

# IOWA

**The Road Towards a More Perfect Union:  
Our Commitment to Democracy**

The University of Iowa

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

University of Iowa's 2022 Voting Action Plan was developed by the Hawk the Vote Executive Team, a student-led initiative within Leadership and Engagement in the Division of Student Life. The University of Iowa located in Iowa City has a student population of 31,206 with 21,608 of them being undergraduates. Iowa City has a population of 74, 950, meaning almost half of the city's population is comprised of students. This action plan will serve as a starting point for cross-campus collaboration on democratic engagement and civic learning. This document will be used as we begin a working group that will be tasked with expanding voter engagement out of the division of student life and into other offices and divisions across campus.

This action plan is developed for the purpose of expanding democratic engagement on campus, in line with the institution's strategic plan which mentions the importance of engagement. The university also prioritizes creating well-rounded and civic-minded leaders, and voting is a crucial part of that educational process. The hope is that democratic engagement is included in a more robust way in the UI strategic plan. This plan contains both short- and long-term goals for increasing civic engagement at the University of Iowa. Our longer-term goals will be implemented over a ten-year period; our short-term goals will be addressed by 2024. This action plan will primarily serve as an overarching plan to get more stakeholders on campus involved in voting over the long term. We will use initiatives from Hawk the Vote as the primary way to implement this plan.

This action plan will primarily be used within the Division of Student Life and the Leadership & Engagement team but will also be reviewed by members of the undergraduate and graduate student governments, staff council and faculty senate. Hopefully by the end of the process, we have a small working group who will think about how to plan democratic engagement moving into the future. The 2022 action plan was created by our executive team who were selected through a fair and equitable application process. As we write this plan, we will review it with our campus partners to ensure we are including input from diverse perspectives.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The current working group for the University of Iowa is the Hawk the Vote executive team. Hawk the Vote was established formally in September 2019 to coordinate and oversee civic

learning and democratic engagement at the University of Iowa. This group of four students meets weekly and are advised by staff from Leadership & Engagement in the Division of Student Life.

The group is comprised of the following:

1. Kathryn Shumaker – Executive Director
2. Alexis Carfrae – Associate Director
3. Kenzie Northup – Social Media Director
4. Caleb Slater – Programming Director
5. Ian Van Anden – Staff Advisor to Hawk the Vote

Hawk the Vote's intake process involves an executive board application that occurs every January. The application is sent out to both the undergraduate and graduate student body.

Additionally, every August students can sign up to volunteer with our group, becoming a Voting Ambassador. Both involve extensive training on Iowa Election Laws and Voter Engagement best practices. The individuals that are brought together through this process are those that are most motivated to support their peers and meet with campus partners to increase the impact of our work. Our executive team has traditionally represented the PWI nature of our university. To increase outreach to underrepresented groups, we plan to partner with the Center for Inclusive Academic Excellence (CIAE) and the Office of Multicultural & International Student Support & Engagement (MISSE). Our plans for recruitment hope to use our pool of volunteers as a place to build leadership skills that could be used in our executive team. Additionally, the executive director for the upcoming year is to be the associate director from the previous year, whenever possible, to assure sustainable and knowledgeable leadership and the successful continuation of the initiative.

In addition to the Hawk the Vote, we plan to create a Voter Engagement Committee for cross campus collaboration. The working group will have representation from faculty senate, staff council, and the undergraduate and graduate student governments alongside Hawk the Vote student leaders. We will also continue to foster a relationship with the Political Science Department to increase opportunities in research and academia within our initiatives. We also have working relationships with many student organizations across campus. Hawk the Vote already meets with the local auditor's office to discuss recent voter ID law changes and ways to utilize existing resources to encourage democratic engagement on campus. Other campus partners include League of Women Voters of Johnson County, Iowa Campus Compact, Campus

Election Engagement Project, Iowa Secretary of State's Office, All In Challenge for Campus Democracy, Big Ten Collaboration: Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and Tufts University (NSLVE, CIRCLE).

Hawk the Vote currently has weekly executive team meetings and biweekly meetings with our volunteers. The proposed Voter Engagement Committee would ideally meet twice a semester and have its own intake process for new representatives, which we would recommend every two years if possible. Our current work is supported by the Office of the Dean of Students and the Office of the Provost; however, we are looking for ways to include them in our advising committee to include their insight into our conversations.

## **COMMITMENT**

The University of Iowa and its leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. The Path Forward strategic planning committee has a subcommittee explicitly dedicated to Engagement, but within their working documents there seems to be limited commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement in terms of voter engagement. There does not appear to be any students on the Engagement committee -- it seems that communication may be lacking when it comes to student buy-in/investment and knowledge. Dr. Barbara Wilson, President of the University of Iowa has signed the All-In Presidents' Commitment, and there is a history of the University of Iowa's senior leadership demonstrating support for democratic engagement. Past Presidents have previously given funds to civic engagement efforts on campus. Additionally, there is communication with the Board of Regents, members of the state legislature, and other bureaucratic offices. There also is some communication with various partners across the state in the form of monthly check-in meetings with other institutions, however these have not been going on for that long.

Educational outcomes in civic learning and democratic engagement are becoming a part of the institutional culture but work still needs to be done to ensure it is a priority for years to come. Previously voter engagement was embedded in the work of the undergraduate and graduate student governments. Hawk the Vote was developed in 2019 and it has made great strides, but it is still a new organization. Additionally, there seems to be ad hoc and sporadic commitment to voting, and civic learning is mainly centralized in the UI Public Policy Center but there is no strategic network that meets on a regular basis to oversee this work. The creation of

the Voter Engagement Committee hopes to address this issue. We are currently exploring ways to include civic learning and democratic engagement in the general education curriculum and co-curriculum. We are looking into a tag for courses that include service/engaged learning or civic engagement component and a public service requirement. We include it in our co-curriculum by offering optional workshops and trainings to campus organizations and classrooms through our 90% Challenge Program. In addition, we are also committed to considering diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in our programming and have dedicated time to making our workshops more inclusive of diverse backgrounds and situations. We are committed to continue to improve our diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice efforts within our programs.

## **LANDSCAPE**

University of Iowa students voted at higher-than-average rates in the 2020 election according to NSLVE data provided by Tufts University, but there is still work to do. There was a 4.2% increase in voter turnout from 2016 to 2020. Turnout also increased among populations that Hawk the Vote identified as demographics with lower voting rates. That included a 9% increase in turnout among second-year students, an 8% increase in turnout among Engineering students, and an 11% increase in turnout among Business students. This is encouraging and shows that with a more targeted and widespread effort, voter engagement can be greatly increased on campus. There has been success at creating a campus culture of democratic engagement through both our voter ambassador program and our voting workshops. 2022's campus voter turnout should reflect the amount of work that has been done to expand voter registration and education through Hawk the Vote.

As far as target groups on campus, work needs to be done to reach out to Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native students, as turnout with both of those demographics decreased in 2020. Engagement is lower with first-year students than any other grade-level, likely because first-year students are so new to campus when the election rolls around in November. As far as target groups on campus, work needs to be done in the Computer Science Department and the Mathematical and Statistics Department, as those colleges had the lowest voter turnout in both 2016 and 2020. In 2021, Hawk the Vote launched a brand partnership program that worked with various social media accounts across campus to share voter registration and election information. This more targeted approach allowed us to reach demographics with lower voter turnout and help

spread important election information to a broader audience. In the future, Hawk the Vote will work to partner with accounts that represent underrepresented demographics to ensure those students are getting all the information they need to get engaged.

Courses that involve civic learning and democratic engagement are generally available to students in the political science and ethics and public policy courses, however courses on service-based learning that tie in the importance of civic engagement are available to all students. Civic learning and democratic engagement are priorities of certain departments and divisions across campus, such as Leadership & Engagement in the Division of Student Life. However, it is not explicitly stated as a desired outcome in the UI's university-wide strategic plan.

NSLVE data shows higher turnout on UI's campus than other campuses across the country, but on a statewide and Big Ten level, we are middle of the pack. Current internal barriers we are face include a lack of communication, siloed budget models, dissolving of Office of Outreach & Engagement, failure to garner student buy-in, lack of centralized messaging, and focus from the top-down through administrative prioritization. External barriers we are facing are state funding and perception of the university across the state. Resources that we are in need of include money and commitment from administration to fully fund and support Hawk the Vote.

## **GOALS**

Long-term Goals:

*The following goals are designed to be completed in the next 10 years but will be analyzed and updated as biennial Voting Actions Plans are developed.*

*By 2032:*

1. Making a strong, concerted effort to register college students to vote in a sustainable and effective manner.
2. Establishing and maintaining support from numerous offices on the University of Iowa Campus to help expand the scope of our efforts.
3. Increase voter engagement efforts to communities that have been identified as lacking turnout through our college's NSLVE reports and other data. This includes but is not limited to: Black and Hispanic students, as well as students majoring in Computer Science and/or Math. This will be achieved by targeting voter registration drives in STEM spaces and in the Iowa Cultural Houses.

4. Coming together to engage students to participate in government from numerous facets including faculty, staff, and students. This means not just focusing our mission to register and educate all eligible voters at the undergraduate level, but to also include University of Iowa graduate students, professional students, and employees.
5. Establishing a strong group of partners from all levels of the institution to discuss the topic of democratic engagement on the campus through adopting new and executing past strategic plans.
6. Learning Outcomes:
  - a. Understand the current rules regarding what is acceptable as a voter ID law in accordance with what documents are accessible at the time.
  - b. Internalize the importance of being involved in one's community including participation in government through voting in not only federal and state elections, but also local and school board elections.
  - c. Know where to find information on what methods to vote are available for their county either in Iowa or in another state.
  - d. Comprehend the process of participating in a caucus or primary when deciding candidates for an election.
  - e. Recognize reputable sources on candidates' policies and stances on issues in order to become better informed before casting their ballot.
  - f. Basic understanding of how to register to vote and when to update registration.
7. Institutional Outcomes in 10 years:
  - a. Having a strong interdisciplinary team of individuals dedicated to democratic engagement on the University of Iowa Campus.
  - b. 90% voter registration, 75% turnout in presidential elections and 60% in midterm elections

Short-term Goals:

*By 2024:*

1. 2022 voting rate of 51.8% and voter registration rate of 80%.
  - a. As we look to the 2022 Midterm election in Iowa we see another year of contentious elections, especially in the US House District that the University of Iowa occupies (2020 had an election determined by 6 total votes). We hope to see

the same increase from 2016 to 2020 for 2022 from 2018, which is 4.2%. This would make the 2022 voting rate 51.8%. As for the registration rate, we would like to see an 80% registration rate in a midterm year, which would be a 2.5% increase from 2018.

2. A strong and dedicated working group that is built up of many stakeholders that can provide tangible collaborations and initiatives to reach every corner of the university and establish the name and mission of Hawk the Vote on campus.
3. One crucial deficit in our current working group is with the graduate colleges and their corresponding students. In the past, small connections with certain motivated students helped us make some impact with their groups, however more concrete and permanent relationships are needed to ensure that every effort is made to support these students.
4. Our institution needs to break the barrier that exists between the student life division and the academic division of the university. This divide has prevented professors from commenting on elections and providing information to students on how to perform their civic duty.

A note on the goals above:

Each goal looks to take what we know about our campus and develops initiatives to enhance our student's perception of their role in their community. As we strive to empower the leaders of our future governments, community leaders, and more, understanding the processes involved in elections in Iowa or other states is imperative. Our campus has the right resources and people to make student engagement a successful mission, however, bring those components together is the true obstacle of our goals. Hawk the Vote will continue to use our data and observations to influence our initiatives and continue to develop ways to report our success and deficits to our stakeholders.

## **STRATEGIES**

Since the inception of Hawk the Vote in 2019, a wide variety of initiatives, activities, and tasks have been developed and optimized to efficiently do the work necessary to engage students on our campus. The main initiatives that Hawk the Vote is responsible for are below:



1. Meeting regularly with campus partners including administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community members to give updates on current initiatives and plan for future initiatives.
2. Providing workshops for student organizations, FSL chapters, classes, and other university affiliated groups to formally educate individuals on the importance of civic engagement and how to register to vote. All workshops are prerecorded and can be given in person or through video. The potential topics to be discuss are the following:
  - a. Voting 101
  - b. The History of Voter Suppression
  - c. Power of the Youth Vote
  - d. The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment
  - e. Researching Candidates and Fact Checking
  - f. International Students and Civic Engagement
  - g. What is Hawk the Vote?
  - h. A custom workshop option with a topic chosen by the group
3. Institutionalizing the 90% Challenge along with the Hawk the Voter Registration Seal for student organizations, FSL chapters, and athletic teams.
  - a. This creates a healthy form of competition on campus and allows for groups to push themselves to get their peers involved and educated before the election.
4. Maintaining our relational strategy of reaching students through the peer-to-peer contact program executed by our Voting Ambassadors.
  - a. The best way to have meaningful conversations with students is to have them with their close friends. We have taken advantage of the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic and trained many students on campus to have conversations with their friends about registering to vote and creating a voting plan over text or DM. This has allowed for not only more conversations, but richer outcomes overall.
5. Consistent tabling around campus, at campus and community events, and by request to register individuals to vote and informally teach individuals the importance of civic engagement.
  - a. We select tabling locations based on the amount of student traffic that occurs and our volunteers help make sure we are there all day to catch as many students as

possible. We also plan to table in different areas to increase our outreach to groups we normally don't reach.

6. Reaching out to organizations and offices on campus that could help Hawk the Vote better reach underrepresented groups and communities that have been identified as lacking turnout to improve our current initiatives and outreach.
  - a. Center for Inclusive Academic Excellence (CIAE), the Office of Multicultural & International Student Support & Engagement (MISSE), multicultural houses, athletics, Computer Science Department, and Mathematical and Statistics Department.
7. Requesting organizations and offices on campus join our brand partnership program that provides social media content with voting-related information to be shared on their accounts.
  - a. Direct-messaging social media accounts for the many offices and departments on campus lead to around 20 groups on campus committing to posting our election content to their feed, which significantly increased our reach across campus.
8. Planning and executing activities on National Voter Registration Day, Vote Early Day, and Election Day.
  - a. In addition to posting information to social media, we had large voter registration pushes by tabling and through voting ambassadors contacting their friends and peers.
9. Table throughout OnIowa! move-in week to register students new to the University of Iowa campus (typically registers 1000-2000 people).
  - a. Every incoming student to the university has to show up to register for the move-in process and we have been able to capitalize on this to register large groups of students every year.
10. Collaborating with the undergraduate student government to hold events like candidate forums and mock-caucuses to provide opportunities for students to participate in unique election-related experiences on campus.
  - a. Often candidates for city council or county positions don't speak about how their policies could affect students. These forums provide time for students to ask questions about how they are being kept in mind while these candidates are in

office. Similarly, events like mock-caucuses provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the unique voting methods in Iowa.

Long-term Strategies:

In order to facilitate a campus committed to civic learning and political engagement along with deepening our capacity for diversity, equity and inclusion, several strategies will have to be accomplished for sustainable and lasting improvement. Our current peer institutional model allows for college students to become leaders and experts on voter ID laws and electoral processes. These students use this information to educate their friends and become the go-to person for help within their personal network. With recruiting a diverse and broad population of volunteers, the combined network will cover a great deal of campus. The difficult part is in maintaining a broad group of students, especially on a campus of our size. Ideally, these efforts could gain compensation in some form greater than buttons, stickers, and t-shirts in hopes of valuing students for their time. The funds for this are not currently available, however more sustainable financial models are being explored in hopes of generating more consistent funds for initiatives of this type. Lastly, the information collected by these volunteers is rich with outcomes data and could potentially become a long-term project of either a faculty or graduate student interested in nonpartisan voter engagement research on our campus. We look forward to creating a collaboration of this type, however meetings with the political science department have not occurred yet.

## **REPORTING**

Upon the completion of this plan it will be shared through our normal communication channels. That includes through social media, on our website [vote.uiowa.edu](http://vote.uiowa.edu), sent to the shared governing bodies of the university, the Path Forward committee, and lastly having it included in our workshops and presentations. This plan will be included with our NSLVE reports and other data reports culminated throughout the year. We hope to make the results of our work into clear reports that are easily digestible by the student population and more.

## **EVALUATION**

The executive director and advisor of Hawk the Vote will be responsible for taking on the assessment of our plan. One of the most important parts of our efforts involves critically assessing our initiatives and using our findings to inform our future strategies. We hope that by evaluating our actions every year we can get a better sense of how we can best use our time to make the largest impact on campus. While it is important to highlight the successes of our team and its strategies, our failures can be just as revealing and perhaps provide even more insight into the most efficient use of our resources. The evaluation that we create is mostly used by the Hawk the Vote executive team, however, the proposed Voter Engagement committee will use it as guidelines for developing the goals and strategies for future election years. This evaluation will be best administered by the advisor of Hawk the Vote for the most accurate and in-depth review of each initiative and outcome. Our process for evaluation is started at the conclusion of the previous election year, utilizing the data and information available at the time and will officially complete once NSLVE reports are released. As a result of previous efforts, our campus has received a Gold Seal in 2018 and Silver Seal in 2020 for the All In Campus Democracy Challenge.

The main information that will be used to create this evaluation will include the following:

1. Annual Campus Partner Outreach Survey and Outreach Meeting Notes
2. Volunteer Close-Out Survey
3. Voter registration information from internal sources, the auditor's office, and NSLVE reports
4. Voter participation information from the auditor's office and NSLVE reports

5. Voter Contact Form data that is created by our volunteers when they have conversations with their friends and discusses learning objectives and conversation topics.

In order to analyze the information, common statistical methods will be used when applicable and comparison of data between years will be used to determine certain trends on campus and within certain key demographics of interest. The information created through the analysis will be synthesized into graphics for presentations, social media posts, and a summary report for stakeholders.

Success at our institution looks like action items or goals within our strategic planning materials either being addressed or having steps taken to accomplish the goal. Although data can be used to drive where our focus should lie, it isn't necessarily used to determine the success of the initiatives we have. Success is determined by how efficient and sustainable an initiative is and whether it provides enough opportunity for students to be engaged and grow. In our 2020 strategic plan we hoped to attain an 80% voter registration rate and 70% turnout rate of our Hawkeyes. Our NSLVE report showed that we came very close to our registration goal at 79.8% and fell slightly behind on our voting rate at 67.4%. We also have had a successful transition of executive teams within Hawk the Vote. The transition this past year went exceedingly well along with a small down-sizing of the executive team to meet the smaller demands of a local election year in Iowa. As for our long-term goals, steps have been taken toward each one as we establish our presence on campus and grow the initiatives, we have developed to most effectively inform students on how to participate in the electoral process.

One key part of our voter registration efforts is during the move-in week on campus. The incoming class all check-in at the student memorial union after moving into their dorm, which provides a great opportunity to register to vote at their new address. We have been able to register several thousand students by collaborating with the admissions office on campus. We also have implemented another Ask Every Student strategy by having our volunteers text and DM their peers and have open conversations about registering to vote and making a voting plan throughout the fall semester before the election. This process leads to quality conversations between friends and establishes our volunteers as experts in voting practices within their networks. As we grow our network of volunteers, their reach on campus increases and gets us closer to achieving the Ask Every Student goal of having conversations with all students, which is quite a feat at a school with 32,000 students.

Collaborations with our cultural centers and center for diversity and equity were commenced prior to the 2020 election. Due to the limited capacity of the supporting staff for these resources, we are exploring ways to reduce their burden and fit their needs into our current framework without diminishing the specific needs of their communities. One of the biggest collaborators within this regard has been our department of athletics since their student population has formed a working group to explore ways their department can better support their minority students. This working group has been an immense help with getting their peers together for workshops and expressing their desires for educational content so that we can best engage and fulfill their needs.

One long-term goal we saw amazing improvement in was with our NSLVE influenced, college specific initiatives to support certain colleges on campus that were struggling with engagement. Both the college of business and college of engineering had lower turnout data in 2016 and 2018. With this information, we approached the administration for both colleges and were received well and had plenty of opportunities to dig into their communities and empower their students to exercise their civic duty. This led to higher turnout in both colleges in 2020 and this success has been communicated to both colleges upon the release of our NSLVE reports. With the new transition of President Barb Wilson to our institution this last year, we haven't had the opportunity yet to meet with her. She has expressed great interest in the political atmosphere of our campus and has said she believes our non-partisan efforts are key to making the climate on our campus less hostile. We have plans to discuss her goals for our campus climate and then we will ask for a more formal commitment to our mission.

In terms of collaborations with academic departments on campus, we have already partnered with communications majors to discuss successful social media strategies to maximize engagement on our informational/educational content that has been used in their coursework. We would like to expand our relationship with students of this type as well as potential graduate students looking to better understand student voter engagement and the movement for young people to participate in politics. However, our 4-person student executive team does not have the capacity to expand our efforts beyond what we are currently completing. Over the past couple years, we have developed several multifaceted initiatives that require significant planning, coordinating, and are in addition to our volunteering and tabling. In order to do more than we are doing and expand our reach farther than we currently are, we would like to add at least one more

student position to our executive team. We would also like to develop other leadership positions within our volunteer pool to allow for mentorship and leadership opportunities as well as more flexibility with tasks like workshops and presentations.