

JumboVote Action Plan for Tufts University 2024

Prepared in Fall 2023

Executive Summary

This past year has been a productive and eventful year for Tufts University's student-led voting resources and advocacy group, JumboVote. In particular, JumboVote mobilized eligible students to vote in elections by providing critical resources related to absentee ballots, polling locations, and candidate information. We held voter registration events early in the semester, tabling events centered around voter education, and club-wide meetings with first-year students to familiarize new students with our mission and purpose on campus.

In the coming year, JumboVote seeks to further its footprint across campus by working with Tufts University President Sunil Kumar and the new university administration, engaging with pre-orientation and academic groups, focusing more on local elections, and expanding outreach to first-year students. We look forward to acting on these goals and positively impacting the student body under the umbrella of civic engagement, a goal that the university also shares.

As always, JumboVote is incredibly grateful for the generous support and resources of the Jonathan M. Tisch College for Civic Life, which shares our commitment to civic engagement, responsibility, and involvement. Needless to say, without the assistance of Tisch College, we would be unable to engage in voter mobilization efforts or grow our outreach on campus.

With that in mind, this Action Plan for 2024 outlines the successes of this past academic year, identifies current challenges facing the organization, and identifies JumboVote's goals for the coming semesters.

Leadership

After the departure of many JumboVote leaders who pursued other campus leadership roles or study abroad programs, current third-year student Alex Landy assumed the Co-Chair position. In this role, he helped select a new Executive Board, which consists primarily of first-year and second-year students and worked to re-envision the objectives of the organization that are listed in forthcoming sections. The complete Executive Board is listed below. In addition, there are also a number of Tisch College and university wide staff members that regularly contribute to JumboVote's work on campus and a few will be listed as well.

Alex Landy, Student Co-Chair

Max Dryfoos, Student Tisch College Liaison

Remy Bernatavicius, Student Assistant Tisch College Liaison

Jacob Ackiron, Student Director of Communications

Olivia Field and Seona Maskara, Student Directors of Resources

Sadie Schmitz and Ava Testa, Student Directors of Events

Jennifer McAndrew, (Staff) Director of Communications, Strategy & Planning at Tisch College

Waideen Wright, (Staff) Student Outreach Coordinator

Commitment

Tufts University has long prided itself as a national leader in civic engagement. This can be observed not only in the student culture — students have long been passionate and engaged around a multitude of contemporary issues, including climate change, criminal justice reform, and economic inequality — but also in its administrative commitments, dating back to the Universalists' founding of Tufts in 1852 was based on their vision of higher education as a force for good.

In 1954, a century after its founding, the university formalized this commitment to civic learning and engagement and created the Center for Civic Education, later renamed the Lincoln Filene Center for Citizenship and Public Affairs. In the decades to come, the Lincoln Filene Center undertook research and published scholarly work on civic engagement, playing a vital role in the growing movement to study and strengthen civic life and eventually merge with the university.

Tufts further reaffirmed this commitment in 2000 with its establishment of the University College of Citizenship and Public Service. Over the next two decades, the University College transformed into the Jonathan M. Tisch College for Civic Life, and today, Tisch College is a vibrant platform for local and global partnerships, several student learning and service opportunities, and groundbreaking research on civic engagement. Above all, Tisch College remains committed to empowering students to meaningfully act on their passions in order to affect change both on campus and beyond.

In 2016, Tisch College created a position for a full-time staff member, the Student Outreach Coordinator, who works as a liaison between current students and Tisch College. This is a role designed to be held by a Tufts alumnus for the academic year immediately following their graduation, who is responsible for managing the student-led JumboVote initiative. The Student Outreach Coordinator can simultaneously untangle the often bureaucratic aspects of university administration on behalf of JumboVote and serve an advisory role for students.

While Tufts' culture of cultivating student activism is primarily enshrined in Tisch College, it can also be seen throughout student life, both in and out of the classroom. Before their time at the school even started, hundreds of students participated in FOCUS, a community-service pre-orientation program founded by Tisch College.

During past Matriculations, former Tufts University President Anthony Monaco has urged each student who is able to register to vote, a tradition that we hope will endure in the incoming administration of President Sunil Kumar. The university also offers a one-of-a-kind Civic Studies co-major dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of collective action and social change.

Campus Landscape

Our understanding of the voting landscape at Tufts is shaped by the data provided in our reports from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), the first and only study to offer student and institution-level data on student voting. In both 2016 and 2018, Tufts overperformed national rates, though by a smaller margin in 2018.

In 2016, the registration rate at Tufts was 86.1 percent (up from 84.1 percent in 2012), and the voting rate was 63.2 percent (up from 51.2 percent in 2012). While the registration rate didn't shift greatly between 2012 and 2016, the voting rate of registered students jumped from 60.9 percent in 2012 to 73.4 percent in 2016.

In 2018, the registration rate at Tufts was 77.8 percent (up from 73.4 percent in 2014), and the voting rate was 45.2 percent (up from 18.4 percent in 2014). Similar to the trend observed in the 2016 NSLVE report, the voting rate of registered students improved from 25.1 percent in 2014 to 58.0 percent in 2018.

Looking at the NSLVE data on known voting methods, most Tufts students vote absentee (52.9 percent) or by mail (34.4 percent), though this should be qualified by the fact that the voting method data omits about half of the student voters at Tufts as “unknown.” Moreover, given the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, many younger voters have transitioned to vote-by-mail or absentee ballots, given the ease of doing so. We surmise that data from the 2022 elections will likely reflect such trends.

Notably, in both 2016 and 2018, Tufts students in the 18-21 age group voted at higher rates than their peers in their 20s and 30s – given that the opposite is true for national data. Similarly, the undergraduate student voting rate in 2018 (42.0 percent) was actually higher than the graduate student voting rate (36.3 percent). Taken as a whole, these results from NSLVE provide a critical base upon which we build our understanding of the Tufts student voting landscape.

Tufts CIRCLE Data from the 2022 Midterm Elections

Recently, Tufts' own Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) [found](#) that youth voter turnout in the 2022 midterm elections was 23%, down from

28% in 2018 and up from 13% in 2014. Despite this decline from 2018, the 2022 midterm elections had “the second-highest youth voter turnout in almost three decades.” In Massachusetts, youth voter turnout was 18.5%.

In addition, CIRCLE discovered the effects of recent state voting laws that expanded ballot access. For example, Michigan, which saw the highest youth voter turnout in the 2022 elections, has eased the process of voting through online voter registration, same-day registration, and automatic voter registration. These figures confirm that making it easier for young people to vote tends to lead to greater electoral participation.

Another article substantiated this view. Rafi Schwartz of *The Week* writes that “when motivated and given the resources to act, younger voters can indeed have a decisive impact on elections,” noting the judicial election in Wisconsin in April that courted high levels of voter turnout. According to Schwartz, expanded voter access on college campuses renders younger voters a valuable political constituency for both of America’s major political parties.

Looking to 2024

Data from CIRCLE [published](#) in late November shows that 57% of young Americans (aged 18-34) are “extremely likely” to vote in the 2024 election, while another 15% are “fairly likely” to do so. According to the data, the leading issues for young voters include the cost of living and inflation, jobs that pay a living wage, gun violence prevention, addressing climate change, and expanding abortion access, among others.

Resources

The strong culture of civic engagement at Tufts is a critical asset. The myriad student organizations dedicated to democratic engagement provide the opportunity for numerous partnerships, expanding the reach of the university’s voter registration efforts to every student. The generous funding and strong administrative buy-in on which we rely also create broad-reaching support to develop new voter registration strategies.

Voter and civic engagement are embedded into the student experience in several ways. Upon arriving at Tufts, during orientation, JumboVote presents to several pre-orientation groups and has a presence through tabling at many of the first-year activities. JumboVote also provides first-year students with a civic engagement packet, including a letter introducing JumboVote, resources for absentee voting, and stickers.

We have many regularly occurring programming events. At the start of the semester, we hosted an ice cream social for National Voter Registration Day (NVRD). This event is a great opportunity for JumboVote leaders to connect with new students and celebrate voting throughout

the community in a fun and inclusive event. We also co-hosted debate watch parties with student-led political organizations.

During this past election cycle, JumboVote held a tabling event at the Campus Center with snacks to educate students about the candidates running for Massachusetts governor. Grassroots events such as these effectively spread awareness about the issues at stake in local and national elections and inform prospective voters about the resources that JumboVote provides.

Student outreach coordinator Waideen Wright attended the 2023 National Student Vote Summit at the University of Maryland which had an abundance of resources and representatives from many universities and organizations committed to voter education and outreach across their platforms. JumboVote plans to utilize the information, resources, and ideas gained at this event to further strengthen the voting infrastructure on campus to create new opportunities for students to be involved in this work.

Goals and Strategy

JumboVote seeks to accomplish several objectives in the coming year. First and foremost, we look forward to engaging with President Kumar as he transitions to this role in the coming weeks. We met with President Sunil Kumar in October to introduce ourselves and JumboVote so that we can preserve and strengthen the beneficial relationship between our Executive Board and the university administration. In particular, we noted that our shared goal is to increase voter registration and turnout rates among the student body and deepen the university's commitment to civic engagement. With this enhanced relationship, we are excited to work with President Kumar to incorporate these values into his agenda in the coming months and years.

Second, we have and will continue to engage with pre-orientation programs of all types to spread awareness about JumboVote and its mission. This outreach is crucial in educating first-year students about our student-led organization and how they can get involved in our efforts. We have also offered to appear before pre-orientation groups virtually or in person to answer questions from first-year students and help recruit those who are interested in joining us.

Third, JumboVote is in the process of working with NESAC Votes, as part of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, to host a voter engagement forum in February 2024 at Tufts. This would be the first time that Tufts has hosted such an event since 2019, marking an important milestone in our relationship with regional universities and organizations that share our mission. It would be a great honor to host representatives from other universities in the region and invite speakers to this forum.

Fourth, the new Executive Board has prioritized investing greater resources into on-the-ground efforts, such as tabling events, speaker panels with Tufts professors, and voter education sessions. The Board feels that these events will broaden JumboVote's outreach and allow more first-year students to get more involved in our efforts. Part of that mission centers on local elections during off-years when voter enthusiasm is especially low. Another aspect is revamping our voter education materials and delivering updated merchandise to the student body through a fresh social media campaign.

In the long term, the Board seeks to focus on many of the broader objectives that previous leaders have identified, such as increasing the voter registration and turnout rates of Tufts students, focusing more on local elections during off-years, and expanding our outreach.

Challenges

JumboVote faces a few challenges in its quest to increase voter registration and turnout rates among the student body at Tufts. In light of these challenges, we are incredibly grateful for the generous support and resources from Tisch College and our Student Outreach Coordinator, Waideen Wright (and formerly Jos Regaldo), who has helped the new Executive Board throughout the recent transition process.

First, the campus is again divided nearly in half in our congressional district maps, which complicates our voter mobilization and candidate education efforts. This was also the case prior to redistricting in 2020. At the moment, Rep. Katherine Clark represents the 5th District, which covers the Northern portion of campus and Medford. Meanwhile, Rep. Ayanna Pressley represents the 7th District, which consists of the Southern portion of campus and most of Somerville. This redistricting scheme makes it more difficult to coordinate voter mobilization efforts, educate the student body on candidates, and identify precinct locations for each student, which varies based on where one lives on campus, whether that be in campus housing or at an off-campus address.

Another challenge facing other universities is the mere fact that voter enthusiasm and engagement are, predictably, more subdued in off-years than in midterm or presidential election cycles. This is especially true when local elections are the only pending elections at the time, which forces JumboVote to take on a less prominent role on campus during such periods.

Reporting

This action plan will be shared publicly on the [Tisch College](#) and [JumboVote](#) websites. Our action plan will also be shared with the election huddle working group when convened and several administrators with Tisch College. Our NSLVE reports are published every election, and

the university is committed to spotlighting its voter registration efforts as well as honestly and critically evaluating them both during and after each election cycle. Our NSLVE report will be published on the JumboVote website as well as made available on the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#) website. Tufts commits to making the action plan, data, and reports publicly available.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In addition to using TurboVote, we plan to use the GivePulse platform at our voter registration events. This will allow us to track turnout at various events and the number of students registered, including those registered via paper forms, and provide a thorough record of voter registration efforts throughout the university. While a less exhaustive source of data than the NSLVE report, this method has the vital advantage of being immediately available and will allow for any necessary changes to the voter registration strategy before the election.

As in years past, the university will also publish our NSLVE reports once they have been released and work to publicize them through university communication channels. These will be used to evaluate our strategy's efficacy and provide the university with an in-depth look at areas for further improvement.

Note: Some sections of this Action Plan have been adapted from the [2022 JumboVote Action Plan](#).