



GVSU **VOTES!**



Campus Vote Project **Grand Valley State University** **Voter Friendly Campus Report**

Submitted: February 2021

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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 2020	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) we can see that between 2014-2018, GVSU has seen continued increases in campus registration rates. While it appears that between 2016-2018, GVSU saw a decrease in the percentage of registered students who voted and the overall student voting rate, we recognize that 2018 was a midterm election, with an increase of 21.1% increase from the previous midterm election in 2014. We eagerly await the 2020 NSLVE results and look forward to using those results to analyze and guide our future voter engagement efforts at GVSU.

Overall Measures	2014	2016	2018
Registration Rate	57.6%	65.1%	67.2%
Registered Students that Voted	25.3%	68.9%	53.1%
Overall Student Voting Rate	14.6%	44.9%	35.7%

During the Fall 2020 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 student 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 to 70% in the 2020 General Election**

- a. *While we will not have specific data to indicate the overall voter participation rate at GVSU for 2020 until NSLVE data is released, we do know that through our coordinated voter registration efforts that more than 800 students were able to utilize the Allendale Satellite Clerks Office to register and cast an absentee ballot while it was open from Early October until Election Day 2020.*

2. Provide opportunities for education and dialogue around public issues for the campus community during the 2020 election season and beyond.

- a. *Students were provided with multiple and diverse opportunities for education and dialogue around public issues throughout the 2020 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 Spring, Summer, and Fall 2020. 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. Student coalition leaders included the Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows, Community Service Learning Center Civic Engagement Associates and Student Senators. Representatives from these groups met throughout 2020 to plan and implement voter engagement events, including Democracy 101, a series of student-led voter registration drives, National Voter Registration Week festivities, presentations for groups, classes, and Resident Assistant trainings, Outvote Texting Couch Parties, and Vote Early and Election Day Events. 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 yard 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 and our Tea Time Conversations on Instagram throughout the fall. Further, we developed our social media campaign—along with a series of videos featuring GVSU students—to promote voter engagement. These videos were posted online on various

GVSU social media accounts, including the Office of Student Life accounts, the CSLC accounts, the GVSU official accounts, and the promotions office accounts. Importantly, the CDEC and staff from the Office of Student Life Community Service Learning Center partnered with stakeholders from across campus to build a campus-wide website hosting election-related resources for our campus community (<https://www.gvsu.edu/election2020/>). This website received approval and support from the GVSU President and Senior Leadership Team.

Due to COVID-19, we had to modify our strategy from a mostly in-person engagement plan to entirely virtual at the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester. As the semester progressed, we were gradually able to host more events and opportunities for in person engagement, which included our on-campus Allendale Satellite Clerks office, as well as the GVSU Election Day Celebration. All on-campus events were conducted in accordance with GVSU, State, and CDC policies to help slow the spread of the virus. All Democracy 101 events, Tea Time Livestreams, class, group, and training presentations were conducted virtually.

As we move beyond the 2020 election season, our the CDEC continues to work together 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 is in the process of transitioning as we work to address newly emerging needs and opportunities that have arisen as a result of the 2020 election. See examples of work that we have planned for 2021 below in “Beyond 2020”.

Analysis of Work

Voter Registration: Because COVID-19 limited the methods in which we could register students to vote, we shifted our strategy to promoting the voter registration resources, including the Michigan Secretary of State Voting Information Center website <https://mvic.sos.state.mi.us/>. This website allowed students find both their municipal clerk as well as their county clerk, print out voter registration and absentee ballot request forms, find their precinct, and register to vote online up to 15 days before the election. We also promoted the All In To Vote Voter resource website <https://allintovote.org/>, which allowed out of state students to find their respective states voting law information. We offered voter registration in person at the Allendale Satellite Clerks Office for Allendale Charter Township residents, where they could register and then vote in person at one time. See **Voter Turnout** for more information.

For our National Voter Registration Day (September 22, 2020) Celebration, we shifted our in-person day celebration to a week-long multi event celebration that was completely virtual. This included a Democracy 101 session on Media Literacy in Elections, a Town Hall with staff from the Michigan Secretary of State's Office, a Tea Time livestream featuring student organizations at GVSU that are passionate about Civic Engagement, and a Discussion on the film *Race: The Jesse Owens Story*. As well, we placed yard signs around both of our main campuses that directed people to register to vote at both websites previously mentioned.

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:

- **Group 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. These presentations were done virtually and included in the presentations was a training on how to use the Outvote texting app that allowed students to text their friends about factual voting information. We included the training to encourage those students to host their own virtual couch parties to spread accurate voting information.
- **Democracy 101:** This series of co-curricular lectures, panel discussions and workshops focuses on the idea and practice of democracy. We welcome faculty, staff, students and community partners to present. Our topics during F2020 focused on preparing our campus community for informed participation in the F2020 General Election. DEM 101 programs included the following:
 - *1920-2020: Women's Voting Rights, featuring GVSU President Philomena Mantella and MI Sec. of State Jocelyn Benson*
 - *How to Stay on Top of Information in the Media*
 - *GVSU Student Senate Panel*
 - *Voter Suppression: Does Your Vote Really Count?*
 - *Issues and Proposals on the Ballot*

- *First Time Voters Seminar and Vote Early Day*
- *Engagement Beyond the Election*
- *Election Day Debrief Part 1*
- *Election Day Debrief Part 2*
- *Mental Health and Politics*
- *Civil Dialogues*
- **Tea-Time:** This student-led series of informal conversations was aimed at promoting community building in a conversation style setting. We created this platform to elevate student voices at the university that were both knowledgeable on the topics, and that were leaders of their respective communities at GVSU. By using the Live feature on Instagram, we were able to reach students as they were on social media where they could interact with the conversation, and it also allowed students to watch our episodes after they aired all on Instagram. Topics included:
 - *The USPS & Voting by Mail*
 - *Dialogue, Listening to Learn and Understand*
 - *Student Orgs Passionate about Voting*
 - *Campus Climate*
 - *Voter Suppression*
 - *Food Insecurity at GVSU*
 - *Election Debrief*
 - *Women of Color and Voting*
 - *What We're Grateful For*

We asked students to complete program summaries after our Democracy 101 events to determine whether they had learned various outcomes. Student learning outcomes for CSLC programs and average scores for these learning outcomes are below for Fall 2020.

1. "I can describe how my civic participation impacts my community."
 - 78% of students responded "Confident".
2. "I can consider the complexities of an issue, limits, and multiple points of view."
 - 81% of students responded "Confident".

Voter Turnout Due to COVID-19, we were unable to provide the Voter Van service that we have been able to provide in the past due to GVSU restrictions on travel in university vehicles. Despite this, we were able to have a robust and engaging GVSU Election Day celebration! On Election Day, we had a celebration at the Cook-Carillon Clock Tower, which is in the central part of our campus. Activities here were led by GVSU President Philomena Mantella, including music performed by the GVSU Marching Band, a table for both our Campus Activities Board and our GVSU Votes campaign, a “Garland of Positivity” where students could write inspiring messages on a garland, and remarks from campus leaders, culminating with a “Parade to the Polls” celebration where the President of GVSU, along with Student Senate representatives and the GVSU Marching Band, led our campus on a walk to the Allendale Satellite Clerk’s Office.

The clock tower celebration was meant to direct people to the Allendale Satellite Clerks Office, which was located in our student center. As mentioned before, the Allendale Satellite Clerks Office provided Allendale Charter Township Residents (mainly students who lived on GVSU’s Campus and off campus apartments that were within the township, but the office was able to be used by any resident of Allendale) the opportunity to register to vote and vote their absentee ballot at one time. The office was open from October 13 through November 3. The Allendale Satellite Clerk’s Office served more than 800 students.

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

- 800+ people used the Allendale Satellite Clerks Office – during a time when relatively few students were on campus, due to online classes, public health orders and students deciding to vote by mail
- Continuing to build 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. Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 also hampered our

ability to transport students to the polling location. The Allendale Satellite Clerk's Office did make voting much more accessible to some students, but for those who lived in Allendale but already registered prior to Election Day, not having a polling location on campus was a barrier. We will continue to push for an on-campus polling location in preparation for both the 2022 Mid Term Election and the 2024 General Election.

Another barrier was the COVID-19 pandemic. Switching our strategy to almost completely virtual had an impact on our reach and our registration numbers, as in person engagement has and is the most efficient and intentional way of reaching students. Despite this, we were able to make the best of the situation, and most of our voter education programs were able to move online relatively easily, and our in-person opportunities were still able to take place with social distancing guidelines and facemask rules in place.

Finally, while the CDEC continued to experience interest and participation in our voter engagement efforts, maintaining broad and consistent participation by partners from across campus, post-election, 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 into 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 2020: Throughout the 2020 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 three goals: (1) Provide space for the campus community to process the results of the election; (2) Provide resources for students to determine how to move forward and continue to be democratically engaged; (3) Establish a polling location on the Allendale Campus of GVSU.

As we move beyond 2020, our campus community as well as many people around the United States are processing the results of the 2020 election, and the effect of hyper political polarization on civic engagement and mental health. Starting winter semester 2021, we are beginning a new student led dialogue program in collaboration with the President's Office, the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies, and the Brooks College Padnos-Sarosik Civil Discourse Initiative

(www.gvsu.edu/service/dialogue-222.htm). We will continue our voter education programs, Democracy 101 and Tea Time, as both of those programs provide space for dialogue and learning from a common ground perspective. We will also continue to work with campus leaders at GVSU and Allendale Charter Township to establish a polling location on our main Allendale campus before the next midterm election in 2022.

Examples of our emergent work for 2021 include:

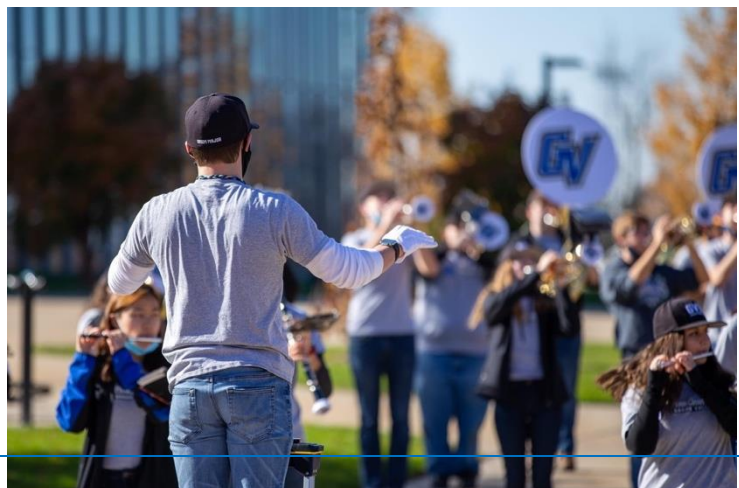
- Democracy 101: We will continue our co-curricular series, which has gained significant traction and credibility around campus. Topics for W2021 currently include:
 - *The Census, Redistricting and Gerrymandering*
 - *The History of the 13th Amendment*
 - *Generation Z's Role in the BLM Movement: A Panel*
 - *History of Intersectional Feminism & The Women's Movement Today*
 - *Women, Leadership, and Power*
 - *Title IX: Purpose and Impacts*
 - *The Importance of Earth Day*
- Tea Time: We will also continue our Livestream Conversations, where we will explore a variety of topics focused on empowerment and civil dialogue.
- Continued voter registration efforts through online promotion, and when restrictions have loosened for the pandemic
- Partnership with Ottawa County elections officials as well as Allendale Charter Township officials to propose an on-campus polling location for 2022
- 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.

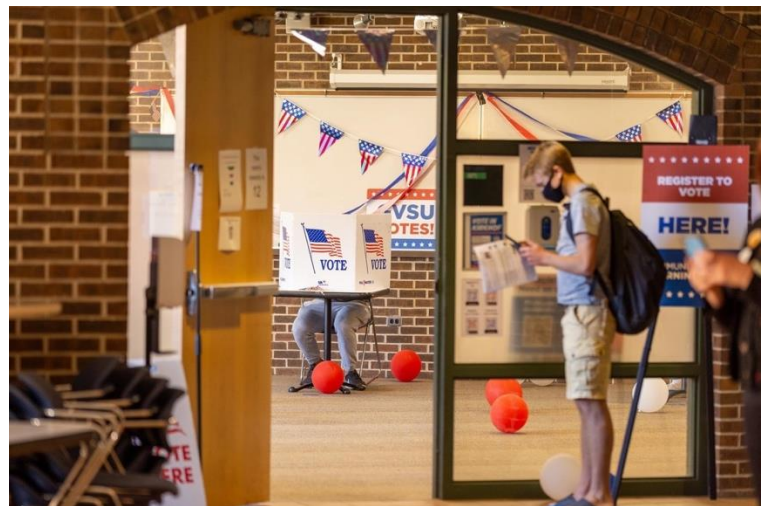
Through the above programs, projects and events, will continue to work to collaboratively develop a civic ethos and opportunities for civic learning and democratic engagement at GVSU.

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.

Election Day 2020





Additional Highlights from 2020





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.
- [“Benson Visits as Part of National Voter Registration Day”](#). September 25, 2019, by Mitchell Boatman
- [“How Student Civic Leaders Across the Country Are Preparing for An Unprecedented Semester”](#). July 7th, 2020, by Philomena Lindquist
- [“Election Day activities on campus include Walk to Vote, remarks from Mantella”](#). October 28, 2020, by Meagan Saxton October 28, 2020