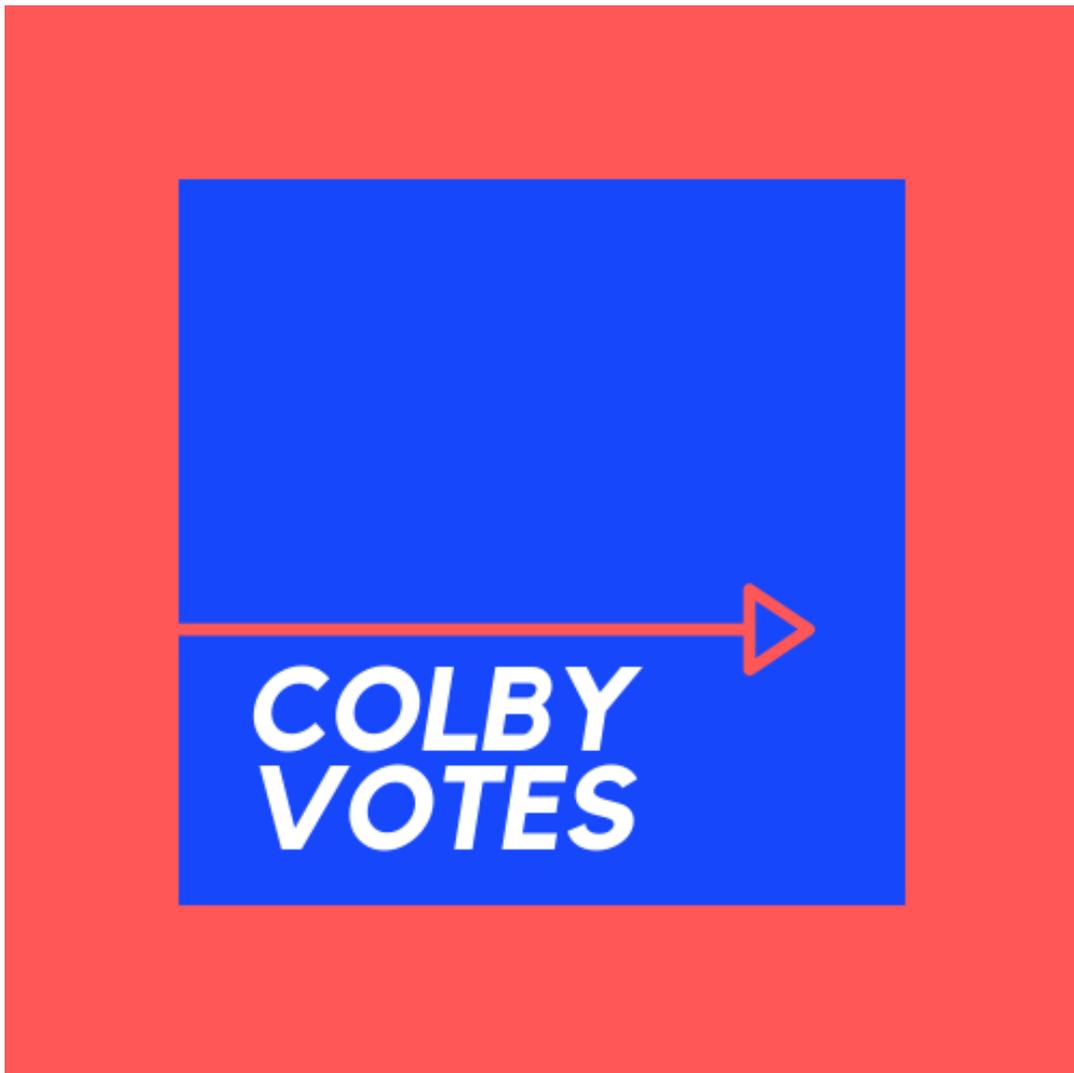


# Action Plan for Civic Engagement and Democratic Learning: 2020

Colby College  
Waterville, ME



With partners NESAC Votes & ALL IN Campus Challenge

## Summary

The Office of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships convened a campus stakeholder group comprised of students, faculty and staff to create the *Colby Votes Campus Action Plan*. The plan is part of the larger *NESCAC Votes* initiative in partnership with the ten other NESCAC campuses and the national organization *All In Campus Democracy Challenge*. The *NESCAC Votes* initiative is designed to “fulfill a responsibility of higher education to graduate informed and civically engaged citizens” and “to push for a more inclusive democracy through increasing voter registration and turnout rates across all of our campuses and, in turn, the nation. *NESCAC Votes* aims to tackle the issue of low college student voter turnout by advancing nonpartisan civic learning and voter participation on each of the eleven campuses.”

Educating students for lives of active citizenship and democratic engagement is core to the liberal arts mission of Colby College and the new Office of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships. Colby students are encouraged to “explore the relationships between academic work and one’s responsibility to contribute to the world beyond the campus and assume leadership roles as students and citizens. The Civic Engagement mission underscores these goals and expands opportunities for students to develop their civic identity and purpose.” The Office of Civic Engagement facilitates long-term partnerships and civic engagement initiatives that unite campus and community in collaboration on real-world projects that address some of society’s most vexing challenges. Through experiences focused on civic learning and democratic engagement, students are emboldened to become innovative leaders and active citizens who will foster the common good and propel social change in their local communities and the broader world.

Additionally, the Civic Engagement program reflects the values and definition of civic learning and democratic engagement as defined by our national partners at the *All In Democracy Challenge*. “Civic knowledge and democratic engagement are a combination of promoting the education of students for engaged participation through democratic participation in their communities, respect and appreciation of diversity, applied learning, and social responsibility.”

The goals of civic engagement and civic learning historically have been part of a Colby curricular and co-curricular education and are now expanding in ambitious ways with the establishment of the new Civic Engagement program. Faculty, in collaboration with the Office of Civic Engagement, recently created a set of common understandings to articulate the broad learning goals of academic, civic engagement at the college. Faculty “define academic, civic engagement and community-engaged learning as pedagogical practices that integrate student learning with community engagement. Through reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships between campus and community, students apply academic knowledge and skills in a real-world context to address community issues and impact change. Academic civic engagement courses amplify the work of local organizations that meet community needs, help increase the organizational capacity of local nonprofits and ultimately strengthen relationships between campus and community. In combination, coursework and critical reflection enhances student learning, increases understanding of the community and builds students’ sense of civic identity and purpose.

The set of common understanding gives faculty clear learning outcomes and guidelines for developing new courses that will elevate civic learning and democratic engagement as a pervasive part of institutional culture. Similarly, we see student organizations working more closely with the Office of Civic Engagement to renew or establish co-curricular initiatives that focus on building skills for active citizenship and civic leadership. This includes new community leadership positions in the Student

Government Association, Student Athletic Advisory Committee, and Questbridge Scholars, among others. Expanding curricular and co-curricular civic learning and leadership development are primary goals of the Office of Civic Engagement and is directly connected to the strategic priorities of the Dean of the College division.

The *Colby Votes Campus Action Plan* starts in spring semester 2020 and continues through fall 2020 leading up to the national elections. Spring 2021 will be an assessment process and developing long term strategies and planning for institutionalizing civic learning and democratic engagement with an emphasis on electoral education and participation on the Colby campus.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The Office of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships is charged with convening and leading the *Colby Votes* initiative. The President and Dean of the College have committed their support and allocated resources to sustain the effort including funds for a *Colby Votes Fellow* in the Office of Civic Engagement, as well as development and educational opportunities for student stakeholders.

The Colby Votes stakeholder group is responsible for creating the campus action plan and designing campus engagement programs, co-curricular education and leadership opportunities for students. The group is in constant communication through emails, shared working documents, working groups and in-person meetings. A Colby Votes student fellow works eight-hour per week and manages the work plan, materials and meetings with the Director of Civic Engagement.

There is some diversity in the stakeholder group, but it is not as inclusive or representative as it should be. It was challenging to recruit a broad stakeholder group of faculty and students. Students observed and remarked that it is often the same group of students who participate in election engagement efforts at the college. While the group took a proactive and strategic approach to recruit new members, they were ultimately unsuccessful in expanding participation.

Faculty are very underrepresented and declined to participate because of teaching loads and other professional commitments. Similar to students, some faculty remarked that it is often the same group of faculty who are asked to support these initiatives. One strategy the group devised to involve more faculty is to solicit faculty expertise and feedback on specific program initiatives within the action plan. Through this targeted approach, the group hopes to garner recognition and faculty investment in Colby Votes efforts.

The *Colby Votes* stakeholder group consists of the following representative campus departments and constituencies:

### **Students + student organizations: need year and majors/minors**

Lily Wilson (Class of 2020, Environmental Policy Major, Philosophy Minor)

Lutie Brown (Class of 2022, History and Classical Civilizations-English, Economics minor)

Jake Nash (Class of 2021, Economics and Government)

Carter Wynne (Class of 2020, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies & Art History)

Emma Terwilliger (Class of 2022, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Anthropology, Education minor)

Rachel Powers (Class of 2021, English: Creative Writing and Government)

Will Palmieri (Class of 2021, Government and Anthropology)

Justin Hegel (Class of 2022, Chemistry: Biochemistry and Anthropology)

**Faculty + academic departments:**

Gail Carlson, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies

**Staff and offices:**

Elizabeth Jabar, Director of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships

Will Saxe, Assistant General Counsel & Director of Risk Management

Sarah Werkman, Interim Associate Director of Campus Life

**Community and or national partners:**

ALL In Campus Democracy Challenge

Maine Campus Election Engagement Project

NESCAC colleges cohort

City of Waterville, Maine City Clerk, Patty Dubois

**Institutional Context**

In its mission and precepts, Colby states that “at the heart of a liberal arts education” is to “become knowledgeable about American culture and the current and historical interrelationships among people and culture...study the ways in which natural and social phenomena can be portrayed in quantitative terms and to understand the effects and limits of the use of quantitative data in forming policies and making decisions...[and] To explore the relationship between academic work and one’s responsibility to contribute to the world beyond campus.” These statements reflect the ways in which Colby College is already aligned with the Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV) definition of civic learning and democratic engagement (CLDE): “promoting the education of students for engaged citizenship through democratic participation in their communities, respect and appreciation of diversity, applied learning, and social responsibility.” This alignment speaks to the way that Colby is in an excellent and critical position to further develop an institutional commitment to civic learning and participation as a hallmark of the Colby community.

A variety of co-curricular organizations on campus are committed to fostering CLDE, including the Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs, the Oak Institute for Human Rights, and the Office of Civic Engagement. Efforts to enhance the visibility and cohesion of this CLDE programming -and to build more of it- are housed within the Office of Civic Engagement. The Office of Civic Engagement’s mission of “helping students live and learn at the intersection of academic work and community involvement to cultivate a citizenry capable of and dedicated to advancing the common good through critical inquiry and public service” makes it a perfect home for the Colby Votes team, heading up this work going into the 2020 election cycle and beyond.

To effectively strategize ways to increase engagement with CLDE outcomes, particularly voting rates, Colby needs to utilize the available data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). NSLVE data demonstrates positive trends in student democratic participation since 2012. Voter registration has increased from 64.8% in 2014 to 73.0% in 2018. However, voting rates have remained significantly lower than registration rates, and lower than the national average of other higher education institutions, with 2016 turnout at just 47.9%, 2 points below the average of all institutions. In the 2018 midterms, Colby’s voting rate was even lower, at just 37.6%. Despite Colby student voting rates remaining below the national average, major progress has been made in registering voters and raising

turnout levels. General election turnout increased almost 5% from 2012 to 2016, while midterm turnout increased over 23% from 2014 to 2018. This momentum, and the knowledge that we are still lagging behind peer institutions, provides an excellent foundation to increase registration, and, more critically, voting rates.

While raising voting rates is crucial, this effort must also be accompanied by more long term and college-wide efforts to build democratic participation into the curriculum and culture of student life. There has been a lack of consistency in the leadership and continuity of efforts to promote civic learning and democratic engagement by Colby students. President David Greene has committed financial and leadership resources to the Colby Votes, which will enable expanding communication with professors and academic departments in identifying and creating civic learning opportunities that will reach more students who may not be exposed to available co-curricular events. Deepening commitment to discussing and promoting civic learning in the curriculum, not just the co-curriculum, is something that has not been intentionally done across all disciplines but that is essential to all of Colby Votes goals, particularly in the face of limited but ongoing opposition by several local politicians to Colby student voting in Waterville.

We are excited and confident that there is widespread enthusiasm about deliberate action to increased civic learning and participation on campus amongst students, faculty, and administration. Gathering and working closely with a wider array of voices and partnering strategically with stakeholders in all areas of campus will be the most crucial component of strengthening CLDE at Colby going forward.

## **Commitment**

In the spring of 2018, President David Greene signed Colby onto the NESAC Votes challenge. This commitment has continued through meeting with the stakeholder group, speaking at a “Why I Vote” event, to providing financial resources to the Office of Civic Engagement to fund events and transportation to the polls. President Greene’s commitment to Colby Votes is just one of the ways that Colby is making an institutional commitment to enhance civic learning and engagement. The establishment of the Office of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships and the O’Hanian-Szotsak Fellows for Civic Leadership program, are new opportunities for students to think and engage critically with community issues. Additionally, in the spring of 2019, Colby demonstrated commitment to democratic engagement and student voting rights by hiring an outside attorney to represent students whose ballots were challenged in the 2018 midterm elections.

The leadership of the college does indeed support increasing CLDE as a part of campus culture. However, historically, this has not been deliberately defined as a curricular or co-curricular programming goal, and sometimes administration can be slow to advertise or enact necessary changes, such as sending the student body address confirmation letters for students to register to vote in Maine.

## **Goals**

As an institution, Colby hopes to achieve several goals through the Colby Votes initiative. Before graduation, Colby hopes to instill in students the importance of democratic and civic engagement, with voting being a primary facet of these goals. Students should leave the College with in-depth knowledge about voting, civic engagement, and an interest in engaging with issues of public concern and social-political events in the Waterville Community, the nation and the world.

## **Stakeholder Coalition**

1. Increase diversity of representation in stakeholder group to include a greater number of student voices and perspectives

#### **Education**

1. Increase civic learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom including as a part of residential life: knowledge about voting, community outreach, current events in Waterville and across the United States.
2. Increase student civic skills: voter registration, early voting/absentee, civil discussion/debate
3. Increase student civic capacities: active participation in the community as voters and learners
4. Increase education for non-eligible voters on campus through programming surrounding civic engagement and voting

#### **Registration**

1. Increase student voter registration rates to 100% of eligible voters in the next 5 years

#### **Turnout**

1. Increase student voter turnout rate to 60% in the next 5 years, matching or exceeding the national average
2. Be in the top three of all NESCAC schools for voter turnout rates in the next 5 years

#### **Institutionalize**

1. Make civic engagement, political engagement and political participation a pervasive aspect of institutional culture, especially in academic and co-curricular areas
2. Secure further institutional support and dedicated resources to ensure sustainability of civic learning and democratic engagement initiatives on campus
3. Establish a collaborative, campus wide stakeholder group and other systems to advance and sustain civic learning and democratic engagement initiatives on campus

### **Strategy**

Below is a timeline of the tasks to achieve the stated goals of Colby Votes leading up to the 2020 election. Long-term goals and strategies, beyond November 2020, are aimed at institutionalizing civic learning and democratic engagement. These long-term strategies will require collaboration with other departments and may take several years to develop and implement. The success of long-term strategies will rely heavily on the capacity and commitment of individuals across the campus as well as dedicated resources to execute these goals.

#### **Spring 2020**

##### **Stakeholder Tasks:**

- Ongoing bi-weekly stakeholder group meetings
- Draft student handbook and syllabi statement on the importance of voting and democratic engagement
- Formalize Colby Shuttle to the Polls
- Create job description and recruit student coordinator for Colby Votes for 2020/2021 school year
- Communication and marketing plan: partner with Communications Office on a social media campaign and creative storytelling
- Identify external nonpartisan community partners/organizations to offer educational opportunities:
  - NextGen Voter
  - Campus Election Engagement Project
  - League of Women Voters

- Develop campus partnerships with the following campus organizations to partner with and create CLDE programming:
  - Goldfarb Center for Public Policy
  - Oak Institute for Human Rights
  - Colby College Museum of Art
  - Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)
  - Center for Arts and Humanities
  - Student Government Association (SGA)
  - Office of Campus Life
  - Pugh Center for Student Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Community Events and Programming:

- Preliminary student survey on perspectives about CLDE at Colby
- Coffee house/lunchtime discussion forums, Coffee Commons with free coffee for attending students
- Engage faculty to design and lead campus wide learning opportunities focused on democratic engagement and related topics of student interest including but not limited to:
  - Environmental issues
  - Social justice topics
  - International political and justice issues
- Voter engagement events for sports teams and outreach to Coaches to encourage athletes to register and vote
  - team registration
  - team early voting or voting trips

**Summer 2020**

- Conduct a curricular mapping to identify courses that integrate civic learning and democratic engagement
- Finalize partner programming and events
- Plan and schedule events to register students and encourage voting
  - Rock the Vote
  - Registration tabling schedule and volunteering
- Create promotional and educational materials
  - Candidate information
  - Polling information
  - Voter guide draft that includes information about Maine and other state voting laws and timelines
- Develop assessment methods and data collection tools such as surveys and ongoing conversations with faculty
  - Work with Dean of Faculty office to develop clear intent and outcomes for civic learning in the classroom and departmental co-curricular programming
- Implement an Orientation Program focused on the importance of civic engagement and voting
  - Move-in day registration at First-Year Resource Fair
  - Civic Engagement Session (local foods, activities, encourage basic engagement with Waterville area)
  - Colby Outdoor Orientation Trip (COOT) voter registration competition (measured by percent of eligible voters); encourage COOT Early Voting Trips

- COOT Leader trainings on civic engagement

## **Fall 2020**

- Voter Registration
  - Weekly tabling in Cotter Union, academic buildings, and Miller Library to register students in Waterville
  - Absentee registration events and resources
    - Stamps, envelopes, information on how and when to vote outside of Maine
- Education
  - Candidate forums
  - Debate watch parties and discussions
  - Policy-based discussions
    - Continuing Coffee Commons
- Get Out the Vote efforts
  - Dorm Storm during early voting and several nights before Election Day
  - Literature drops in dorms
- Rock the Vote event
  - Student bands playing a concert where students can register at the door
- Shuttle from Colby to Thomas College
  - 8AM-8PM leaving from Campus and Downtown Waterville

## **Reporting and Evaluation**

- Surveys for students and faculty
  - Surveys online that are accessible and advertised through multiple channels
- Oral interviews & focus groups
  - Create forums for feedback from students and faculty in small-group settings
- Continue to work with administration to develop common and consistent understandings of CLDE amongst faculty
- Share NSLVE data, Colby Votes goals, and resources with faculty and receive feedback about how mission of increased CLDE can be enhanced for them
- Develop campus partnerships to advance CLDE goals
- Increase visibility and sharing of NSLVE Data beyond administration and stakeholder group to enhance campus-wide awareness of and responsibility for voter registration and turnout rates

## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1. Colby College Mission and Precepts**

Colby is committed to the belief that the best preparation for life, and especially for the professions that require specialized study, is a broad acquaintance with human knowledge. The Colby experience is designed to enable each student to find and fulfill his or her own unique potential. It is hoped that students will become critical and imaginative thinkers who are welcoming of diversity and compassionate toward others, capable of distinguishing fact from opinion, intellectually curious and aesthetically aware, adept at synthesis as well as analysis, broadly educated with depth in some areas, proficient in writing and speaking, familiar with one or more scientific disciplines, knowledgeable about American and other cultures, able to create and enjoy opportunities for lifelong learning, willing to assume leadership roles as students and citizens, prepared to respond flexibly to the changing demands of the world of work, useful to society, and happy with themselves.

Colby stands for diversity, for respect for various lifestyles and beliefs, and for the protection of every individual against discrimination. In the classroom and outside, there is freedom to study, to think, to speak, to work, to learn, and to thrive in an environment that insists upon both civility and the free and open exchange of ideas and views. The behavior of individuals may often affect the rights and well-being of others; therefore all members of the campus community are responsible for fostering an environment in which teaching, learning, and research flourish.

The Colby Plan is a series of 10 educational precepts that reflect the principal elements of a liberal education and serve as a guide for making reflective course choices, for measuring educational growth, and for planning for education beyond college. Students are urged to pursue these objectives not only in their course work but also through educational and cultural events, campus organizations and activities, and service to others. These precepts, which the College believes are at the heart of a liberal arts education, are as follows:

1. to develop one's capability for critical thinking, to learn to articulate ideas both orally and in writing, to develop a capacity for independent work, and to exercise the imagination through direct, disciplined involvement in the creative process
2. to become knowledgeable about American culture and the current and historical interrelationships among peoples and nations
3. to become acquainted with other cultures by learning a foreign language and by living and studying in another country or by closely examining a culture other than one's own
4. to learn how people different from oneself have contributed to the richness and diversity of society, how prejudice limits such personal and cultural enrichment, and how each individual can confront intolerance
5. to understand and reflect searchingly upon one's own values and the values of others
6. to become familiar with the art and literature of a wide range of cultures and historical periods
7. to explore in some detail one or more scientific disciplines, including experimental methods, and to examine the interconnections between developments in science and technology and the quality of human life
8. to study the ways in which natural and social phenomena can be portrayed in quantitative terms and to understand the effects and limits of the use of quantitative data in forming policies and making decisions
9. to study one discipline in depth, to gain an understanding of that discipline's methodologies and modes of thought, areas of application, and relationship to other areas of knowledge
10. to explore the relationships between academic work and one's responsibility to contribute to the world beyond the campus.

## **Appendix 2. Colby College Office of Civic Engagement Mission**

We believe a student experience focused on engaging with and learning from the community prepares students to enter the world beyond Colby as thoughtful leaders and engaged global citizens. The Office of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships facilitates opportunities for students and faculty to collaborate with Waterville area non-profit organizations, local government, public schools, and businesses on real-world projects that address some of the city's most pressing challenges.

The program builds relationships between campus and community through an integrative approach to project-based learning, action research, participatory design, social entrepreneurship, and service that defines the liberal arts experience at Colby and provides students with intellectual and logistical support to participate in society as engaged citizens.

When we encourage students to live and learn at the intersection of academic work and community involvement, we cultivate an engaged citizenry capable of and dedicated to advancing the common good through critical inquiry and public service.

#### Academic Civic Engagement

Colby provides an extraordinary intellectual and creative experience that positions graduates to solve the most vexing issues of our time. Civic Engagement courses enable students to have an impact in the world through intellectual inquiry, engaged scholarship, creative expression, and meaningful partnerships with community stakeholders.

Through the development of targeted skills and abilities, and forging meaningful relationships with community service organizations Colby students become active learners, leaders, and role models in responding to challenges and opportunities at the local, regional, national, and international levels. The curriculum designs opportunities for Colby students to build civic capacities that complement and strengthen their personal and professional aspirations and set them apart as leaders in our community and world.

#### Co-Curricular Civic Engagement

Creating a campus culture of active citizenship requires opportunities for students to engage in service, civic inquiry, and collaborative problem solving beyond the classroom. Co-curricular Civic Engagement initiatives elevate the intellectual challenges Colby offers its students and develops individual's ability to assume leadership roles as students and citizens. Student initiated projects include dedicated days of service, youth mentorship, and semester programs that foster long-term community partnerships and purposeful reflection, the Office of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships is a pipeline for students looking to place their education squarely in the context of the real world.