



Voter Engagement Plan

GUSTAVUS 
GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

Prepared December 2019, Revised June 2020



Executive Summary

In the recent past, students at Gustavus Adolphus College have significantly increased their presence at the polls. Though the increase in the turnout among the student body is encouraging, we realize that the next step is not complacency. Looking ahead to the 2020 election, the College has assembled a Voter Education Committee to develop a plan to sustain this trend. In developing and fulfilling this plan of action, the committee intends to foster civic education and reduce the barriers to political participation in a non-partisan manner. The plan centers around the campus but also extends into the Greater Gustavus and St. Peter communities. We have several aggressive goals in mind:

1. Register 85% of students;
2. Increase the turnout rate to 90% of registered students, for an overall turnout of 80%;
3. Engage in non-partisan programming to increase voter education, including development and dissemination a comprehensive guide for national, state, and local candidates;
4. Remove barriers to participation by assisting with absentee and mail-in voting, early voting, and student transportation to the polls and developing a flowchart to assist students with the registration process.

The action plan will begin during the spring of the 2019-2020 academic year and will continue through the 2020 election. We will implement this plan through the leadership of the Voter Education Committee for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year. In the summer of 2020, we will select a small group of students as “Voter Ambassadors” and then involve other interested students, faculty, and staff in the fall of 2020.

Understandably, we will be updating and adapting this plan regularly as the COVID landscape and guidance changes. This Action Plan represents a snapshot in time and we pride ourselves on an ability to be creative and flexible.

Leadership

The Voter Education Committee represents a campus-wide constituency. This wide representation from across campus has served the institution well in the past, engaging students from many different corners of campus because those groups/areas have been represented on the Voter Education Committee. Again this year, the Committee consists of individuals from the student body, the faculty, and the administration:

Students:

Monali Bhakta '20 (Student body Co-President)

Chelsea Boyden '21
Hailey Concepcion '21
Ben Menke '22
Paige Patterson '21
Karrie Villarreal '20 (Student body Co-President)

Student Voting Ambassadors (selected June 2020)

Sara Kasel '21, Wisconsin
Charlotte Lim '21, Minnesota
Ben Menke '22, South Dakota
Christopher Ortiz '22, California

Faculty:

Pamela Conners, Associate Professor of Communication Studies/
Director of the Dialogue & Debate Program
Yurie Hong, Associate Professor and Chair of Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies
Katherine Knutson, Professor of Political Science

Administrators:

Andrea Junso, Director of Campus Activities
Megan Ruble, Assistant Vice President for Student Life
Danny Sandberg, Assistant Director of Residential Life
Amy Pehrson, Director of Community Engagement
JoNes VanHecke, Vice President for Student Life

The committee recognizes that some elements of the action plan are contingent on efforts from the student body, both individuals and organizations, in the fall of 2020. As such, an element of leadership invariably falls on the student body to mobilize others with new ideas or informal social connections.

In addition, four students have been selected by the Dean of Students Office and Community Engagement Center to serve as "Voting Ambassadors." We had almost thirty applicants for the positions. We were especially cognizant of seeking out students from underrepresented populations for these opportunities, and we ultimately we hired three out-of-state students and two non-white students. Each of these positions will receive a \$500 stipend, funded by a grant through ALL IN or LEAD MN, or by the College itself. These fellows will work 5-10 hours per week from mid-July to mid-November. Some of their responsibilities will include:

- Review appropriate voting data specific to Gustavus students, using it to inform plans and decisions
- Work as a part of a team to implement the voter engagement plan already created
- Contribute creative ideas to existing challenges, including alternatives to election day poll places (due to COVID) and engaging student populations currently underrepresented in the voting process
- Be a campus liaison with one or more of the following state/national college voting

- initiatives: ALL IN, Ask Every Student, LEAD MN, Campus Election Engagement Project
- Register students to vote in general and utilizing National Voter Registration Day and Vote Early Day
- Plan and implement non-partisan voter education resources, programs, and initiatives

Historically, and continuing in the 2020-2021 academic year, the committee will also partner with voter officials from the City of St. Peter, including the League of Women Voters (Linda Witte) and the County Elections Office (Jaci Kopet). The City partners with the College to actively invite Gustavus students to be trained as voter judges and polling location assistants each election and 2020 will be no exception.

A succession plan is key to making these efforts last longer than 2020. A member of our Dean of Students staff will always be the point person for our voter engagement efforts. We will plan to offer the paid fellowships every other year to work on voter engagement, and will solicit these students (as well as volunteer voter education committee members) through a campus-wide email. If that does not provide a diverse and adequate yield, we will target student groups and ask for a representative from politically-purposed student organizations to serve as well as from our Student Senate. We will regularly ask for the Director of Dialogue & Debate to serve on our committee in addition to other interested faculty. The Director of Community Engagement will also be a regular member. Beyond this, we will ask Student Life employees who are interested, targeting Campus Activities and Residential Life and being open to others.

Commitment

The Gustavus mission statement promotes “educating students for a life of leadership and service.” Community and Justice are two of five core values that have guided the institution since its founding. Throughout its history, and especially in recent years, Gustavus has demonstrated a firm commitment to civic engagement in the student body.

We are currently in year four of a ten year strategic plan, called Gustavus ACTS. The vision is: Gustavus equips students to lead purposeful lives and to act on the great challenges of our time through an innovative liberal arts education of recognized excellence.

“In order to prepare students to act on the great challenges of our time, we must ask fundamental and enduring questions. We must seek to understand complex issues in our world from a variety of perspectives. We must think deeply about root causes of these great challenges and the implications and consequences of possible solutions. In fact, we do not presume to know what the great challenges are or will be. Defining those challenges is, itself, part of the inquiry. A defining value of an excellent liberal arts education is considering how things are and how they could be.

Addressing the great challenges of our time demands more than critical thinking. It demands that we care. A Gustavus liberal arts education strengthens a student’s capacity to do so by

providing spaces and opportunities to contemplate and deliberate. It inspires students to ask themselves how they will become people who continue to care, even when challenges cannot be solved in their lifetimes.”

One major way to achieve the lofty goals above is through civic involvement, including voting. This emphasis has translated to recent efforts to encourage voting, especially during the 2018 election. In the months before the election, student organizations including the College Democrats, the Libertarians and the College Republicans encouraged members and the wider student body to vote. Moreover, academic departments have collaborated with organizations such as the ACLU, League of Women Voters, and a regional group, “Indivisible,” to host registration and voter education events. Together, these efforts have been successful in fostering civic engagement. In both 2016 and 2018, Gustavus registered the most student voters of any private institution in the state of Minnesota, winning the first two “Ballot Bowl” competitions sponsored by the Minnesota Secretary of State.

This commitment is also reflected in the academic requirements for students. Among other areas of study, the general curriculum includes classes in the areas of “Social Institutions” and “Global Cultures and Perspectives” as requirements for graduation. Likewise, the alternative Three Crowns Curriculum challenges students to address questions about ethics and society. Through these courses, Gustavus hopes to foster a spirit of civic engagement in the student body.

Our commitment begins at the top. President Rebecca M. Bergman is a recent signatory of the Higher Education Presidential Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation and supports our efforts wholeheartedly. In addition, the primary campus contact/convenor is an Assistant Vice President in Student Life, which provides executive access and decision-making authority to the group.

Landscape

The civic engagement landscape at Gustavus is very encouraging. The College formed its first campus-wide Voter Education Committee in 2016 in response to low voter participation in 2014 (19.1%). Voter participation rates rose to 60.5% of the student body. While we understood that we also benefitted from a presidential election cycle, the committee was very pleased with the dramatic increase in voter registration and participation. At that same time, the State of Minnesota sponsored the first ever “Ballot Bowl” competition coordinated by the Office of the Secretary of State and Gustavus was pleased to be announced as the winner, registering the highest percentage of student voters among the Minnesota private colleges.

In the 2018 election cycle, without the added benefit of a presidential election, the College once again employed the use of a cross-sectional campus committee to focus on voter education, registration and bolster voter participation. The results were a nearly 36% positive

change compared to the 2014 election (voting rate: 2014 = 19.1% vs. 2018 = 55%). With 69% of the students registered to vote in the 2018 election, Gustavus was awarded the State of Minnesota Ballot Bowl cup for private colleges for a second time.

COVID will obviously change many of our methods of reaching students, as we are a residential, highly personal, and relationship-based environment. Plans are underway to transition many of our traditional efforts for voter engagement. We benefit from Minnesota laws and landscape that allows for early voting, mail-in voting, and day-of registration. We will encourage students to consider mechanisms for voting that don't encourage a mass of Gusties physically present at the polls on November 3.

NSLVE Data

Year	2012	2014	2016	2018
Registration Rate	73.8%	60.4%	71.5%	79.6%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	84.4%	31.7%	84.7%	69.2%
Voting Rate	62.3%	19.1%	60.5%	55%

Our most recent NSLVE data does indicate some gaps, most notably lower percentages of voters among students who are identified as Black (26.1%) and Asian (26.6%). Our Voter Ambassadors have committed to working with student organizations and the Diversity Leadership Council to increase this turnout. This will be a focus for us this year, with a goal of growing both percentages at least 10%. Also, we will target efforts toward some underrepresented majors including Computer Science (38.5%) and Health/Fitness professions (32.7% - 41.4%). Our goal would be that both groups be over 45% in the next report.

We already have a reasonable number of voters who exercised their absentee option in 2018, with 44.2% of our voters voting this way. This is good to build on, as we will publicize this option even more this year.

Goals & Strategy

Because we believe that civic engagement is embedded in the fabric and mission of our

institution, the Voter Education Committee talked about the importance of setting aggressive goals for the 2020 election cycle. We feel great about the positive strides we have made in increased registrations and increased voting but we also believe that with a committee organizing earlier than ever before and thanks to the structure suggested by All In, we are well positioned to set goals that stretch us. While we may not meet all of our goals, the committee decided it was appropriate for us to aim high. Thus, we have established the following goals for the remainder of the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic year:

Goals/Strategies for voter participation

- Student registration rate: 85%
- Voting rate of registered students: 90%
- Overall student voting rate: 80%
- Grow voter turnout for Black populations and Asian populations by 10% each
- Grow lowest voting majors to a minimum of 45%
- Involve multiple campus constituencies to increase student participation
 - Engage with all of the politically affiliated student organizations and ask them to name a representative
 - Ask key offices (Residential Life, Community Engagement Center) and influential groups of students (Gustie Greeters, Peer Assistants) to sponsor events

Goals/Strategies for voter education

*Engaging students across the political ideological spectrum

- Develop a website for all of our voter education materials, including action plan
- Host Presidential debate watch parties
- Logistics and deadlines educational efforts
- Understanding our systems and civic engagement
- Disseminate a voter guide highlighting major issues and where the candidates stand on each issue
- Research and educate on local St. Peter ballot candidates and issues (e.g., school levy, City Council)

Goals/Strategies for outreach and partnership

- Sponsor program/activities that highlight the college's commitment to the importance of voter education beyond the current student population
 - Community Engagement Center will sponsor a "Kids Vote" Night (via Big Partner Little Partner Program, Gustie Buddies, local schools, employees' children, etc. either on campus or at one of the city polling locations)
 - A communication (email or letter) will be sent to recent Gustavus alumni (ages 23-25) encouraging civic engagement and reminding them of the importance of voting. This communication will be signed by the Dean of Students and ideally the Student Senate Co-Presidents from their year as well as their Class alumni Representatives

- Work with the City of St. Peter to continue student participation as polling judges and assistants
- Seek to host more candidates and debates on campus
- Partner with Minnesota agencies to facilitate voter trainings for interested students and Gustavus employees. Our county elections personnel have volunteered to do this

Goals/Strategies for removing logistical and knowledge barriers

- Resolve transportation issues
 - Vans (reserve as many vans as possible from the Motor Pool, Safe Rides van).
 - Incentive to stay waiting in line (tea, hot chocolate station) at 3 Flags.
 - Have a tent with activities for waiting students
 - Consider special transportation options for “remote” buildings (Arb, Chapel View)? Ride Share sign up or poster, Res Life CFs take it on.
- Create a “Fast Pass” option for students with tight schedules
 - Send out a survey ahead of time if students need a ride and then email them back about the Fast Pass option. “Fast Pass” - sign up for a specific time to ride to the polling location without waiting in line
- Assist new and first year students with registration and voting
 - Helping First Years (and/or others) understand that they may or may not be registered
 - Have the First Term Seminar (or Gustie Greeter/Peer MALT) and 3 Crowns directors embed voter registration into the FTS/3C curriculum (engaged citizenship)
- Utilize varied communication platforms to get information to all students.
 - Kipsu (via Res Life)
 - Social media
- Create a simple flow chart for all students with steps for voting options.
 - Include information and encouragement for absentee/mail in ballots and early voting options
 - Out of state student information and assistance
 - Utilize resources from allintovote.org

Please see Appendix A: Tactics & Timelines for more detailed information.

Long-term Goals (beyond the Fall of 2020):

- Voter registration embedded in Gustie Gear Up (summer registration), New Student Orientation, and Housing move-in
- Voter registration connected to obtaining student IDs
- Voter registration associated with web advisor/registration portal and/or Moodle
- Awareness for faculty to create a placeholder in their curriculum regarding civic engagement and voting

Reporting

We will utilize the following to make our plans, data, and reports public:

- A comprehensive website for all of our voter education materials, NSLVE data, and action plan.
- A poster infographic with main points and a QR code leading students to a website with more detailed information.
- An email to students with a link to the website mentioned above.
- Partnerships with political student organizations and professors/classes to link the website to their syllabus and meeting materials.
- Granting permission for the ALL IN Challenge and NASPA (Voter Friendly Campus) to publish our data and action plan.
- Work with our Marketing/Communication office to create press releases about our efforts for internal and external use.
- Social media accounts specifically set up for voter engagement, and the “borrowing” of other popular campus social media accounts (Senate, Campus Activities Board, Peer Assistants, Hill Crew, etc.) to disseminate information.

Evaluation

The following are the strategies we will utilize to measure how well we implemented our plans. Assessment strategies for:

Increasing participation rate

- Track participation in fall programming - use id card scan for counting if in person, keep records if virtually
- Disseminate a short survey asking was this valuable, what did you learn type questions and tabulate results.
- Engage students across the political ideological spectrum for programming
- Ask various political clubs to be involved and report count of their members
- Ask program audiences to indicate their political persuasion (could include in satisfaction survey)

Logistics, deadlines education

- Pre/post survey asking if they know about deadlines and logistics
- Incentivize participation in pre/post

Understanding our systems and civic engagement

- Track student participation rates at related events

Voter Guide

- Did we produce or make available a comprehensive voter guide?
- How many copies were distributed and/or downloaded?

Outreach to greater Gustavus and St. Peter communities

- Did we actually do this?
- Numbers affected/participated

Removing barriers

- Examine actual participation rates to measure success

Strategies cross multiple levels of leadership

- Evaluation from faculty activities (artifacts from courses)
- Administration - discussion at cabinet level and at divisions about how to support and gather input from those groups

Our plan will be continually evaluated and revised throughout the next few months, as we have done between fall's initial draft and this summer. Following the election in 2020, our key leaders and contributors will do a more thorough and comprehensive review of this Action Plan and our efforts, making notes and revisions for future years.

Appendix A: Tactics & Timeline

May-June-July

- Graphics request in to create a “brand” for this initiative
- Graphics request for items
 - Flow chart for posters
 - Door hangers
 - Digital for website banner, social media
 - Stickers
- Ask Deb to create a pictorial cheat sheet for registration
- Create a “how to” video explaining flow chart and MN registration
- Send out registration instructions with housing assignments(?)
- Develop a website with information, materials, events, contacts, etc.

August

- Ask key offices to sponsor or co-sponsor events
- Become familiar with allintovote.org and its uses
- Communicate with faculty about including election engagement in courses (Yurie Hong, Pam Conners, Kate Knutson, or Political Science department create a guide?)

September

- If new student ID pictures are taken during Orientation, offer them voter registration at the same time
- Org fair table with “big draw” food or giveaway (ex: taco in a bag, succulents)
- Observe/promote National Voter Registration Day on 9/22. If you become a partner campus you can get posters & stickers.
- Educational efforts around logistics and deadlines for pre-registration
- Put committee of students together to work on implementation of this plan
- Seek out visit and debate opportunities with candidates
- FTS and 3 Crowns embed registration into their course (offer video to show in class?)
- Check out ipads and/or a cheat sheet in front of Marketplace, have them return when done. Also Courtyard Café.
- Promote early voting opportunities, absentee or in person
- Social media campaign begins

October

- Observe/promote “Vote Early” day on 10/24
- Student Senate host debate parties with food
- Continue checking out ipads until registration deadline

- Continue social media posts (student to manage content)
- Big bulletin board with registration info. until deadline, then election/candidate info.
- Begin tabling once per week with some information or issue
- Educational event with ALCU, Indivisible, other interested community organizations
- Faculty member(s) present on the election at Family Weekend, like they do in the Arb series
- Distribute a voter guide, including local ballot issues & candidates. Ideally use CEEP guide and add local information.

November

- Shuttles on election day
 - Incentive to stay waiting in line (warm beverage station and/or giveaways)
 - Have a tent for shelter at pickup location, 3 Flags
 - Create a “Fast Pass” pre-registration option for students so they don’t have to wait in line
- “Kids Vote” initiative, sponsored by Community Engagement Center
- Communication/reminder/encouragement to recent alumni

Miscellaneous ideas

- Couch Parties: national program that makes a “party” out of training a group of volunteers to text their contacts (can be in person or virtual)
- Could students sign up to take the CBSL shuttle at any time it is operating for early voting?
- Use of “All in to Vote” tool as a one-stop-shop for all students despite their situation
- Special email communication to out of state students
- Will absentee and early voting be the preferred method this fall due to COVID? Should we be pushing that?
- Long Conversation event – with students and staff from Communication Studies, English, Political Science, Economics, etc. Ask Dialogue & Deliberation fellows to coordinate(?).

Key dates

May 13: online absentee ballot application opens

September 4: new student move-in, Orientation begins

September 15: org. fair

September 18: early voting period begins in MN (absentee ballot or in person)

September 22: National Voter Registration Day

September 29: big board reservation begins

September 29: first Presidential debate

October 10-11: Family Weekend
October 13: pre-registration deadline
October 15: second Presidential debate
October 22: third Presidential debate
October 24: Vote Early Day
November 2: early voting period ends in MN
November 3: ELECTION DAY