WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Equip. Engage. Elevate.

2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Submitted by Diana Martinez
Associate Director
Jewett Center for Community Partnerships

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wesleyan University is committed to equipping, engaging, and elevating civic engagement amongst our students. A key tenet of this commitment is electoral engagement.

The following Action Plan was developed for the purpose of coordinating electoral engagement efforts across campus and community; to demonstrate our active commitment to voter education and engagement; and to develop a better connected, more effective process for supporting student voter engagement.

Our Action Plan was developed primarily by the staff of Wesleyan's Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life (which includes the Jewett Center for Community Partnerships, as well as the Office of Community Engaged Learning), alongside staff and faculty from the University President's Office, the Government Department, the Gordon Career Center, and the Center for the Arts; students from Wesleyan's Student Assembly and various non-partisan and partisan student groups; and community members representing our municipal Voter Registrar's Office, our local high school, our local NAACP chapter, and more.

Together, we have pulled together a plan that builds on current efforts and will be in effect throughout the entire 2024-25 Academic Year. This Action Plan will be implemented on campus at Wesleyan, in the greater Middletown community, and will follow students to sites of electoral engagement across the country. Our planning team has pulled together a series of interactive, individual, in-class, and extra-curricular opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and community to engage deeply with the electoral process, key ballot issues, and across difference.

Our key goals are to:
- Boost voter education and access to resources
- Support voter registration and engagement beyond campus
- Decrease the voting gap between white and BIPOC students
- Increase Wesleyan student voter registration rates to 95%
- Increase Wesleyan student voter turnout rates to 85%

LEADERSHIP

Our leadership team consists of students, faculty, staff, community partners, and municipal partners.

01

STUDENTS

Wesleyan Student Assembly's Community Committee
- Brendan Barry
- Noelle Crandell
- Saul Ferholt-Kahn
- Elana Hartley
- Saheba Singh
- David Tu

Voter Registration Volunteers
- Nathalie Borden
- Marissa Clauburg
- Cecilia Foldessy-Steigemeir
- Jesse Geoghan
- Elana Hartley
- Liam Jarvis
- Jasmine Jhun
- Arielle Lack-Zell
- Elizabeth Littell
- Alba Moreno
- Olivia Norrie
- Sophia Ortins
- Nursima Ozgencil
- Zoey Possick
- Alexandra Potts
- Sasha Raskin
- Margaret Rowe
- Zara Skolnik
- Yazmin Walters
- Abigail Wee
- Gray West
- Nora Whiteside
- Katie Williams
- Lawi Worku
- Lilia Yorkhall

Student Groups

- WRAL- Wesleyan Reproductive Advocacy and Legislation
- WDP- Wesleyan Doula Project
- ASHA-Adolescent Sexual Health Awareness
- Sunrise Movement-Wesleyan
- Cultivating Justice at Wesleyan
- Wesleyan for Harris

LEADERSHIP

02

FACULTY

- Michael Roth, President of the University
- Khalilah Brown-Dean, Professor of Civic Engagement; Executive Director of the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life
- Robyn Autry, Faculty Director of the Center for the Study of Public Life
- Logan Dancey, Professor of Government
- Amy Grillo, Professor in the Allbritton Center, and Environmental Studies; Director of Community-Engaged Learning
- Jim Cavallaro, Professor of the Practice in the Allbritton Center; President of the University Network for Human Rights

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STAFF

- Clifton Watson, Director of the Jewett Center for Community Partnerships
- Diana Martinez, Associate Director of the Jewett Center for Community Partnerships
- Briana Bellinger-Dawson, Coordinator of Community Participation of the Jewett Center for Community Partnerships
- Ahmed Badr, Director of the Patricelli Center for Social Entrepreneurship
- Camille McGadney, Law & Social Impact Career Advisor at the Gordon Career Center
- Jennifer Kleindienst, Director of the Sustainability Office
- Rani Arbo, Campus and Community Engagement Manager for the Center for the Arts
- Ben Michael- General Manager at WESU Radio
- Tess Wheelwright- Director of the Center for Prison Education
- Marie McKenna- Administrative Assitant
- Ying-Fei Chen- Administrative Assistant
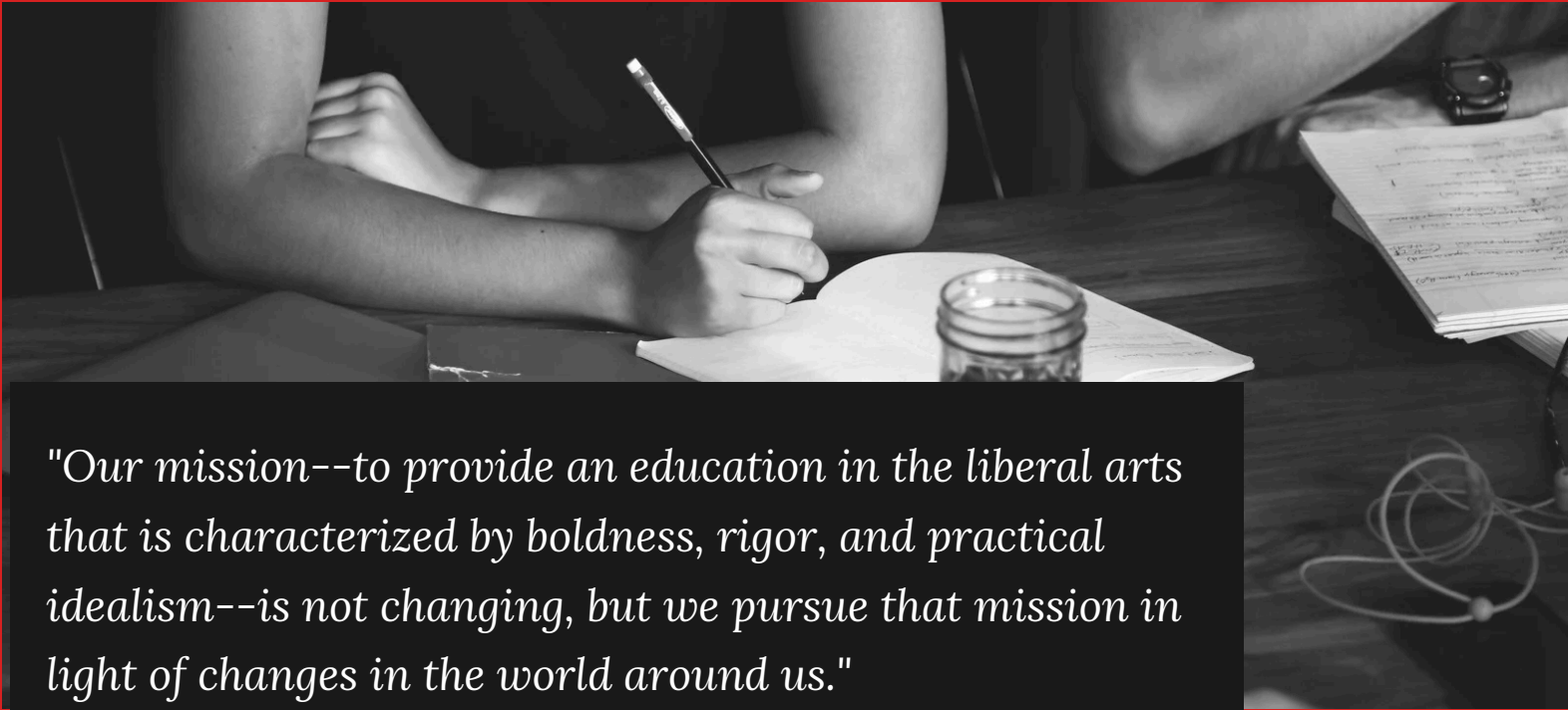
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COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Full Citizens Coalition
- Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice
- Middletown Public Schools
- Middlesex NAACP

05

MUNICIPAL PARTNERS

- City of Middletown Voter Registrar

COMMITMENT

> *"Our mission--to provide an education in the liberal arts that is characterized by boldness, rigor, and practical idealism--is not changing, but we pursue that mission in light of changes in the world around us."*
> *-Michael S. Roth '78, President of Wesleyan University*

Our Democratic Engagement Action Plan is rooted in our mission and in our University-wide commitment to democracy in action and civic engagement. Our primary goal is to develop and support citizen-scholars prepared to enhance the world around them. This commitment is codified by our efforts towards three overarching goals. The work enacted in this plan:

1. Fully capitalizes on Wesleyan's academic strengths by offering coursework and academic events and programming geared towards civic engagement;
2. Builds on our reputation as a leader in pragmatic liberal education by connecting students with other campuses and the communities around us; and
3. Enhances access by creating opportunities for low-income, first generation students and engaging key demographics like high school students, and formerly incarcerated people.

UNIVERSITY MISSION

- Wesleyan University is dedicated to providing an education in the liberal arts that is characterized by boldness, rigor, and practical idealism. At Wesleyan, distinguished scholar-teachers work closely with students, taking advantage of fluidity among disciplines to explore the world with a variety of tools. The University seeks to build a diverse, energetic community of students, faculty, and staff who think critically and creatively and who value independence of mind and generosity of spirit.

LANDSCAPE

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

3,000

WOMEN-IDENTIFYING

53%

STUDENTS OF COLOR

33%

STUDENTS RECEIVING AID

39%

Wesleyan University is a private, coeducational, non-sectarian school of liberal arts and sciences offering undergraduate, graduate, and PhD degree programs. Our democratic engagement work includes the entire University body. The majority of our students do not live in Connecticut which means we have to develop a robust out-of-state voter registration and absentee-ballot request process.

Our student body is about 53% women, and 47% male. About 4.6% of the Class of 2027 identify as transgender, gender nonbinary, or genderqueer. Several of our student groups are working on gender-specific and gender-inclusive voter outreach both on campus and beyond.

The Classes of 2024-27 are about 33% students of color. This accounts for about 6% Black or African American students; 9.3% Asian or Asian American students; 10.2% Latine students; and 7.3% students of two or more races. Our Action Plan intentionally connects with students and community partners targeting BIPOC voter outreach.

Approximately 39% of our students are receiving Federal or Institutional Aid. We are committed to financially supporting students by paying Work-Study eligible students for voter registration, and by offering funds for students to engage in electoral work across the country.

NSLVE 2020 RESULTS

2020 VOTER ENGAGEMENT METRICS

Registration Rate	**89.2%**	This number represents the percent of our voting-eligible students who registered to vote	⬆ We saw a slight increase in registered students, up from 87.5% in 2016
Voting Rate of Registered Students	**86.5%**	This represents the percent of registered students who voted on Election Day	⬆ Our registered student voting rate jumped about 10% from 76.4% in 2016
Voting Rate	**77.2%**	This accounts for the percentage of voting-eligible students who voted on Election Day	⬆ Our overall voting rate increased 11% from 66.9% in 2016

Overall, our 2020 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data is trending in the right direction! This data confirms that we are effectively closing the gap between students who are registered and students who vote. Should this trend hold in 2024, the more students we register, the more likely we are to see an increase in our overall voting rate. Because NSLVE takes into account students who register and vote either in Connecticut or in their home states, pushing for registration and absentee ballot request drives can only help drive higher voting rates. Our rates by race/ethnicity all increased from 2016, but there still remains a 7-27% gap between white students and BIPOC students. Our goals for 2024 are based on this 2020 data, as well as an anticipated moderate increase in voter engagement during this election.

2016-2020 RACE-BASED DIFFERENTIAL

Asian	⬆ 17% increase (2020: 56%)
Black	⬆ 21% increase (2020: 60%)
Latine	⬆ 22% increase (2020: 66%)
White	⬆ 23% increase (2020: 83%)
2 or more	⬆ 16% increase (2020: 76%)

GOALS & STRATEGIES

01 **BOOST VOTER EDUCATION AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES**

- Short-Term
  - Identify 5 courses in key departments to present on voter registration and Action Plan efforts
  - Create and disseminate voter education materials to approximately 400 students in the Allbritton network
  - Put together and train a cohort of 30 or so students to participate in voter education and outreach, as well as registration
  - Host at least 4 voter education events- ex. Debate Watch Parties, Election Day Results Event, Post-Election Reflection Event
- Long-Term
  - By 2026: connect with each faculty member in key departments, present plan, strategize ways to improve outreach and incorporate Action Plan into coursework
  - By 2026: connect with student facing support staff to ensure voting information is available in Orientation packets, dorms, dining halls, and other student spaces

02 **SUPPORT REGISTRATION AND ENGAGEMENT BEYOND CAMPUS**

- Short-Term
  - Connect with key community and municipal partners about ongoing voter registration efforts that Wesleyan can support; special focus on high school student, BIPOC, and formerly incarcerated demographic
  - Host at least 2 voting focused events with community and municipal partners- including Diploma to the Ballot registering high school seniors before college
  - Widely share information about the Political Engagement Fund across campus so that students know they can apply for funds to engage in voter outreach
  - Increase the number of applicants and participants in the Political Engagement Fund in 2024-25 to 40; expand the fund to make it available during Fall Break ($500 max), Winter Break ($500 max), Spring Break ($500 max), and Summer Break ($5000 max)
  - Include staff from the Gordon Career Center in the Political Engagement Fund process to support students in translating their experiences onto their resumes and job applications
- Long-Term
  - By 2026: deepen and expand relationships with community and municipal partners; plan for support for midterm and local elections
  - By 2026: expand Diploma to the Ballot initiative to 5 high schools in the state

GOALS & STRATEGIES

03 DECREASE VOTING GAP BETWEEN WHITE AND BIPOC STUDENTS

- Short-Term
  - Targeted outreach with 4 Student of Color groups around voter engagement
  - Identify opportunities for Students of Color to connect with BIPOC students in other Universities and HBCUs
- Long-Term
  - By 2026: deepen and expand relationships with Student of Color groups and leadership; train leaders on voter registration and have them lead efforts

04 INCREASE VOTER REGISTRATION RATE TO 95%

- Short-Term
  - Targeted outreach through Centers and campus-wide to first-year students encouraging voter registration
  - Trained cohort of 30 or so students registering students to vote on Tuesdays from mid-September to Election Day
  - Partner with 3-5 student groups to coordinate at least 2 "Storm the Dorm" events registering students in dorms
  - Identify 3-5 key events on campus at which to host voter registration drives-including concerts, speaker engagements, lunch waves, large events
  - Determine a fixed location for voter registration form pick up and drop offs
  - Supply students with the basic materials for registration drives, as well as 2 reservable wireless printers to facilitate printing out-of-state forms
- Long-Term
  - By 2026: work with campus and off-campus partners to support voter registration before students arrive on campus
  - By 2026: connect with student facing support staff to ensure voting information is available in Orientation packets, dorms, dining halls, and other student spaces

05 INCREASE VOTING RATE TO 85%

- Short-Term
  - In addition to the goals above, provide and promote rides to the polls for students on Election Day
  - Track students who requested absentee ballots; text, email, or call when approaching mailing deadlines
- Long-Term
  - By 2026: work with campus and off-campus partners to support absentee ballot plan development before students arrive on campus

REPORTING

Our 2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan will be made available via our University website. We will also share it with key stakeholders and partners on and off campus. Our Civic Engagement Fellows will post on social media and write a blog post for our Engage Blog on the plan, as well as on the outcomes. We will report on the plan and our progress at our Allbritton staff meetings, Cross Unit collaboration meetings, and Engagement Council Meetings.

EVALUATION

We will evaluate our outcomes in a number of ways:

- Polling voter registration volunteers weekly on turn out, challenges, and outcomes
- Continued participation in data sharing with NSLVE to ensure we receive reports
- Tracking the number of Political Engagement Fund Recipients, requiring a reflection statement from them, and asking them to participate on panels encouraging other students to apply and engage
- Tracking and reporting on meetings and strategies formed with relevant faculty and staff
- Survey to students in our Centers around what went well this year, and what could have better supported their engagement