

Swarthmore College Voter Registration & Get Out the Vote Action Plan

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 establishes concrete goals for the 2018 election cycle and beyond.

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 to reflect new opportunities, changes, and outcomes.

—Emily Weisgrau, committee chair, May 2018

II. Leadership

The committee is overseen by director of advancement communications Emily Weisgrau in collaboration with Nancy Nicely, secretary of the College and vice president for communications. Faculty and staff members of the committee were appointed based on their known passion for the cause and/or because they would bring helpful insight to it. Student members were selected because of their involvement in relevant groups or clubs.

The Steering Committee

The steering committee will coordinate efforts across campus to increase Swarthmore student voter participation. The group is loosely sub-divided into a planning team (“P” in list below) and implementation team. The planning team is largely focusing on this document, including interpreting NSLVE and other data. The implementation team (“I” in list below), because of their roles on campus, will focus more on executing tactics to achieve our goals. The committee will meet in person monthly with informal planning and conversation in between meetings.

Members of the steering committee are:

| First Name | Last Name | Department | Title | Affiliation | Team (I or P) |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|----------------------|
| Andrew | Barclay | Dean's Office | Assistant Director of Student Activities and Leadership | Staff | I |
| Ben | Berger | Political Science / Lang Center | Assoc. Prof. of Political Science & Exec. Dir. of the Lang Center | Faculty | I/P |
| Jacob | Demree | Class of 2019 | Coordinator, Swarthmore Political Access Network | Student | I |
| Ryan | Dougherty | Communications | Senior Writer/Editor | Staff | I |
| David | Foreman | Advancement | Director of Institutional Relations | Staff | P |
| Mary | Hasbrouck | ITS | Technology Coordinator | Staff | P |
| Nancy | Nicely* | Communications | Secretary of the College and Vice President for Communications | Staff | I/P |
| Katie | Price | Lang Center | Assistant Director for Co-Curricular Programming and Outreach | Staff | P |
| Simran | Singh | Class of 2019 | Lang Center Associate for Political Engagement & Public Policy | Student | I |
| Isaiah | Thomas | Dean's Office | Assistant Director of Residential Communities | Staff | I |

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|--------|------------|--------------------|--|---------|-----|
| Rick | Valelly | Political Science | Claude C. Smith '14 Professor of Political Science | Faculty | P |
| Martin | Warner | Registrar's Office | Registrar | Staff | P |
| Emily | Weisgrau** | Communications | Director of Advancement Communications | Staff | I/P |

*Nancy will be leaving Swarthmore in July 2018.

**Emily is the chair of the committee.

Campus Partners

Student Groups:

- Swarthmore Political Access Network (SPAN)
- *Daily Gazette* (merging with *The Phoenix* in fall 2018)
- *The Phoenix*
- *Voices*

Faculty/Staff:

- Advancement
- Communications
- Dean's Office
- Department of Political Science
- Information Technology Services
- Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility
- Office of the President
- Registrar
- Secretary's Office

Off-Campus Partners

- All-In Campus Democracy Challenge
- Borough of Swarthmore
- Campus Vote Project
- Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Tufts University
- Mile 22 Associates (Sam Novey)
- Turbovote.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, PA., 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 they identify as "Engaged Scholarship."

Building on the success of the Lang Center, the College's comprehensive campaign *Changing Lives, Changing the World* is raising \$70 million in strategic giving 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 such as the Chester Community Fellowship.

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 for the 2016 presidential election 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.

Local Voting

Students who wish to vote in the Borough of Swarthmore must register based on which dorm 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. The "Person Who Has Recently Moved Law" provides some help in these instances, allowing a recently relocated student to cast a ballot in the previous voting location, but this also tends to contribute to confusion. Many students do not understand where they have registered or where they should register. The state's "Find Voter Registration Status" website helps those that use it, but it does not solve the problem of confused students on voting day. Fortunately, get out the vote van drivers or poll officials at the voting place usually help students get where they need to go to vote, but the confusion lingers.

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: 45% of 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 in 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 foreign languages had the highest.

Understanding why students who are registered don't turn out at higher rates is also of interest to the student group Swarthmore Political Access Network. They launched a survey in spring 2018 to learn more about the factors behind these lower than average voting rates. The results appear in Section VII below.

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.

Thanks to Swarthmore alumnus David Meyers '75, we were encouraged to apply for the Voter Friendly Campus designation and received a grant (available to colleges in Pennsylvania) to support two student fellow positions and for implementing our goals. These opportunities come through the Campus Vote Project, which helps colleges and universities institutionalize reforms that empower students with the information they need to register and vote. The Campus Vote Project, in partnership with NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators), created the Voter Friendly Campus designation program. The goal of the program is to help institutions develop plans to coordinate administrators, faculty, and student organizations in civic and electoral engagement.

We will also seek to earn awards and designations from All-In Campus Democracy Challenge to further raise awareness on and beyond campus of Swarthmore's commitment to civic engagement.

V.–VI. Goals & Tactics

By the 2018 Midterm Election

Our overarching goal for this time period is to increase every number for every method of voting shown on our 2014 NSLVE report below, and double the combined number of students voting in total (224 to 448).

| VOTING METHOD | ENROLLED | VOTED |
|-------------------------|----------|-------|
| Absentee | 1,517 | 71 |
| Early Vote | 1,517 | * |
| Mail | 1,517 | 35 |
| In-Person, Election Day | 1,517 | 84 |
| Unknown | 1,517 | 34 |

Toward this goal, the committee will:

COMPLETED. Promote registration and voting in the Pennsylvania primary election. Assigned to: Martin and Emily

COMPLETED. Survey students to learn about obstacles to participation and attitudes toward voting and registration. Assigned to: Jacob

COMPLETED. Identify two student Democracy Fellows by the close of the Spring 2018 semester. Assigned to: Katie

IN PROGRESS/ONGOING. Advocate for a single voting precinct in the Borough of Swarthmore to serve all students. Assigned to: Martin

IN PROGRESS/COMPLETE BY MAY 31. Secure financial support to cover expenses incurred in fulfilling the committee's goals. Develop a budget for the midterm election goals described in this section. Assigned to: Emily

IN PROGRESS/COMPLETE BY AUGUST 15. Redesign and promote the College's voter information online. Create URL vote.swarthmore.edu for easier navigation and update site with midterm NSLVE data. Assigned to: Emily

SUMMER. Explore ways to engage international students in elections. Assigned to: Jacob

WEEK OF AUGUST 27. Offer voter registration assistance to students during move-in days. Emphasize ease of absentee voting and offer state-based information about contested

elections to help students decide if they should register with their home address or campus address. Provide the necessary paperwork, stamps, and envelopes for easy completion and mailing. Table will be located next to the campus post office. *Assigned to: Implementation Team*

SEPTEMBER. Bring greater awareness to Swarthmore’s GOTV efforts among the campus community, alumni and parents, and the general public. Do a press briefing about the work of the committee and secure placements for op-eds. Provide alumni and parents with suggestions for how they can support this work. *Assigned to: Emily, Ryan, Rick*

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER. Continue to offer voter registration assistance to students. Following the move-in days format described above, offer “voter study breaks” to emphasize ease of absentee voting and offer state-based information about contested elections to help students decide if they should register with their home address or campus address. Provide the necessary paperwork and mailing supplies to ensure students complete and send their registrations. Activities will be located adjacent to the campus post office. *Assigned to: Implementation Team*

SEPTEMBER–NOVEMBER. Develop peer-to-peer social media strategies. Implement from September through Election Day. *Assigned to: Implementation Team*

OCTOBER. Create and promote a friendly competition among academic departments to increase voting rates across the board but particularly among students in fields of study that have historically had lower turnout according to our NSLVE data. *Assigned to: Emily, Ben, Katie, Rick*

OCTOBER 24. Host nonpartisan educational speakers on campus who will speak about congressional elections. Frances Lee from University of Maryland has committed; an invitation has been extended to John Lapinski from University of Pennsylvania. Aim for attendance of at least 100 people. Will explore possibility of expanding programming to have students discuss specific elections. *Assigned to: Rick, Katie*

NOVEMBER 5. Send an email from President Smith to all students encouraging them to vote. *Assigned to: Emily*

NOVEMBER 6. Create a fun and festive atmosphere on Election Day with food trucks, a party bus to the polls, and “I voted” stickers. *Assigned to: Implementation Team*

By the 2020 Presidential Election

Our overarching goal for the 2020 election is for Swarthmore to simply surpass the NSLVE national collegiate voting rate of 50.4% in 2016 by any amount. We want, in effect, to be “above average.” Toward this overarching goal, the committee will:

- Continue to engage with student press on campus with a focus on successes and upcoming plans.
- Continue to create excitement on campus around elections and voting. Based on 2018 programs, determine what did and did not work well toward this objective.
- Explore the possibility of a friendly competition among the Tri-College Consortium (Swarthmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr Colleges) or the Quaker Consortium (Tri-Colleges plus the University of Pennsylvania) that includes individual campus goals and cumulative goals for registration and turnout.
- Institutionalize the Swarthmore Political Access Network (currently a student-run group) within the Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility to have a formal student governance structure that reports to a faculty/staff advisory board.
- Come to a resolution with the Borough of Swarthmore on having all students vote in a single precinct based on the College’s mailing address rather than each student’s residence hall address.
- Identify external funding sources to support our work.
- Identify student representatives to join the committee as current members prepare to graduate from Swarthmore.
- Consider ways to infuse conversations about voting into the curriculum, particularly thinking about *representation* and *institutional resilience* through participation. How might this tie into the 2018–2019 all-campus theme of “Borders & Migration?”
- Could think about educational programming outside of class that professors could get involved with, like a speaker event once a semester.

Beyond 2020

- Surpass the most recently available national collegiate voting rate calculated by NSLVE.
- Surpass Swarthmore’s own voting rates for the previous corresponding election (i.e. surpass the 2018 midterm election rate in 2022).
- Create a campus climate in which voting is the norm.

VII. Reporting

This plan will be shared on the College's voter registration website (vote.swarthmore.edu) which is also viewable by the public. We will further promote the plan in our press outreach beginning in fall 2018.

As we make progress toward our goals, we will update this section so there is an always-current progress report available.

Spring 2018

- ✓ Promoted registration and voting in the Pennsylvania primary election:
 - Martin emailed all students on March 29 with a reminder of the April 16 deadline to register with a party in Pennsylvania. Also promoted the College's voting information website and what to do if registering to vote in another state.
 - Students tabled in the dining hall to register voters and change registrations.
 - Emily created an advertisement for publication in the student-run *Daily Gazette*:



04/16/18 - Today's Happenings from Swarthmore College's Daily Student Newspaper

Join the staff!

WSRN Weekly Schedule

PA PRIMARY VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINE:

MONDAY, APRIL 16

To **vote** in the **May 15** Pennsylvania primary election, you must be **registered** as a Democrat or Republican by Monday, April 16, 2018.

Remember to use your dorm name as your address of residence on the PA voter **registration** form.

For more information about voter **registration** in PA or in your home district, including absentee **voting**:

swarthmore.edu/registrar/voter-registration

Or begin the registration process: turbovote.org

- ✓ Surveyed students on March 29th. The 40 responses yielded three key findings:
 - Students don't have enough information about absentee voting.
 - Students didn't know enough about local candidates in 2016.
 - There is a lack of excitement about voting on campus which discourages turnout.
- ✓ Identified two student Democracy Fellows: Jacob Demree '19 and Simran Singh '19.

- ✓ Advocated for a single voting precinct in the Borough of Swarthmore to serve all students. Martin Warner used our NSLVE report to share information with the Borough in writing and in person regarding the student turnout in Swarthmore's western precinct, suggesting they be shifted to the northern precinct with the rest of campus to minimize confusion.
- ✓ Secured the URL vote.swarthmore.edu for easier navigation and promotion.

VIII. Evaluation

Evaluation of the committee's work and progress toward stated goals will be an ongoing process. The committee meets monthly during the academic year, 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 plan 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.