



University at Buffalo
Student Life

University at Buffalo

**2024 ALL IN Campus
Democracy Challenge**





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University at Buffalo (UB) is a diverse, inclusive scholarly community dedicated to bringing the benefits of our research, scholarship, creative activities and educational excellence to local and global communities in ways that impact and positively change the world. UB is committed to preparing students to live and lead in a global world while deepening their engagement in the local community.

The Community & Civic Engagement Team, a subunit of the Student Engagement department, is dedicated to supporting students' engagement with the community as change agents, leaders, and activists. Composed of students and staff, the team is expanding over the next year to improve our ability to focus specifically on civic engagement efforts, including voter registration and engagement and student activism.

The Community & Civic Engagement Team for the 2023-24 academic year includes:

Rachel DiDomizio, Associate Director
Hannah Giarrizzo, LEAD Coordinator
Cheyenne DeMarco, AmeriCorps VISTA
Erin Duggan, Graduate Assistant
Khrystina Bevilacqua, MSW Intern

This action plan was developed by the Community & Civic Engagement Team and focuses on short-term goals around the 2024 Presidential Election, as well as long-term goals for the continuous support of civic engagement on UB's three campuses. The Community & Civic Engagement Team is primarily responsible for implementing this plan, with the support of various other departments on campus with a vested interest in supporting students, the Buffalo community, and beyond.

A background image showing several white 'I VOTED' stickers with a blue and red American flag design, scattered on a light-colored surface.

LEADERSHIP - UB VOTES COMMITTEE

UB Votes is a non-partisan, campus-wide effort charged with increasing voter registration and engagement among UB community members in national, state-wide, local, and campus elections by uniting divergent efforts from across the university into one concerted initiative. Membership is open to all students, faculty, and staff. The UB Votes Committee is a whole-campus effort, with support from departments across disciplines:

Rachel DiDomizio - Associate Director of Community & Civic Engagement

Thomas Vane - Assistant Director of Student Governance & Organizations

Hannah Giarrizzo - LEAD Coordinator of Community & Civic Engagement

Dylan Steed - Assistant Director of Community Relations

Jessica Coram - Assistant Director of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

D'Ann Keller - Deputy Director of Athletics

Robert Terreri - Residence Hall Director, Campus Living

Jacob Neiheisel - Associate Professor, Political Science Department

Cindy Havey - Voter Services Chair at the League of Women Voters

Annually Rotating Student Members include:

President of the Residence Hall Association

Student Association Executive Board members

Honors Student Council members

Student Engagement & Civic Engagement Ambassadors

Campus Collaborators:

Fred Stoss - Associate Librarian

Barbara Wejnert - Professor - Global Gender Studies Department

Yotam Ophir - Assistant Professor - Communication Department

COMMITMENT

The entire SUNY system has demonstrated a commitment to civic engagement in strategic planning, especially over the past 15 years. As SUNY's flagship institution, UB is equally committed to improving our civic engagement efforts as shown through the short and long-term goals outlined in this plan. Our campus is highly engaged in the Buffalo community, with a large increase in on-campus student activism in the last few years.

In the 2024-2025 academic year, we plan to host a variety of related programs and initiatives, including:

- The establishment of a Civic Engagement Ambassador program.
- Various events focused on voter registration, education, and engagement.
- Alternative Winter and Spring breaks focused on topics such as Civic Engagement, LGBTQ+ Rights, and Criminal Justice Reform.
- Continued support of student activism from the Freedom of Assembly Support Team (FAST).
- Expansion of the Community & Civic Engagement Team in the Student Engagement Department.

Additionally, this plan outlines goals to increase UB's curricular commitment to civic engagement, as we currently have a largely co-curricular focus. With faculty members on the UB Votes Committee, we hope to expand our impact to more classrooms in the future.





Photo credit: UB Spectrum

Civic Engagement Ambassadors

Our plan to establish the Civic Engagement Ambassador Program will allow us to create a network of student leaders who embody and promote civic engagement on campus. A new cohort of Ambassadors will be selected each academic year by the Community & Civic Engagement team through an application process.

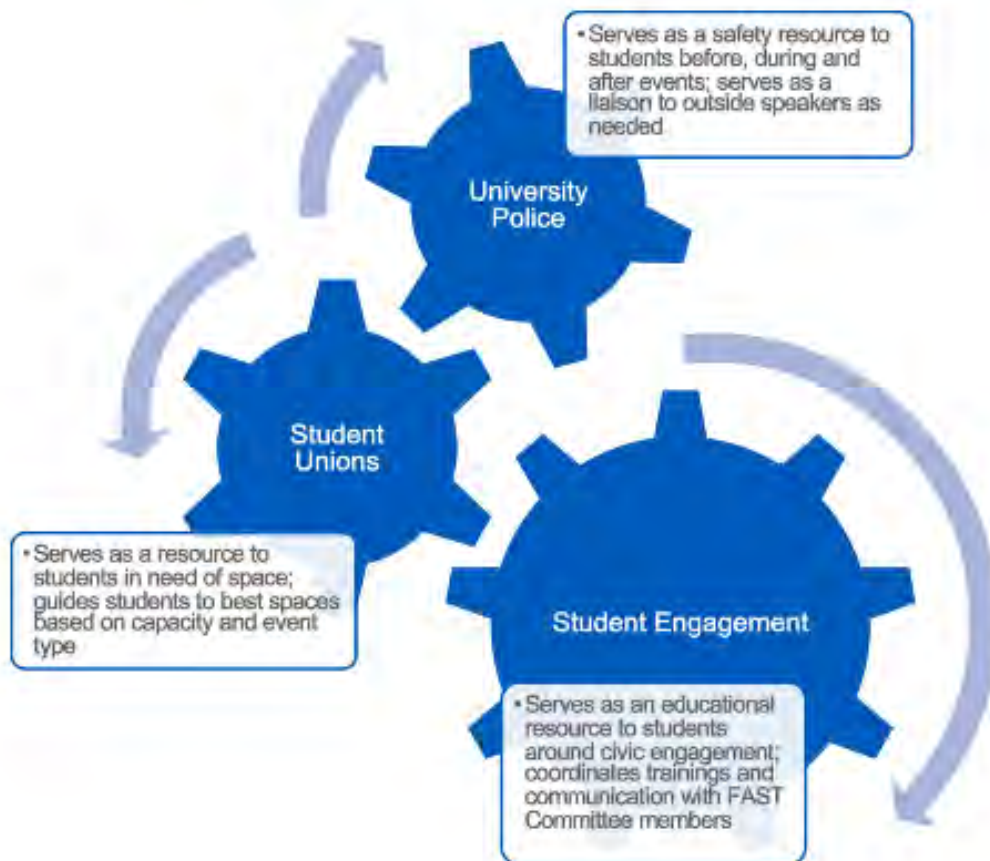
Ambassadors will begin in the Fall 2024 semester. They will support the Community & Civic Engagement team in voter registration and engagement, community service, and civic learning and engagement. Civic Engagement Ambassadors will host Couch Parties before the 2024 Presidential Election to boost voter registration on campus.

We strive to establish this program in time for the 2024 election, but plan to continue every academic year to support and engage students as active citizens. This may include voter engagement, leading community service or advocacy projects, and assisting the Assistant Director for Civic Engagement with annual UB Votes and FAST projects.



Freedom of Assembly Support Team (FAST)

A Collaborative Approach



The **Freedom of Assembly Support Team** supports student activism at UB. Members of the Freedom of Assembly Support Team (FAST) serve as a resource to students before, during, and after their events as they learn how to become agents of positive social change.

- Building bridges between students and UPD:
 - Engage UPD in trainings on trauma-informed approaches and restorative justice in partnership with UBSSW & Counseling Services
 - UPD presence at FAST events - build connections with students by consistently showing up in a non-threatening manner

Freedom of Assembly Support Team (FAST)



The question of free speech on college campuses has become a pressing issue. As New York's flagship state institution, UB continues to set an example for campuses throughout NY and the country.

- Other campuses have looked to UB's model for insights as to how to improve practices on their own campus. During the 2023-24 academic year, FAST is collaborating with the School of Social Work to further improve our practices to maintain our ability to educate our students about and their constitutional rights.
- FAST takes a balanced approach to fostering both free speech and inclusion on campus. Priorities include:
 - Student safety and well-being.
 - The educational value of intellectual curiosity and engaging with ideas across difference.
 - The ideals of free speech.



LANDSCAPE

Photo credit: UB Spectrum

Freedom of Speech & Assembly On Campus

UB has a long history of student activism. This history has granted us the title of the “Berkeley of the East” beginning in the 1960s-70s. Our community is no stranger to maintaining students’ freedoms of speech and assembly while upholding diversity and inclusion.

With the recent increase in campus activism, including speakers invited by national organizations, UB developed and expanded the Freedom of Assembly Support Team (FAST) to educate students and ensure safe, peaceful protest on campus.

UB is becoming a recognized leader in student support during protests. Our students, faculty, and staff are committed to advocating for human rights while protecting our campus community. Student activists continue to advocate for change, with recent events focused on topics such as abortion rights, voter engagement, LGBTQ+ pride, and racial injustice.



Campus Learning Outcomes

Current civic engagement related institutional learning outcomes include “recognize the relevance of human and cultural diversity within local and global contexts” and “demonstrate commitment to community service and engagement.” Institutional learning outcomes are assessed by the Office of Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching Transformation (CATT) and Institutional Assessment Council. As of fall 2023, these offices report 76% of programs including these learning outcomes. Beginning in the 2024-25 academic year, data on achievement of each individual outcome will be reviewed and reported on the [CATT webpage](#).

The UB Votes Committee also outlines learning outcomes for both its members and students impacted by the work of the group. These will be shared on the [UB Votes webpage](#) with this action plan, and some examples are provided below:

UB Votes Committee Members will recognize and respect the diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and beliefs within the university community, fostering an inclusive environment that encourages participation from individuals of all identities and affiliations.

Students impacted by UB Votes’ work will acquire foundational and functional knowledge about voter registration procedures, election processes, and relevant policies, enabling them to participate in elections.



Civic Learning in UB's Curriculum & Co-Curriculum

Civic learning and democratic engagement is present in the curriculum of at least 25 open courses at the undergraduate level, meaning those which are available to students of all majors and class years. Some of these courses include:

SW220: Introduction to Community Organizing

This course provides a general introduction to the history, organizations, strategies and practice issues related to community organizing and development. This course will also introduce empowerment, strengths-based, human rights, and trauma-informed perspectives as frameworks for developing, exploring, and analyzing community organizing and development in urban and rural settings.

PSC313: Elections and Voting Behavior

The existence of free and fair elections is a hallmark of a democratic society. This course focuses specifically on the American case and will explore how well American elections stack up against widely-held democratic ideals. Other important topics include: partisan identification, candidate positioning, primary elections, down-ballot races, and voter turnout.

SOC206: Social Problems

What constitutes a social problem, and who defines what a social problem is? Why do some social problems receive so much attention, while others are ignored? What are the consequences of defining social problems in a particular way? This course examines these questions drawing on case studies of contemporary social issues, on a wide range of topics such as income inequality, harassment, racism, mass incarceration, and immigration.



Civic Learning in UB's Curriculum & Co-Curriculum

A majority of UB's civic engagement efforts occur in the co-curriculum.

Departments and offices on campus which participate in some capacity include:

- Student Engagement
- Athletics
- Campus Living
- Student Government and Organizations
- University Police Department
- University Libraries
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- College of Arts and Sciences

Many student organizations host events and programs focused on activism, voting, social justice, and other related topics. Some of our most engaged groups are:

- Turning Point USA
- Young Americans for Freedom
- Students for Justice in Palestine
- Black Student Union
- Jewish Student Union

These groups regularly host speaking events, protests, rallies, and tabling to engage students in civic and democratic action and discussion. Most of these groups have been involved with voter registration efforts in the past.





Barriers to Success

As a public institution, a lack of funding and staff is a common barrier we face in taking on large-scale efforts. The UB Votes Committee and FAST team are both largely volunteer-based. These efforts are only included in the job descriptions of the Community & Civic Engagement team housed in Student Engagement. This makes it difficult to plan for and achieve large improvements in voter engagement, and especially curricular efforts to improve civic engagement. A lack of support from University leadership creates even more strain on our ability to enact large-scale change.

Additionally, the absence of an on-campus polling place is a barrier for many students. We hope to address this by reinstating a polling place on campus by the 2028 election, however this can only be done by increased efforts from the UB Votes Committee and partners.

Contributors to Success

Before the 2024-25 academic year, the Community & Civic Engagement team will hire an Assistant Director for Civic Engagement to focus their time to all efforts outlined in this action plan. A dedicated staff member will better enable our University to achieve the short and long-term goals we've set, as civic engagement efforts have never been the dedicated focus of any one staff member at UB in the past. The establishment of our Civic Engagement Ambassador program will also expand our ability to reach a greater number of students within their communities.

As the Community & Civic Engagement team expands, we hope to utilize the strengths of our team to develop deeper partnerships throughout the university including with the President's Office to ensure our success.



GOALS

Long-Term Goals

- By 2028, we will build a sustainable and consistent UB Votes coalition, with action and engagement year-round instead of only election years. We will achieve this by coordinating with faculty, staff, and students from various departments on campus and holding coalition meetings every other month to set goals and measure progress.
- By 2028, we will secure a consistent on-campus polling location on UB's North Campus, easily accessible to all UB students by campus-provided transportation.
- By 2028, we will have voter registration and education incorporated into every orientation session for new UB students.
- By 2034, we will explicitly add civic learning and democratic engagement to UB's institutional learning goals.
- By 2034, we will add civic learning and democratic engagement to the syllabi and learning objectives of at least 5 introductory 100-level courses.

Our long term vision will work towards instilling a sense of lifelong civic responsibility among UB students, inspiring them to remain engaged in the democratic process beyond their university years and contribute to positive societal change through active citizenship. We strive to improve our curricular commitment to civic and democratic engagement, and to make it as accessible as possible for all students.

- By the 2028 Presidential Election, our student voting rate will be 10%.
- By the 2032 Presidential Election, our student voting rate will be 20%.

Building on our current student voting rate, we will incrementally yet substantially increase these rates with each election.



Short-Term Goals (2024 Election)

For the 2024 Presidential Election, we aim to achieve the following goals:

- By October 2024, we will register at least 300 students with their on-campus address in order to establish a polling place on campus.
- By October 2024, we will increase voting participation from historically underrepresented groups of students, including veterans, LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and disabled students through targeted outreach efforts.
 - Specific numeric goals will be developed once we are able to access our previous National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) data.
- In November 2024, we will get at least 300 students to vote on Election Day (40.8% increase from 2020).
- By October 2024, we will increase number of student volunteers registering their peers to vote by 50%.
- By the end of 2024, we will establish a relationship with the Erie County Board of Elections and invite them to join the UB Votes Committee.
- By the end of 2024, we will meet with the President's Office to establish a partnership and discuss the importance of the President's public commitment to civic engagement.
- By July 2024, we will update the UB Votes webpage to include an abridged version of this action plan, our goals, and timely resources for the 2024 Presidential Election utilizing ADA guidelines for accessibility. ADA-compliant print copies will be available in the Student Engagement office.

The action plan has already begun, as UB's Civic & Community Engagement Team work year-round to promote and support civic engagement on and off campus. This plan will continue throughout the 2024-2025 academic year to not only get out the vote, but also to boost civic engagement beyond Presidential elections.

STRATEGY

Key Dates

Winter/Spring 2024:

- February 14, 2024: Change of Party enrollment
- March 23, 2024: Last day of Voter Registration & Absentee Ballot Application
- March 23-31, 2024: Early Voting for Presidential Primary
- **April 2, 2024: New York State Presidential Primary Election**

Fall 2024:

- August-October 2024: Presidential Debates (ongoing)
- September 17, 2024: Constitution Day & National Voter Registration Day
- **October 26, 2024: Last day of Voter Registration**
- October 26-November 3, 2024: Early Voting for Presidential Election
- **November 5, 2024: Presidential Election**

Winter/Spring 2025:

- **January 20, 2025: Inauguration Day**



Ongoing Initiatives

- To improve voter access, education, and registration, the UB Votes Committee utilizes the following strategies:
 - The [UB Votes website](#) provides voter registration information, and **UBLinked** features a “Get Ready to Vote” tab which takes users to this site.
 - [Voting 101 guides](#) from the United States Election Assistance Coalition are available year-round in the Student Engagement Office, and other campus offices during election years.
 - **Voter Registration forms** are available year-round in the Student Engagement Office.
 - **UB Votes Committee** meetings to set goals for marketing, student engagement, and registration tactics.
 - Per the **National Voter Registration Act**, Accessibility Resources assists new students with voter registration if needed.
 - **Campus-wide emails** with voter registration and absentee ballot links for every election, from local to Presidential elections.
 - Voter registration and education will be included in **freshman orientation** sessions.
 - Until a polling place is established on campus, a **UB Votes Shuttle** is provided to students for free on election day for the Presidential election.
 - **Voting and election related programming** is hosted surrounding elections, including a Presidential Trivia event.
 - Programming is hosted by various departments and offices on campus, as well as student organizations.

Ongoing Initiatives

- The Community & Civic Engagement team utilizes the following strategies to promote a culture of civic and community engagement:
 - Monthly **Social Change Saturdays** maintain students' civic engagement within the Buffalo community.
 - **Alternative Break Programs** are offered annually during Winter & Spring break to promote civic engagement and education.
 - **Ready, Set, Buffalo!** allows first-year and transfer students to complete community service at local nonprofit agencies and explore Buffalo through sightseeing activities prior to their first day at UB.
 - Student activism receives ongoing support from **the FAST team**.
 - **Civic Engagement Ambassadors** will be trained to use relational organizing to get out the vote for every election cycle, and to educate their peers on civic engagement all year long.
 - **UB Pride & Service Day** takes place once every semester to offer students the chance to give back to the local community through volunteer service.
 - Students can record more than 500 hours of service as part of the **UB The Impact Challenge** to receive university recognition and a special cord at graduation.
 - Student Engagement's **Community Work-Study Program** offers students facing financial hardships the opportunity to complete community service through their Federal Work-Study.





NSLVE & Reporting

UB is a NSLVE participating campus, however due to changes in UB Votes Committee membership, we have not yet been able to access previous NSLVE data. We are currently working to access our previous NSLVE data and will make future NSLVE reports publicly available on the [UB Votes website](#). Additionally, reports will be shared during UB Votes coalition meetings, with student organizations and community partners, and other internal institutional meetings.

UB will also focus on collecting and reporting data as the Community & Civic Engagement team's capacity expands with new team members over the next two years. Data will be utilized to improve programming and on-campus efforts to boost civic engagement. For example, utilizing data on voter engagement to get more students registered and to the polls on election day.

Evaluation

We plan to work with the Assessment and Research Division of Student Life to create an evaluation plan for the short and long-term goals outlined in this action plan. The Community & Civic Engagement team aims to meet with this division before the 2024 Presidential Election, which is the deadline for our first set of goals.

Incorporating a formal evaluation process is a key long-term goal for our institution, and will require further communication and expansion of the UB Votes Committee to include higher university leadership.