



OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY VOTER FRIENDLY CAMPUS ACTION PLAN 2024

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Otterbein's Action Plan was developed by the **OtterbeinVOTES** team of colleagues at the Center for Student Engagement (**CSE**), that includes students, faculty members, and other campus and community stakeholders. The plan provides a thoughtful campus compass for the team grounded in data and goal setting.

The CSE recognizes that civic engagement is vital to amplifying all the voices of our community. We seek to engage our campus in efforts to define civic engagement both in and outside the classroom, increase student voter registration and participation, integrate civic engagement into the curriculum, and engage students in the civic work of our communities.

In 2024, our work will be focused on events at our **OtterbeinVOTES Kiosk** in our coffee shop at the library where students can check on their pathways to vote, learn about candidates, and connect with our civic network. We will also focus on the development of new civic opportunities in the local community for students to engage more fully in both their democratic education and action.

A key initiative is to fully partner this year with the **Franklin County Board of Elections** to ensure that students have a local polling location that is accessible. Our goal is to work with the BOE to set expectations for a unified polling location for one campus address to address voter registration, Ohio Voter ID regulations, and other voting issues.



II. LEADERSHIP: OUR COALITION

The Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement team at Otterbein, **OtterbeinVOTES**, is responsible for implementing the action plan. The team includes multiple stakeholders from across the campus, including students, faculty, and staff. The team will meet monthly to clarify goals, determine implementation plans, develop community, and network with community constituencies. Dr. Melissa Kesler Gilbert, Dean of Student Engagement and advisor to the bi-partisan student group, *Raise Your Voice* will co-chair the team with student *Democracy Fellow* Grace Simms (Senior, CardinalCorps Leader) and Abby Vitali (Senior, CardinalCorps Leader).



Campus & Community Stakeholders will include:

1) The Otterbein Library, with key personnel developing programming and educational materials for the library. **Allen Reichert** (Courtright Memorial Library) will serve as the Library Liaison to the team.

2) Members of N2N (Neighbor 2 Neighbor), a local community alliance committed to bipartisan collaborations that includes the **Mayor of Westerville** and chair of the city council, **Kenneth Wright**.

3) Collaborators from the Divisions of Academic Affairs, including faculty from the departments of Sociology, Communication, Political Science, English, Education, and others. Key faculty stakeholders include:

- **Dr. Carla Corroto** (Sociology)
- **Dr. Kerry Strayer** (Communication)
- **Dr. Leesa Kern** (Sociology)
- **Dr. Nichelle McNabb** (Communication)
- **Dr. Tammy Birk** (English & Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies)
- **Dr. Margaret Koehler** (English & Ethnic Studies)

4) Partners in Student Affairs who collaborate with student organizations and residence life programming: With leadership from **Kirsten Peninger** (Assistant Director, Campus Center Operations)

5) Representation from **Integrative Studies** (our General Education program) to help with communication in courses.

6) Collaborators from **First Year Experience** courses where peer mentors will help raise awareness about voting.

7) Representation **from the Franklin County Board of Elections**.

8) Partners at *The League of Women Voters* (key contact: **Elizabeth Grieser**, Operations Manager)

9) **Student Leadership** from partisan student-led organizations, including: Ohio Student Association and Turning Point.

10) Friends at All IN, Campus Votes, AAC&U, and NASPA's Civic Learning and Democracy Education KC.

III. OTTERBEIN'S COMMITMENT TO CIVIC LEARNING



Otterbein University is committed to enhancing civic learning on our campus and the democratic engagement of our students. Our commitment is evident through our guiding documents, curriculum, and infrastructure.

Since the founding of our institution in 1847, the university has engaged students in the civic work of the temperance movement, the abolitionist movement, and more contemporary movements for social change. Civic engagement is part of the historical framework of the institution and is manifested today in the contemporary fabric of our work.

A. *Our commitment is evident throughout our **guiding documents** which will serve as both the motivation and the scaffolding for our work:*

- **Vision**

Otterbein University will be nationally recognized as a model community of educators, leaders, and learners who set the pace for higher education and **contribute to the common good**.

- **Mission**

Otterbein is an inclusive community dedicated to educating the whole person in the context of humane values. Our mission is to prepare graduates to think deeply and broadly, to **engage locally and globally**, and to **advance** their professions and **communities**. An Otterbein education is distinguished by the intentional blending of the liberal arts and professional studies, combined with a unique approach to **integrating direct experience** into all learning.

- **Core Value: Service**

We are committed to **fostering a culture of social responsibility, civic engagement, and meaningful service** to our communities.

B. *Our commitment is also evident in our **intentional and integrative curriculum**.*

- Our **general education** instruction, known at Otterbein as “Integrative Studies” (INST) emphasizes civic engagement. One of the primary goals of INST is: **To encourage purposeful public engagement and social responsibility.**

Outcomes:

- 1) Students demonstrate the intellectual and practical skills necessary for meaningful work and active participation in the local community and the larger world.
- 2) Students investigate multiple and evolving forms of **civic identification** and belonging, with attention to the **practice of citizenship** in local, national and global contexts.
- 3) Students explore the value of purposeful action in the face of the pressing problems of the 21st century.
- 4) Students come to see themselves as responsible, engaged and informed persons, capable and **willing to act in ways that will improve or reshape the world.**



- Our commitment to experiential learning promotes the high impact practice of **service-learning**, offering over 60 service-learning courses and fellowship opportunities for community-based research.
- In 2024, the curriculum will include two courses that specifically address the election: 1) **SYE4302: High Stakes: The 2024 Election**, and 2) two sections of **FYS: The 411 on Election 2020**. These courses, offered to both incoming first years (FYS) and seniors (SYE), will share an assignment to develop issue posters that will articulate current local and national issues that will appear on the ballot. In October they will host an Election 2024 Fair to help educate the student body about the impact of ballot issues. Students will also be required to attend campaign rallies, work with Raise Your Voice on voter registration, host radio spots, and more. Other courses that will take part in organizing and hosting electoral education activities will include our debate class and PR/Event Planning.



C. *Our commitment is also evident* in the **institutionalization of two offices** on campus who are responsible for civic engagement and social justice initiatives: The Center for Student Engagement and The Office of Social Justice and Activism.

D. *Our commitment* is illustrated by the university's support of national civic initiatives, for example, Dr. Melissa Gilbert serves as the Research Coordinator for the **NASPA Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement's** Knowledge Community Executive team.

- E. *Our commitment* is evident through our participation in the national **ALL IN** Challenge and has competed in the Ohio Athletic Conference (OAC) challenge!

- F. *Our commitment* is recognized through our new national partnership with Antioch University: **The Coalition for the Common Good**, the first national higher education system of affiliated universities organized around a shared mission of educating students not only to advance their careers, *but to promote our pluralistic democracy, social, racial, economic, and environmental justice, and the common good.* The Coalition “amplifies the opportunities we can provide for students – who will, in turn, go on to become *champions for change for good in our society.*”



IV. LANDSCAPE

Otterbein’s landscape of civic learning and engagement is robust, with curricular and co-curricular efforts that have shown to be effective in meeting agreed upon campus learning objectives. We have received the Voter Friendly Campus designation and in 2021, Otterbein was named to Washington Monthly’s **Best Colleges for Student Voting Honor Roll!**

Several of our signature experiences at Otterbein are grounded in **civic experiences** for our students and provide both training and skill inventories to measure success. Below are some of the highlights of our current democratic engagement efforts:

Fall Community Service Plunge: Each fall, 300 First Year students engage in community service for the City of Westerville as part of their introduction to the civic workings of their new local community. The **Mayor of Westerville** welcomes the students to the community, noting their new civic role as members of a thriving local democracy. The students gather on the steps of the city’s “civic green” to learn about both the beauty and the growing needs of their new home. After the speeches, students disperse into civic teams to serve with local non-profits, learning about the specific needs of youth, adults with disabilities, the environment, and other key issues, followed by two hours of volunteer service to address those needs.



CardinalCorps Leaders mobilizing volunteers for the Fall Community Service Plunge



MLK Day of Service: Every January the university host an MLK Convocation and Day of Service. Over 150 students gather after an afternoon of speeches to volunteer for projects addressing some of the most pressing needs of our local community. Non-profit organizations bring projects to campus for an evening of service that has included making blankets for foster care children, earrings for cancer patients, backpacks of food for children to take home over the weekend, and more. Students engage in dialogue about the work they are doing and the needs of the local community.

Otterbein Ready Initiative: In 2022 the campus embarked on an initiative to ensure that every Otterbein student will have an immersive experience to gain professional skills and build a strong network. Given the university's emphasis on experiential learning, our campus climate also encourages, supports financially, and rewards students who participate in "community engagement" – one of the immersive experiences that will count toward this new graduation requirement. At Otterbein, **Community Engagement** is one of the most accessible pathways students take to deepen their civic understanding.



The 2019 Democratic Debate: Otterbein hosted CNN's national democratic presidential debate in October of 2019. This event played a pivotal role in situating our university on the national stage for political engagement and mobilized hundreds of students to become more aware of the contested issues on the national landscape. Over one hundred students volunteered for the debate, spoke on panels, and served as college media spokespeople.

Civic Partnerships: The CSE has developed extensive partnerships to enhance opportunities for both student civic engagement and voter education. We have partnered with an alliance of local non-profit stakeholders to engage our students in building the capacities of our community to thrive. Examples of these partnerships include our local Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Westerville, City Council, Westerville Library, and more.



The university has also engaged **The League of Women Voters** to assist with voter education efforts. The League has co-hosted events on campus with local candidates, voter registration drives, and voter awareness events during Constitution Day with sample voting machines from the Board of Elections at our Library.



Student Government: The university supports a student-led governance system to expand the democratic participation of students. Students engage in a campus-wide electoral process, they vote as Senators in all campus governance questions, and they serve on governance committees across campus. In March of 2020, the student government issued a proclamation to engage the **Franklin County Board of Elections** to change the voting precincts in the city to decrease confusion about student addresses and eligibility.

Measures of Civic Learning and Engagement: We have developed several standardized instruments on our campus to measure knowledge of community, civic competencies, civic awareness, social responsibility, and levels of civic engagement. For example, the **CardinalCorps Community Engagement Survey** is given to groups of students who engage in community service and the **Van Sant Leadership Survey** is given to students who participate in civic engagement as part of their leadership journey. Both instruments have an inventory of **civic competencies** to measure the impact of their experiences on their ability to engage successfully in civic work.

Student Life Survey: This annual survey was revised in 2023-24 to include several measures of civic dimensions and civic activities. Below are several of the relative results:

Student Learning Outcomes

| Survey Item | Percent of Students Who Indicated Gains |
|---|---|
| Ability to lead a group to a common goal | 85% |
| Ability to engage in productive and civil dialogue about difficult topics | 90% |
| Understanding my role in the community | 86% |

Participation in Campus Activities Outside of the Classroom

| Survey Item | Percent of Students Who Participated |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Community Service Activities | 14% |
| Student Government | 4% |

National Surveys: We also participate in several national surveys that provide information on civic engagement, including: NSLVE, NSSE, CIRP, and the Campus Compact Annual Survey.

NSSE Survey

Our most recent NSSE Data (Spring 2023) has revealed:

| Survey Item | First Years | Seniors |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Connected your learning to societal problems or issues | 51% | 66% |
| Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments | 51% | 59% |
| Had discussions with people with political views other than your own | 49% | 53% |
| The institution emphasized attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues | 61% | 54% |
| How many courses have included a community-based project (service-learning)? | 55% | 83% |
| How much does your institution provide a supportive environment for differing political affiliation? | 51% (very much+quite a bit) | 47% (very much+quite a bit) |

Internal Barriers: For students who feel politically connected to their hometown, they often want to vote locally and register with their home address; however, they do not request an absentee ballot, and then do not get home to vote. We do not have one person whose sole job is voter education; it is one of many hats that we all wear.

External Barriers: For our voter registration drives, we often have external agencies come to campus and register students incorrectly. Our campus is divided by a geographic boundary that separates two polling locations, which also adds to the confusion. Students also need help understanding the new Ohio ID laws that impact all voters, but especially our out-of-state students.

Learning Outcomes: The campus has identified campus-wide learning outcomes for our students: Knowledgeable, Multiliterate, Engaged, Responsible, and Inquisitive, known on our campus as KMERI. In each of these areas, there is an emphasis on several learning outcomes that directly align with civic work. For example (but not limited to):

- **ENGAGED** = As civically engaged people, they will be prepared to confront, act upon, and lead collaborative responses to increasingly complex challenges in diverse local, national, and global communities.
- **RESPONSIBLE** = Students will make choices that promote their own well-being and that of others. Encouraged to grapple with diverse value systems, they will move toward ethical commitments that reflect a sense of agency, honesty, and fairness.

V. GOALS:

Otterbein University's challenge will focus on two primary focus areas in 2024, with several short-term objectives scaffolding our work, 1) Get Out the Vote, and 2) Enhance Civic Landscapes.

2024 Short-term Goals and Objectives:

1. **GET OUT THE VOTE:** Increase voter turnout to 85% in the 2024 general election.

- Increase awareness about our **OtterbeinVOTES Kiosk** in the Otterbean Coffee shop at the library. This student-friendly station will host voter materials, both on paper and on our Ipad “Civic Gateway.” The kiosk will share the following resources and more:

- Ballotready.org
- Vote411.org
- Otterbein Voting Roadmap (see image)
- Links to all registration, absentee voter, change of address forms
- Mail center with stamps and envelopes



- Increase the number of students engaged in voter registration with new strategies provided by the student Raise Your Voice team
- Increase our social media presence and on-line voter education
- Implement targeted strategies for students whose turn out rates are traditionally lower (e.g., environmental studies, sports recreation, social sciences, students of color)

2. **CIVIC LANDSCAPES: Enhance civic landscapes for democratic participation**



- ✓ Engage current community partners in dialogues about the civic competencies students could gain at their sites
- ✓ Enhance the quality of community engagement sites to create additional opportunities for students across the disciplines.
- ✓ Increase the number of academic courses engaging student in civic participation by 50%

Long-term Goals:

- Increase voter turnout at all future elections
- Strengthen community partnerships to increase opportunities for student experiences
- Develop an intentional set of civic engagement courses grounded in our historic service-learning work
- Institutionalize a voter registration system

VI. 2024 STRATEGIES



To meet both our long- and short-term goals, the **OtterbeinVOTES** team will work together to engage the Otterbein community in the following planned activities for the 2024-25 academic year.

These strategies follow the timeline of both local and national events, as well as campus collaborations.

1) GET OUT THE VOTE

- ✓ Develop an Otterbein University voter **website and libguide** with all essential information
- ✓ **Move-In & New Student Week** (at First Friday)
 - Include a postcard in move-in packets with information about absentee ballot requests (partner with Res. Life)
 - Host a virtual **"Registration Station"** to answer questions on Brightspace
 - Follow-up email from Student Affairs with current voter information
- ✓ **Campus Groups Gamification of Civic Engagement:** We will launch a new program to assign game points to students who participate in numerous civic engagement activities throughout the fall semester.
- ✓ Students will earn a *"Civic Engagement Badge"* once they reach a specific threshold.
- ✓ All Otterbein students will receive information on digital access to voter **registration** through the **VOTE411.com** site.

- ✓ **OtterbeinVOTES** will host our KIOSK at the library with live “*Ask me how to VOTE*” events to introduce students to all of the materials to help them vote successfully.
 - Link to a new **OZONE channel** that houses all the voting links, forms, and websites
 - Provide voting roadmaps
 - Mount **candidate information** -- these informational pieces will appear not only at our kiosk, but also on all of the digital screens across campus, as appropriate.

- ✓ **Course Visits:** The **OtterbeinVOTES** faculty team will **visit classes/make virtual visits** to encourage voting; target FYS classes and INST classes

- ✓ **Absentee Ballot Bash:** We will gather students at a pizza party to fill out their absentee ballots, potentially with one of the campus leaders and then march to the mail room to get them posted.

- ✓ **Partnership with the Mail Room** will provide a special MAIL BOX for student absentee ballot requests and absentee ballots (secure funding for STAMPS). We will make a concerted effort this year to engage students in the absentee voting process, especially for out of state students who can't vote at the Ohio polls without a certified **Ohio ID**. With the timeline for ballot requests moved up considerably, we will begin this push earlier in the semester.



- ✓ **Constitution Day (September 17th):** We will host our annual voter awareness campaign with the Otterbein Library as we celebrate this federal holiday.

- ✓ Host the **COTA Awareness Session** with the City of Westerville and Otterbein's Sustainability Committee to educate students on the possibilities of public transportation and the November ballot issue.

- ✓ **National Voter Registration Day (4th Tuesday of September):** **OtterbeinVOTES** will host a party at our Kiosk with voter registration information. The Franklin County **Board of Elections** will join us for this *National Voter Registration Day* and provide a “ballot talk” to introduce students to what they will see on their ballot and will visit with the **voting machine**

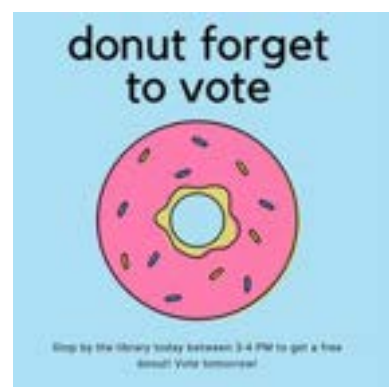
- ✓ The **League of Women Voters** will host a local **candidate debate** in October with *Raise Your Voice*

- ✓ We will celebrate **National Voter Education Week** (October 7-11) with consistent tabling at our Library. This week will include a trip to the **Westerville City Council Meeting** to develop a deeper understanding of local politics.

- ✓ We will host **Debate Watch Parties** in Riley Auditorium to raise awareness about candidates and offer opportunities for civic dialog. The first debate of the fall semester that is currently scheduled is September 10th on ABC.

- ✓ **Women’s and Gender Studies Program**, and URGE will host Women’s Reproductive Health tables at the Library to raise awareness about local elections that directly affect issues facing women.

- ✓ *Raise Your Voice* will host:





- “Coffee Talks” in the library for civil discourse about local and national issues directly affecting students
- ✓ Student **TOWN HALLS** will engage students in voter engagement activities (partnership with Otterbein Undergraduate Student Government)
- ✓ We will engage students in **Vote Early Day** (October 29) with van rides to the Franklin County Board of Elections and stamped envelopes for absentee ballots.
- ✓ On election day, we will host an **Election Day Fest** outside of our Campus Center with van transportation to the polls, bipartisan information about candidates, OtterbeinVotes buttons, and election-themed carnival games.
- ✓ Election night we will plan a series of **Election Results Watch Parties** to gather students in our theater and other smaller intimate spaces for students to review timely centric reports of results.
- ✓ On the day after the Election we will create spaces for student dialogue and support.

2) CIVIC LANDSCAPES FOR ENGAGEMENT

- ✓ Community partners will join the campus in a **Democratic Engagement Alliance** to build new opportunities for student civic engagement in the community. New partners include WeRISE and The Westerville Queer Collective.
- ✓ CSE will work with INST to match community needs to INST3000-level “public good” courses
- ✓ CSE will host a series of **workshops for faculty** members to learn about civic education strategies, including a new workshop on how to respond to “misinformation” about the candidates, elections, or issues.
- ✓ The University will establish an **Otterbein Pluralism Collaborative** to engage students in dialogue and service to break down barriers to constructive conversation and action. We just received a grant from Interfaith America to support this initiative and engage students in the leadership of the project.



TIMELINE: We are currently working on our timeline with partners, but will not have it confirmed until all students, faculty, and other stakeholders return to campus in August. While members of the coalition have had several small group meetings and 1:1's with the chair, the full coalition will meet the first week of the semester.

The current schedule is based on the program strategies listed above, national signature events, and announcements by local candidates for debates and candidate nights.

VII. NSLVE as a RESOURCE

NSLVE Data has Revealed:

| MEASURE | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 | 2020 | 2022 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|------------|-----------|
| Total Eligible Voters | -- | 2817 | 2336 | 2664 | NA |
| Overall Voting Rate | 16.9% | 61.7% | 44.9% | 74% | NA |
| Registration Rate | 68.7% | 82.8% | 79.8% | 86.0% | NA |
| Voting Rate of Registered Students | 24.5% | 74.5% | 56.9% | 86.1% | NA |
| % of Registered Undergraduates who Voted | -- | 57% | 40.9% | 73% | NA |
| % of Registered Graduate Students who Voted | -- | 80% | 61.1% | 80% | NA |

Differentiated Results: There were no significant differences in the voting behavior of males and females; however, we did note that students of color (especially Asian, Hispanic, and Black) voted at lower rates than their White peers.

We will work with the Office of Social Justice & Activism to navigate barriers to voting access for these students.

VIII. REPORTING



We will convene the **OtterbeinVOTES** team to develop a communications plan to share the data used to inform the plan, the action plan itself, and the outcomes of the civic work, to include:

- ✓ A social media campaign to illuminate our work on both Facebook (for staff, faculty, and alumni, and on Instagram for students and new alumni.
- ✓ A report to the Otterbein Board of Trustees
- ✓ Infographics posted to our website and Ozone pages
- ✓ Presentations to local organizations and community partners
- ✓ Press releases to local, regional, and national news outlets
- ✓ A voter engagement wrap-up factsheet to disseminate to all stakeholders and host on websites.



IX. EVALUATION

The CSE and the **OtterbeinVOTES** team will work collaboratively to evaluate progress toward goals, in partnership with our Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The purpose of the evaluation is to help the institution understand student engagement in the electoral process and the impact of civic learning initiatives.

Both formative and summative evaluations will be implemented over the course of the academic year for the purpose of improving our plan and engaging our students. We will use both our tested standardized instruments that measure civic awareness, civic competencies, and social responsibility as well as new instruments designed specifically for this project.

We will also implement the following:



- Participate in the NSLVE to determine 2024 voter engagement
- Track participation and impact of voter engagement efforts
- Assess learning outcomes from INST and service-learning courses
- Collaborate with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to triangulate data from other national standardized instruments