

Voter Friendly Campus Final Report

SUNY Buffalo State College
January 2023

Coalition

2022 Coalition Contributing Members Include:

- Aurora Schunk, Assistant Director, Civic and Community Engagement (Jan-May 2022)
- Lisa Kragbé, Assistant Director, Civic and Community Engagement (Nov-Dec 2022)
- Laura Hill Rao, Director, Civic and Community Engagement
- Luke Haumesser, Associate Director, Student Leadership and Engagement
- Cindy Harvey, Outreach Coordinator, League of Women Voters

The Buffalo State Voter Friendly Campus Coalition saw some significant changes leading up to the fall 2022 election. During the spring 2022 semester, committee members revisited our plan for fall 2022. Students involved in writing the plan with faculty and staff and the Student Civic Leadership Board provided input and feedback as well. However, in June 2022 the CCE Assistant Director left the college, and the committee was not actively meeting during fall semester due to this vacancy. CCE staff and committee members executed plan objectives as best as possible according to the plan that had been put in place. We were somewhat effective in completing plan objectives but certainly could have been more effective with the Assistant Director position in place.

Internal and external partners proved to be critical in our fall 2022 voter engagement activities, even more so than originally intended in the plan. Community partners included the League of Women Voters, New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Voice Buffalo, and Open Buffalo. These partners assisted voter registration by coming on campus to register students to vote and conducting social media campaigns that were shared on Buffalo State Civic and Community Engagement (CCE) platforms. On-campus partnerships included library and student-led voter registration tables, social work department involvement on election day, a political science department watch party that contributed to the efforts to register and mobilize voters, Student Leadership and Engagement Office sharing information on social media and student emails. A Communications department course also created social media videos

about voting which were shown to 300+ students at a campus community service day and on social media.

The Assistant Director position was filled on November 1, 2022, and voter engagement efforts were a focus of the first week of employment for the new Assistant Director. Moving forward, the Assistant Director will lead the campus coalition and will reconvene a leadership team in the spring 2023 semester to revisit the existing action plan and adjust as necessary. The Assistant Director will reach out to Athletics, Residence Life, relevant academic departments, and relevant student organizations to ensure 1-2 students are represented on the leadership team. The committee will meet twice per semester. A student voter ambassador program is still in the early stages of development as well.

Overview

Based on the primary goals Buffalo State developed in our action plan, we successfully met these goals in a variety of ways including:

1. This goal stated, “Utilizing NSLVE voting rate data, create an actionable roadmap to increase civic learning and democratic engagement throughout the campus”.
This goal was achieved through the development of the action plan, and subsequent work to implement it.
2. This goal stated, “Intentionally design new and integrate current co-curricular programs and initiatives into the long-term goal of developing students into active citizens”.

This goal was achieved as outlined in the plan and additional efforts including:

- The spring 2022 and fall 2022 Civic Engagement Series provided students with opportunities to learn about and engage in civic action including voter engagement. In total, approximately 116 total participants engaged in the Civic Engagement Series of events over the course of the year. There were 90 unique participants, which indicates there were multiple students who participated in more than one of our events throughout the year.
- Broad campus and community partnerships were created to assist with voter mobilization efforts. On campus, these partnerships included the Student Leadership and Engagement Office, Communications Department, Political Science Department, Social Work Department, and individual students. Community partnerships included League of Women Voters, New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Voice Buffalo, and Open Buffalo.
- Significant website resources and social media efforts were developed and implemented. A student intern assisted with creating and updating [voter engagement videos](#) shared internally and externally and included web resources and social media efforts and included “How do I register to Vote?”,

“How to Complete Your Voter Registration Form?”, “6 Easy Tips for First Time Voters?”, and 7 other videos were created and shared.

- Buffalo State’s president, Dr. Katherine Conway-Turner is a significant supporter of student voting. [She blogged](#) about voting and posted on social media directly from her account in fall 2022.
 - Through Buffalo State’s anchor initiative, the West Side Promise Neighborhood (WSPN) newsletter, and the Civic and Community Engagement office newsletter, direct outreach to community members and partners about voting assisted in getting the word out beyond campus.
 - Buffalo State’s Community Academic Center (CAC) worked with new citizens and individuals preparing to take their citizenship test to educate program participants about the voter registration and engagement process
 - The Buffalo State CCE educated students during new student orientation about voter registration and turnout
3. Mobilize resources and stakeholders throughout campus to expand in civic learning and democratic engagement beyond currently engaged departments (ex: Civic and Community Engagement, Political Science, History and Social Studies, etc.)

This goal was met through the collaboration with the Social Work department, the Communications department the Buffalo State Library, West Side Promise Neighborhood, and the Community Academic Center.

The plan was adapted during the fall 2022 semester, primarily in response to the unexpected departure of the Assistant Director. Increased partnerships were created, which will actually support sustained commitments institution-wide and that is a positive outcome. Some more negative impacts were felt as well, including Buffalo State email posts occurred two times per month instead of weekly; students were emailed once instead of twice about voter registration and absentee ballots; and workshops were not held as planned. However, we increased partnerships and collaborations with community organizations to compensate for the decreased capacity of campus staff.

Analysis of Work

Voter Registration

Intended Outcome	Strategies (2020-2025)	When	Effort	Effort Coordinated By	Effort Result
Voter Registration					
Increase the visibility of voter registration efforts and peer-to-peer opportunities.	Build voter registration and absentee ballot efforts into New Student Orientation programming.	Summer 2022	Voter registration forms were emailed, and paper copies were included in new student bags	Student Leadership and Engagement (SLE) Civic and Community Engagement (CCE)	1,639 first-year students 598 transfer students
	Create programming/opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction during National Voter Registration Day efforts.	September 15 - October 9	Seven in-person voter registration drives and other efforts	CCE	245 registered
	Identify, train, and promote offices/individuals where students can register to vote. Offer further trainings as necessary (e.g., absentee ballot process).	Fall 2022 and continuous	Drop-in "voter station" continued Library trained	CCE	17 registered
Promote voter registration	Provide information for students to determine where (location/address) it is best for them to be registered to vote (i.e. residence hall address vs. home address).	Summer 2022	Shared four videos to guide students through registering process.	CCE	227 views
			Resources on website	CCE	2022 Views - 806
			Five <i>Daily Bulletin</i> posts	CCE	Faculty/staff shared with students
	Promote voter registration and share with students the process on multiple mediums (i.e. in-person NYPIRG class visits, Blackboard announcements, <i>Daily Bulletin</i> posts, social media posts)	Ongoing	Social media campaign	CCE	Users Reached - 6,934 Saved -33 Shares - 92
Email campaign with voter registration information			CCE Dean of Students	Email sent to 6,445 enrolled students	

Voter Education

Intended Outcome	Strategies (2020-2025)	When	Effort	Effort Coordinated By	Effort Result
Voter Education					
Create and promote accessible and digital resources for voter education.	Link websites on the CCE webpage so students can search for information about candidates, polling location, early voting, advocacy, etc.	Fall 2022	Redesign of website pages for digital tools and resources.	CCE	2022 views - 1,311
	Create, upload, and promote 5-10-minute videos about parts of the voting process (i.e. registration, absentee ballot, looking up candidate information, finding your polling location, early voting).	Updated Spring 2022	Updated 6 digital videos.	CCE	384 views
			Unity Activity	Student Leadership and Engagement	6,445 students invited
Educate on issues and candidates.	Host issue forum or educate re. ballot measures and state-wide issues.	Dec 2020 – Dec 2022	Bengal Stripes Leadership Program	SLE	67 students
			Restorative Justice Circle	Student Conduct and Community Standards	18 events
			Constitution Day Deliberative Dialogue	SUNY	150 across SUNY
			Election Results Watch Party	Political Science Department	50 participants

Voter Mobilization

Intended Outcome	Strategies (2020-2025)	When	Effort	Effort Coordinated By	Effort Result
Voter Turnout/Voter Mobilization					
Facilitate voter mobilization efforts	Provide opportunities for students to learn how to apply for and submit an absentee ballot, vote early, and vote on Election Day	Ongoing	Election Day Call-In Assistance Line all-day	NYPIRG	Call-in assistance held; outcome data not available
			Early Voting Office Hours every day during Early Voting Period - Oct. 26 through Nov. 1	NYPIRG	Call-in assistance held; outcome data not available
			Phone and text blast to get out the vote.	NYPIRG	Reached over 3,000 students.
			Analyze posts on Election Day and during the Early Voting Period on Instagram made by campus constituents as a demonstration of a voter mobilization culture on campus.	Academic Affairs/ Student Affairs	Analysis not yet conducted
			WSPN radio show	WSPN	At least 1,000 listeners
			Channel 4 interview of CCE Director	CCE	WNY regional impact
			Walk to the Polls	CCE	11 + all students who received info
			Daily Bulletin and social media posts	CCE	Data not available
			LoWV, Open Buffalo, and other partners	Partners	Data not available

Successes

We had strong successes in implementing our plan this year. Our top three successes include:

- Political science watch party (appx 50)
- Walk to the polls event (11 students)
- **Campus Culture and Partnerships:** We are particularly excited about the broad support the leadership team received from numerous new and

continuing campus partners, as well as community partners leading up to the election. These partnerships are described above. Civic learning and democratic engagement have been manifested in the curriculum at SUNY Buffalo State through service-learning pedagogy since 2003. It now appears that the significant efforts to build community-engaged co-curricular efforts and the partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs have found common ground in civic learning and democratic engagement activities and messaging.

Barriers

Coming out of the pandemic there was an increase in in-person student engagement permitting to get students involved in all the planned activities and events. Our biggest barrier was the vacancy of the Assistant Director position, and collaborations with academic departments and our community partners were able to assist and step in by helping with voter registration and voter education efforts. The collaboration could not replace the absence but helped us work toward our goals.

Beyond 2022

We continue to evaluate the work that is done which will be a continual process. The methods employed to achieve Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan goals will be adjusted as needed so that we can meet institutional targets. Over the long-term, the institution seeks to maintain our Voter Friendly Status through creative, innovative, and engaging student voter education and mobilization efforts, knowing that voting at a young age is habit-forming and part of active citizenship.

By engaging students in civic learning and democratic engagement on the curricular and co-curricular levels, students will achieve and practice the institutional learning outcomes of cultural fluency, urban engagement, and ethical reasoning. The college seeks to graduate students who are:

- able to engage with ideas that are different from or conflict with their own
- aware of factors that influence assumptions, prejudices, and privileges
- able to understand how to meaningfully interact in their communities
- possess the skills to be wise, productive, and responsible citizens
- applying their values and principles in ambiguous, complex, and controversial contexts.

A long-term goal of the institution's Voter Friendly Campus coalition is to bring early voting to campus, removing many barriers that prevent students from exercising their

civic duties and ensuring that all students, regardless of citizenship status, can learn how they can amplify their voices and engage in civic and democratic engagement while in college and after graduation.

We are challenging ourselves with Youth Service America's 50 X 250 Campaign, aiming to increase our voter engagement by 50%. We will seek to create opportunities for these students to be able to learn about the political process with efforts like growing the website resources. We will seek to nurture civic life while teaching them the skills to advocate for and work in collaboration with their peers with events like restorative justice circles, focus groups, and voter registration training. We will seek to provide access to the polls by continuing successful voter engagement efforts like Walk to the Polls, the Watch Party, and The Bengal Dare to Care Voter Engagement projects, while remaining open to trying new methods to increase student engagement. These are best done with collaboration so maintaining partnerships with academic departments and community partners that we have been working. We will continue to also look for new partnerships and develop ways to reach our goals.

NSLVE Data

Buffalo State has now received NSLVE data for the 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022 election years. This comprehensive look at Buffalo State's student voting has been instrumental in planning, reporting, and understanding trends and gaps in participation. As an institution with a majority of underrepresented students, it is particularly important to us to understand the voting trends of our minority students in order to educate, register, and encourage students to turn out to vote. The data has specifically been used in the following ways:

- Student voting trends identified in the report were used in an interview with local media
- A Buffalo State Daily Bulletin communication was sent to campus faculty and staff with data from the NSLVE report in an effort to invite other campus collaborators to be involved in voter engagement efforts
- Data was also referenced when community partners were invited to collaborate on voter engagement efforts
- A press release was sent to local media utilizing data when an announcement when Buffalo State was recognized on the 2022 Washington Monthly Best Colleges for Student Voting
- The NSLVE data and recommendations were used by the leadership committee as a frame for establishing goals and objectives for the action plan