

Center for the
Common Good

UNIVERSITY OF
St.Thomas



TOMMIES VOTE

Civic Learning & Engagement Action Plan



2024-2025

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Planned By:

CEVEA Taskforce



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OVERVIEW

With a residential four-year campus in St. Paul, Minnesota, graduate programs, a two-year college in Minneapolis, and a campus in Rome, the University of St. Thomas is the largest of the 17 private colleges and universities in Minnesota. Founded in 1885 as a high school, college, and seminary for Catholic immigrants, the university's 9,000 students – historically drawn from Minnesota and the Upper Midwest – are increasingly diverse in geography, ethnicity, and social class.

In response to such developments, as well as broader transformations in our cities and society, St. Thomas has developed new university initiatives to ensure that our university and students are equipped to meet the emerging challenges of our contemporary world. Our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is rooted in our Catholic identity. Archbishop John Ireland founded the University of St. Thomas for immigrants who weren't welcomed elsewhere. Our convictions call us to protect and enhance the dignity of every human and to work for a more just and equitable society. We strive to be a university characterized by radical hospitality and are steadfast in our commitment to embedding a shared sense of belonging where all feel welcomed.

Examples of these include the Racial Justice Initiative, headed by nationally renowned scholar and activist Dr. Yohuru Williams; the Morrison Family College of Health, focused on health equity and integrated, whole-person health and headed by Dr. MayKao Hang; Dougherty Family College, an internal two-year college designed to serve first-generation college students and headed by Dr. Buffy Smith; and our university's recent, pathbreaking transition from Division III to Division I athletics. All are but a few examples of the transformative work being done – civically, socially, academically– at St. Thomas.



Voter Ambassadors from a Social Work course run a registration station in the library.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

St. Thomas acknowledges the challenges that exist in our current times and remains steadfast in the commitment to increasing voter education and access as well as helping our politically diverse student body deal with the deep political divisions of our day. This commitment to civic engagement and action aligns with the mission of the University of St. Thomas to “educate students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.”

A strong commitment to nonpartisan civic education and voter engagement is embedded in our mission and work at the University of St. Thomas, led in recent years by the Civic Engagement, Voter Education, and Advocacy (CEVEA) taskforce and leadership team. The CEVEA taskforce is made up of representatives from campus constituencies including faculty, staff, administration, and students. This taskforce is responsible for the design and implementation of the Tommies Vote 2024-2025 Action Plan.

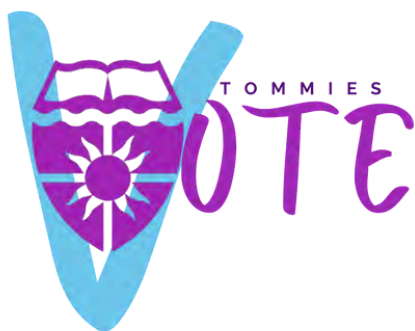
The 2022-2023 elections generated strong momentum for civic engagement at St. Thomas that the university is excited to build upon in years to come. For 2024-2025 specifically, CEVEA leadership has identified several short- and long-term goals. These include maintaining our robust levels of student voter registration, increasing student voter turnout rate to match our student registration rate (at around 90 percent), and further strengthening our commitment to nonpartisan civic engagement across campus. We elaborate on these goals and related strategies later in this report.



Campus staff and faculty help students register to vote and make a voting plan.

CAMPUS & COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE

A neighborhood-based city, St. Paul created 17 District Councils in the 1970s, at the behest of a popular and charismatic mayor, in order to foster citizen engagement and streamline citizen input to the City Council. Our home campus in St. Paul straddles two District Councils (Union Park and Macalester Groveland), both of which are seeking more engagement with college students. We aim to work with Human Resources to create work-study jobs off campus in order to incentivize participation in the District Council board and committee meetings, where student input would be important on matters of housing, transportation, sustainability, voting, and more. Although our demographics and our admissions goals are evolving, St. Thomas currently draws primarily from the Twin Cities, Greater Minnesota, and nearby Iowa and Wisconsin, making it relatively easy for students to vote in person in the town or city where they were raised. CEVEA aims both to better engage our residential and nearby neighborhood students in the issues of St. Paul and to encourage particularly our BIPOC students to be civically engaged in their home communities.



Whether through voting, education, or activism, however, student engagement in our local community is especially pertinent given the racial reckoning that the Twin Cities metro area is undergoing, along with the growing calls for equity and inclusive policies – in housing, policing, and more – from both the Minneapolis and St. Paul City Councils. As St. Thomas continues to broaden our national profile and name recognition beyond our traditional base, we are also increasingly working with students from other regions to navigate their options for voter participation, including absentee voting. We utilize TurboVote as a nationally oriented and recognized resource for providing students with up-to-date information based on their unique situations.

The majority of our 55 graduate-degree programs are housed on a campus in downtown Minneapolis, which in recent years has also become home to the transformational two-year Dougherty Family College (DFC). This cohort-based program prepares “historically underrepresented scholars to earn a future bachelor’s degree, get on the path to a meaningful professional career and step into their role as transformative community leaders,” according to the DFC Vision Statement. While CEVEA is primarily housed on the St. Paul campus, we continue to explore strategies for strengthening our work on our Minneapolis campus, particularly with students in DFC.

LEADERSHIP & CEVEA

The University of St. Thomas created the Civic Engagement, Voter Education, and Advocacy (CEVEA) taskforce in 2019 with a mission to “coordinate, streamline, and promote campus-wide civic engagement, voter education, and advocacy efforts in order to advance the common good.” CEVEA is a campus-wide collaborative whose 44 active members include faculty members, university administrators from Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Government Relations, Office for Mission, and library staff, among others, as well as nine students.

The CEVEA Leadership Team likewise represents a broad cross-section of university stakeholders. If someone in CEVEA stops showing up and doing the work or needs to step away, we will first inquire of the person about their ability to continue, at what level they can commit to, and additional support we can offer. If unable to continue, we would then reach out to administrators in their division/school or organization and ask for other names of individuals who could step and carry the work forward.

CEVEA LEADERSHIP TEAM (LISTED ALPHABETICALLY)



Roberto Aspholm

Assistant Professor of Social Work & CEVEA Faculty Liaison



Jerome Benner

Director of Neighborhood & Community Relations



Patricia Conde-Brooks

Executive Director, Student Engagement & Inclusion



Katharine Hill

Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement & Research



Manuela Hill-Muñoz

Director of Social Justice, Changemaking & Voter Coordinator



Amy McDonough

Chief of Staff & Liaison to the Office of the President



Theresa Ricke-Kiely

Executive Director, Center for the Common Good

CEVEA TASKFORCE TEAM (LISTED ALPHABETICALLY)

ADMINISTRATION:

- Fr. Chris Collins SJ, Vice President for Mission

STAFF:

- Nayely Becerra Balbuena, Assistant Director, Student Diversity, and Inclusion Services
- Margaret Cahill, Director, Campus Life
- Stephan Cole, Lab Manager for School of Engineering
- Anna Ewart, Service Analyst, Innovation and Technology Services
- Josh Hengemuhle, School of Divinity
- Dustin Killpack, Associate Director, Center for the Common Good
- Ed Kim, Digital Project Manager, Marketing, Insights, and Communications
- Andrea Koeppe, Academic Services Librarian
- Aaron Macke, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life
- Teri Mueller-Dorn, Program Manager, Center for the Common Good
- Kelly Sardon-Garrity, Associate Director, Center for the Common Good

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Advocacy Representative, Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis
- Jessica Howell, Catholic Relief Services
- Representative from the League of Women Voter's Saint Paul

FACULTY:

- April Eichmeier, Communications
- Mel Gray, Business Economics, Professor Emeritus
- Angela High-Pippert, Political Science
- Jessica Hodge, Sociology and Criminal Justice
- Mike Klein, Justice and Peace Studies
- Amy Levad, Theology
- Paul Lorah, Geography
- Timothy Lynch, Political Science
- Patricia Maddox, Sociology and Criminal Justice
- Amelia McNamara, Computer and Information Sciences
- Christopher Michaelson, Business Ethics and Social Responsibility
- Debra Petersen, Communication Studies
- Aaron Sackett, Marketing
- Muffet Trout, Education
- Elizabeth Welsh, Management
- Virgil Wiebe, Law School

LOCAL ELECTIONS OFFICE

- Ramsey County Elections Representative (rotating)

STUDENT CEVEA TEAM (LISTED ALPHABETICALLY)



France Aravena '25
Communications



Claire Blum '25
Criminal Justice & Sociology, Voter Ambassador



Meghan Green '24
Masters in Leadership and Student Affairs '24



Madelyn Orr '26
Political Science, Voter Ambassador



Skye Shultz '24
Social Work & Psychology, Global Justice Movement Intern



Samskrith Sriram '24
Undergraduate Student Government



Maggie Sutton '24
Political Science, Global Justice Movement Intern



Morgan Whiting '26
Political Science, Voter Ambassador



Michael Yohanes '27
Undecided, Voter Ambassador

COMMITMENT & MISSION

CEVEA is housed in the University of St. Thomas Center for the Common Good, which reports to the Vice President for Mission. The Center for the Common Good oversees “collaborative curricular, co-curricular, and research initiatives that address civic and community challenges” and works to “encourage and support students, staff, and faculty to be transformational partners who work tirelessly for social justice in our local, national, and global communities.”

CEVEA and the Center for the Common Good both embody the mission of the university, which reads: “Inspired by Catholic intellectual tradition, the University of St. Thomas educates students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.” Its community partners include Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Keystone Community Services.

The University of St. Thomas is both broadly and specifically committed to the ideals of democratic engagement promoted by the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. Moreover, the university has institutionalized resources dedicated toward this end and will continue to explore strategies for strengthening this work as we move forward into 2024/2025 and beyond.



D1 student-athletes help peers register on National Voter Registration Day.

CEVEA was organized to provide an institutional collective base for voter registration, civic engagement events, voter turnout efforts, and similar endeavors, formalizing activities that had previously been carried out via Student Affairs and Undergraduate Student Government (USG).

In the last five years, CEVEA has sponsored and strategically implemented a wide range of activities to further its mission, including:

- Systematically scheduling voter registration events, including National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and turnout events in the days leading up to elections;
- Panel events, with topics including voting among vulnerable populations, implications of changes in Minnesota voting laws, and the importance of local elections;
- Guest speaker events, including webinars with elected officials such as the Minnesota Secretary of State and county elections officials.



D1 student-athlete encourages Tommies to vote.

These efforts extend beyond national election years into local election years. To comply with Minnesota state law, which changed in 2023, we named a campus voter coordinator, Manuela Hill-Muñoz, to manage campus efforts around voter engagement. In Fall 2023, we also piloted a Faculty Voter Ambassadors initiative in which faculty members commit to promoting voter engagement in their classrooms; we had 12 faculty members in our inaugural pilot group. We are continuing to work with USG to navigate campus coverage of various events and endeavors and collaborate on the annual Day at the Capitol event sponsored by the Minnesota Private College Council. We have continued to prioritize a collaboration with the university's Athletics Department to promote voter registration and turnout, given that the university's recent transition into D1 allows us to participate in higher-profile Athletic Voting competitions.

League of Women Voters-MN and St. Thomas ambassadors urge Tommies to register on National Voter Registration Day.



These efforts have translated into heightened levels of democratic engagement among our student body. In November 2021, the University of St. Thomas was awarded the Platinum Seal for Voting Rate by ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge for our campus' achievement of a student voting rate of 82.2 percent, an increase of nearly 5 percentage points from 2016; according to a recent report by Lead MN, it represented the fourth-highest student voter rate among all colleges and universities – public or private – in the state of Minnesota. It is also 16 percentage points higher than the national average. While we are awaiting NSLVE data for voter participation in 2022, our action plan for that year was designated by ALL IN as “highly established” and is featured on the ALL IN website as an example that other institutions might refer to in crafting their own action plans.



GOALS & STRATEGIES

SHORT-TERM GOALS AND STRATEGIES (2024-2025)

Maintain high levels of student voter registration.

- Maintain the voter registration rates on campus for 2024 relative to 2020, when the registration rate on the St. Thomas campus was 89.1 percent.
- Pilot Minneapolis campus engagement by holding two voter engagement events at DFC.
- Implement the "Ask Every Student" strategy, including outreach events on campus, integrating voter registration in new-student orientation materials, and building cross-campus collaborations with our D1 Athletics division and other campus groups.
- Maintain and grow the Voter Ambassador leadership group.

Increase levels of voter turnout.

- Close the voter turnout rate in 2024 from 82 percent to 89 percent.
- Include election-related information on the official university calendar.

Further strengthen commitment to nonpartisan civic engagement across campus.

- Plan and organize at least four panel events to provide students with opportunities to learn about democratic engagement.
- Institutionalize and expand the Faculty Voter Ambassador program from 12 to 20 faculty.
- Train 10 faculty and staff as facilitators for the Reduce the Rancor model and plan four student co-hosted Reduce the Rancor events with Braver Angels.
- Engage student organizations through initiatives such as the Tommies Vote Student Organization Challenge, student organization meetings, and strategic partnerships with academic and co-curricular campus entities.
- Plan and organize at least four Advocacy 101 workshops for students through the Global Justice Movement partnership with Catholic Relief Services.
- Invite, engage, and connect students in Day at the Capitol activities via the Minnesota Private College Council, the National Association of Social Workers, and other partners.
- Support and organize events based on the Ready to Run® model designed to encourage women to run for elective office, position themselves for appointive office, work on a campaign, or strengthen their citizenship skills.





CEVEA taskforce members at a celebratory gathering.

LONG-TERM GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Facilitate greater ease of student voter engagement.

- Work with Ramsey County and our Ward 4 City Councilmember to strategize around how to ensure that all residential students can vote on campus.
- Systematize the voter registration reminder process through university automated systems and more consistently direct students to CEVEA-vetted, nonpartisan voting resources.

Further strengthen university commitment to democratic engagement.

- Explore making Election Day a non-class day university wide.
- Ensure that the St. Paul campus can be an early-voting location.
- Further embed community/civic engagement, democratic participation, and political inclusivity in future iterations of the university's strategic plan.
- Secure greater university and outside funding for voter mobilization activities.

NSLVE ENGAGEMENT

Like many colleges, the University of St. Thomas partners with the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE) housed at Tufts University to get data about student registration and voting rates through the NSLVE (National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement) report.

This graph represents the NSLVE data from 2020 and looks at our student voting rate by race/ethnicity categories. The data show an increase in voting rates in almost all of the categories. We believe that partnerships with multicultural clubs and organizations that support marginalized communities have helped to increase voting rates across the board. Though work remains to be done, we are excited about the progress made thus far.

	2016			2018			2020			2016-2020	
	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	Enrolled	Voted	Rate	Change	(p.p)
Asian	444	257	58	482	229	48	558	369	66	↑	8
American Indian/ Alaska Native	18	14	78	26	17	65	22	15	68	↓	-10
Black	357	220	62	384	222	58	436	329	75	↑	14
Hispanic	353	237	67	422	247	59	578	421	73	↑	6
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 or More Races	241	187	78	229	145	63	261	214	82	↑	4
White	7,274	5,750	79	6,537	4,127	63	6,312	5,397	86	↑	6
Race Unknown	662	155	23	1,011	387	38	558	426	76	↑	53

Our efforts primarily focus on our undergraduate students as the largest group in our campus community. However, we continue to engage in partnership with our graduate programs and professional schools to educate, engage, and get vote ready.

This has manifested into gains across almost every category in the education level / undergraduate class year graph.

By Education Level / Undergraduate Class Year											
	2016			2018			2020			2016-2020	
	Enrolled	Voted	Rate (%)	Enrolled	Voted	Rate (%)	Enrolled	Voted	Rate (%)	Change	(p.p)
EDUCATION LEVEL											
Undergraduate	5,993	4,416	74	6,014	3,383	56	6,029	4,954	82	↑	8
Graduate	3,282	2,360	72	3,016	1,953	65	2,638	2,187	83	↑	11
Class Unknown	74	44	59	61	38	62	58	30	52	↑	-8
CLASS YEAR											
First Year	1,331	73	976	1,659	56	924	1,409	81	1,146	↑	8
Second Year	1,456	74	1,079	1,415	53	746	1,436	81	1,169	↑	7
Upper Level	3,280	73	2,405	2,999	58	1,752	3,241	82	2,668	↑	9
ENROLLMENT STATUS											
Full-time	8,143	5,890	72	8,124	4,711	58	7,897	6,521	83	↑	10
Part-time	1,206	930	77	967	663	69	828	650	79	↑	1

The university's strong student voter registration and participation in the 2020 presidential elections are shown in the 2020 NSLVE report. The 2020 voting rate of 82.2 percent is an improvement from the 2016 presidential voting rate of 77.3 percent, for which St. Thomas had been awarded a Gold Seal.



Seals awarded to University of St. Thomas from ALL IN DEMOCRACY.

While we have yet to receive our NSLVE data from the 2022 election, the university plans to channel the momentum of achieving a Platinum Seal to further improve voting rates in the Platinum Seal Range of 80 to 89 percent voting rate and work toward the Diamond Seal credential criteria of 90 to 100 percent voting rate. Closely monitoring the university's NSLVE reports will help St. Thomas to keep tabs on the voting rate in both midterm and presidential elections as the university works to more deeply engage our students in the preparation for and act of voting. We will revisit and update our goals and strategies as necessary upon receiving our 2022 NSLVE data.

Steve Simon, MN Secretary of State, helps two St. Thomas students register to vote.



REPORTING & EVALUATION

St. Thomas works diligently to share information about voting initiatives and civic engagement with the campus community. CEVEA maintains a web presence on St. Thomas' intranet, One St. Thomas, and the external university website "[Civic Engagement at St. Thomas](#)" and reports information about voter registration and turnout statistics via select news stories and different social media accounts such as Instagram [@USTChangemaking](#).

The university has also developed a Voting and Civic Engagement research guide on the library website to provide campus constituents with up-to-date information on voting and access to helpful resources. Data from the NSLVE reports will help the university to evaluate changes in voting over time to ensure that adequate – and ambitious – progress is being made. Data from NSLVE is publicly available on the All IN Democracy Challenge website and in the internal intranet One St. Thomas CEVEA website.

St. Thomas will continue to strengthen our measurements in an effort to have better evaluation processes, such as:

- Track participation in programming by utilizing the [CEVEA Tommie Link](#), our widely used club-management software, to scan participants' event passes.
- Provide opportunities for post-event reflection via Tommie Link.
- Incentivize participation, particularly of first-year students, by adding events to be part of the FYEX (First-Year Experience) program.
- Track views and clicks on websites, social media platforms, and email communications.

2022-2023 IN NUMBERS



69 TOMMIES PARTICIPATED IN A 2023 LOCAL ELECTIONS PANEL EDUCATIONAL EVENT.



TOTAL OF 15 EVENTS HELD TO SUPPORT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FROM VOTER REGISTRATION EVENTS TO VOTER EDUCATION PANELS.

2023-2024 IN NUMBERS



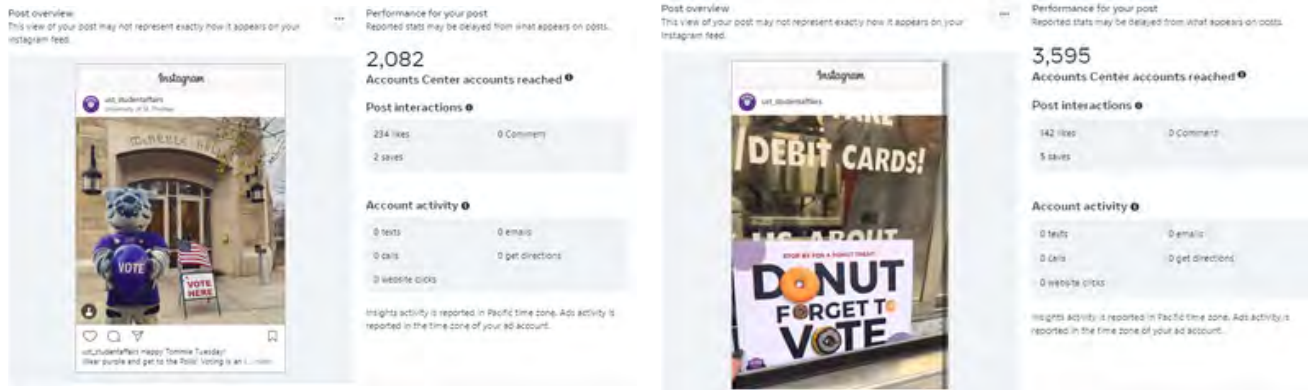
72 TOMMIES PARTICIPATED IN A 2022 VOTING ACTIVIST PANEL EDUCATIONAL EVENT.



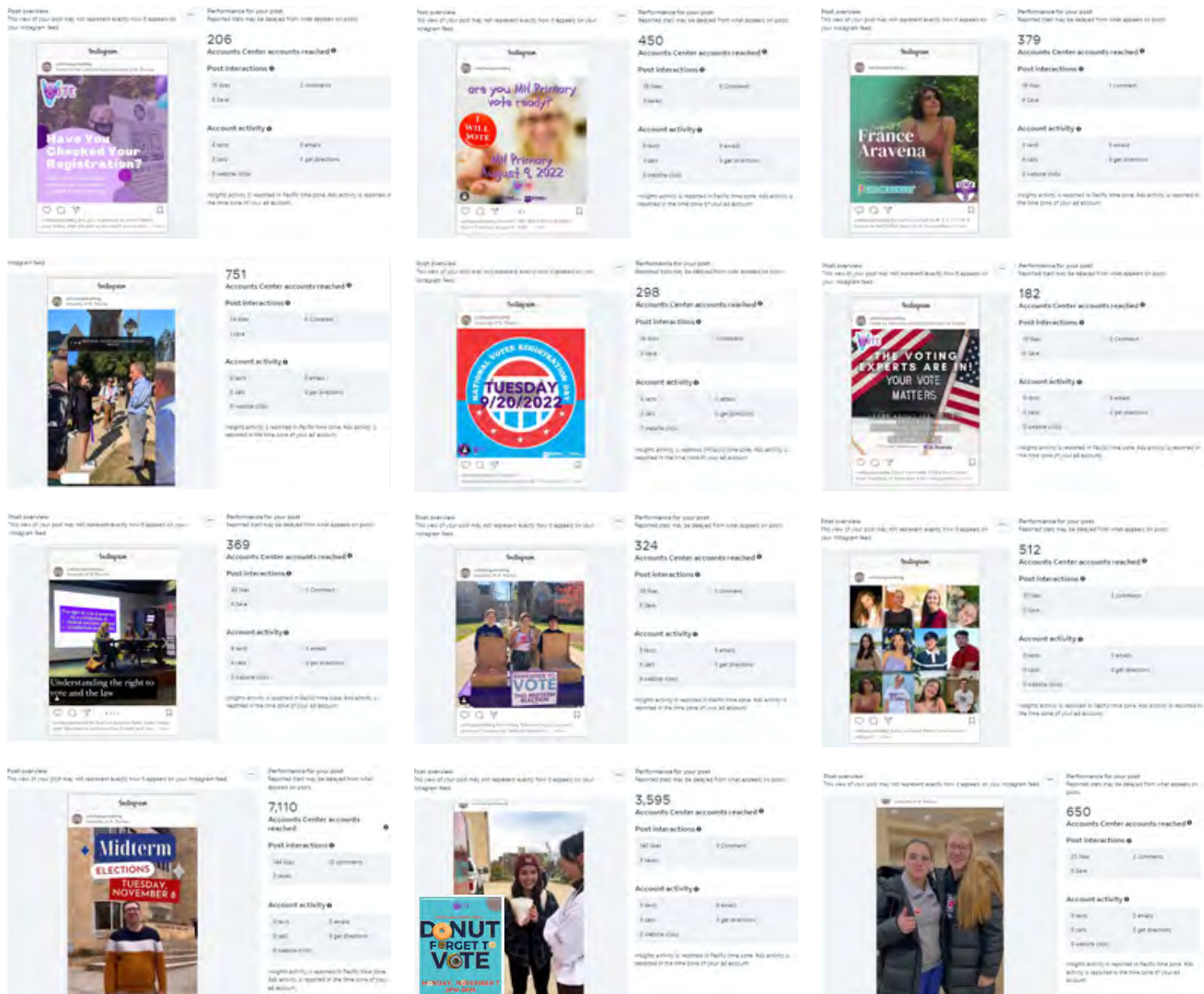
TOTAL OF 12 EVENTS HELD TO SUPPORT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FROM VOTER REGISTRATION EVENTS TO VOTER EDUCATION PANELS.

Showcasing our different university accounts that support all Voter Education efforts, reminders, and social media campaigns.

MIDTERM ELECTIONS SOCIAL MEDIA 2022



Examples of Student Affairs Social Media Campaigns and Reach.



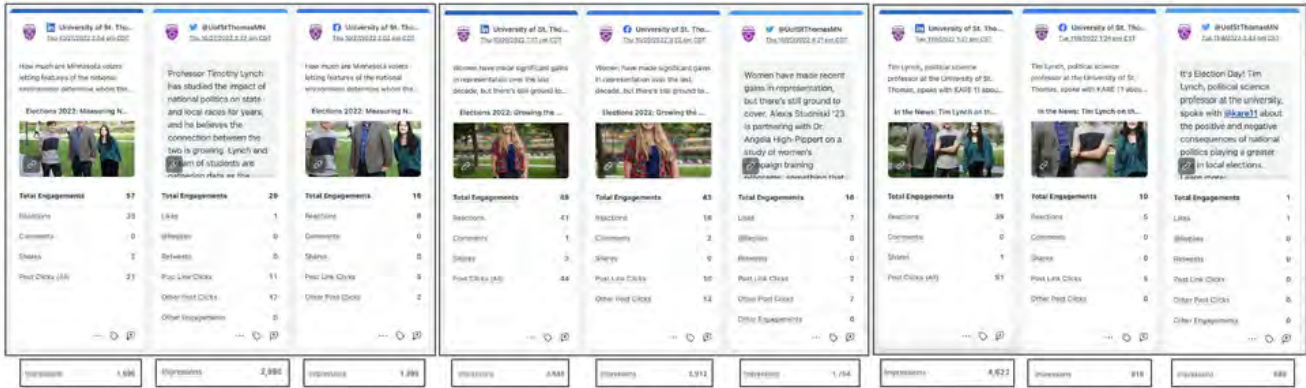
Samples of Social Media Campaigns that Drive Change with Impressive Reach.

MIDTERM ELECTIONS SOCIAL MEDIA 2022

Elections 2022: Measuring National Political Influences in Minnesota

Elections 2022: Growing the Next Generation of Women in Office

In the News: Tim Lynch on the Impact of National Politics on Local Elections



University-wide Social Media Channel sample campaigns and reach.

LOCAL ELECTIONS SOCIAL MEDIA 2023

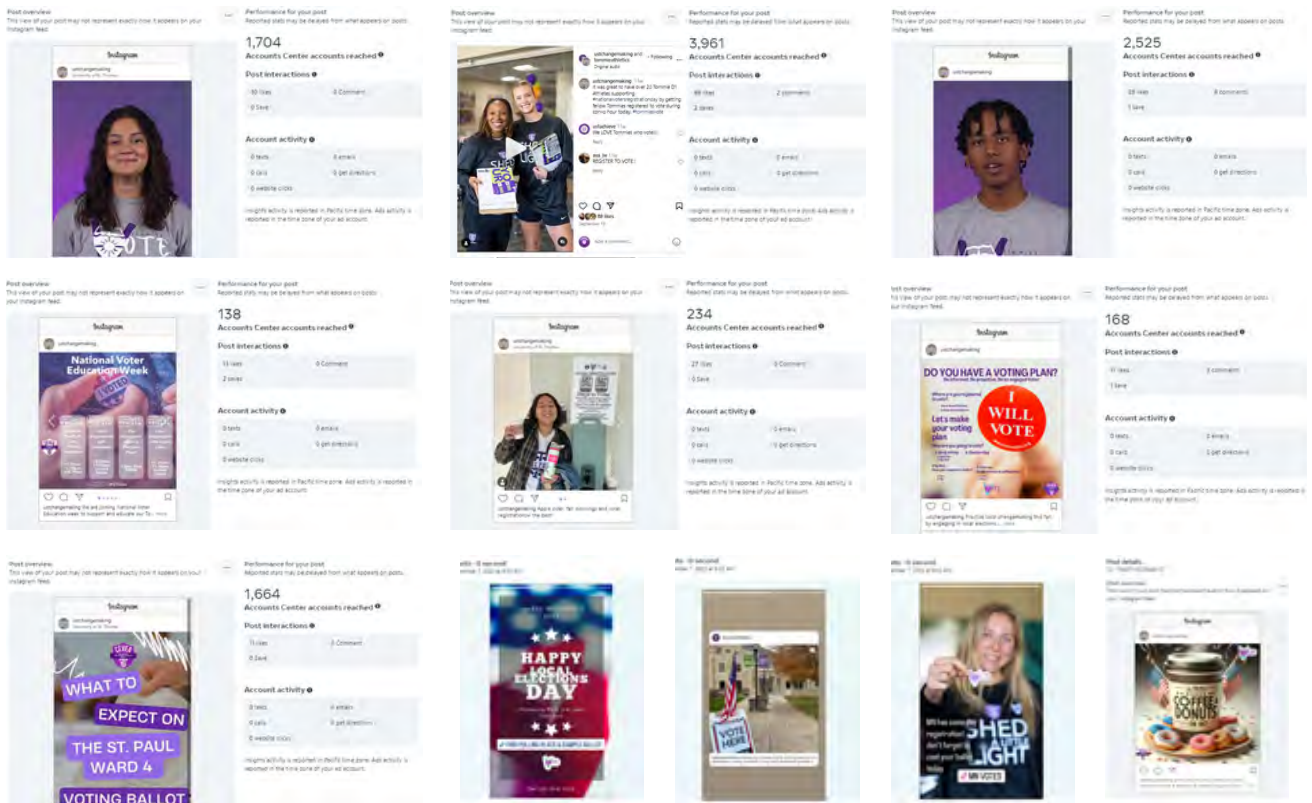


University-wide Social Media Channel sample campaigns and reach.

LOCAL ELECTIONS SOCIAL MEDIA 2023



Examples of Student Affairs Social Media Campaigns and Their Reach.

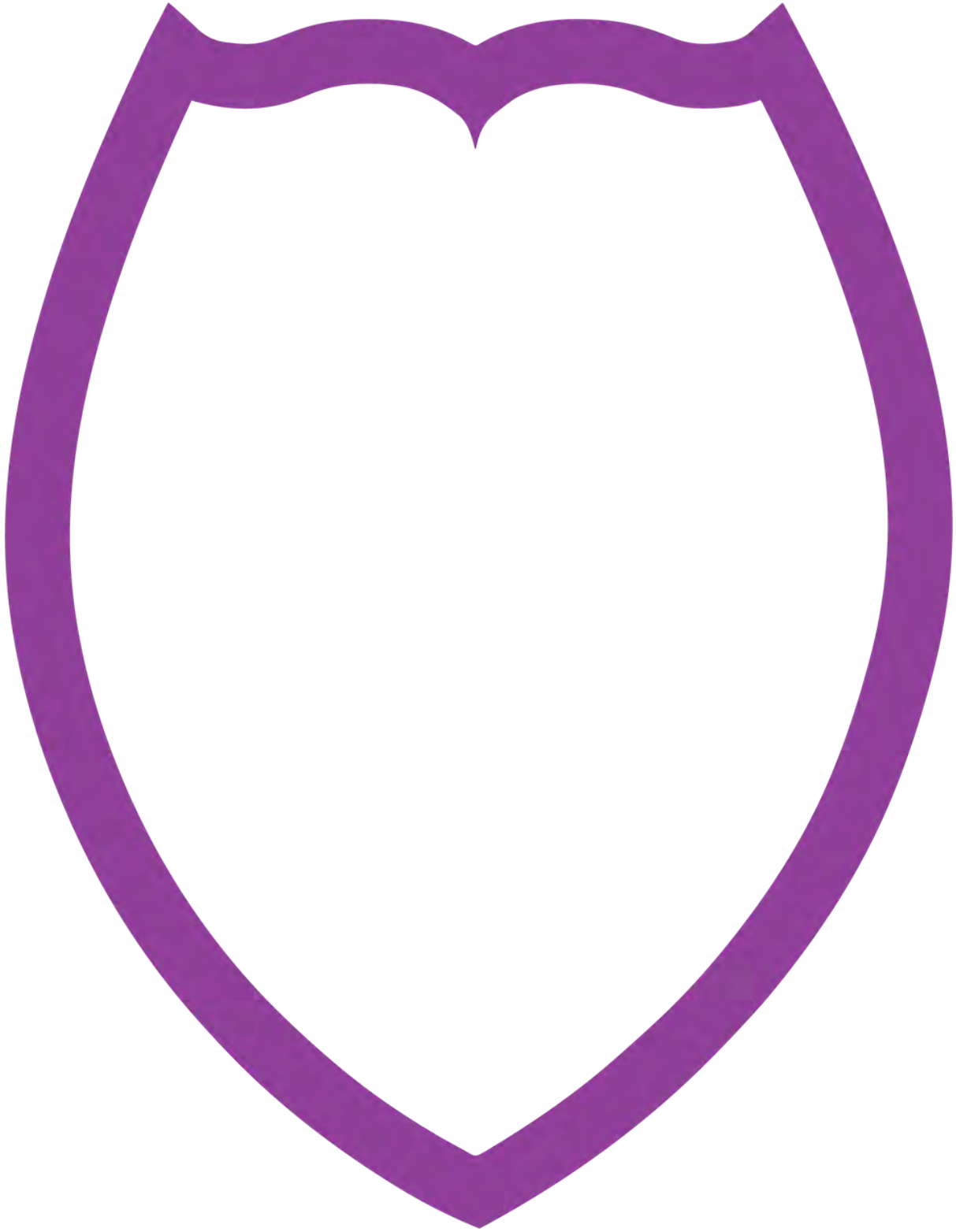


Examples of Changemaking Social Media Campaigns and Their Reach.

We plan to gather information throughout the 2024/2025 process and adjust programming and outreach based on the data as we go along. We will also do an overall evaluation with all data after the 2024-2025 elections, using these data – along with the information we receive in our next NSLVE report – to evaluate our success in meeting the goals set out in this plan.

We will share the information gathered through the CEVEA team, reports to upper administration, social media, and university news outlets as appropriate.

We are eager to continue to deepen our impact!



All for the Common Good[®]

