

Executive Summary

At Berea College, the Voter Empowerment Political Awareness Coalition (VEPAC) will be the driving force behind increased awareness, education, and access to political participation. This coalition, made up of students, staff, and faculty, represents a true cross-campus coalition, allowing for maximal student awareness.

Berea College students typically have higher than national average rates of voter registration paired with lower than average voter turnout. The campus also reflects locally a national reality of a new vigor and interest in political engagement, regardless of party affiliation. Acknowledging the importance of teaching civic engagement as part of the college experience (both curricularly and co-curricularly), combined with the awareness that students need tools and skills to track and evaluate information and to have civil discussions, led VEPAC to be formed.

Following the formation of VEPAC in the 2017-18 school year, the Voter Empowerment Political Awareness Coalition plans to build on last year's foundation to build increased voter registration as well as voter turnout. Paired with educational and training opportunities, this will be the heart of our action plan for the 2018-19 school year.

Leadership

VEPAC is comprised of:

Channell Barbour, Associate Dean, Student Life

Ashley Cochrane, Director, Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELS)

Dara Evans, Housing Team, Campus Life, KAHO Team, Training and Development, Clubs and Organizations

Gus Gerassimides, Associate Vice President, Student Life

Sarah Rohrer, Associate Director, CELS

Dr. Alicestyne Turley, Director, Carter G. Woodson Center; Associate Professor of African and African American Studies

Dr. Andrea Woodward, Assistant Professor of Social Sciences

Student Government Association Representation

Additional Student Leadership from across campus

Commitment

Berea College has a long history of public engagement and nonviolent social justice activism that stems from John G. Fee's commitment to provide for "all peoples of the earth" an education that gives a new future to those on the margins of society.

Selected from the College's Community Aspirations statement:

Berea College values freedom of expression and collegiality. Education and edification both proceed through rich engagement and honest sharing of knowledge, perspectives, and insights. Hindrances to dialogue and free expression can very much impede learning.

The College values the good will and respect of the City and its residents as well as that of visitors to the area. Bereans are aware that their dealings and activities will influence views of others about the school and its mission. They aim to be good citizens and to participate actively and positively in civic life, striving to conduct their affairs so as to enhance the quality of life for all, and respecting the property and interests of others.

The school demonstrates its commitment to improving civic learning through:

- Participation in the NSLVE to track the campus' political engagement
- A variety of academic courses across disciplines like Communications, Education Studies, General Education, Philosophy, Sociology, and Peace and Social Justice, etc. that include topics of civic engagement
- Educational events inviting elected officials or including advocacy opportunities
- Participating campus of Project Pericles
- Bonner Scholar school with a common commitment to Civic Engagement

Landscape

In 2012, 73.99% of Berea College students were registered to vote.

In 2012, only 31.58% of Berea College students actually voted.

Local Community Resources:

- Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
- Berea KY Human Rights Commission

Challenges:

- Campus exists in two voting precincts which makes it harder to engage in local politics and to know where to vote (students need to move registrations from year to year)
- Some students don't feel safe going to the polls due to past voter intimidation from surrounding area
- Unofficial polls show conservatives feel that their opinions are not adequately represented

Goals

- Students will be engaged voters.
 - 90% of Berea College students eligible to vote will be registered.
 - 80% of registered Berea College voters will vote in any local, or national, election.
- Students will be informed on political issues and able to engage in constructive dialogue regarding issues.
 - Half of the registered Berea College student voters who participate in a VEPAC program(s) will be able to articulate or describe how to engage in constructive dialogue regarding political issues.
 - Half of the registered Berea College student voters who participate in a VEPAC program(s) will be able to demonstrate how they are more informed on political issues.

- Students understand political processes and how to interact with them to make constructive change.
 - At least two educational events will be provided covering topics like why voting matters, how to get your voice heard, how decisions are made, what's the role of local elections, how to communicate with elected officials

Strategy

- Campus partnership with Turbovote, link on Berea student landing page and shared widely
- Voter registration opportunities are numerous and tied to required activities like housing and orientation
- Civic engagement part of wellness campus opportunities
- Participation in National Voter Registration Day
- Election day shuttles to voting precincts
- Outreach to incoming students before their arrival
- Educational collaborations with other groups on campus
- Host a city council debate