Swarthmore College Voter Registration & Get Out the Vote Action Plan

2020 EDITION

I. Executive Summary

This plan is the work of the Voter Registration/Get Out the Vote Steering Committee of Swarthmore College, which includes representatives from the faculty, staff, and student body. Our charge is to coordinate efforts across campus to increase student participation in our democracy through voter registration and voting in all primary and general elections. Our charge and efforts are nonpartisan; the aim is to increase participation in the voting process regardless of political party.

The committee was called to action by Swarthmore College President Valerie Smith in February 2018 in part in response to the College's student voting rate determined by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) by Tufts University. Swarthmore's overall voting rate fell below the national averages in the presidential elections of 2012 and 2016. The plan set forth in this document builds upon the original plan written in 2018 and establishes concrete goals for 2020 and beyond.

As we write this plan, the College is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The campus has been closed since March 2020 and we continue to navigate the uncertainties of this health crisis. This plan has been created with individual safety and public health of paramount importance. The College will closely monitor health and safety recommendations and continue to adapt our activities for increased student voter engagement as circumstances warrant.

The committee will oversee planning, assessment, implementation, and evaluation of its goals in collaboration with on-campus and off-campus partners. Because the committee's work is ongoing, this plan is as well. It will be a "living document," updated regularly throughout 2020 to reflect new opportunities, changes, and outcomes.

—Pam Shropshire, committee chair, January 2020

II. Leadership

The committee is led by Pamela Shropshire, Special Assistant for Presidential Initiatives in the Office of the President. Faculty and staff members of the committee are invited to join based on their known passion for the cause and/or because they would bring helpful insight to it generally, or in the context of Swarthmore's campus and culture. Student members are involved in democratic engagement as members of the Swarthmore Political Access Network, as Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows, and/or as Politics and Public Policy Associates of the Lang Center.

The Committee

The committee coordinates efforts across campus to increase Swarthmore student voter participation. The committee meets in person eight times a year with additional planning and conversation in between meetings.

First	Last	Department	Title	Affiliation
Andrew	Barclay	Dean's Office	Director of Student Activities	Staff
Ben	Berger	Political Science/ Lang Center	Associate Professor of Political Science & Executive Director of the Lang Center	Faculty
John	Blanchar	Psychology	Assistant Professor of Psychology	Faculty
Ryan	Dougherty	Communications	Senior Writer/Editor	Staff
David	Foreman	Advancement	Director of Institutional Relations	Staff
Katie	Price	Lang Center	Associate Director of the Lang Center	Staff
Pamela	Shropshire	Office of the President	Special Assistant for Presidential Initiatives in the Office of the President	Staff
Gigi	Simeone	Office of Academic Success	Health Sciences/Pre Law Advisor	Staff
Satchel	Tsai	Class of 2023		Student
Frannie	Richardson	Class of 2023		Student
Martin	Warner	Registrar's Office	Registrar	Staff
Robert	Zigmund	Class of 2021	Lang Center Associate for Politics and Public Policy	Student

Campus Partners

Student Groups:

- SwatVotes

Faculty/Staff:

- Advancement
- Communications
- Dean's Office
- Department of Biology
- Department of Political Science
- Department of Psychology
- Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility
- Office of the President
- Office of the Provost
- Registrar

Off-Campus Partners

- All-In Campus Democracy Challenge
- Ballotready.org
- Borough of Swarthmore
- Campus Vote Project
- Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Tufts University
- Students Learn, Students Vote
- Vote.org
- Voter Friendly Campus

III. Institutional Commitments

Swarthmore's commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is rooted in its Quaker history and values. Social justice, solving global problems, and supporting local communities are integral to the Swarthmore experience. Evidence of this tradition can be found today across campus in formal and informal settings and in the fulfillment of our mission statement which reads, in part, that students are expected to prepare themselves to become "responsible citizens."

The Eugene M. Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility facilitates Swarthmore College's commitment to intellectual rigor, ethical engagement, and social responsibility by connecting curriculum (formal coursework and related research), campus, and communities. These communities include the proximate communities of Chester, Pennsylvania, and the greater Philadelphia area; more distant community partners around the country and globe; and the community of scholars and practitioners, including Swarthmore College faculty, who share knowledge and best practices regarding ethical action and civic engagement. The Lang Center connects the College's curricular excellence with engagement in all of those communities using an approach that builds upon Ernest Boyer's concept of "Engaged Scholarship."

Building on the success of the Lang Center, the College's comprehensive campaign *Changing Lives, Changing the World*, which concludes June 30, 2020, has raised $98 million for programs that enhance Swarthmore's social impact in local and global communities. These programs include sustainability research and advocacy, socially responsible leadership and entrepreneurship, and deepening connections to our local community through programs.

Swarthmore is committed to fulfilling its federally mandated commitment to provide access to voting resources for all students.The 1998 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 included a mandate that required institutions of higher education to engage in certain voter registration activities during years when there are elections for federal office, governor or other chief executives within the state [HEA Section 487(a)(23)]. More recent legislation, enacted by Congress as part of the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act, revised the law to allow institutions to comply with the mandate through electronic distribution. The Registrar's Office took responsibility for ensuring that Swarthmore was in compliance with the law from 1998 to 2017. From 2018 to the present, the President's Office and the Swarthmore Get Out the Vote Committee have ensured compliance and sought to creatively support students in ways that exceed these expectations

IV. Landscape and Background

Background

Swarthmore has offered registration and voting information (including absentee voting information) for years via the College website, emails to students, and distribution of paper voter registration forms. Several offices and student groups on campus have made efforts to encourage registration and voting, including debate watch parties and efforts among groups and individuals to drive students to the polls. These efforts have been informally organized and did not have a central guiding plan until 2018 when President Valerie Smith convened the Voter Registration/Get Out the Vote Steering Committee.

COVID-19

All aspects of campus life have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including student voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts. All students who were able safely departed Swarthmore's campus in March 2020, and the College completed the spring semester with entirely online instruction. The Pennsylvania primary election was rescheduled from April 28 to June 2. A cloud of uncertainty hovers over our planning efforts because the course of the disease and its impacts are unknown. Many effective get-out-the-vote education strategies involve significant in-person contact and communication (tabling, rides to polls on election day, etc). Our plans reflect uncertainties about the future and the need to be nimble and able to adapt to changing circumstances.

Local Voting

Students who wish to vote in the Borough of Swarthmore must register based on which residence hall they live in, not based on their mailing address. Many students don't understand this, and outside groups that come to campus to help students register are often unaware of the distinction. As a result, some students register with their mailing address, which prompts a clean-up effort between the county and the Registrar's office and which delays registration and confuses students. Furthermore, if a student switches dorms, they are required to re-register, but many don't.

Research (figures provided by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement)

The committee is concerned that barriers to easy voting for Swarthmore students might be reflected in the College's low voting rate for the 2016 election. According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE): 45% of eligible Swarthmore students voted in 2016 compared to a national average of 50% (all numbers are rounded). Notably, of those registered—a respectable 82%—only 55% turned out. Twenty-seven percent of those voted absentee, 54% voted in person, and the remainder voted early or by mail. The numbers demonstrate a difference between in-person voting between 2012 and 2016, with a 12% increase in that method in 2016. The report also captured a decrease in male voters (15%) between the two elections. In 2016, computer science and psychology majors had particularly low turnout while engineering, English, and modern languages had the highest.

November 2018 NSLVE election data was very encouraging. Swarthmore student rates of registration and voting both improved; registration increased from 68% in 2014 to 79% in 2018. The voting rates for registered student voters increased dramatically, from 25% in 2014 to 50% in 2018; the overall student voting rate also more than doubled, from 17% to 39%. We are especially encouraged by the increases because the 2018 election is the first election held after the creation of the Get Out the Vote committee.

Understanding why students who are registered don't turn out at higher rates is also of interest to the SwatVotes, a nonpartisan student group that receives mentorship from the Committee. They launched a survey in spring 2018 to learn more about the factors behind these lower than average voting rates. Students reported that the three biggest barriers to voting in 2016 were the distance to local polling stations, lack of information about absentee voting in their home districts, and busy schedules.

Financial and Other Support

Though the steering committee does not have a dedicated budget from the College, the Office of the President may offer discretionary funds for specific strategies, as may other offices or departments on campus that have an interest in partnering with us.

During 2018, the committee received two external grants from Campus Vote Project and from Students Learn, Students Vote. These funds supplemented those normally supplied by the Lang Center, and allowed us to fully realize our programming and communications visions. The extra support and effort showed in our results.

We also sought and continue to seek non-financial support that will elevate Swarthmore's reputation as a democratically engaged campus. Specifically, we have been named a Voter Friendly Campus as determined by Campus Vote Project.

V.–VI. Goals, Strategies & Tactics

2020 GOALS

For the 2020 election cycle, Swarthmore's goals are to:
- Reach 82% student registration rate, matching our 2016 rate.
- Reach 55% student voting rate for the entire eligible student population, exceeding our 2016 rate of 45% and the national average of 50%.

We will rely on NLSVE data to measure our actual performance against these goals.

2020 STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Context:

Two events of significance compelled the committee to reconfigure our planning and outreach for the spring and the fall.

- COVID-19 has significantly disrupted the operation of the College and has altered the lives of students both on and off campus.The high likelihood of a fall semester with very limited in-person contact on campus has encouraged the committee to amplify activities and outreach that can be done remotely. We will also focus our attention primarily on Pennsylvania voting.

- The rescheduling of the Pennsylvania primary from April 28 to June 2 (after the traditional end of Swarthmore's spring semester) prompted the committee to re-think outreach activities for the primary.

STRATEGY #1: EDUCATE AND INFORM

- **Register students during move-in days.** This includes confirming the registration status of students who say they are already registered. If student contact is limited due to COVID-19 precautions, the committee will find alternative methods of reaching students when they begin the fall term.

- **Offer ongoing registration assistance to students throughout the fall.** If in-person activities are possible this would include voter registration tabling at high traffic areas on campus (e.g., dining hall). If contact is limited, the committee will find alternate ways to provide the necessary paperwork to ensure students complete and send their registrations.

- **Compilation of voting resources.** The College's website (**www.swarthmore.edu/voter-information**) includes a comprehensive list of information on registering and voting geared specifically for college students.

- **Provide comprehensive voter registration training for individuals and groups** An ongoing challenge is that some students and student groups interested in getting others to register to vote do not fully understand the complexities of voting at Swarthmore (i.e., registration to be done with dorm addresses). The Office of Student Engagement will provide a comprehensive training for any/all students who are interested in registering students to vote if contact is permitted; if it is not, we will seek other ways to train students on registration

- **Address new voting machines.** This year, Pennsylvania has implemented new voting machines. The committee will lift up opportunities for students to go to voting machine demonstrations, if possible. Video demonstrations of the machines will also be posted on the College's website.

- **Deploy social media.** This includes using peer-to-peer outreach via social media to engage and inform students, recognizing that one of the best ways to encourage student voting is to create an environment where students recognize and support voting among their peers. .

- **Partner with student groups.** The committee will continue to work with SwatVotes, a student group formed specifically to address student voting. The committee will also reach out to the student press for news stories, OpEd pieces, etc. that can engage student voters. Resident Assistants (once contact is allowed) will be equipped with talking points on registration and voting.

- **Connect with other stakeholders.** Outreach will be done to faculty, alumni, and parents on how they can encourage student voting and registration.

- **Regular communications from administration**. Staffers like the registrar will regularly send out emails to students with information on registration and voting deadlines.

STRATEGY #2: REMOVE BARRIERS TO VOTING

- **Make voting easy on Election Day**. If contact is permitted, the committee will organize rides for students from campus to the local polling places on election day.

- **Create voting plans**. The committee will work with students to create individual voting plans that outline where and how a student will vote -- and if in person, at what time and how they will get there.

- **Advocate for a single voting precinct to serve all students voting in the Borough of Swarthmore.**

STRATEGY #3: GENERATE EXCITEMENT AROUND VOTING

- **Involve leadership.** The committee will help to craft and then share fun and encouraging messages from the President and the Provost on the importance of registering and voting.

- **Personalized voting promotions.** The successful "Voting Buddy" promo the committee oversaw in 2018 will be converted into a virtual partnership, if needed, to encourage accountability and generate excitement. A "Why I Vote" campaign featuring remarks and videos from faculty and staff will also be rolled out.

- **Special events.** Events such as (virtual) panels on voting, debate watching parties, and Quizzo nights on voting with faculty hosts are also being planned. If on-campus activities are permitted, we will hold election day events such as a pop-up tent with music, food, and other amenities for all students.

STRATEGY #4: OTHER ACTIVITIES

- **Build relationships.** The committee will continue to engage with groups both on and off campus to coordinate our efforts to provide education and training to student voters.

- **Work with faculty to infuse conversations about voting into the curriculum.** The committee will brainstorm ways to creatively partner with faculty to educate and inform student voters. With the reduction of critical in-person educational opportunities, the committee will reach out to targeted members of the faculty and ask them to consider promoting registration and voting in the course of their teaching contact with students.

VII. Reporting

This plan and its previous versions are shared on the College's voter registration website (vote.swarthmore.edu) which is also viewable by the public. As we make progress toward our goals, we will update this section so progress reports are available.

Spring 2020

- New members joined the GOTV committee, including members of the faculty, staff, and student communities.
- In March 2020, members of the Swarthmore community participated in demonstrations of new voting machines at the Swarthmore Public Library.

- Pamela Shropshire emailed the campus community about changes to Pennsylvania voting laws and new deadlines for registration, requests for mail-in ballots, and the spring election day. This included animated videos by Democracy Fellows Lily Fournier '23 and Frannie Richardson '23 on registering in PA and voting by mail (May 1 and May 15).
- Members of the GOTV committee met in a Zoom call with Benjamin Oh, Emerson Fellow at the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, to share information about GOTV committee efforts and how regional colleges and universities might work together (May 6).
- Pamela Shropshire emailed the campus community a reminder regarding the June 2 election with information about the hours for polls and policies regarding voting (June 1).
- In spite of the campus being shut down due to COVID-19, the GOTV committee continued to meet and plan registration and get-out-the-vote activities for the 2020 elections.

Summer 2020

- Swarthmore Alumni Council hosted a SwatTalk discussion involving Mike Dukakis '55, former Governor of Massachusetts and Democratic candidate for President in 1988; and Carl Levin '56, former US Senator from Michigan, discussing the state of US politics in 2020. The session was moderated by Chris Van Hollen '83, US Senator from Maryland (May 28).

VIII. Evaluation

Evaluation of the committee's work and progress toward stated goals will be an ongoing process. The committee meets monthly (except for January, June, July, and December), but the bulk of the committee's work happens between those meetings. As a result, meeting time is largely used to discuss and evaluate progress in order to best determine if any course-correction is needed.

Evaluation will be done with an eye toward individual goals, and this planning document will be updated to reflect the outcomes of completed goals. In this way, the plan will be a living document, updated regularly to reflect successes, lessons learned, and new opportunities.