

2024 Student Voting Action Plan, University of Northern Iowa

Prepared by Justin Holmes, Associate Professor of Political Science and Chair of the American Democracy Project Committee

Executive Summary

UNI has a tradition of being a high turnout campus. For 2024, our plan is to build on our past success in several ways. First and foremost, we intend to broaden our coalition. Second, we plan to target areas of campus that have traditionally had lower levels of turnout. Finally, we plan to increase staffing around voter engagement. Our goal for 2024 is 70% turnout. In addition, in 2024, we are working to institutionalize our voter engagement efforts so that we can continue this work into the future and make it part of our campus culture.

Mission Statement

The University of Northern Iowa has a strong commitment to student engagement and building citizenship skills, and is recognized as a Carnegie Engaged Campus. PantherVote mission is to work within that tradition to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to get them to vote, and to train students to be leaders in civic engagement.

Background and Past work

In 2018, the American Democracy Project chapter on campus moved to the department of Political Science. We decided that one of our goals was to increase the role of ADP in get out the vote efforts. What we discovered from our old NSLVE reports is that UNI already had very high turnout (67.2% in 2016). A variety of groups were involved in registration and get out the vote efforts, especially NextGen and College Democrats, but there was little coordination among these groups, duplicated efforts, and little institutional support. Additionally, we had concerns that some of these efforts were largely based on particularly motivated students, and in other years, there might not be this kind of leadership. Our plan was to use ADP not to replace other groups, but to help them coordinate their efforts, and to identify and engage student leaders in the process. We united stake holders from a variety of organizations including College Democrats (at this point the College Republicans were in a rebuilding phase and chose not to participate), student government, the political science department, the Black Hawk County Auditor's office (who runs elections), university marketing, and the Student Organizations Coordinator. We dubbed the effort #panthersvote, so that we could have a consistent brand across campus. The provost provided funding for merchandise, activities, etc. In 2020 we ran a mostly online campaign due to covid, with less input from various partners. We were, however, able to increase turnout among our students.

	2016	2020
UNI Registration	89.8	89.1
UNI Turnout among eligible voters	66.7	73.1
UNI Turnout among registered voters	74.6	82
Turnout at peer institutions	52	65

- Our registration rate dipped slightly, but turnout among registered voters increased substantially, for an overall improvement of 6.4% from 2016. While our turnout did not improve as much as it did a peer institutions (Public MA granting universities, by the report), this is largely due to our extremely high starting point (We had the 2nd highest turnout in the nation in 2016), which limits our room for growth. In context, Iowa’s overall turnout was 75.8%. As voters under 30 have the lowest voter turnout rates, this makes our numbers look even more impressive

2024- Growing #panthersvote

We have been continuously working on voter engagement since the 2018 election, and are gearing up to start our big push in the spring and summer of 2020. We were very happy with our 2020 results, particularly given the difficult circumstances of the pandemic. In 2024, we seek to maintain our high turnout by growing out program.

Taking New Partners

We have lost some of our original partners. In particular, the College Republican group disappeared, and given that our mission is non-partisan, we have pulled back from the College Democrats as well. WE have added several new partners. The department of Athletics has invited us to do registration and GOTV activities and several sporting events, and promoted registration among athletes. Housing and Dining has helped us get promotional materials into the dorms.

Targeting Low Turnout Majors-

Our 2018 and 2020 NSLVE reports show several large majors with substantially lower turnout than the campus average. Leisure Studies and Business stand out as having lower than average turnout, and a large number of students. We have partnered with the college of business to target their majors. WE have done multiple days of tabling, spoken in their classes, and have partnered with their faculty to put on a forum on economic policy and the elections.

Building up Staffing-

We were able to recruit 3 student interns this semester to serve as voter ambassadors. They have received a modest stipend through our campus’s Koob Scholarship, which provides funding for students doing service internships. Additionally, the Black Hawk County Auditor’s office hired a student intern who spends a portion of her time on campus. Our main staff this year

Justin Holmes, Professor of Political Science, and Chair of Panthersvote

Amanda Jahnke-Sauer- College of Social and Behavioral Science Marketing Manager

Sam Caughron- Student Voter Ambassador

Kimberly Frisbee- Student Voter Ambassador

McKenna Pierce- Student Voter Ambassador

Providing Access-

Iowa allows early voting at satellite locations. In 2020, we had a three days of satellite voting on campus, located at the Dome due to COVID. We have 3 days of early voting in the union this year, and have been heavily promoting it.

Timeline of Activities-

Spring Semester 2024

Professor Holmes offered an experimental class centered on panthersvote. The first half of the class consisted of readings on voter participation, particularly of young people, and guest speeches from various potential campus partners. In the second half, students prepared various materials (social media, event planning, a dorm based campaign, etc. for the fall

May- Holmes spoke to the University Council (large group of University leaders) to talk about past successes in turnout and garner attention for the fall.

Summer 2024

Design of graphics for signage

Ordering of signs, buttons, T Shirts, etc.

Fall 2024

Tabling in the Union, Library, Business building and Education building multiple days per week throughout the fall

Social Media on Facebook and Instagram, ongoing

September- Joint National Voter Registration day/Constitution Day event

Student Voter Ambassadors visit classes to give registration presentation. They are on track to speak in 50 classes. September through Oct 21 (Registration Deadline)

Power Point Circulated to all faculty to share with students, with information on registration and voting.

October- Speaker series with 4 presentations on election topics: Foreign Policy, Election Security, Misinformation, and economic policy

October 16-19 Early voting on campus

Late October- Poster template made available to all dorm Resident Advisors with polling place locations

Yard signs all over campus to promote Election Day

Rally prior to Election Day to promote turnout

Nov 5- Election Day.