



# WAUBONSEE

## COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### **Democratic Engagement Action Plan**

#### **I. Executive Summary**

Waubonsee Community College is a public, comprehensive community college that was organized in 1966 as mandated by the Illinois Community College Act to provide education and training services for individuals in portions of Kane, Kendall, DeKalb, LaSalle, and Will counties of District 516. At Waubonsee, we believe that learning is a lifelong process, and we've created a place where students can pursue knowledge and enhance their lives through education.

Waubonsee Community College prepares learners for success in the 21st century by raising student achievement through academic quality and technological innovation. We focus on personal, experiential learning to help students adapt to the changing needs of business, industry and society. Our college emphasizes a culture of diversity and global understanding. We are committed to the future of our students, our colleagues, our institution and our community.

Our success is defined by the dreams we help shape, the opportunities we help design, and the futures we help create. To achieve such success, we recognize our part in helping students, faculty, staff and the community understand the power of their vote. This document outlines our current initiatives to improve our voter registration, education and engagement within the college and throughout the community. This plan was formulated by Waubonsee's college-wide committee, the All In Democracy Challenge.

The committee is committed to creating programs and events that help educate our Waubonsee community on what it means to be civically engaged and heighten voter literacy. As a college, we understand our role in creating space for students to have open dialogue on important political matters and debunk false information distributed on social media. This will occur through deliberative dialogues, voter registration drives, volunteering and credible resources distributed by the college.

Through the creation of our democratic engagement action plan, we hope to achieve our goal of instilling in students the practice of being engaged in their communities and beyond, so that they can graduate being lifelong responsible community members.

#### **II. Leadership**

The All In Democracy Challenge committee is the primary working group responsible for coordinating and implementing the college's initiatives to increase civic engagement on campus. The committee consists of the Student Life Manager and Student Life Coordinator, who act as the leaders of this initiative. The remaining members of the committee consist of faculty and staff with the skillsets and

interest to help support the college's effort to increase democratic involvement and civic engagement on campus.

The Student Life office is the epicenter for civic engagement and volunteer opportunities within the college. Student Life enhances the educational experience by providing opportunities for students to connect, engage and develop leadership skills through quality programs and services. The office is housed in the Student Center, a hub that promotes dialogue amongst students and engagement.

The Manager of Student Life acts as the chair for the working group, supporting the program and its initiatives. The Student Life Coordinator is the primary vehicle for ensuring the committee's programs, events and projects are supported and executed to completion. The larger working group is made up of faculty, staff and student representatives. Members include an Assistant Professor of Humanities, a Circulation Assistant from the library, the Marketing and Communications Coordinator, the Student Senate President and a Special Projects Analyst from Institutional Effectiveness.

The committee will work on a weekly to biweekly basis to plan and implement civic engagement. This working group helps to execute the following projects:

- National Voter Registration Day
- Vote Early Day
- Voter Registration Drives
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Virtual Programming
- Social Media Promotion
- Deliberative Dialogues
- Special Projects/Contests that highlight important causes such as Earth Day, National Volunteer Week and career opportunities in the non-profit sector
- Advocacy
- Updates to our [waubonsee.edu/vote](http://waubonsee.edu/vote) page

The committee also works closely with The League of Women Voters of Aurora and Central Kane County.

### III. **Commitment**

Waubonsee Community College's commitment to fostering an environment where civic learning is part of the landscape starts with its mission statement which includes; "The philosophy of Waubonsee Community College is based on the premise that education is the cornerstone of a literate, democratic society; that learning is a lifelong process; and that the pursuit of knowledge must be supported by institutional policies that demonstrate the values of quality, value, innovation, service and accessibility." Furthermore, as a community college, part of its implied mission is to ensure open access, and pledges to provide quality educational programs and services that are academically, geographically, financially, technologically and physically accessible to meet the educational and training needs of a diverse, multicultural population and the organizations within our community. To support an educated populace, the college strives to maintain institutional policies, programs, practices and efforts that provide an emphasis on a learning-centered college for students and the community.

Another pledge is to develop the intellectual, physical, social, cultural and career potential of the individual - all requirements for a strong democratic society. The college promotes diversity in faculty, staff and student recruitment; staff development; and cultural enrichment activities while contributing to the economic, workforce, social, recreational and cultural quality of life of the community through responsive and relevant programming. Cooperation with other local, state and national organizations, while providing leadership as appropriate, makes the college a vital partner on the regional, state and federal levels.

Waubonsee Community College's Board of Trustees are elected members. Their Board Policy Manual documents that they operate in accordance with Illinois Compiled Statutes. The college President is an active participant in many levels of governance outside of the college campus including: Invest Aurora, Aurora Education Commission, Marmion Academy, Rush-Copley Medical Center, Illinois Skyway Collegiate Conference, AFIT Executive Committee, American Association of Community Colleges, American Council on Education, The Conservation Foundation, Illinois Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Mutual Ground, IL Facilities Fund – Chicago Area Local Market, Illinois Council of Community College Presidents Generations Serving Generations Liaison, Association of American College and Universities Presidents' (AAC&U), and Hispanic Association of College and Universities (HACU). In addition, many administrators and staff serve on local service agencies boards and committees. These administrators and staff represent the college and also provide a bridge to the community.

Students are involved in college governance. Each year, a student sits on the Board of Trustees as a Student Trustee. The student trustee is elected by the student body and serves as the liaison between the Board of Trustees and the college's students, representing student interests at the board level. Other student voices are represented by Waubonsee's Student Senate, a channel of communication for students to discuss academic topics with the administration. Members of the Student Senate sit on many college committees, enabling them to provide student perspective and feedback. The Student Senate is governed by a constitution approved by vote of the student body. These efforts by the college develop students for potential future roles in society whether it be in the military, government, at work places, in houses of worship or in community organizations.

Students' rights are inherently protected by federal, state and local laws. In the Student Handbook, the college proclaims, "It is the practice of Waubonsee to respect the properly exercised rights of its students. The College recognizes a student's rights within the institution to freedom of speech, inquiry and assembly; to the peaceful pursuit of an education; and to the reasonable use of services and facilities of the college." As in all democratic institutions, where there are rights, there are responsibilities. Students are asked to become familiar with, and abide by, a Student Code of Conduct.

Students are offered several opportunities to participate in service learning experiences. Many student clubs donate their time and energy to organizations, raising money for causes and donating their time to help run events. Some coursework incorporates service learning. An institutional scholarship fund, known as the Gustafson Scholarship, requires awardees to fulfill service hours. The Student Life function at the college also sponsors an annual Alternative Spring Break. These experiences allow students to internalize the rewards of giving their time to worthy causes, while building skills such as teamwork and leadership, as well as valuable hands-on skills. These experiences lay the groundwork for civic participation and volunteerism outside of college life - a vital component of democratic living.

In these and other ways, Waubonsee Community College makes an earnest and ingrained commitment to contribute to the civic learning of students. In doing so, the college experience aims to encourage students towards political engagement and voter participation.

The College's [2020-2022 Strategic Plan](#) lists Community Connections as one of its key initiatives. "Waubonsee partners with our community members and alumni to promote cultural and economic development, civic partnerships, and lifetime educational opportunities." As the top choice of learning in our community, Waubonsee recognizes the importance of advocating for our students and providing the resources necessary to help them become knowledgeable and impactful members of the community, which is why in the FY22 Strategy and Planning, the institution places "Student Equity and Success" at the top of the pyramid. "Waubonsee partners with all students to ensure their success, providing equity for our diverse and historically underserved students, developing broad, integrative, specialized, and applied knowledge and meeting their academic, professional, and personal goals."

A few of the priorities of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan are listed below:

1. Launch our new Developing Hispanic Institutions (Title V) Grant.
2. Minimize student financial barriers with a renewed focus on offering flexibility, education, and financial support for students while providing clear communication on how to access financial resources.
3. Redesign student service delivery models to reduce obstacles to persistence and create a more dynamic experience.
4. Commit to providing the necessary technology and academic support for students to ensure more equitable access and outcomes.
5. Implement our institutional equity plan to close equity gaps while providing a welcoming, safe, and adaptive environment for all students.

#### IV. **Landscape**

Waubonsee Community College's student voting rate is at 59.8%, an increase of 9.6% from 2016, and higher than the national average of public institutions. This information is reported by the National Study for Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE). The NSLVE Study helps navigate the committee's planning and implementation of events and programming, which helps support the expansion of civic learning throughout the college.

#### ***Curriculum***

Currently a number of courses and programs incorporate service learning within the curriculum. The main areas of focus are: direct service, community research, advocacy and education, social responsibility, and capacity building. Curriculas that incorporate these include (but are not limited to): sociology, psychology, human services, English, visual arts, performing arts, peace studies, nursing, government, history, philosophy and communication.

Furthermore, an essential college learning outcome, Global Awareness, incorporates a number of the above areas of focus. All students who graduate from Waubonsee are expected to meet the requirements and expectations of Global Awareness, with varying levels of intensity depending on the program or course. Key to meeting the Global Awareness COL, is mastering each of the following criteria:

knowledge about society, skills for participation in the community (globally and locally), and positive attitudes/willingness to engage in public efforts.

Courses aligned to the Global Awareness COL address the following, in either comprehensive and exploratory ways:

- Moral and civic virtues, such as a concern for the rights and welfare of others and appreciation of diversity.
- An understanding of the structure and processes of government and community organization.
- An awareness of public and community issues, and participation in service to address problems.
- The skills, knowledge and commitment to influence decision-making and public policy.
- An awareness and understanding of public issues, how they are connected across local, national and global levels, and how one affects and is affected by them.

### ***Co-curriculum***

The Office of Student Life which includes all student clubs, Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society and the National Society of Leadership and Success, along with our Alternative Spring Break program and Gustafson Scholarship program all incorporate democratic engagement and civic learning as part of their programming and activities. Additionally, all students are welcome to participate in volunteering opportunities such as our annual Day of Service event.

### ***Barriers to Success***

We know that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Waubensee Community College has experienced a decline in enrollment, which has created budgetary shortfalls that could impact our initiative. We also recognize that due to lower than usual enrollment, our voter registration numbers will be impacted. However, with the partnership between The League of Women Voters of Aurora and Central Kane County, along with the support from administration, we are confident that we will continue to remain successful in engaging and educating our students.

While we also understand we serve a large population of underserved and marginalized members of our community, we hope to provide the resources necessary to remove barriers and use campus as an outlet for learning and navigating the democratic process at the national and local level to ensure their vote is used as their voice to make a positive impact in our community.

### ***Resources***

The college draws support from a wide array of community partners such as The League of Women Voters, local food pantries and 501c3 Health and Human Services, dedicated students, staff, faculty, administrators, residents, and informed leaders in the community.

## **V. Goals**

The long-term goal of this initiative is to provide 100% of students the resources they need to vote, including digital technology that provide resources in the palm of their hand, integrate democratic

engagement in the classroom and empower those who are not eligible to vote the opportunity to make their voices heard by providing civic engagement opportunities in order to make an impact on a local, national and global level. In addition, we'd like to:

- Designate or create a new position at Waubonsee as a government liaison
- Offer an AA in in Public Service (stretch goal)
- Create a Center for Civic Engagement
- Create a co-curricular transcript denotation for community service
- Be more involved in advocacy efforts on a state, national and global level

Ultimately, we hope to instill in our students the practice of being engaged in their communities and beyond, so that they can graduate being lifelong responsible community members.

Short term goals include:

- Creating learning outcomes for our civic engagement initiatives
- Better inform the college community on the impact of local elections
- Implement the voter registration process with the class registration process and new student orientation
- Host engaging panel discussion events with city commissioners and local officials
- Demonstrate the act of voting and volunteering by staff and faculty through pictures and videos on social media
- Teach the differences in party ideologies and reliable resources
- Educate students on how to properly research candidates and social justice issues
- Educate students on the art of civic dialogue
- Bring awareness events to campus that directly correlate to issues being experienced among the student body and how voting impacts such issues
- Updates to the [waubonsee.edu/vote](http://waubonsee.edu/vote) page with new resources and information

## VI. **Strategy**

Our strategies align to our overall goals to increase voter education, voter registration, and voter turnout primarily among students but also include faculty, staff, and administration from our campus. Our activities will be in person, virtual and hybrid:

- Ongoing social media posts
- Voter Registration Tabling with League of Women Voters
- National Voter Registration Day and Vote Early Events
- Voter Register Communication
- Civic Engagement Panels
- Volunteer events
- Student Projects
- Constitution Day
- Speakers
- Host spaces for civic dialogue

## ***Audience***

Our goal is to engage everyone on our campus, regardless of their role, including everyone who is part of our campus community, namely students, but also faculty, staff, and administrative personnel.

## VII. **Reporting and Evaluation**

We want to know that our voter engagement strategies are working and are effective by utilizing evidence that shows students are registering to vote and voting on election day and ultimately, graduating as better informed and engaged community members.

Reporting from the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) voting rates are shared publicly and will be attached as a supporting document as our goals strategically align with the reporting captured through NSLVE. In addition, we plan to utilize:

- Event surveys
- Waubonsee's voter registration portal
- Program reviews
- Creation of learning outcomes
- Event attendance numbers
- Volunteer hours
- Co-curricular transcript
- Social media and website tracking
- Community organization feedback

## VIII. **Conclusion**

The purpose behind this action plan is to empower students to not only use their vote as their voice, but realize their potential for greater impact by putting their voice into action. Creating change can seem like an overwhelming thought to many, especially when thought of at a national or even global scale.

However, becoming involved at the local level is often a catalyst for lasting impact. We hope this action plan ignites action here at Waubonsee and within the community we serve.