

**WESTERN TECHNICAL COLLEGE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

*Distributed To:  
Campus Vote Project  
All In Challenge*

**I. Executive Summary**

Community Engagement is an essential piece of a Western Technical College education. In 2018, Western Technical College committed to increasing the number of technical diplomas and associate degree programs with an embedded community-based learning (CBL) experience from 48% to 100% by 2025. In fall of 2022, we hit our goal of embedding CBL in 100% of our diploma and associate degree programs. There are multiple pathways for community engagement and Western recognizes the role civic engagement, specifically voting, plays in shaping our democracy and developing our students to be engaged members of the workforce. It is also critically important for student success to be achieved for our white students and our students of color and we commit to eliminating any equity gaps that may exist. Therefore, Western Technical College seeks to increase student voter rates during all upcoming midterm and presidential elections. Julie Christensen, the Community Engagement Coordinator and Kari Reyburn, the Director of Student Life, Equity, and Engagement put this action plan together to help guide Western's voter engagement efforts. A college team consisting of employees and students will be organized to bring capacity to the Division who leads the efforts.

The purpose of this plan is to provide guidance and suggested implementation for increasing voter engagement efforts during the 23-24 academic year. This action plan will be implemented at Western Technical College in La Crosse, WI and online to serve students attending virtually. Our efforts will include students throughout our district which includes 11 counties.

**II. Leadership/Campus Team**

1. Kari Reyburn, Director of Student Life, Equity, & Engagement – Team Lead
2. Julie Christensen, Community Engagement Coordinator – Team Lead
3. Amy Thornton, Vice President of Student Services and Engagement
4. Margy Krogman, Student Leadership & Engagement Coordinator
5. Eric Jacobson, Marketing, Communications, & Legislative Advocacy
6. Ge Vang, Student Life & Integrity Manager
7. Orion Roen, Residence Life Community Director
8. William Garcia, Instructor – Academic Intervention
9. Anika Hadley, Democracy Fellow
10. TBD, Democracy Fellow
11. Western Student Government
12. The SPACE (Student Place of Action, Culture, and Empowerment)
13. La Crosse League of Women Voters

The Civic Engagement Team consists of key individuals throughout Western who can help fully engage students and build capacity within our division of Student Life, Equity, & Engagement which primarily consists of 2 departments including the department of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement and the department of Student and Residence Life. This team will also utilize the help from the local League of Women Voters and work with Democracy Fellows at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse and Viterbo University to share ideas and partner on voter education efforts to maximize resources. We also plan to utilize the strengths of Western Student Government and General Assembly meetings to help build capacity and share information to the greater student population. Margy Krogman,

Student Government Advisor, will help make these connections and Julie Christensen, Community Engagement Coordinator, will ensure the Student Government stays connected to the voter efforts. It is anticipated that both Democracy Fellows will be attending General Assembly meetings regularly to share information and connect with student clubs/organizations.

Western has intentionally paired two departments intentionally with civic engagement efforts to ensure continuity of knowledge and programming in the event a staff member leaves or is promoted to another position. Civic engagement is embedded into the Community Engagement Coordinator position and the Student Leadership & Engagement Coordinator position. Western is in the process of working to embed civic engagement more formally into Student Government roles to help with continuity from year to year. In past years this has been determined based on the individuals' interest in Student Government positions but embedding it within those roles would be incredibly beneficial to the college.

### **III. Commitment**

Western Technical College is part of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Campus Vote Project, and the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement. Our college President has signed All In's President's Commitment. Throughout its history, Western Technical College has been committed to connecting the College to the needs of the community. These community partnerships are essential to the Western experience and provide students an opportunity to connect what they are learning in the classroom to the community. Community Engagement and Equity, Inclusion, and Support are both key commitments in Western's Experience 2025 Strategic Plan.

- Infuse community-based learning in 100% of associate degree and technical diploma programs by 2025.
- Eliminate course completion, retention, and graduation achievement gaps between black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American students and white students by 2025.
- Increase enrollment of program-declared students of color from 12.82% in 2018 to 20% in 2025.

The following language is excerpted from the College's Experience 2025 strategic plan.

- Equity, Inclusion, and Support  
Western is committed to providing students from all backgrounds and academic levels an accessible, inclusive, and equitable learning environment that results in credential attainment. Western and its employees are committed to every student, every day.
- Fundamental Beliefs
  - Every employee, regardless of position or title, is obligated to help create accessible, inclusive, and equitable conditions for student success.
  - Teaching should be inclusive of all cultures and backgrounds and appropriate to the needs, abilities, and aspirations of each student.
  - Students' self-efficacy is increased by balancing academic rigor with compassionate support, effective teaching methods, and a precise focus on career-relevant topics and skills.
  - Academic, social, and emotional assistance should not be stigmatizing. Success achieved with support is still success.

Civic engagement work is embedded into the Community Engagement Coordinator's role on campus which is housed within the department of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement. The Community Engagement Coordinator works alongside all equity and inclusion initiatives on campus to ensure voter education is available and accessible to all students.

### **IV. Landscape**

Western Technical College is located in La Crosse, WI and has regional locations in five surrounding communities. Western offers 46 associate degree programs and serves around 9,000 students each year with a full-time enrollment of around 3,030 each year. Western awards associate degrees,

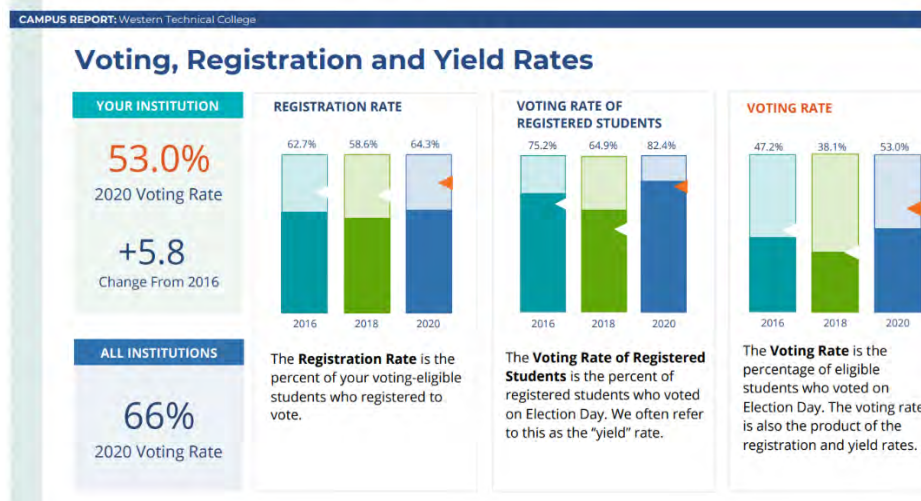
technical diplomas, specialized certificates, customized training, GED/HSED, and classes that transfer directly to 4-year institutions; two of which are within a mile of the La Crosse campus.

Western’s mission is to provide relevant, high-quality education in a collaborative and sustainable environment that changes the lives of students and grows our communities. We value workforce and community engagement experiences and pride ourselves on a hands-on approach. Our institution has consistently provided voter education and encouraged civic engagement through events around Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day, hosting civic engagement panels, and inviting the League of Women Voters on campus.

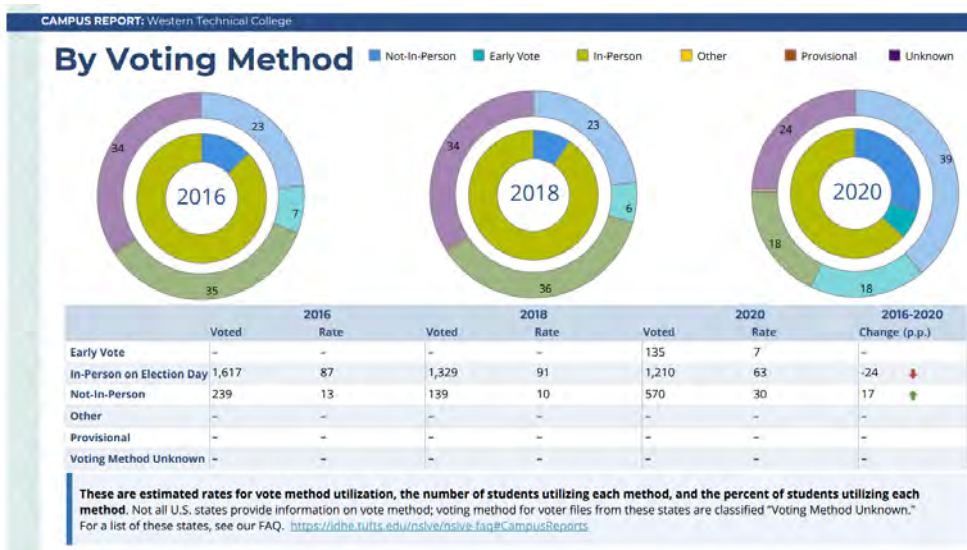
One of the biggest challenges post-COVID and with having 5 regional locations is reaching all our students through various communication channels. More and more of our classes are online or a combination of hybrid classes which make reaching students in-person harder than past election years. We utilize a mix of communication medias including social media, student newsletters, direct email, classroom visits (both in-person and virtual), tabling on campus, and meeting students where they are whether that is in the residence hall, during general assembly, or club meetings.

Another challenge Western faces is our students are extremely busy. Most Western students are not just students, they are going to school, working jobs, and many are also caregivers (either as parents or to others in their lives). Due to their busy schedules, it can be difficult to reach them. Our strategy reflects this approach.

- Western’s voter rate in the 2020 presidential elections was 53% which was up 5.8% from 2016 with an increase in voter engagement across all age ranges. The biggest increase was between 18-21 year-olds.



- With 2020 being impacted by COVID, Not-In-Person voting increased by 17% while, in-person on election day decreased by 24%.



- Community-based learning is currently embedded into 100% of our associate and technical degree programs. Community-based learning encourages students to be more civic minded individuals and actively engage in their community.
- During the 2020 Presidential elections, Western created a Cavaliers Vote webpage on the Western Technical College website with voter education in English and Spanish including videos, guides, and more. This has continued to be updated regularly for students and staff.
- Western’s student population is 18% students of color. From the 2016 to 2020 election we were able to increase our all of our race/ethnicity group voting rates, except the Asian group. We have been working with Cia Siab, Inc., a local nonprofit committed to serving the Hmong community through a variety of ways including working to increase voter education and engagement.

### Looking Closer

By Race/Ethnicity

This page provides the numbers we used to calculate race / ethnicity group voting rates. We include the counts of students and the change in rates between the two most recent comparable election years. If you notice unavailable/missing data in this page, it could mean any of the following for your institution: (i) does not report this data; (ii) did not provide this data in past years; (iii) does not separately submit data for one or more of the demographic groups, or (iv) the data is reported for 10 or fewer students.

|                                   | 2016     |       |      | 2018     |       |      | 2020     |       |      | 2016-2020 Change (p.p) |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-------|------|----------|-------|------|----------|-------|------|------------------------|
|                                   | Enrolled | Voted | Rate | Enrolled | Voted | Rate | Enrolled | Voted | Rate |                        |
| Asian                             | 184      | 73    | 40   | 170      | 53    | 31   | 149      | 53    | 36   | ↓ -4                   |
| American Indian/ Alaska Native    | 50       | 21    | 42   | 63       | 27    | 43   | 47       | 27    | 57   | ↑ 15                   |
| Black                             | 97       | 26    | 27   | 109      | 19    | 17   | 71       | 23    | 32   | ↑ 6                    |
| Hispanic                          | 57       | -     | -    | 65       | 12    | 18   | 96       | 37    | 39   | -                      |
| Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander | -        | -     | -    | -        | -     | -    | -        | -     | -    | -                      |
| 2 or More Races                   | -        | -     | -    | -        | -     | -    | -        | -     | -    | -                      |
| White                             | 3,374    | 1,646 | 49   | 3,312    | 1,289 | 39   | 3,151    | 1,726 | 55   | ↑ 6                    |
| Race Unknown                      | 176      | 81    | 46   | 132      | 67    | 51   | 100      | 50    | 50   | ↑ 4                    |

©2021 Institute for Democracy & Higher Education

While we do not have the 2022 NSLVE report, we hope to see that the efforts we made will be reflected in the updated report once it is out.

#### V. Goals:

Short Term Goals – Academic Year 2024

- Increase our student voting rates from 53% in the 2020 Presidential Elections to 56% in the 2024 Presidential Elections.

- Through civic engagement programming, Vote Central locations on main campus and the five regional locations.
- Embedding civic engagement touchpoints throughout their journey (both passive and active) – orientation, registration, Blackboard shell, email, social media, etc)
- Work with Student Life office to provide voter registration info and educate students on how they can use their Student IDs as Voter IDs when they receive their Student ID in the Student Life office. ‘
- Increase our Asian student voting rates from 36% in the 2020 Presidential Elections to 40% in the 2024 Presidential Elections.
  - Work with Cia Siab, Inc. to increase Hmong student voter engagement through programming and outreach.
  - Work with Western’s newly formed Hmong Student Organization to engage Hmong students with civic engagement.
- Formalize an active civic engagement role inside Western Student Government to build continuity.
  - Get Student Government to embed civic engagement into their Parliamentarian position to work alongside or as a Democracy Fellow.
- Work with the Registrar office and La Crosse City Clerk to get students in the Residence Hall registered via a list.
  - Review Registrar guidelines with closed campus directory.
  - Add a box for students to check for their names to opt in to their info being shared with the La Crosse City Clerk office.

#### Long Term Goals

- Increase our student voting rates from 53% in the 2020 Presidential Elections to 62% in the 2028 Presidential Elections.
  - We will do this through a variety of programming and planning efforts.
- Work with academics to embed voter education/registration into 1<sup>st</sup> term Strengths Seminar course.
  - This is a new course for all incoming students in all programs. It will provide a foundation for learning and engaging at Western covering a variety of resources.
- Institutionalize voting within Western’s residence hall.
  - Embed Civic Engagement programming into res hall activities.
  - Train all Community Advisors/Residence Assistances on basics of civic engagement/ voter registration.
  - Rally to City Hall Day during Vote Early week.

#### **VI. NSLVE as a Resource for Colleges & Universities**

Western participates in NSLVE and receives a report detailing voter engagement of Western students. Looking at the 2020 presidential elections, Western had a 53% voter rate, a 5.8% increase from the 2016 presidential elections. We had an increase in all race/ethnicity, except for our Asian students which had a decrease of 4%. We also saw an increase in all age ranges, except for the 50+ group, which had a 3% decline. Based on the data in the NSLVE report, we created the goals above. When we receive the 2022 NSLVE report, we will have more data and may adjust our goals.

#### **VII. Strategy**

##### **Strategy: Build institutional capacity for voter registration and education.**

- Create Vote Central stations on main campus, the five regional learning centers (Mauston, Tomah, Viroqua, Black River Falls, and Independence), and our three-training center (Public

Safety, Transportation, and Apprenticeship) to act as a central location where students can learn about voting, register to vote, take candidate guides, etc.

- Staff these during peak times with trained student workers or staff to answer questions.
- Host voter registration/education events in collaboration with the League of Women Voters at least three times prior to the November 2024 election.
  - Build and promote events on Engage Platform and into the co-curricular pathways.
- Train Democracy Fellows and Student Workers in The SPACE to assist students with registering to vote and answering common voting questions.
- Work with Learner Support and Transition instructors who teach first year Strengths Seminar to build in voter education to course.
  - Prepare pre-made resources and videos for Blackboard course shells and coinciding reflection questions.
- Create a student communication plan including these activities:
  - Create a voting tagline to inspire our campaign.
  - Embed voter registration/info in our primary student communication systems (Blackboard, ENGAGE, MyWestern, etc).
  - Update Cavaliers Vote webpage.
  - Integrate voter registration/education into Residence Hall programming.
  - Partner with Union Market to distribute voter registration and election information via stickers on coffee cups/ table tents throughout dining area, and info near checkouts.

**Strategy: Educate students about the voting process.**

- Distribute resources on materials needed for voting, the process of what happens at the polls, how to find polling place, and what a sample ballot looks like.
- Increase awareness of absentee voting through promotional materials.
- Create a video or series of short videos with campus videographer on the importance of voting and (Why I vote) with info embedded at the end and shared with the video on the process. Students, staff, and faculty can share why they vote!

**VIII. Reporting**

This plan and the NSLVE report will be shared with the campus team internally as well as our Senior Leadership team and any internal or external partners that request it such as the UWL fellows of Viterbo fellows as we plan to partner with them on some events and information sharing. We have shared our report in the past with other college fellows. Western is currently transitioning websites, but we plan to include the NSLVE report and our action plan on our Cavalier's Vote webpage on the new site once it has transitioned later this summer.

**IX. Evaluation**

Information will be collected via the NSLVE report to help guide future civic engagement work at Western. Data will also be collected using our Engage platform, which hosts all our campus events and tracks RSVPs and attendance at events. We will be able to use data collected from Engage to see:

- How many students attended an event, how many RSVP'd prior, and to send surveys out to attendees after if we choose to inform future events.  
In addition, the Campus Civic Engagement team will discuss:
- How many students were engaged during different activities? i.e. how many students registered to vote, how many passed by, how many mentioned they were already registered, how many took information, etc.
- Follow up information including how they heard about the event, their key takeaways from the event, actions taken after they event, etc. via post-event surveys.
- How was social media engagement? Reach? Comments, Likes, Shares
- How many communications were sent and when?

- Partnerships that were made and how beneficial they were (Women's League of Voters, UWL Fellows, Viterbo, Student Government, etc.)
- What team members felt worked well and what didn't for future planning.

The information discussed during evaluation with Western's Civic Engagement Leadership Team will be used to make improvements, check, and adjust, and plan for future civic engagement efforts at Western. As always, we will continue to look at the NSLVE data when it is available and use that to guide efforts as well.