



GVSU VOTES!



Campus Vote Project Grand Valley State University Voter Friendly Campus Report

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Table of Contents

I.	Overview	3
II.	Coalition	4
III.	Analysis of Work	6
IV.	Successes and Barriers.....	9
V.	Beyond 2018	10
VI.	NSLVE Data.....	11
VII.	Photos	12
VIII.	Media coverage, publication and recognition.....	17

Overview

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) is a four-year, Master's large public university established in 1960. With 25,000+ students, 2 main campuses (one rural and one urban) and 3 satellite campuses, GVSU is an institution which holds civic learning and democratic engagement as core to our institutional mission and values. We recognize the central role of a public university in our democracy as a bastion for the free exchange of ideas, a place where students learn to think critically, are exposed to opposing viewpoints, and hone their skills of inquiry, dialogue and democratic engagement—all skills essential for the healthy functioning of a robust democracy.

According to The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) in 2016, GVSU had a total overall student voting rate of 44.9% compared to 50.4% for all institutions.

Overall Measures	2014	2016
Registration Rate	57.3%	65.1%
Rate of Registered Students that Voted	25.5%	68.9%
Overall Student Voting Rate	14.6%	44.9%

During the Fall 2018 election season, our efforts to create a campus-wide civic ethos were enhanced by intentional cross-institutional partnerships and programming that aimed to prepare our students to be informed, engaged and empathetic citizens who understand and exercise their civic rights and responsibilities. We focused on efforts on creating a campus culture wherein students recognize the importance of civil discourse, the power of their own voices, the legacy of student leadership in social change and the importance of actively engaging in the public sphere. The NASPA/Fair Elections Legal Network Campus Vote Project Voter Friendly Campus Plan has served as a guide for our efforts in the area of civic learning and democratic engagement.

Below are the goals identified by GVSU in our 2016 Voter Friendly Campus Plan:

- 1. Ensure that every GVSU student has the opportunity to register and vote to increase overall voter participation from 44.9% to 75% or above.**
 - a. *While we will not have specific data to indicate the overall voter participation rate at GVSU for 2018 until NSLVE data is released; we do know that through our*

coordinated voter registration efforts, more than 1,300 students registered to vote and 524 students submitted absentee ballot applications. In addition, through voter turnout efforts, nearly 200 students were provided with transportation to local polling places through GVSU Voter Vans in Election Day 2018.

2. Provide opportunities for education and dialogue around public issues for the campus community during the 2018 election season and beyond.

- a. Students were provided with multiple and diverse opportunities for education and dialogue around public issues throughout the 2018 election season and beyond. Please see “Analysis of Work” for more information.*

3. Build a coalition of partners from across campus to grow and sustain an ethos of civic learning and democratic engagement at GVSU.

- a. The success of the GVSU Votes! effort is in large part due to broad and committed campus support to student voter engagement and civic learning that was cultivated throughout the fall of 2018. Our effort included leadership from students, faculty and staff. See “Coalition” and “Analysis of Work” for more information.*

Coalition

The GVSU Votes! initiative began during the spring of 2016 with a small group of faculty, staff and students who began thinking about gearing up for the 2016 election season. Our campus coalition grew from that small initial group to include representatives from across the university and from a broad range of demographic groups. Campus partners include representatives from:

- Allendale Township Clerk
- Black Greek Council
- Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies
- College Democrats
- College Republicans
- College of Education
- College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
- Division of Inclusion and Equity
- Division of Student Services & Dean of Students Office

- Frederik Meijer Honors College
- Laker Dance Team
- LIB 100/201 Students
- Michigan Secretary of State
- Milton E. Ford LGBT Center
- Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Office of Student Life and the Community Service Learning Center
- Office of the President
- Ottawa County Clerk
- Promotions Department
- Resident Assistants
- Student Senate

Partners played various roles in the initiative. Core coalition leaders included the Community Service Learning Center, Student Senate, Division of Inclusion & Equity, Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Frederik Meijer Honors College and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Representatives from these groups met throughout the fall of 2018 to plan and implement voter engagement events, including Democracy 101, a series of student-led voter registration drives, National Voter Registration Day festivities, presentations for groups and in classes across campus, GVSU Votes! football game and tailgating party and the GVSU Voter Van initiative. Core-coalition leaders attended voter registration trainings, promoted events, participated as volunteers at on-campus events, recruited additional volunteers and participants, and documented our work through photo and editorial journalism.

Our attempts to create energy around voter engagement and cultivate a civic ethos on-campus were advanced by involving such a broad number of campus stakeholders—from the President and the Dean of Students, to individual student and community volunteers, and many others. In collaboration with the Promotions Department, our coalition further developed our GVSU Votes! promotional campaign, which included: design and use of T-shirts, buttons and signs that covered GVSU's campus. Students had multiple opportunities to publicly voice their opinions about the importance of voting and democratic engagement at our Democracy 101 events throughout the fall. Further, we further developed our social media campaign—along with several videos featuring GVSU students—to promote voter engagement. These videos were broadcast during the halftime show throughout GVSU fall sporting events.

As we move beyond the 2018 election season, our coalition continues to work together and to envision ways that we can continue to build a more robust and vibrant democratic culture on our campus, and beyond. Through this collaborative work, we developed a shared set of values around civic learning and democratic engagement—as well as relationships of trust. The CDEC has transitioned quite seamlessly as we work to address newly emerging needs and opportunities that have arisen as a result of the 2018 election. See examples of work that we have planned for 2019-20 below in “Beyond 2018”.

Analysis of Work

Voter Registration: Through a coordinated training and implementation process, the GVSU Votes! coalition conducted 23 voter registration drives on GVSU’s Allendale campus, hosted by student organizations, academic departments, campus units and community volunteers during 2018. All volunteer hosts were trained in the voter registration process. All sponsors were expected to promote their drive and actively engage students in voter registration. Our coalition actively sought out sponsor organizations which represented a broad cross-section of the GVSU community. Through working with these groups, we were able to promote voter engagement for all students.

Voter registration was offered in many locations and events throughout 2018, including:

- Student and parent orientation (dates throughout S/S 2018)
- Black Excellence and Laker Familia orientations
- GVSU Votes! football game and tailgating party
- Homecoming football game tailgate party
- Campus Life Night
- All Community Service Learning Center events (Days of Service and DEM 101 sessions)
- Classroom presentations
- Student organization tabling
- On-site registration in the Community Service Learning Center
- Last day to register to vote social media campaign

On National Voter Registration Day (September 25, 2018), GVSU hosted the Michigan Secretary of State Mobile Unit. A large number of campus volunteers, partners from the Allendale Township Clerk and the

Ottawa County Clerks offices, together registered more than one new student voter per minute, for a total of 380 registrations in a 6 hour period! According to the Michigan Secretary of State, GVSU holds the record for the largest number of voters registered on a college campus during the 2018 election season—we also received this recognition during the 2016 election season! In total, the GVSU Votes! campaign resulted in the registration of 1,318 new voters and submitted 524 absentee ballot request forms during 2018.

Voter Education: Voter education was a critical component of the GVSU Votes! campaign. Our coalition developed a multi-faceted strategy for voter education. Our approach included education on voting rights, specific issue education and opportunities for broader conversation about the nature and practice of democracy. Voter education took place through programming and information sharing. Examples of our strategies to educate GVSU voters included:

- **Classroom Presentations:** Community Service Learning Center (CSLC) consultants, graduate assistant, and full-time staff were available for both presentations and one-on-one (or small group) consultations. We welcomed the opportunity to work with student organizations, individual students, classes, and campus departments. Presentations covered specific topics related to community and democratic engagement and voting. We also offered voter registration on-site during all presentations.
- **Democracy 101:** This series of co-curricular lectures, panel discussions and workshops focuses on the idea and practice of democracy. We welcomed faculty, staff, students and community partners to present. Our topics during F18 focused on preparing our campus community for informed participation in the F18 midterm election. DEM 101 programs included the following:
 - *Who Are We as Americans? “American Creed” film screening*
 - *Proposal 1: Should Marijuana be Legal in Michigan?*
 - *Proposal 2: Drawing Lines, Gerrymandering & Independent Redistricting*
 - *Proposal 3: Promote the Vote: A Michigan Voting Rights ballot initiative*
 - *Making Your Voice Heard: A First Time Voter Workshop*
 - *Are Elections Rigged? Election Security in 2018*
 - *Laker Elected Officials Forum*
- **Coffee and Conversations:** This student-led series of informal conversations was aimed at promoting community building and public dialogue. It was created to discuss topics related to our Democracy 101 series. We welcomed students to express their opinions in a safe

environment and invited them to carry on the dialogue, started in our DEM 101 events, in a smaller, student-led environment.

We asked students to complete program summaries after our Democracy 101 events to determine whether they had learned various outcomes. On a scale of 1 (Not Confident) to 4 (Very Confident), we asked students if they had achieved various learning outcomes. Results of student learning outcomes assessment are provided below:

Learning Outcomes	Average Score
I have gained knowledge concerning communities and cultures different from my own.	3.44/4
I am more committed to my role as an active citizen in the community and as a result I intend to continue serving in the future.	3.58/4
I am able to describe how my civic participation impacts the community.	3.51/4
I have increased my awareness of perspectives different than my own.	3.54/4

Voter Turnout: In addition to the broad and comprehensive GVSU Votes! campaign described above, our team also organized GVSU Voter Vans to get out the student vote. GVSU Voter Vans provided free transportation to 2 local polling places from 8:00am-8:00pm on Election Day. GVSU Voter Van drivers included some local “celebrities”—some of Grand Valley’s most well-known figures, including the Dean of Students, Student Senate President and other campus “stars.” Drivers and assistants prompted conversation with students about the election and their experience as first time voters, using the drive time as a space for reflection and dialogue.

Voter Vans not only provided transportation for student voters, but fostered a sense of community around the civic duty of voting. With Voter Van signage and volunteers all over campus and a social media campaign coordinated with University Communications, we were able to spread the word about our two pick up / drop off locations and Voter Vans that ran every 15-20 minutes throughout the day. Our “Election Day Party” featured pizza, popcorn, music, a photo booth and a visit from Louie the Laker! In addition, students were encouraged to interact with a “Democracy Wall” in the Kirkhof Center (student union), asking student to respond to the prompt “Why I Vote”. Faculty, staff and community partners all volunteered to implement our Election Day programming.

Finally, a new and celebratory addition to our Election Day programming in 2018 was the “Stroll to the Polls”. In order to encourage democratic engagement amongst the black Greek community, we partnered with the Black Greek Council to host this “stroll”. Members of Black Greek organizations came out in clothing that represented their various organizations and chapters, donned GVSU Votes! swag and put on a “stroll”, where students performed dances for each student organization. All were welcome to join in and dance. This provided lots of energy and fun for our Election Day celebration, and also was an important opportunity for the BGC to demonstrate their commitment to civic engagement, as well as the broader importance of minority voter engagement. By the end of the day, our team had provided nearly 200 students with a ride to the polls!

Successes: GVSU’s top three successes of the GVSU Votes! campaign included:

- Registration of nearly 1,400 new voters
- Building a campus-wide coalition to support voter engagement and increase a culture of civic ethos at GVSU
- Opportunities for GVSU representatives to be involved in shaping the national landscape of CLDE in higher education, through NASPA/ADP/TDC/AACU and SLSV networks.
- GVSU Votes! was honored with the 2018 NASPA Gold Excellence Award for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement.

Barriers: One barrier to voter engagement was that the polling locations for GVSU students are located off-campus and not on the bus route. While we worked around this barrier by providing transportation to students, our coalition continues to explore the idea of hosting a polling location at GVSU for the 2020 election. GVSU has over 25,000 students that attend every year. We believe that by providing on-campus access to voters, we could significantly increase our voter turnout rate.

While the CDEC experienced increased interest and participation in our voter engagement efforts, maintaining broad and consistent participation by partners from across campus has been a challenge. Another unique challenge relevant to building broad buy-in and participation has been the difficulty of involving student groups from the conservative side of the political spectrum. We have reached out to various student organizations (College Republicans, Students for Liberty) to invite them in to our non-partisan voter engagement work, but have yet to see those relationships develop in any substantive way. We will continue to reach out to a broad cross-section of students via our personal and professional networks, as well as through Student Senate and direct and targeted outreach.

Beyond 2018: Throughout the 2018 election season, GVSU saw students engaged in the democratic process. We continue to create spaces and opportunities for students be involved beyond the election cycle. Our post-election work has focused on two goals: (1) to provide space for the campus community to process the results of the election and (2) to provide space and resources for students to determine how to move forward and continue to be democratically engaged.

In addition, we will be paying close attention to the changes of Michigan's voting policies that will be implemented before the 2020 election due to the passage of Proposal 3 in 2018. Proposal 3 added several voting policies to the Michigan Constitution. Some of these voting policies existed in state statute, but not the state constitution, while others were modified policies or new policies. The new policies that were added to the state constitution included: straight-ticket voting; automatic voter registration; same-day voter registration; and no-excuse absentee voting during the 40 days before an election. Proposal 3 allowed eligible persons to register to vote by mail until 15 days before an election, whereas 2018 law allowed them to register to vote by mail until 30 days before an election. Through our partnerships with the Michigan Dept. of State and the Ottawa County Clerk's Office, we will be well positioned to thoroughly understand how these changes will impact our work. Elections officials will also partner with us to attend and provide an educational session to participants from across the state at the Michigan Student Voter Engagement Summit on May 10th at GVSU.

Examples of our emergent work for 2019-20 include:

- Democracy 101: We will continue our co-curricular series, which has gained significant traction and credibility around campus. Topics for W19 currently include:
 - *This is What Democracy Looks Like! Breaking the Silence and Living the Legacy of MLK: An Open Mic Event*
 - *Democracy in Ancient Athens*
 - *Lessons in Democracy from South Africa*
 - *What is Fascism?*
 - *Democracy as Thriving*
 - *The Building Bridges Experience*

- Michigan Statewide Student Voter Engagement Summit: In partnership with the Campus Vote Project, GVSU will host this one-day summit for students, faculty, staff and community partners on May 10, 2019.
- Student led civic engagement podcast
- Continued voter registration efforts (student org sponsored, in partnership with summer orientation programs, MDOS mobile unit visit in partnership with “Greek Week” on 3/28/19.)
- Partnership with Ottawa County elections officials to propose an on-campus polling location for 2020.
- Continued GVSU staff engagement and leadership in national conversation with NASPA / ADP / TDC network on the continued development of the CLDE Theory of Change and related projects.
- Continued and regular CDEC meetings to build campus buy-in and expand our efforts across campus.

Through the above programs, projects and events, will continue to work to collaboratively develop a civic ethos and opportunities for civic learning and democratic engagement at GVSU.

NSLVE Data: When NSLVE data is available, we will reconvene key coalition members to review the data, this activity report and exchange updates on current CLDE programming in order to evaluate our progress against goals and to revisit future planning.

Photos and Stories: Please see below for photos and a list of media coverage of the GVSU Votes! initiative.

Democracy 101



Laker Elected Officials Forum



Prop 1: Should Marijuana be Legal in Michigan?

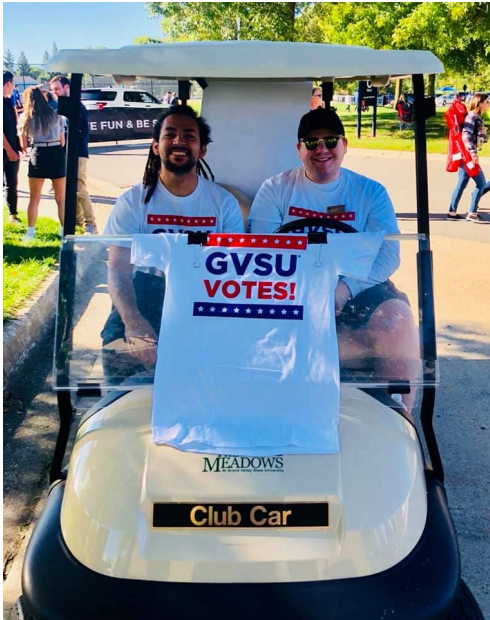


First Time Voter Workshop



Proposal 3: Promote the Vote: A Michigan Voting Rights ballot initiative

GVSU Votes! Tailgating Party



Student volunteers in action!



President T. Haas, repping GVSU Votes!



Dean of Students and student leaders



GVSU Votes!



Registering to vote!

National Voter Registration Day, 2018



Election Day Celebration 2018

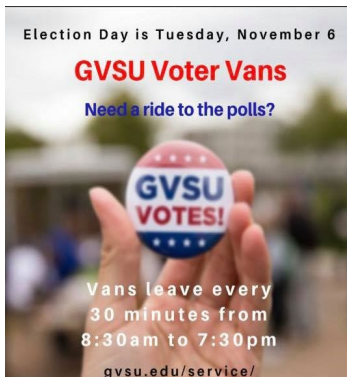


GVSU Democracy Fellows and student leaders



Black Greek Council "Stroll to the Polls"

Election Day 2018 and GVSU Voter Vans



Local media coverage on WOOD TV-8



Media coverage, publications and recognition:

- [“College Campuses Working to Increase Voter Turnout”](#). October 30, 2018, WOOD TV-8
- [2018 NASPA Gold Excellence Award for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement](#),
- [“Democracy 101 at Grand Valley State University”](#). July 18, 2018, by Anna Szalay and Melissa Baker-Boosamra
- [“Rethinking Non-Partisanship in an Increasingly Divisive Era”](#). October 15, 2018, by Jane Johnston and Melissa Baker-Boosamra
- [“It’s Time to Get Out and Vote!”](#). November 6, 2018, by Larenz Rivero and Rihan Issa.