

All IN Campus Challenge Berea College 2020 Campus Action Plan

Executive Summary

At Berea College, the Voter Empowerment and Political Awareness Coalition (VEPAC) continues to take the lead in promoting awareness, education, and programming related to voter engagement and voter empowerment. This cross-campus collaboration, made up of students, staff, and faculty, promotes voter registration, voter turnout, engagement with elected officials, and the development of civic engagement skills. Following VEPAC's formation during the 2017-18 school year, it has benefited from strong student leadership, on-going staff and faculty involvement and leadership, support from Berea College's administration, and collaboration with community-based organizations. These strong collaborations strengthen the impact of VEPAC's work.

The VEPAC planning committee members created this 2020 Campus Action Plan. The plan will be implemented at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, and the purpose of the plan is to further the goals of Berea College's VEPAC, which are to increase voter registration and voter turnout, and to continue to engage Berea College community members in educational programming that provides opportunities for students to develop skills of civic engagement. All members of the collaborating groups and organizations will play roles in implementing the plan. Implementation will be tracked and evaluated through regular meetings of VEPAC planning committee members

While this plan is created for the 20-21 academic year, the plan includes on-going, long-term goals and strategies, as well as shorter term goals and strategies. Specifically, due to the safety responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, Berea College VEPAC leaders are prepared to adapt successful strategies and to develop new strategies that accommodate altered academic schedules and social distancing protocols in fall 2020, and beyond, if necessary. Despite these challenges, VEPAC remains focused on the established goals of increasing voter registration and voter turnout, and of continuing to offer educational programming that provides opportunities for students to develop skills of civic engagement.

Leadership

The on-campus Berea College VEPAC planning team includes students, faculty, Student Life students and staff, and staff and students from the center for student civic engagement. On-campus VEPAC planning team members include (in alphabetical order by last name):

- Ashley Cochrane, Director, Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTS)
- Gus Gerassimides, Associate Vice President, Student Life
- Michelle Johnson, Program Coordinator, Student Life
- Sarah Rohrer, Associate Director, CELTS
- Dr. Andrea Woodward, Associate Professor of Social Sciences
- Student Life students (work-study and volunteers)
- Student Government Association student representatives
- Students from CELTS (Center for Excellence in Learning through Service)

Berea College leaders, including President Dr. Lyle Roelofs, Provost Dr. Linda Strong Leek, and Vice President for Student Life Dr. Channell Barbour, also support the work of VEPAC.

Local community collaborators include: staff and volunteers from a statewide, membership based, issue-focused organization that works to empower disenfranchised Kentuckians, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC); and the City of Berea Human Rights Commission, which focuses on advocating for the human rights of all Berea residents. National networks also inform and support the work of VEPAC, including (in alphabetical order) the Bonner Foundation, Campus Compact, Kentucky Campus Compact, Project Pericles, and TurboVote.

Commitment

Founded in 1855 as the first interracial and co-educational college in the South, Berea College promotes understanding and kinship among all people, service to communities in Appalachia and beyond, and sustainable living practices. Berea charges no tuition and admits only academically promising students, primarily from Appalachia, who have limited economic resources. Today, every Berea College student receives a full-tuition scholarship and holds a ten to fifteen hour per week labor (work-study) position either on campus or in the community.

Guided by its motto, “God had made of one blood all peoples of the Earth,” and its Eight Great Commitments that are rooted in service, justice, and equality, Berea College has a long history of public engagement, service, and nonviolent social justice activism. Berea demonstrates its commitment to improving civic learning through existing programs, affiliations, and collaborations, which include:

- Recipient of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement (awarded in 2008, renewed in 2015)
- Bonner Scholar Program (established in 1990, the founding Bonner Scholar school in the nation)
- Project Pericles member institution
- Campus Compact member institution
- Active member of Kentucky Campus Compact
- Student Life promotes programming focused on civic engagement, includes civic engagement in wellness programming, and hosts a labor (work-study) position focused on coordination and support of VEPAC’s work
- Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTS), Carter G. Woodson Center for Interracial Education, and the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center, are three of the centers at Berea College that promote place-based education, development of awareness of and skills to address current social issues related to social justice, identity, and place, and engagement with local community partners through educational collaborations, service, and outreach
- Strategic Initiatives is a division of the College that supports federally-funded and foundation-funded outreach programs, primarily serving the Appalachian region
- A variety of academic courses across the disciplines include service-learning collaborations and civic engagement topics and pedagogical strategies
- NSLVE (National Study on Learning, Voting, and Engagement) participant college
- Campus collaboration with TurboVote

Landscape

Recent reports from the NSLVE have played a key role in informing VEPAC and the Berea College campus about Berea’s voter registration and turnout rates, and in providing national context for Berea’s rates as

compared with other college students. In 2018, 62.4% of Berea College students were registered to vote, and 33.4% of those registered voted in the 2018 midterm elections. While fewer Berea College students were registered to vote in the 2018 midterm election compared to previous years, the rate at which students actually voted in that election nearly doubled in comparison to the 2014 midterm election. Participation was highest of all in 2016, a presidential election year, when almost 40% of students turned out to vote. Despite these increases in voter turnout, Berea College student voting rates remain lower than voting rates at other private Bachelor's institutions.

In addition to the barriers that prevent many college students from voting, VEPAC has spent significant time exploring, discussing, and developing strategies to address some challenges that may be particularly relevant for Berea College students:

- *Challenge:* The relatively small, centralized, residential college campus of 1688 students (as of Fall 2019) exists in four different voting precincts at two different polling locations. This means that students' voting precinct may change from year to year, depending on their residence hall, creating confusion and uncertainty regarding where they should vote and what will be on their ballot. Strategies to address this challenge include:
 - VEPAC has created a map that diagrams the voting precincts of Berea, clearly marking which residence halls are in which precinct. Leading up to the November elections, VEPAC has posted the large map in a central location in the building where the dining hall and other common spaces are located.
 - An information table at the location of polling place shuttles on Election Day was staffed with volunteers who helped each voter check their voter registration on-line, to confirm their current voting precinct and their correct voting location.
 - A list of the voting precinct for each residence hall was provided for shuttle drivers on Election Day, and the drivers were trained to check with each voter to confirm their precinct before the voter boarded the shuttle to be driven to the polling place.
- The national climate of political polarization extends to every community in our country, including our own. In particular, there have historically been members of the Berea community who advocate that Berea College students should not be allowed to vote in Berea. Students have encountered indirect and overt hostility, as well as unhelpful or inaccurate information, at the polls. This climate can be intimidating for some voters, and requires that voters are well-informed about their voting rights. Strategies to address this challenge include:
 - Volunteer polling place shuttle drivers attended a training to become informed of voter rights. Each shuttle driver was prepared to go into the polling place to assist voters who encountered questions about their voting rights, by helping them to communicate with poll workers.
- Statistically, US voters with higher incomes have higher voting rates than those with lower incomes. Based on these statistics and because we know that Berea College students come from limited financial means, we can surmise that some Berea College students may come from families and communities without a strong tradition or culture of voting. Strategies to address this challenge include:
 - VEPAC provided voter education programs that highlighted these statistics and encouraged Berea students to change these statistics by voting and by becoming lifetime voters.

Goals

Long-term/aspirational goals: When VEPAC was formed, the planning committee members discussed long-term, aspirational goals for the group. We established a vision for high rates of voter registration and participation for current students and graduates. We also established a vision for the development of civic engagement skills in all Berea College students. These aspirational goals guide the long-term work of the group and give direction to the short-term goals that we establish for each year and election cycle.

- Increasing voter registration: 90% of Berea College students eligible to vote will be registered to vote.
- Increasing voter turnout: 80% of registered Berea College voters will vote in any local, state, or national election.
- Increasing voter turnout: 90% of Berea graduates who are eligible to vote will vote regularly in most elections.
- Developing skills of civic engagement: Every Berea College student will participate in programming to develop their civic engagement skills.

Annual/short term goals for the 20-21 academic year: The goals for the coming academic year follow the SMARTIE goal model (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound, Inclusive, and Equitable) and are informed by data from the NSLVE reports for Berea College and by data from Berea College's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

In a typical year, we would include goals related to the development of civic engagement skills; however, these goals are dependent on the ability to provide programming that focuses on the development of these skills. Because of safety responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the time of the writing of this action plan, we do not yet know if Berea College students will be on campus during the fall semester, and we do not know – if students are on campus – what the limitations to programming will be. Therefore, the short-term goals for this academic year focus primarily on voter registration and voter turnout. We look forward to a time when we can focus again on in-person programming.

- Increasing voter registration: Every incoming Berea College student will encounter at least 4 opportunities to learn about how to register to vote before the fall voter registration deadlines.
- Increasing voter registration: Every returning Berea College student will encounter at least 2 opportunities to learn about how to register to vote during the academic year.
- Increasing voter registration: At least 75% of Berea College students will be registered to vote in 2020.
- Increasing voter turnout: Berea College's student voter rate in the 2020 November election will be at least 50%.
- Developing skills of civic engagement: Every Berea College student will encounter information about how to engage with elected officials at least once.

Strategy

Long-term, on-going general strategies:

During the past several years, VEPAC has established long-term and on-going strategies to support long-term and short-term civic engagement goals. These strategies include:

- Develop opportunities for students to encounter information about how to register to vote through required activities like incoming student orientation and the annual housing selection process.
- Develop opportunities for students to register to vote with the support of trained volunteers in co-curricular settings, like residence hall programs, labor meetings, volunteer recruitment fairs, student organization fairs, campus-wide celebrations (like Mountain Day, Labor Day, and others), and tabling at times leading up to elections.
- Develop opportunities for students to register to vote with the support of trained volunteers in curricular settings, like academic courses, by asking faculty to make time for short presentations in their courses, especially general education courses.
- Successfully requesting that civic engagement activities be recognized as part of wellness campus opportunities.
- Promote National Voter Registration Day through celebratory, fun, and educational programming, like a mock vote for favorite drinks or desserts, emails to campus sharing data from NSLVE reports, and offering voter registration stations in central locations around campus.
- Host candidate forums for local elections like City Council, in collaboration with a local community-based organization.
- Successfully requesting that Election Day be listed on the official Berea College academic calendar.
- Successfully requesting an alternate class schedule on November Election Day to allow time for students to vote.
- Faculty and staff are offered time to vote on Election Day and are informed about this opportunity.
- Providing Election Day shuttles to voting precincts with trained volunteer drivers and a welcome table at the shuttle departure location that provides information about voter rights and helps voters check their voter registration precinct.
- Educational programming and collaborations with various campus groups, including issue-focused letter-writing/calling campaigns; trainings about how to communicate with elected officials; and various forums for discussing and debating pressing social issues.
- Develop a sense of fun and celebration around voting and civic engagement through activities like coffee/hot chocolate station at the shuttle departure location on Election Day; Election Day returns watch parties; swag giveaways at registration tabling events (stickers, beads, etc.); photo booth with red, white and blue props and signs that say, "I vote because ..." or "My voice matters because ..."

Specific strategies for 2020-21 goals:

Strategies used to achieve the short-term goals will include the established long-term strategies, as well as strategies particular to the immediate circumstances:

- Continue successful long-term strategies, listed above (Summer and Fall 2020)
- Adapt successful long-term strategies as needed for current pandemic protocols (for example, more on-line or virtual opportunities) (Summer and Fall 2020)
 - Specific plans for Fall 2020 programming and Election Day will be developed when we know if Berea College students will be on campus for Fall 2020 or not.
- VEPAC team members meet with staff of Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) to develop strategies for tracking progress on long-term and short-term goals (Summer 2020)
- Present voter registration information during on-line orientations for incoming students (Summer 2020)
- Present voter registration information during regional on-line “send-off” events for incoming students (Summer 2020)
- Provide information to faculty to make it easy to integrate information about voter registration and voter turnout into classes (Summer 2020)
- Present to Berea College Staff Forum and General Faculty Meetings about voter registration and student voter engagement (Summer and Fall 2020)
- Share NSLVE student voting data with campus community via email and social media (Fall 2020)
- Share VEPAC short-term goals and plans with campus community via email and social media (Fall 2020)
- Host a candidate forum (possibly virtual) for local Berea City Council election (Fall 2020)
- Report on progress toward short-term goals to campus via email, social media, and presentations, when data is available (Fall 2021)

Reporting and Evaluation

VEPAC plans to document progress on action plans during regular planning meetings. Data to reflect progress toward short-term and long-term goals will be provided by NSLVE and by the Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA). VEPAC planning committee members will meet with OIRA staff to develop strategies for gathering relevant data from current students and graduates, in addition to data that is already gathered and provided by the OIRA. VEPAC planning committee members will develop plans for making information about the action plan, goals, and progress toward goals accessible for the campus community.