



WASHINGTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY



# Fall 2024 Democratic Engagement Plan

## Executive Summary

Washington State University (WSU) is a public research and land-grant university that was founded in Pullman, Washington in 1890. As a land-grant institution, WSU is dedicated to strengthening communities across the state and developing civic-minded students and alumni who will continue their service to society throughout their lives.

This Democratic Engagement Action Plan for the Fall 2024 election serves not only to engage students in the democratic process, but to institutionalize civic learning and democratic engagement at WSU going forward. This action plan serves as a framework for WSU staff and faculty to work with community partners and students as colleagues to implement the plan utilizing new and existing partnerships. This plan highlights the leadership involved, the institutional commitment to democratic engagement, the landscape, barriers, strategies, implementation, potential partnerships, and reporting and assessment.

Through Cougs Vote, the WSU Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) has led democratic engagement efforts at WSU since 2012 and will again take the lead for the Fall 2024 election. Cougs Vote has provided a way for campus and community wide collaboration to enable democratic engagement among students, staff, and community. WSU has been designated as a Voter Friendly Campus after the 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022 elections, recognized as a Gold Seal Campus in the 2018 and 2020 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, and as a Most Engaged Campus for College Student Voting in 2022. Additionally, through its commitment to community engagement more broadly, WSU has earned the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Classification from 2008 through 2025 and the National President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll five times. The implementation of this action plan will capture the energy and enthusiasm around the 2024 election to continue to strengthen WSU's commitment to democratic engagement and enhance student participation in our democracy.

## Leadership

The Cougs Vote Coalition consists of students, staff, faculty, and community members who are interested in increasing student democratic engagement at WSU. The Coalition is diverse and inclusive of representation from different parts of campus, including representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise, trusted leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy, and leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus into our work. The Coalition will meet bi-weekly beginning in summer and will serve as a steering committee to develop methods and events to engage WSU students in the democratic process.

- Ben Calabretta, Director, WSU Center for Civic Engagement
- Sandy Jamison, Whitman County Auditor
- Doug Call, Senior Vice Provost, Washington State University
- Andria Donnenwerth, Student Involvement Manager, WSU Global
- Dave Jones, Student Engagement Coordinator, WSU Center for Civic Engagement
- Haley Yamane Melhart, Leadership & Organizations Coordinator
- Deb Olsen, Pullman League of Women Voters
- Lorena O'English, Social Sciences Librarian, WSU Libraries
- Sarah Page, Assistant Director, WSU Student Affairs Marketing
- Matthew Jeffries, Director, Campus Climate and Community Building

## Commitment

Washington State University has demonstrated a commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement in a variety of ways, including that WSU's president Kirk Schulz sign on to the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Presidents Commitment.

Additionally, this commitment is highlighted in the institution's strategic plan, stating that WSU "will be a national leader in advancing the quality of life, economic development, sustainability, and equity through meaningful engagement in discovery, education, and service with partners throughout the state, nation and world." More broadly, community engagement is prioritized and named specifically in the WSU system-wide strategic plan, and the strategic plans of both WSU Pullman and WSU Vancouver.

Finally, WSU's Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service has joined three dozen nonpartisan political institutes to help promote election integrity and civic understanding as we prepare for the 2024 election cycle. This initiative seeks to be a resource for fighting misinformation, bolstering trust in our electoral processes, and providing civic education. It aims to educate the public about the nuts and bolts of how local elections are run, who is responsible for what, and how ballot integrity is protected, so that election processes are better understood and trusted.

## Landscape

According to the Tufts University National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report, WSU students voted at a higher rate than the voting rate average for all institutions in the 2012, 2016, and 2020 presidential elections. In the 2020 election, WSU students voted at a rate of 72.8%, up from 51.6% in 2016. This followed a similar increase in the voting rates for the midterm elections, which increased from 18.7% in 2014 to 41.5% in 2018. Significant energy, both in the national landscape and on campus, led to these recent increases in WSU student voting rates, and at WSU, we will capitalize on this energy to further imbed democratic engagement into the culture moving forward.

Students at WSU have a history of activism and culture of engagement that is still active, though an emphasis on civic learning and democratic engagement that could be increased. Historically, we've seen and experienced:

- Voter registration and education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Civic Holiday events (e.g. National Voter Registration Day)
- On campus Student Voting Engagement Hubs
- Protests / rallies / walkouts
- Signage promoting Election Day
- Political speakers & forums for deliberative dialogues

Based on Fall '23 data, the total student enrollment at WSU was 26,490, comprised of:

- 82.7% undergraduate students and 17.2% graduate & professional students
- 54% women and 46% men
- 79.9% in-state students (Washington residents)
- 34.1% minority students
- 33.1% first-gen students

Most of WSU's students are residents of the state of Washington, where they can vote-by-mail, which removes significant barriers. There is still room for improvement though and the Cougs Vote Coalition will work to ensure that students, staff, faculty, and community members will be able to engage in our democracy regardless of which WSU campus they are affiliated with.

Every public institution in Washington hosts a Student Engagement Hub (including each WSU campus), which is an official voting center to increase access to information and voting for students. Washington is a vote-by-mail state, but these hubs allow for in-person voter registration and voting through election day, which is especially important for WSU students who live on campus but may be registered elsewhere.

## Goals

The goals for this democratic engagement action plan are for the fall 2024:

- Increase voter registration rates and voting rates of WSU students above 2020 election levels through co-created democratic engagement opportunities of deliberative dialogue, community engagement, and voter registration efforts.
- Increase voting rates among multicultural and other underrepresented students through intentional partnerships and collaboration with departments and organizations that directly serve these students.
- Plan and implement Student Engagement Hubs at each of the WSU campuses to increase student access to voter information and student voter turnout.
- Further institutionalize democratic engagement at WSU using best practices like residence hall move-in voter registration and enrollment holds.

## Barriers

During the 2022 midterm election, the main barrier the Cougs Vote campaign faced was a dearth of participation from both staff/faculty and students at WSU. Students did volunteer and participate at events, but there were no students regularly involved in the planning and implementation of Cougs Vote. A few students reached out to learn more about Cougs Vote and were provided resources, but that was the extent of their involvement. Faculty and staff showed less interest and were less involved than in previous Cougs Vote campaigns. Being more intentional and direct when engaging students and staff will drive the strategies for 2024.

## Strategy

WSU is comprised of six campuses, and democratic engagement is coordinated system wide through Cougs Vote. Cougs Vote is an ongoing campaign that significantly ramps up for midterm and general elections. The goal is to provide information to students and others about voter registration, provides opportunities for deliberative dialogue, works toward increased voter education, works to make ballot access easy for students, and strives to increase voter turnout. Cougs Vote helps partners collaborate, align efforts system-wide, and provides a variety of branded materials that all partners can access and use when promoting their events. The following partners have expressed their interest and intent to participate in 2024.

## **Student Organizations**

The work of Cougs Vote will be student driven and student focused and doing everything to support their engagement in the Cougs Vote effort. Student government and organizations include, but are not limited to:

- Associated Students of Washington State University (ASWSU) of the six campuses
  - Pullman, Vancouver, Tri-Cities, Spokane, Everett, & Global
- Graduate and Professional Students Association (GPSA)
- Registered Student Organizations, including, but not limited to Black Student Union, Political Science Club, Young Democrats, College Republicans, Young Libertarians
- Student Government Council (statewide)
- The Daily Evergreen (student newspaper)

## **Community/External Partners**

Community members will act as local democratic engagement experts and support for on campus programming, including training student volunteers and campus staff, providing voter information, hosting public forums, and collaborating with students.

- Pullman League of Women Voters
- League of Women Voters of Washington
- Whitman County Auditor's Office
- Washington Secretary of State Office

## **Campus Partners**

Partners on campus will work with students in developing events or support WSU's overall democratic engagement plan.

- The Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service
- WSU Athletic Department
- Student Affairs Marketing
- Multicultural Student Services
- Women's Resource Center
- Service-Learning Faculty & Instructors
- Office of the Provost
- WSU Libraries
- Center for Student Organizations & Leadership
- Residence Life
- Compton Union Building
- Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life

## Implementation

Starting in the summer, the Cougs Vote Coalition will begin regular bi-weekly meetings that will go through November. Below are key dates identified for the Coalition will schedule around and focus its energy.

- **June:** Convene Cougs Vote Coalition
- **July:** Cougs Vote Coalition to meet with Student Government Council
- **August 10-17:** Voter Registration at WSU Week of Welcome & Residence Hall Move-In
- **September 17:** Constitution Day
- **September 17:** National Voter Registration Day
- **October 7-11:** National Voter Education Week
- **October 21:** Start of the 18-day voting period & ballots mailed in Washington
- **October 28:** Online and mail voter registration deadline in Washington
- **October 29:** National Vote Early Day
- **November 4-5:** Student Voting Engagement Hubs on WSU campuses
- **November 5:** Deadline for in-person voter registration (at Student Hubs)
- **November 5:** Election Day!

Support and resources available through Cougs Vote include:

- The Cougs Vote website ([cce.wsu.edu/cougsvote](https://cce.wsu.edu/cougsvote)), which includes the following components to assist students with navigating the voting and election process:
  - Voter registration and instructions for the state of Washington, and links to guides for other states, that include upcoming deadlines, how to register to vote, how to vote, and how to request and submit absentee ballots.
  - NSLVE Data Reports and WSU's Democratic Engagement Plan
  - WSU Cougs Vote Library Guide
  - Links to several nonpartisan or bipartisan sites or apps to help students research candidates and initiatives to determine which best align with their values.
  - An election FAQ section to help new voters navigate the election process.
- Social media will be used in the following ways to promote Cougs Vote, including the CCE promoting all election related events on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (all @WSUCCE) and the hashtag #CougsVote will be emphasized for all partners to use on their own voting related social media posts.
- Event Support for student groups and partner organizations to include Cougs Vote logos, designs, and t-shirt options, community organizations for partners to work with, voter registration drive instructions, and event and marketing ideas



## Reporting

WSU's Fall 2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan and NSLVE reports for WSU student registration and voting rates over the past eight years will be publicly available on the Cougs Vote website. Additionally, these documents will be available on the ALL-IN Campus Democracy Challenge website, which will be linked on the Cougs Vote website. Finally, the Fall 2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan will be sent to all members of the Cougs Vote Coalition and WSU administration.

## Assessment

The following measures will determine the campaign's success at increasing student democratic engagement and voting:

- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting short and long-term goals accordingly
- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- ALL In Campus Democracy Challenge recognition seals

The Cougs Vote Coalition will revisit the goals of this plan throughout the fall 2024 election as a form of ongoing assessment. Post-election, the group will debrief the entire campaign using the goals as an indicator of success.

The NSLVE Report data will directly show if WSU saw an increase in voter registration and voting from the 2020 election to the 2024 election. An increase in these rates would indicate that the Cougs Vote Coalition succeeded in increasing student democratic engagement.

Recognition through the ALL IN Challenge will serve as an indicator for success in relation to institutional peers and overall democratic engagement nationally.

