



Middlebury College
Center for Community Engagement

Democratic Action Plan

Fall 2016

Middlebury College
Fall 2016 Democratic Action Plan
Submitted to ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

Commitment:

At Middlebury College in Vermont, democratic engagement is at the heart of our liberal arts education. We strive to educate graduates who are thoughtful and ethical leaders able to meet the challenges of informed citizenship both in their communities and as global citizens. We hope our students become independent thinkers, committed to service, with the courage to follow their convictions and to accept responsibility for their actions. In light of this mission, Middlebury College currently offers our students multiple opportunities to partake in, learn about and contribute to the democratic process. This year, Middlebury College accepts the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, continuing a multi-faceted approach to democratic participation as well as identifying new ways to improve democratic engagement, increase student voter participation rates, and prepare students for a lifelong commitment to being informed and active citizens.

An emerging priority that our new president is particularly interested in is developing “rhetorical resilience” among our students. Fostering ease and ability to discuss difficult issues across differing viewpoints is becoming more critical for today’s students. This is closely linked with “civil discourse” and is an area we will pursue more intentionally this year.

Background:

Currently, Middlebury’s commitment to the democratic process reaches across campus, both in the classroom and out. Teaching pedagogies and opportunities for engagement facilitate the learning of the democratic process. From offering courses during all three terms of our academic calendar to bringing in visiting professors and politicians to speak to the community, Middlebury strives to expose its students to a variety of perspectives on politics and civic engagement. Middlebury’s democratic engagement is furthered by programs and initiatives outside the classroom. These include student-led clubs, such as College Democrats and College Republicans, which regularly convene and conduct discussions to increase political awareness on campus. Our MiddView first-year orientation program organizes an annual trip for incoming students to the state’s capital to speak with local leaders.

In the Center for Community Engagement, civic engagement goes hand-in-hand with service and scholarship as the foundation to prepare students to impact positive change in their communities. A signature program at the Center for Community Engagement is MiddVote, a student-led, non-partisan initiative that mobilizes students on campus to engage in democracy through voting. MiddVote conducts multiple voter registration drives during election season to help eligible students register to vote and request absentee ballots. With the help of the Center for Community Engagement and MiddVote, Middlebury College has launched TurboVote on campus. A web-based voter registration tool, TurboVote helps college students register to vote, request an absentee ballot, and send the absentee ballot back to the polling place. TurboVote also sends periodic updates about upcoming elections, registration and absentee ballot deadlines, and other vital information to help boost student participation. MiddVote sponsors debate viewing parties and get-out-the-vote events. They also offer students access to local Vermont election events such as sending students to the Vermont PBS Gubernatorial Debate to join the live studio audience.

Fall 2016 Goals and Initiatives:

As we look ahead to this upcoming year, we hope to continue and build on our initiatives to increase voter participation and education about the democratic process. Our key goals for the 2016-17 academic year include:

- Create and promote opportunities for students to learn about democracy, political processes, and civic engagement.
 - Support student led-initiatives and develop students as leaders. For example, earlier this fall, Andrew Plotch '18.5 represented Middlebury College and the state of Vermont in College Debate 16, “a national non-partisan initiative to empower young voters to identify issues and engage peers in the presidential election.”
 - Organize multiple debate watching parties and invite professors to provide context for attendees.
 - Educational outreach to inform campus about registration and absentee request ballot deadlines to ensure maximum voter participation and better understanding of the processes
- Create and promote opportunities for students to participate in the presidential election.
 - Plan and execute multiple voter registration drives prior to state registration deadlines in October.

- Maximize usage of the TurboVote platform both at in-person MiddVote events and via online engagement.
 - Participate in the NSLVE survey to better understand Middlebury's Civic Engagement trends and use past reports to optimize efforts and share these results with Civic Nation.
 - Starting this year, the college will provide transportation for students to access polling stations during days of voting for local, state-wide and federal elections.
 - To ensure all eligible and interested students studying abroad are able to vote if they wish to, the Center for Community Engagement sends out emails with guidelines and resource manuals outlining the process of voting for students studying abroad.
- Create and promote campus-wide conversation and collaboration to better understand and promote our collective efforts
 - Offer campus-wide events co-sponsored by Center for Community Engagement, student leaders of MiddVote, Middlebury College Democrats, Middlebury College Republicans, and Political Science faculty including debate watches and discussions
 - Create an advisory committee in Fall 2016 that represents the Center for Community Engagement, Political Science Department, and the student leaders of MiddVote, Middlebury College Democrats and Middlebury College Republicans
 - Explore and identify opportunities for CCE and interested students to further develop "rhetorical resilience" through speakers, discussions, resources identification, etc.