

# Campus Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates

## Executive Summary

Civic engagement is a distinctive of an Alfred State education and a fundamental element of ongoing strategic initiatives related to applied learning, student success and local/regional impact. The following comprehensive campus action plan is focused on registering, educating, and turning out student voters. This politically neutral initiative will focus on co-curricular and curricular pathways to enhance the likelihood of pervasive outreach and substantive, informed civic participation among students. Implementation will rely on robust collaboration engaging internal and external stakeholders in data informed programming and information sharing.

The plan will be implemented on the Alfred, Wellsville, and Northland campuses as well as integrated into the online platform for web based students. The timeline will run one academic year from summer 2020 through summer 2021. A key goal will be an 18% increase in the voting rate for the 2020 election. This plan was developed by the Director of Civic Engagement with feedback and collaboration with faculty/staff colleagues and student leaders. Of particular value was the input of the leadership team described below- an inclusive committee of civic advocates who will inform actions taken to achieve short and long term goals for engagement.

## Leadership

The leadership team for this initiative include the following individuals:

- Deputy Commissioner, Allegany County Board of Elections
- Coordinator, Accessibility & Tutoring Services, Academic Affairs
- Deputy Commissioner, Allegany County Board of Elections
- Student Senate Vice President of Student Life, Student
- Civic Engagement Advocate, Student
- Director of Civic Engagement, Student Affairs
- Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs
- Office of Accessibility, Academic Affairs

The leadership team is based on position rather than focused on individuals. Should there be any transition of professional staff, the new staff member would be requested to serve a role within the group. Student representation will often change from year to year due to student government elections and employment selection. However, students serving in these positions would consistently demonstrate a knowledge and passion in supporting this political engagement effort.

Locally, the Allegany County Board of Elections is a key community partner in exchanging information and coordinating efforts to maximize student engagement. In addition, the Center for Civic Engagement's Community Advisory Board provide valuable external input on the activities and direction of this office. This board, which meets 1-2 times annually, is made up of

leaders from key sectors within the region who can share additional insight for future effective action.

National partners enable access to resources and best practices that enhance outreach and engagement. These partners include:

- [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#) whose mission “strives to change civic culture and institutionalize democratic engagement activities and programs on college campuses, making them a defining feature of campus life”.
- [Voter Friendly Campus Designation](#), a joint venture of Campus Vote Project and NASPA seeks to “help institutions develop plans to coordinate administrators, faculty, and student organizations in civic and electoral engagement.”
- [Tufts University Institute for Democracy & Higher Education](#) is a non-partisan applied learning entity which has developed customized National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement reports that outline Alfred State students’ aggregate voter registration and turnout rates in national elections since 2012

## Commitment

Alfred State College has a long tradition of community engagement, outreach, collaboration, and service. This tradition is exemplified in the institutional seal with the words ““Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve”. Currently, this outward focus is core to an institutional strategic plan that highlights applied learning, local & regional impact, and student success as priorities.

The Center for Civic Engagement provides dedicated infrastructure and leadership to civic initiatives. The mission of the Center is to promote a culture of civic engagement on campus preparing students to be civic leaders in their community. This Center will continue to serve as a catalyst for political engagement efforts on campus in collaboration with a representative leadership team.

Collaboration is key in demonstrating this commitment. Summer orientation sessions are the venue for ensuring that every first year student has the opportunity to register to vote. Campus forum events such as Constitution Day offer opportunities to highlight expertise and ideas from faculty. A Residential Life competition called Pioneer Cup provide incentives for related activities and event attendance. Collaboration with the League of Women Voters during National Voter Registration Day enables synergy of effort and enhanced impact. And, messaging from the college President is utilized to support get out the vote efforts.

## Landscape

The 2016 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report for the last Presidential election provided significant insight into the voting patterns of Alfred State students. This report highlighted substantial increases in the percentage of students registered to vote and the voting rate from 2012.

This report also highlighted a need to invest renewed effort in accelerating our positive trajectory. Alfred State student voting metrics have not yet achieved average benchmarks of

like institutions. More specifically, students in certain majors are a significantly disengaged compared to their peers in other majors. Focused efforts on connecting with students in these majors promise to generate the most momentum in adjusting overall metrics upward. Goals and programming will be aligned to generate traction in the following metrics:

- **Registration rate**: The percentage of your students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and registered to vote.
  - The 69.2% 2016 registration rate represented an 8.8% increase from 2012.
  - The 2020 goal will seek to achieve an 11% increase for an overall rate of 80%
- **Rate of registered students** is the percentage of students who registered and actually turned out to vote.
  - The 47.2% 2016 rate represented an 8.8% increase from 2012.
  - The 2020 goal will seek to achieve a 13% increase for an overall rate of 50%
- **Voting rate** is the percentage of students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and voted.
  - The 32.6% 2016 voting rate represented nearly a 10% increase from 2012.
  - The 2020 goal will seek to achieve an 18% rate increase for an overall rate of 50%

Our next step is to convene our planning group to utilize NSLVE data to develop and fine tune strategies for the coming two years. We will also begin identifying new goals to continue the positive momentum.

## Goals

Alfred State has identified three primary goals for democratic engagement for 2020-2021 that focus on efforts to maximize student involvement in the electoral process. These goals include:

1. Enhance knowledge on the pathways to political engagement
2. Develop a greater understanding of candidates, parties, and platforms.
3. Increase voter participation in general to maximize the political impact of the student body.

These three goals are be consistently both short term and long term with an overall vision of enabling 100% informed voting by all eligible students. The metrics associated with the short-term efforts for the 2020 election are as follows:

- **Registration Rate**: The 2020 goal will seek to achieve an 11% increase for an overall rate of 80%
- **Rate of Registered Students**: The 2020 goal will seek to achieve a 13% increase for an overall rate of 50%
- **Voting Rate**: The 2020 goal will seek to achieve an 18% rate increase for an overall rate of 50%

The **first goal** for 2020-2021 is to enhance knowledge on the pathways to political engagement. Many students are confused by the paperwork, regulations, and other similar barriers that depress young adult turnout and participation in New York. Alfred State plans to continue making significant traction in achieving this goal by leveraging multiple platforms and events throughout the year. Examples include:

- Register students during new student orientation in January and July
- Embed voter registration in the move-in process for returning students
- Embed voter registration materials in the parking decal procurement process for commuter students
- Embed voter registration in the Pioneer Cup residence hall competition
- Conduct bi-weekly voter registration events by tabling at key campus intersections such as the Central Dining Hall and the Student Leadership Center
- Leverage National Voter Registration Day, Constitution Day, and other key events to initiate pushes for new registrations
- Utilize social media, emails to students, tabling, hand-outs, and other platforms to publicize key dates, resources, and websites
- Create posters and design informational bulletin boards in residential halls focusing on the impact of voting
- Explore embedding voter registration opportunity within the class registration process for returning students
- Continue leveraging the Office of the President to send reminders to students on registration and participation

The **second goal** for 2020-21 is to develop a greater understanding of candidates, parties, and platforms. Consistent avenues for non-partisan information will be designed to raise awareness around important local, regional, and national issues. A few examples include:

- Collaborate with other departments to organize programming focused on civility, digital literacy, and other relevant issues to the upcoming election
- Distribute and display non-partisan information on candidate positions. Make available straightforward party platform posters and handouts
- Leverage Constitution Day programming to register and share voter education materials
- Held mock ballot election around election days in March and November to help students better understand the voting process
- Made available resources so students knew their electoral rights. For example, the “Student Voting Guide for New York”, produced through the Fair Elections Legal Network, could be made widely available
- Leverage platforms like Rock the Vote and other apps designed to make involvement and engagement easier for online oriented students
- Hold debate watch parties in the residence halls
- Design informational bulletin boards and posters in residence halls & academic building with important election oriented dates
- Collaborate with faculty to engage students via courses

The **third and final goal** for 2020-2021 is to increase voter participation in general to maximize the political impact of the Alfred State student body. A few examples of specific programs designed to enhance voter participation include the following:

- Partner with food services to decorate the Central Dining Hall with voting paraphernalia and information on election day
- Partner with Student Senate to have a van shuttle students to the polling station throughout election day
- Leverage the student newspaper to share information and feature student voices on why they are voting.
- Encourage students to sign a “Pledge to Vote”
- Use chalk to clearly mark out the footpath through village from campus to the local polling station to make it as easy as possible for students to locate this venue.

## Strategy

The goals outlined above represent a student focused strategy designed to deliver resources where they are most effective. These venues include the classroom, residence halls, co-curricular venues, dining locations, and other settings. Incorporation into ongoing competition’s such as the Pioneer Cup and ongoing events such as Constitution Day reduce duplication of effort and enhance effectiveness.

The tactics outlined above under each goal represent an overall strategy of collaboration with key departments and divisions including Academic Affairs, Residential Life, Student Engagement, Dining Services, and the Diversity & Inclusion office. Student collaborations will take place with Student Senate, clubs/organizations, honor societies, student employees, and other. The tactics and activities will be informed by a collaborative effort designed to engage as many students as possible.

Long-term strategies will be informed by the success of actions taken over the course of 2020-2021. While the overall goals will remain the same, approaches, programming, and metric measuring success will be adjusted to account for the learning gained through meaningful feedback loops.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic may interface in how programming and messaging take place. Contingency planning will continue as the facts and situation changes in New York state and nationally.

## Reporting

This action plan, as well as National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) reports, will be shared broadly in the interest of transparency and accountability. Specifically, information will be shared within the institutional intranet so all students, faculty, and staff can access the information. Past NSLVE report will also be shared through this forum.

This platform ensures easy access to the public as well as internally with faculty, staff, and students. This effort to make plans, data, and reports available will not only demonstrate a commitment to broadening and deepening civic learning and democratic engagement, but may inspire ideas and input from stakeholders that can benefit ongoing efforts.

## Evaluation

Effectiveness of methods and strategy will be evaluated by collecting key metrics such as event participation and voter registrations completed. Student survey data will also be leveraged to inform effectiveness and efficiency of programming efforts. Finally, data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement will continue to play a central role in measuring progress over time and developing benchmarks to further streamline goals and objectives of this effort.

Event participation, voter registration data, and event evaluations can take place on an ongoing basis. NSLVE data would not be available until well after the election. The political engagement leadership team will utilize this immediate feedback loop as well as the NSLVE data to inform programming focus and communication strategies throughout the year.