

# WEBSTER VOTES

## Webster University Action Plan to Increase Voter Engagement, Civic Learning, and Voter Turnout

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WEBSTER UNIVERSITY

## **Executive Summary**

This action plan has been developed to help support Webster University's mission of transforming students for global citizenship and individual excellence through an action-oriented network of faculty, staff, and students which foster environments for civic and political engagement.

The Webster University "WebsterVOTES" action plan, developed by members of the Webster community, namely Jennifer Stewart, Director of the Office of Student Engagement, and builds off the 2022 Action Plan. This plan has been drafted for the 2024 election cycle through January 2025. The purpose of this plan is to increase student engagement in elections and election-related activities.

As Webster University has multiple extended campus locations, both nationally and globally, this plan enacts goals to increase civic participation and learning (e.g. registering to vote and voting) primarily at the main campus in Webster Groves, however, many components are applicable to the worldwide network. The implementation of the "WebsterVOTES" Task Force composed of Webster students, faculty/staff, and administration will allow a coordinated effort to increase voter engagement within the entire Webster community and is supported through the Office of Student Engagement staff, student employees and funding with additional support provided by grants received.

## **Leadership**

The WebsterVOTES Task Force is composed of many campus partners with a variety of offices for campus collaboration efforts regarding goals for increasing civic engagement and voter turnout. There are several permanent members of the WebsterVOTES Task Force, as well as rotating members as well across a variety of offices.

Permanent committee members will be determined by the position they hold within the university, others will be nominated by those permanent members based on personal interest and those whose strengths best fit the gaps in the established group.

### *Permanent Members*

**Jennifer Stewart**, Director of the Office of Student Engagement

**Justin McCoy**, Campus Activities Graduate Assistant Graduate Assistant

**Tara Graves**, Global Marketing and Communications

**Vincent Flewellen**, Chief Diversity Officer

**Webster University College Democrats**, Student Organization

**Webster University Campus Conservatives**, Student Organization

*Rotating Members*

**Faculty (Bruce Umbaugh)**, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Faculty (Warren Rosenblum)**, History, Politics, and International Relations Department

**Faculty (TBD)**, School of Education

**Representative (Rachel Amick)**, Office of Housing & Residential Life

**Representative (Andrea Barajas)**, Multicultural Center & International Student Affairs

**Representative**, Office of Study Abroad

**Representative (Patrick Giblin)**, Global Marketing and Communications

*Other Partners*

**Eric Fey**, Democratic Director, St. Louis County Board of Elections

**Nicholle Spencer**, Public Information Coordinator, St. Louis County Board of Elections

**Jenny Starkey**, Director of Public Affairs & Engagement, City of Webster Groves

**Rick Stream**, Republican Director, St. Louis County Board of Elections

**St. Louis Area Colleges/University Campus Voter Access Coalition**, Fontbonne University, Harris Stowe State College, Saint Louis University, University of Missouri – St. Louis, Washington University – St. Louis, Webster University,

**ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, [allinchallenge.org](http://allinchallenge.org)**

**Voter Friendly Campus, [voterfriendlycampus.org](http://voterfriendlycampus.org)  
Commitment**

Through the Office of Student Engagement and the WebsterVOTES initiative, we provide our global campus population with voter registration, voter education and democratic engagement programs and serve as a clearinghouse and centralized voice in promoting voter education efforts throughout the campus network. We aim particularly to collaborate with experts in academic departments to integrate with opportunities provided in the classroom setting.

Beginning in Fall 2020 we partnered with our IT unit to successfully integrate links to voter registration sites on the homepage of the University intranet site as well as a voter education and registration training module launched through our virtual New Student Orientation. Following the 2020 election cycle, the University intranet site became the primary hub for student targeted data. The continued focus will be to build out a full WebsterVOTES intranet page supported through the Office of Student Engagement. WebsterVOTES is supported and promoted on campus by administration, faculty and staff, but there are areas where more concerted efforts can be made. We will pursue the President's and Chancellor's commitment again in 2024 with the retirement of our current Chancellor and a shift in University Leadership on our horizon.

Webster University's Mission: Webster University, a worldwide institution, ensures high quality learning experiences that transform students for global citizenship and individual excellence.

As one of its core values, Webster University values global citizenship. Webster University commits to this value "by educating a diverse population locally, nationally, and internationally, acting responsibly toward the environment to foster a sustainable future, and strengthening the communities we serve." These values and priorities set in place align with the action plan, providing an environment for the entire Webster University community to engage in both on and off campus partnerships and become global and civically engaged citizens, aligning with the core mission and values of Webster University.

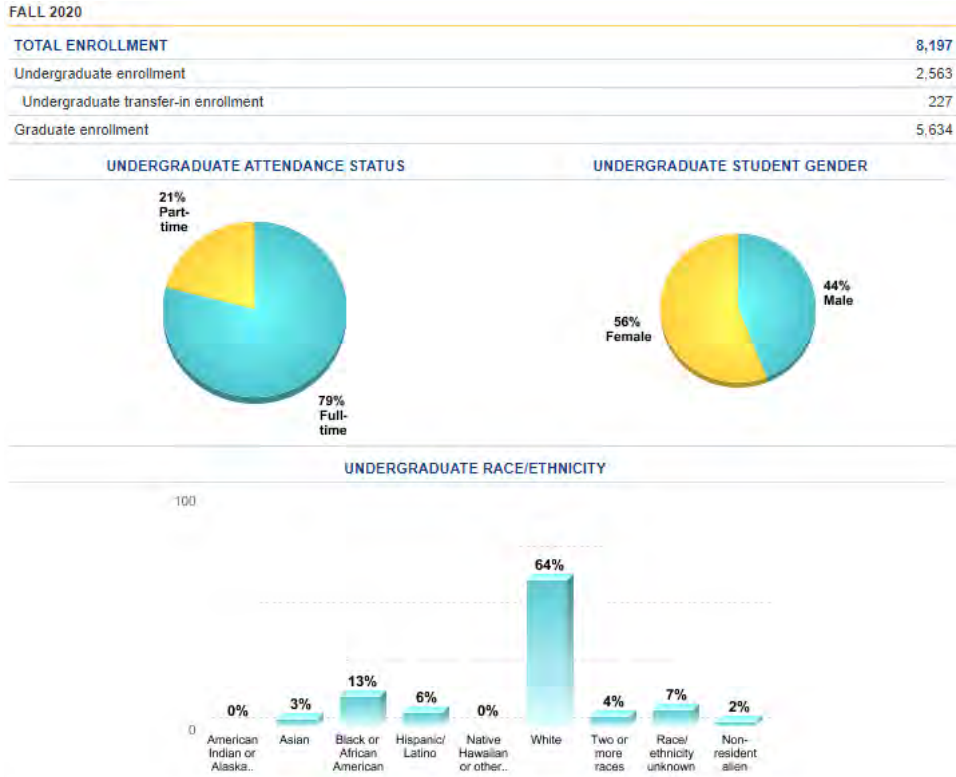
This action plan correlates with our commitment to our values and mission, as well as providing voters access to information and any election changes that are affected by the ever-changing landscape.

## **Landscape**

With its home campus in St. Louis, Missouri, USA, Webster University comprises an action-oriented global network of faculty, staff, students and alumni who forge powerful bonds with each other and with their communities around the globe. Founded in 1915, Webster is a private non-profit university with students studying at campus locations in North America, Europe, and Asia and in a robust learning environment online. The university is committed to ensuring high-quality learning experiences that transform students for global citizenship and individual excellence. Highlights of a Webster education include:

- Students experience an ideal, student-centered environment with small classes and personalized learning
- Students attend from across the United States and from more than 100 countries
- Diversity and inclusion are core values
- Global feature in academic programs. Globalized curriculum is our distinctive hallmark
- Every student experience includes a global learning component
- Every student is exposed to a worldwide network of fellow students who live, work and study around the U.S., Europe, Africa and Asia

As reported by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), included below is the demographics outlined by undergraduate and graduate students at Webster University.



Students at Webster University and are quite politically engaged; this can be partly attributed to popular academic degree programs in Political Science, International Relations, Human Rights and Women & Gender Studies. Our liberal arts ideology also lends itself to students who are concerned with civic engagement.

WebsterVOTES has an established history of promoting elections and voter registration through previous partnerships with the Office of Student Engagement, Political Science Department and the (former) Holden Public Policy Forum. The goals of these programs have expanded and changed throughout the years with shifts in campus structure and campus population. They are trending toward more consistent integrated civic engagement programming through non-election cycles.

Voter registration laws and voter access at local and statewide levels are an on-going challenge in the state of Missouri. Legislation from 2022 significantly limited voter access through ID laws and voter registration limitations. WebsterVOTES members will be keeping a close eye on potential changes throughout the 2024 cycle as it will affect how we can manage our programming. Missouri voter laws significantly restrict the ability to cast absentee ballots and require ballot notarization in most circumstances. St. Louis County introduced on-demand ballot printing in 2020 which allows St. Louis County residents much flexibility for voting where they are best able. Lessons learned from these constant changes are to ensure that WebsterVOTES is offering many

options for students to learn about Missouri voting processes, providing resources, in-person programming and communicating these updates with our academic partners.

## **Goals**

Increasing voter engagement, civic engagement, and voter turnout compile the general short- and long-term goals of the “WebsterVOTES” action plan. For the 2024 elections, we compiled both short and long-term goals as part of our mission and effort to support civic engagement within the Webster University community. These goals are included for the 2024 action plan alongside new goals as part of our ongoing efforts

**2020 Goal 1B (long term):** To maintain the “Voter Friendly Campus” through 2028.

**2022 Goal 1C (short term):** To renew the designation of “Voter Friendly Campus” through 2024. - **ACHIEVED**

The designation of “Voter Friendly Campus” helps Webster University develop engage students in civic and political engagement discourse; our commitment to these topics is clear. The strategies and plans created from this designation will be a part of the Webster University community for years to come, engaging students in many aspects of civic engagement. To maintain this designation will require continual improvement and review of our program.

**2020 Goal 2A (short term):** To increase voter registration rate by at least 10% (89% or greater) in the 2020 election cycle – **INCREASED BY 3.1% - GOAL NOT MET**

**2020 Goal 2B (long term):** To increase voter registration rate to 100% by 2028.

**2022 Goal 2C (short term):** To increase voter registration rate by at least 1.5% (85% or higher) in the 2022 election cycle. - **STILL AWAITING DATA REGARDING THIS GOAL, 2024 GOAL WILL BE ADJUSTED UPON RECEIPT OF NSLVE DATA.**

Although our voter registration rate improved by 3.1% in 2020, we fell short of the goal of the 10% increase. Because 2022 is a midterm election year with historically lower registration and voting rates, we will scale back our goal and aim to increase the rate by 1.5%. We will focus on academic areas that had decreases in registration rates or small increases. We will continue to engage strategies to connect each student to voter registration opportunities during their campus on-boarding processes at New Student Orientation and Registration. We are hopeful that we made progress toward our goal in the 2022 election, Webster University students have a history of high voter turnout in midterm elections.

**Goal 3A (short term):** Increase voter rate to at least 70% for the Presidential Election in November 2020 – **INCREASED BY TO 68% VOTER RATE – GOAL NOT MET**

**Goal 3B (long term):** Increase voter rate to at least 75% for the Presidential Election in November 2024

**Goal 3C (short term):** Maintain voter rate of at least 65% for the Midterm Election in November 2022 - **STILL AWAITING DATA REGARDING THIS GOAL, 2024 GOAL WILL BE ADJUSTED UPON RECEIPT OF NSLVE DATA.**

We believe this goal could be met using strategies outline, including social media campaigns, registration drives, voter education initiatives, and a multitude of other “WebsterVOTES” initiatives outlined in the strategy section. For 2022 we increased our partnerships with Housing and Residential Life to connect on-campus residents to voting options while increasing voter education programming identifying the importance of participating in the Midterm Election. The 2024 election cycle will follow similar strategies and focus on partnerships with academic areas.

**Goal 4A (short term):** Join the President’s Commitment by getting signatures from both our University Chancellor and President. Our current Chancellor is retiring at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year, and we are beginning a search for a replacement. We will likely need to recommit to this goal. **ACHIEVED for 2022, plan to recommit for 2024**

By having University leadership participate in the President’s Commitment, it would make their support visible and public. Known support from leaders in these roles would help to encourage our student population and challenge them to increase participation as well.

**Goal 5A (short term):** Engage First-Year Seminar and Webster 101 courses to add democratic engagement as an established learning outcomes within the curriculum. Partner with Learning Communities when appropriate for theme beginning Spring 2023 through Fall 2024.

By including these learning outcomes in First-year student curriculum and co-curricular programming we create a campus culture around voter education. This further supports the President’s Commitment and the work of WebsterVOTES.

### **National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)**

The Webster University 2018 Voter Registration rate was 54.7%. Voting patterns were steady across major, age, and academic department populations throughout our campuses. Thus, we will be increasing all our voter engagement with institutional and



educational efforts in equal strength across all areas. Included is a brief overview of our NSLVE data from the NSLVE 2014-2018 Data Report.

	2016	2018	2020	2016-2020 Change (p.p.)
Total Student Enrollment	11,788	9,723	6,948	↓ -4,840
(Age under 18/Unknown)	-	-	-	-
(IPEDS estimated non-resident aliens)	32	288	154	↑ 121
(FERPA records blocked)	18	27	-	-
(Non-Degree Seeking Students)	-	-	-	-
Total eligible voters	11,737	9,406	6,789	↓ -4,948
Number of students who registered	9,037	7,562	5,669	↓ -3,368
Number of students who voted	6,883	4,871	4,616	↓ -2,267
Registration Rate %	77	80	84	↑ 7
Voting Rate of Registered Students %	76	64	81	↑ 5
Voting Rate %	59	52	68	↑ 9

## **Strategy**

Our strategy remains broken into three categories: Institutional, Fall, and Spring. All these strategies include ways to increase or maintain voter registration, voter education, and turnout. Aligning with Webster University’s mission to transform students as global citizens, the following activities and curriculum create an institution enhancing civic engagement as the short-term tactics addressing the 2024 election and continuing to move toward our long-term goals.

### **Institutional**

1. All voter education and civic engagement related initiatives will be promoted through the “WebsterVOTES” branded social media pages and Connections 2.0 (intranet) website to be launched by the end of the Spring 2024 semester
2. WebsterVOTES will create a one-page Oversees Voter Information Guide for students who will be living outside of the U.S. during election periods to be included in Study Abroad orientation programs. Notifications will be sent out to study abroad students periodically to remind them of upcoming voting deadlines.

This is an ongoing project carried over from 2022, we will complete the Voter Guide to be updated to reflect our current study abroad sites.

3. WebsterVOTES will work with the Office of First Year Experience to incorporate voter registration into summer advising and registration programs for newly enrolling first-time freshman students. This will target over 90% of new freshman students.
4. WebsterVOTES will pursue academic partnerships with Webster 101 and Cornerstone Seminars (First Year Students), Keystone Seminars (Junior/Senior Level Students) and Learning Communities (First year students). Through partnerships with these programs, we can embed education about Missouri Voter Laws, ballot initiatives and civic engagement into the course work.
5. WebsterVOTES will pursue partnerships with the Reeg Academic Resource Center and Academic Advising office to be voices to promote voter registration and civic engagement with all students they meet with.
6. WebsterVOTES will utilize the Voter Friendly Campus designation to further publicize campus accomplishments related to civic engagement.

#### Spring 2024

1. WebsterVOTES will partner with an external organization to have a voter registration table at our bi-annual involvement fair. WebsterVOTES will also have sign-ups for student volunteers willing to assist with election-related events and outreach.
2. A focus on absentee-ballot completion will begin in January 2024; the Missouri Primary is no longer in March, but party caucuses will be held at dates TBD. Registration for Spring voting will be more critical for local elections.
3. Flyers with voting information and the closest campus polling location will be placed around campus within a week of elections
4. The Dean of Students Office will send emails to all current students' network-wide with information regarding primary voting. Email will be sent prior to registration deadline.
5. One debate watch party will be held in conjunction with Webster College Democrats and Webster University Conservatives. Voter registration cards and polling information will be made available to students during this event.
6. Bi-Monthly Voter/Election themed movie series will be hosted in partnership with academic departments – this will provide an opportunity for casual conversations and to generate interest in the Election programming.

#### Fall 2024

1. WebsterVOTES will partner with an external organization to have a voter registration table at our bi-annual involvement fair.

2. WebsterVOTES will also have signups for student volunteers willing to assist with election-related events and outreach.
3. Three or more voter registration tables will be held. Non-partisan candidate guides and polling location information will be handed out.
4. A 'Know Your Voter Rights' Voter registration event will be held on September 17, 2024, in conjunction with Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day
5. Flyers with voting information and the nearest to campus polling location will be placed around campus.
6. The Dean of Students Office will send an email all current students' network-wide prior to the voter registration deadline with information regarding voter registration.
7. Debate Watch Parties will be co-hosted with Webster College Democrats and Webster University Conservatives during each of the Presidential and Vice-President Debates. Voter registration cards and polling information will be made available to students during these events.
8. Flyers and social media outreach one week before the election.
9. Absentee Ballot Collection will occur on and before the Missouri absentee ballot deadline. Notaries will be present at these events to notarize ballots in line with Missouri state law.
10. Compiled List of Notaries – WebsterVOTES surveyed faculty and staff at the main campus location to identify all those who are Notary Publics. Those individuals were listed on our website and shared through social media for students to contact for socially distanced notarization services.
11. Paid Postage – The Office of Student Engagement coordinated with the Mail & Copy Center to provide paid postage for any voter related mailings coming through their system. All mailed absentee applications or ballots through our campus system were sent at no charge to the sender.
12. First Time Voter Buttons – Will distribute "First Time Voter" buttons that were distributed throughout the day at local polling sites and our election day coffee station.
13. Post-election conversations will be conducted with faculty/staff, students, and potentially community leaders or organizations.
14. "Elections in America" panel in partnership with Multicultural Center – targeting our international student population and educating about the American election system.
15. Donut Forget to Vote and other reminder events the day before the elections.
16. Election-Day Events:
  - Utilize polling place direction signage to send students from campus housing locations to nearest polling place.

- Election Day hotline: one or more individual(s) will monitor the WebsterVOTES social media and designate a call-in number to answer election related questions.
  - Mock election - to engage international students and educate them on the US voting process.
  - Coffee Station – distributed coffee and “First Time Voter” buttons to students going to/from the polling place.
  - Election Night Watch Party
17. Post-election conversations will be conducted with faculty/staff, students, and potentially community leaders or organizations.

### **Reporting and Evaluation**

Reporting and evaluation efforts will allow Webster University to assess its current and future efforts to obtain our outlined goals. Using the data from the NSLVE Data Report, we will track how our current efforts are helping to support our community and meet our goals.

What Data Will Be Collected:

- Total number of events held/hosted
- Total number or event attendees
- Social Media Impact
- Qualitative feedback at events – including QR code surveys, feedback forms and comments on posts

How will Data Be Evaluated:

- The WebsterVOTES committee will meet monthly throughout the spring and weekly in Fall through the election – we will review past and upcoming event data to make adjustments to meet the needs of students.
- Following the election, we will gather information from all partners and committee members to create a thorough post-cycle report.

How will Data be Shared:

- Reports such as NSLVE, ALL IN and Voter Friendly Campus report will be housed on our website as well as distributed through Campus Communication channels such as the Gorlok Gazette and Webster Today.
- We will share academic area specific data with Academic deans when NSLVE reports are available.