



## **Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan 2024**

### **OVERVIEW**

The University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) is a public university in the capital city of Springfield, Illinois. The University was established in 1969 as Sangamon State University by the Illinois General Assembly and became a part of the University of Illinois System on July 1, 1995. UIS serves roughly 4,000 students in 30 undergraduate degree programs, 20 masters degree programs and 1 doctoral degree. The university was once one of the two upper-division and graduate universities in Illinois, but now accepts freshmen, transfer, and graduate students.

In 2017, The UIS Strategic Compass was developed with a set of 7 Essential Values, meant to serve as guiding principles to clarify UIS' identity and guide the strategic direction of the university. The Essential Value of Civic Engagement was included with the statement, "*We build meaningful relationships that enable us to both learn from and contribute to our local and global communities.*" Therefore, UIS has a commitment to providing opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to be engaged citizens with a commitment to community and notably, democratic engagement. Although this commitment falls on the entire campus community, specific responsibility lies in the efforts of the UIS Volunteer & Civic Engagement Center (VCEC).

The UIS VCEC's mission is *to link the UIS Community to service and civic engagement opportunities in central Illinois and beyond.* Within this mission is a dedication to connect the campus community – consisting of students, staff, and faculty – to resources and information to be engaged citizens in the democratic process.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Volunteer & Civic Engagement Center (VCEC) staff are heading this effort to increase democratic engagement at UIS. Included are Jill Hawkins Wright, Program Director of the VCEC Center, and Connie Komnick, Assistant Director of the VCEC. These efforts are supported by various supporters outlined in the Leadership Section. Our efforts will span the Springfield campus, which also includes a cohort University of Illinois Chicago Nursing Students located at this campus. Our plans were created in an effort to support the UIS Strategic Compass and Values of Civic Engagement, which encompasses efforts of Democratic Engagement, and the mission of the VCEC. The goals outlined in our action plan include both short term AY 2024-2025 goals as well as long term goals to grow and systematize these efforts. These goals include 1) increasing voter registration to a 80% registration rate 2) increase non-white voter rates by 30% and 3) Provide voter education through Orientation materials/events.

Building on our current designation as a Voter Friendly Campus, we aim to expand our efforts to exceed the accomplishments outlined in the 2022 NSLVE campus report. The continued designation as a Voter Friendly Campus (including all the resources, clarity, and support provided) will allow a compass for strategic thinking and planning to promote democratic engagement. This Action Plan is outlined to include efforts for the 2024 primary election, as well as the 2024-2025 Academic year. This action plan is designed for in-person, online, and hybrid students, with intentional collaboration among a wide variety of departments and organizations promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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## **LEADERSHIP**

Leader: Jill Hawkins - Program Director, VCEC

Jill will serve as chair of this effort – planning meetings, outlining goals, timelines/deadlines, coordinating among campus constituents, and directing overall efforts.

Additional leadership – Volunteer & Civic Engagement Center Staff:

Connie Komnick - Assistant Director, VCEC

Jazell Ware-Grant, Undergraduate Student Employee – VCEC

Carl Burts Graduate Student Employee - VCEC

VCEC staff and student staff will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> level of involvement by assisting in coordinating efforts/events with additional members, designing/creating educational content, marketing events, leading events, and making connections with the campus community, as well as community groups.

Campus Departments:

Diversity & Inclusion Center – Stephen Johnson Jr., Interim Director

Student Life Office – Cynthia Thompson, Director

Residence Life – Melissa Biesel, Director

Chancellor's office – Joan Sestak, Director of Community & Government Relations

Orientation – Lisa McGuire, Director of New Student Orientation & Parent Relations

Academic Affairs – Molly Lamb, Director Center for State Policy & Leadership

Campus Media Relations – Blake Wood, Director of Media Strategy

Athletics – Nicole Hager, Senior Associate Athletic Director

Faculty - Various Department of Public Affairs

Campus departments/units will play a key role in collaborating on reaching various students, sharing information and promoting events, meeting with students to discuss voter registration/education/etc., and fostering ideas for additional programming

Student Groups:

Student PIRG's

Student Government Association

Political Activist's & Understanding Group

Student Advocacy Coalition

College Democrats, Republicans, and any other politically affiliated groups

Greek and Service Organizations

Leadership for Life Living & Learning Community

Students are the best at reaching students! By working with students in leadership roles within well-known and highly involved organizations, we hope to see a surge in information sharing and increased registration and voting rates. Students will be asked to assist with tabling, information sharing, and planning/coordinating/emceeding in person events.

Community Groups:

League of Women Voters

## Sangamon Country Board of Elections

It is vital to get connected with local elections offices and organizations that offer timely information and opportunities outside of the campus. We are all in this effort together and are better together when we work together.

### National Partnerships:

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

Students Learn Students Vote

Voter Friendly Campus

Rock the Vote

Vote Ready

These partnerships boost our efforts and save a great deal of time/planning as marketing toolkits and myriad resources/ideas are available. The ideas, flyers, hashtags, and swag offered through these partnership helps reach the campus and increase energy around democratic engagement

We will remain hopeful to include the potential partners listed above and will also welcome other groups whose values align with our efforts to achieve our goals.

Succession Plan: The coalition identifies key roles and their responsibilities. It develops clear guidelines for recruiting and mentoring new leaders, ensuring continuity. Important processes, contacts, and event timelines are documented. On-boarding and leadership development opportunities are conducted via shared files and webinar offerings. A checklist is established for training successors before they fully assume their roles.

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## **COMMITMENT & LANDSCAPE**

The current commitment encompassed in the landscape of UIS is a deep value to Civic Engagement, as outlined in the Chancellors strategic compass initiatives. The Strategic Compass initiatives focus on aligning the institution's mission, vision, and values with long-term goals. Developed through broad stakeholder engagement, the Compass emphasizes student success, academic excellence, and inclusive growth, fostering an institutional commitment to collaborative leadership and community engagement. The Strategic Compass is a key document that underlines the university's collective aspirations and commitment to improving student experiences and fostering innovation.

Other statements and documents reflecting the institution's commitment include the university's mission and vision statements, diversity and inclusion policies, and ongoing academic excellence initiatives like the UIS Strategic Plan. These statements ensure that UIS remains dedicated to its core values of education, innovation, and public service.

Despite the commitment, it is important to consider the youth of the campus and the progress that has and is still being made.

Since beginning as Sangamon State University for only post-graduate students and later expanding in 1996 to undergraduate, on-campus, student populations, there is still work to be done in terms of engraining democratic engagement into the campus-wide programs and curriculum. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice efforts of robust on campus and include various training programs for students, staff, and faculty.

The VCEC believes these efforts currently support and will continue to help support and align democratic engagement efforts on campus. We are inspired by the increase in democratic engagement since welcoming a new Chancellor just over 1 year ago. We have seen an increase in partnership with our office, resulting in campus-wide reminders and announcements of Civic Days, important dates/deadlines, and educational materials focused on democratic engagement (provided by our coalition).

As a campus, we have been encouraged by a variety of staff and faculty supporting our efforts. Professors refer students to our office for support on voter registration. Staff have been excited to share materials as part of our civic day events. There is a new energy on campus and one in which our coalition and efforts appear far more visible than ever before – through reposting and sharing our graphics, to offerings to speak with classes. We are delighted for this new energy and involvement.

While we are fortunate to be in the capital city and have fewer barriers to voter engagement compared to many other states, we recognize to the demographic challenge of merging partnership between the UIS campus and downtown Springfield's political engagement and work. Further connections, collaborations, internship opportunities, and intentional programming will help support presence for UIS' democratic engagement in the capital city. Fortunately, there are many ways to engage in voting, including on campus early voting, shuttle to the polls, vote by mail efforts and other means to simplify the process to student participation.

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## **GOALS**

UIS has a commitment to providing opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to be engaged citizens with a commitment to community and democratic engagement. Based on results of the 2022 NSLVE data, our short term goals are:

1. By 2025, increase voter registration by 13 percentage points to a rate of 80% as compared to the 2022 registration rate.
2. By 2025, increase education to underrepresented student populations resulting in an increase of non-white voter rates by 30%.
3. By 2025, include Voter Education messaging in the Orientation materials and received by each new student – including freshman and transfer students.

In 2022 we were able to provide myriad in-person communications and events. While our programming was robust, we did adapt to unexpected circumstances that challenged our voter engagement efforts as COVID-19 efforts still lingered to an extent. Currently, we are hopeful that this removal of barriers and return to full normalcy will assist us via more in-person opportunities and education programming.

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## **STRATEGY**

The VCEC hosts early voting efforts on campus and provides information about voter deadlines, residency requirements, voter ID, student address options, vote by mail, and online registration. Within the VCEC a “Campus Vote Coordinator” is a registered deputy registrar with the State Board of Elections. This individual serves as the point of contact for any on-campus organization wishing to conduct a voter registration effort.

In recent years, UIS has collected valuable data to aide in creating goals and monitoring progress toward voter engagement and voter rates. Membership with Illinois Campus Compact has allowed us to stay abreast of news and resources available to engage students. Data from participation in the National Study for Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) will continue to drive efforts.

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## **Voter Registration**

- New students are informed of voter deadlines, residency requirements, voter ID
- student address options, online voter registration, and absentee ballots (now known as “Vote by Mail” ballots) as a part of the required orientation session in the days prior to the start of classes for each semester.

- UIS Residence Life makes proof of residency letters available to students wishing to register to vote with their campus address.
- Zoom helpline offers students the chance to hop online and get immediate assistance with registration, requesting vote by mail ballots, and any questions related to voting – offered 2x/week 8 weeks leading up to an election day
- The UIS Student Advocacy Coalition, a student organization supported by the University, will conduct several voter registration drives throughout the fall and spring.
- First Voter Registration drive is scheduled for Constitution Day in September
- The UIS Volunteer & Civic Engagement Center provides information about vote deadlines, residency requirements, voter ID, student address options, online voter registration, and absentee ballots by:
  - Tabling at key locations during key times
  - Announcements in campus-wide (daily) mail
  - Announcements on the UIS Connection student engagement platform
  - Announcements via social media
  - Hosting a student debate (e.g., College Republicans v College Democrats) and voter registration drive prior to state and national election cycles
  - Publishing voter information and a non-partisan voter guide in the student newspaper prior to state and national election cycles
  - Partnering with student organizations to host voter registration drives on campus
  - Using National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement data to improve our outreach to areas of the campus that showed low or decreased voter turnout
  - The Volunteer & Civic Engagement Center works with the county clerk’s office to host early voting on campus
  - “Shuttle to the polls” transportation provided for up to 11 people at a time to the polls. Shuttles run every 15 minutes on election days
  - Celebrating/Recognizing Civic Holidays

**Proposed Activities:**

On-going:

- Making Civic Education systemic: Creating modules on civic learning/responsibility and incorporating them into every class and/or as part of first year seminar courses (so that EVERY student completes them to graduate)
- Students are required to complete hours in “Engaged Common Citizen” courses which center on Civic Engagement and social issues
- Promote the Institutional commitment to Civic Engagement (re: Democratic Engagement) via the UIS Strategic Compass goals and informing the Springfield Community
- Create virtual information presentations (Voter registration, Voter education, Candidate information) and make connections to Academic Affairs - ask to share with students
- Create Social media plan to promote events, voter registration drives, and countdown to election days

Aug:

- Voter registration event during new student orientation week with a focus of registering first-year students
- Offer in-person and/or virtual information sessions (Voter registration, Voter education, Candidate information)
- Engage and train students as “Election Ambassadors”

Sept:

- Voter Registration Competition (hosted by Residence Life - TBD)
- Constitution Day - Voter Registration tabling
- National Voter Registration Day; voter registration drive with information on early voting requirements

Oct (election years)

- Vice-Presidential debate watch party
- Presidential debate watch party
- Presidential debate watch party

Nov.

- Shuttle to the Polls - occurs every 15 minutes.
- Evening - Election party
- Post debate discussion/reflection
- Post results discussion/reflection

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## REPORTING & EVALUATION



Data from the NSLVE will be used to determine rates of both voter registration and voting, to allow us to determine the impact of our efforts in reaching out designated goals. Comparison of this data with our previous data from 2022 will determine the results of our efforts to reach our future goals as well, in determining trends over the years. This data will be assessed by VCEC staff upon receipt of the next NSLVE data showing our efforts this election year.

We also will use UIS Connection, a UIS specific engagement platform, to track student attendance at each event, in hopes that we will see growth beyond our typical programming.

The Star Map Student Affairs Curriculum will provide quantitative feedback from students regarding the level of engagement and learning achieved as a result of participating in these events.

Efforts and achievements will be shared on social media on both the University page and our office's pages. The VCEC encourages/asks posts to be shared by all leadership. Additionally, we share news, education, achievements on our daily campus email – campus announcements. We will work closely with Campus Media Relations to create press releases to inform the city of Springfield and surrounding areas of our accomplishments. The UIS webpage will boast accomplishments and designations as well, including the sharing of our Campus Action Plan and designation(s).