

UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER
Civic Engagement Campus Action Plan
2024

Center for Community Engagement
Glenn Cerosaletti, Director

Committee for Political Engagement
Payge Vukelic '24, Chair

Center
for | **COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**

CPE **COMMITTEE FOR
POLITICAL
ENGAGEMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This action plan has been developed by the University of Rochester Center for Community Engagement (CCE) for the 2024 election cycle. It seeks to foster students' civic engagement through actions such as increased voter registration and turnout rates for the 2024 US election cycle and beyond. It follows the guide, [Strengthening American Democracy](#), published by the Students Learn, Students Vote coalition, and the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge.

By engaging with this action plan, students will be able to:

- Understand and communicate their civic identity
- Engage in controversy with civility
- Develop a greater capacity for empathy, as seen by engaging with and relating to others of different backgrounds
- Analyze complicated social issues
- Connect and apply knowledge from coursework to community engagement experiences and vice versa
- Develop capacity for active participation in a community

The University of Rochester is a private, highly selective, tier-one research university in Rochester, NY. It encompasses six schools and divisions including the School of Arts & Sciences, the Hajim School of Engineering, the Eastman School of Music, the School of Medicine and Dentistry, the School of Nursing, the Simon Business School, and the Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. While there is collaboration across these academic divisions, this action plan places particular emphasis on undergraduate students in the College of Arts, Science, and Engineering (AS&E).

The University's mission is to "learn, discover, heal, create—and make the world ever better." Shared values include equity, leadership, integrity, openness, respect, and accountability. Voter mobilization efforts help to

ensure that all people have a voice in making decisions that impact our communities. While not explicitly addressed in the University's vision and values, the College's co-curricular college competencies are similar to the identified civic engagement learning outcomes: adaptability and resilience, career design and management, critical thinking and problem-solving, intercultural and global fluency, leadership, oral and written communication, and teamwork.

Staff from the Center for Community Engagement developed this action plan in collaboration with undergraduate students in the Committee for Political Engagement (CPE), an advisory board convened by the Center.

The action plan will begin in spring 2024 and proceed through December 2025, when stakeholders will assess progress toward the identified goals. The action plan will be reviewed and updated between September and December 2025.

LEADERSHIP

The working group will be led by:

Glenn Cerosaletti

Assistant Dean of Students and Director,
Center for Community Engagement

Payge Vukelic

Student and Chair,
Committee for Political Engagement (2022–2024)
Class of 2024

The strengths of the working group members include:

- Student perspective and voice
- Student organization and government involvement
- Campus partnerships network
- Community partnerships
- Institutional knowledge

The working group recognizes the importance of advancing civic learning and democratic engagement, especially for groups that continue to be marginalized in the US democratic process.

The working group will convene stakeholders in several ways:

Committee for Political Engagement (CPE)

CPE is made up of students diverse in class year, academic interests, political ideology, and social identities. The group is selected through an application and interview process moderated by current members (their peers). Ex officio members include a representative from the Students Association Government, College Democrats, and College Republicans. CPE has

established processes for leadership selection and transition. Students have occasionally been compensated in the past for their contributions.

Coalition for Political Engagement

The Coalition is a University-wide convening of stakeholders passionate about creating a civic engagement culture on campus. The Coalition provides a mechanism for stakeholders whose focus is adjacent to political engagement to make strategic and instrumental contributions to the elaboration and implementation of the campus action plan. These stakeholders include students from other student organizations (not only organizations focused on politics but also awareness, service, cultural, and other organizations, including fraternities and sororities; it may also include non-affiliated students), student affairs staff (particularly student activities, fraternity & sorority affairs, residential life, athletics and recreation), other staff (registrar, information technology, religious and spiritual life,...) and faculty members. The Coalition receives occasional communications and meets at least once per year to coordinate efforts.

Community Partnerships

CCE and CPE have collaborated closely with the Rochester chapter of the League of Women Voters (LWV). This partnership has included regular voter registration support provided by the LWV; in 2023, the collaboration extended to include off-campus voter registration outreach. The University also maintains regular communications with the local Board of Elections to coordinate voter registration, education, and mobilization efforts, including promoting the opportunity for students to serve as poll workers. The University participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement and is an ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge partner. The University was a founding member of the [national campaign](#) convened by Harvard University's Institute of Politics and has participated in its conference.

The Center for Community Engagement reports to the Dean of the College and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies. The dean can advocate for the efforts of the working group. Its work also benefits from the support and advocacy of senior leadership in the provost's office and the University's office of equity and inclusion.

COMMITMENT

The University's [mission, vision, and values](#) do not include a specific commitment to civic and political engagement, but they place a clear emphasis on equity, inclusion, leadership, and "making the world ever better," which collectively support the aims of the campus action plan for political engagement.

In 2023, the University completed and released a new [strategic plan](#). One of the core beliefs underpinning the planning process was that the University must contribute to making the local community more vibrant and just through economic, social, educational and cultural partnerships. An additional core belief is that increasing the diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and justice is necessary to advance the University's mission. While not explicitly focused on civic learning or political engagement, both of these core beliefs relate to and support the work of our campus action plan. The plan articulates a commitment that all undergraduate students will complete at least two experiential learning opportunities, with community-engaged learning highlighted as one such high-impact experience.

University leadership has also shown its support for this work through support of the University's participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting & Engagement (NSLVE) and for our partnership with Democracy Works to use the TurboVote platform. The TurboVote platform has been institutionalized and promoted through a seasonal link in the Blackboard learning management system. In 2023, University president Sarah Mangelsdorf signed the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. University senior leaders have also issued campus-wide messages in advance of recent elections to encourage participation of students and other members of the university community to participate in the elections. In 2022, the dean of the College of Arts & Science also committed to the establishment of [a Democracy Center](#) within the political science

department to promote the comparative study of the health of democracy both domestically and internationally. In 2023, the Dean of the College and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education committed to the creation of a new, full-time staff position to provide additional support for voter engagement efforts (among other responsibilities).

The first effort to create a campus-wide action plan for civic and political engagement was completed in 2022; the current plan builds on that foundational effort. While individual departments or units may have learning outcomes related to civic, democratic, and political learning, there are not yet institution-wide learning outcomes. A hallmark of the undergraduate education at the University is an open curriculum with no general education requirements. Instead, students complete significant work in each of the three primary academic divisions: humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, math and engineering. Co-curricular efforts are guided by the College Competencies, as described in the executive summary.

LANDSCAPE

Learning Outcomes: The University does not have over-arching campus learning outcomes, although selected departments may include civic learning and democratic engagement among their priority learning outcomes. This is certainly true for the Center for Community Engagement.

Assessment: The University has participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) since 2012 and makes [its NSLVE reports publicly available](#), in addition to promoting them with student, faculty, and administrative leadership. In the most recent election cycle for which data is available, the University's voter registration and participation rates were slightly higher than the average of all institutions that participated in NSLVE, but slightly behind that of the University's peer group. (Note that the University has not yet received its 2022 NSLVE report at the time of the drafting of this

2024 action plan.) The University has also participated in the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) on a triennial schedule since its inception in 2006. This study provides indirect evidence of students' ideological views as well as other aspects of leadership and civic involvement.

Curricular integration: The University's political science department is well established and respected. Its curricular offerings (majors, minors, certificates) are among those most popular for undergraduate students. The integration of civic learning and democratic engagement (CLDE) into the undergraduate curriculum happens especially there. However, other academic departments, often led by faculty interest, offer courses that include CLDE to varying degrees. For example, the Program in Dance and Movement has offered several courses that have addressed issues of civic learning and political engagement. More broadly, the Center for Community Engagement supports faculty in developing and delivering community-engaged courses, which to varying degrees incorporate some aspects of CLDE.

Co-curricular integration: The Center for Community Engagement is the office primarily responsible for promoting CLDE outcomes through its various programs, which encompass both curricular and co-curricular realms. The Center serves as an advocate for student organizations that focus on politics. Other student organizations, including fraternities, sororities and cultural organizations, occasionally incorporate CLDE in their programming.

Internal barriers to success include:

- General disinterest in political engagement outside students majoring in political science
- Distrust of University intentions with regard to civic and community engagement

- Limited faculty involvement (e.g. excusing students from class to vote, sharing info)
- Class schedules prevent students from voting on Election Day
- Overcommitted student body
- Campus bubble: students are disconnected from current events

External Barriers to success include:

- Deadlines to register to vote
- Students may not understand how to properly complete the voter registration form
- Students changing address for campus housing from year to year may result in their registrations expiring
- Not allowing absentee ballots for every election for everyone
- Polling site accessibility: the Election Day polling site is at the University's medical center, a 20-25 minute walk for most students
- Transportation to polling sites

Student demographics (data reflects undergraduate students)

- 32% international students; 37% white, 13% asian, 5% black, 7% hispanic, 3% multi-racial, and 4% unknown
- High international student population means a significant portion of student body is ineligible to vote in US elections and may contribute to the lack of interest and engagement
- Residential campus: Almost all students live on or near campus and so must choose whether to register to vote at the campus address or at their home address
- Most students are from other US states and some perceive their vote as being more influential if they are from a swing state

Assets for success

The following resources are available to help the institution be successful:

- Diverse student body
- The Center for Community Engagement

- The Committee for Political Engagement
- School is generally willing to support civic learning and democratic engagement
- Very involved student body
- TurboVote portal
- Early voting in New York State
- Formal support from Students Association to host a polling site on campus
- Data from NSLVE reports since 2012
- Newly formed Center for Democracy in a well-established department of political science

What additional resources are needed to help the institution be successful?

- Additional support from administrative departments such as transportation, administration
- Further engagement of student leadership of diverse organizations
- Institution-wide promotional approach

GOALS

The University of Rochester envisions a future where political engagement is part of student civic engagement and campus culture and all students contribute to the democratic process.

College Competencies include:

- Adaptability and resilience
- Career design and management
- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Intercultural and global fluency
- Leadership
- Oral and written communication
- Teamwork

Political engagement efforts contribute most directly to critical thinking and problem-solving, leadership, and intercultural and global fluency. It also contributes to varying degrees toward the development of most of the competencies.

LONG-TERM GOALS

By 2032, the University of Rochester aims to:

- Increase voter registration rates (as measured by NSLVE) to at least 95% of students eligible to vote.
- Increase voting participation rates to at least 75% of eligible students.
- Eliminate disparities in voting participation by under-represented minority students eligible to vote (as measured by NSLVE).
- Reduce disparities in voting participation by gender by at least 50% (as measured by NSLVE).
- Reduce disparities in voting participation by areas of study by at least 50% (as measured by NSLVE).

- Provide registration guidance to all eligible students voting for the first time while attending the University of Rochester.

SHORT-TERM GOALS

In the short term, the University of Rochester seeks to:

- Increase student voter registration rates to at least 90%.
- Increase student voter participation rates to at least 75%.
- Increase STEM student voter participation rates by 10% in Fall 2024 compared to 2020 rates.
- Increase Asian student voter participation rates by 15% in Fall 2024 compared to 2020 rates.
- By 2024, the University will strengthen cross-campus partnerships through its coalition for political engagement.
- Reach 3,000 TurboVote users by the end of our current subscription (2025)
- By 2025, develop and implement an assessment to determine a baseline on the number of students that:
 - feel they can communicate their political identities and values
 - know mechanisms for sharing their thoughts (e.g. voting, writing to representatives, speaking to council,...)
 - feel capable of pursuing these mechanisms for sharing their thoughts.

To accomplish these outcomes, we identified priority areas:

PROMOTION

- Increase engagement with social media posts
- Increase Instagram followers for the Committee for Political Engagement and Center for Community Engagement accounts by 20% compared to 2023 levels

- Develop a sustainable, timely process for publicizing political engagement events

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

- Establish an early voting polling place on campus for 2025 election cycle

PARTNERSHIPS

- Increase participation in national efforts, such as the Students Learn, Students Vote coalition
- Continue to build on local partnerships with the League of Women Voters and the Monroe County Board of Elections

ENGAGEMENT

- Cosponsor each event with a student group or department.
Suggestions may include:
 - Competitions focused on voter registration with student organizations, fraternities and sororities or a capella groups
- Each semester, cosponsor with two new groups/departments (particularly those that support STEM students, Asian students, and other underrepresented students)
- Host at least one program that includes international students each semester (through the Committee for Political Engagement's International Outreach Committee)
- Host a forum of elected officials on campus to connect students to engage with their representatives at all levels of government

STRATEGY

Goals (Outcomes)	Program (Outputs)	Anticipated Date	Venue	Responsible Person(s)
Increase student voter registration rates to 90%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct early outreach to new students over the summer - Run voter registration drive during orientation - Programming for NVRD - Collaboration with Board of Elections - Organize campus competition 	February-October, 2024	Newsletter & social media Orientation Fair Student Center	CCE + CPE, MC BOE, LWV, campus partners
Increase student voter participation rates to 75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establish campus polling place -Consistent messaging regarding absentee voting -Messaging from University leadership -Engage campus mascot in promotion and encouragement of student voting -Host an absentee/mail-in voting party 	October 2024	Goergen Hall Atrium	CPE (VOC) + CCE; MC BOE
Increase STEM student voter turnout rates by 10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop partnerships with key STEM departments -Develop partnership with Carlson Science Library + Physics Optics & Astronomy Library 	October 2024	Science & Engineering quad; Carlson Library; Green Lounge	CCE + CPE
Increase Asian student voter turnout rates by 15%	Develop partnerships with relevant student organizations and academic departments (Sigma Psi Zeta; Asian Studies)	January-October 2024		CPE + CCE

Develop and implement an assessment instrument	-Engage instructor of program evaluation course at the Warner School -Develop assessment instruments and questions in consultation with faculty and students	October 2024	Online	CCE; Warner Graduate School
Register 1,500 TurboVote users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link TurboVote on BlackBoard - Spotlight in social media posts - Direct traffic at all events - Course outreach 	November 2024		CPE (VOC chair) + CCE
Increase Instagram followers (CPE/CCE)	Targeted outreach to campus groups and departments	December 2024		CPE (Publicity Chair) + CCE communications team
Develop publicity process	Coordinate internal process for Committee for Political Engagement with those used by the Center for Community Engagement	September 2024		CPE Publicity Chair + CCE communications team

REPORTING

Once finalized, the campus action plan will be shared via the following venues:

- CPE meeting
- Campus Coalition for Political Engagement
- Students Association Government
- Faculty Senate
- College Deans meeting
- Staff meeting of the CCE
- With leadership of key student organizations, such as political organizations, as well as fraternities and sororities
- The Vice President for Community Partnerships

The plan will also be made public by linking it on the CCE website and the web page for the CPE. The CCE website already includes public access to the University's NSLVE reports.

By sharing the plan with other students, staff, and faculty leaders on campus--and by having engaged them in the process of formulating the plan--we aim to achieve a high level of awareness and engagement among these stakeholders for its implementation.

EVALUATION

Progress toward this plan will be evaluated on an annual basis through updates by the student leadership of CPE and staff from CCE, with input from other stakeholders. In addition, a more systematic, qualitative evaluation will be conducted in 2025 following the 2024 presidential election cycle in order to determine the effectiveness of programming related to political engagement, and the overall campus climate for this aim. The evaluation will be conducted by faculty and students in the Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development in conducting the evaluation. The school offers a certificate in program evaluation and regularly seeks projects for students to undertake in teams or as an individual practicum; such a team conducted an evaluation in spring, 2021, to assess efforts for the 2020 election. Additional faculty and student projects in other departments/programs could build upon these efforts.

The evaluation will gather information to answer the following questions:

- What is the campus climate for political engagement?
- How effective are the programs and efforts that have been undertaken in this area?
- Which efforts contributed most to shifts in NSLVE and other data?
- What could be done to improve data metrics?
- If voter registration data in NSLVE didn't change much--or decreased--can we understand why that is the case and how can we improve on that?
- What are the reasons why students don't register and participate in elections?
- What are the most effective methods for communicating with students about these civic and political issues?

The University has previously compiled relevant data through other evaluation mechanisms. The University attained the Carnegie Classification in Community Engagement in 2020 and will be eligible to re-apply for the 2026 cycle. The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership, in which the University has participated on a triennial schedule since 2006, also collects relevant data. The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement will continue to be a vital source of evaluation data. Data will be collected from the NSLVE reports, campus programs and through a survey of staff and student collaborators and interviews or focus groups involving at least 20 staff and faculty members and at least 50 students. Questions will focus on the campus climate for political and civic engagement as well as supports and obstacles to political participation. Particular attention will be paid to ensure that the data collection is inclusive of populations historically under-represented and disenfranchised in the US electoral process. The audience of the evaluation will be students, staff, and faculty involved in promoting civic learning and democratic engagement, as well as senior leadership at the institution. The qualitative data collected should provide insight into perceptions and reasons behind the results of NSLVE data, including voting participation rates for diverse groups of students.

To advance civic engagement and reach long-term goals, the University needs increased awareness of the data and the efforts among all stakeholders--students, faculty, staff, and community partners--in order to garner the momentum needed to make progress. Additional staff time and budget would be instrumental toward this end.