeting and shared information as part of a presentation organized by Human Resources.
 - President Smith shared a video message on her personal voting story with the community.

- GOTV recruited faculty and staff members to serve as guides to walk students to the polls on election day
- GOTV brought on Swarthmore Inclusive Excellence Fellow Kilin Tang '25 for a project that looked at student voting through a DEI lens.
- GOTV met with Leanne Krueger, PA House of Representative from the 161st district.
- GOTV met with Jim Allen, Director of Delaware County Election Operations.

VIII. Evaluation

Evaluation of the GOTV committee's work and progress toward stated goals will be an ongoing process. The committee meets eight times a year but the bulk of the committee's work happens between those meetings. As a result, meeting time is largely used to discuss and evaluate progress in order to best determine if any course-correction is needed.

GOTV will rely on NSLVE data to measure our actual performance against goals. And, as was done in 2020, the GOTV committee will deploy a campus-wide survey to gauge student's self-reported voting behavior and attitudes towards voting.

Evaluation will be done with an eye toward individual goals, and this planning document will be updated to reflect the outcomes of completed goals. In this way, the plan will be a living document, updated regularly to reflect successes, lessons learned, and new opportunities.