Illinois State University
Voter Friendly Campus/All-In For Democracy
Election 2020 Final Report

Overview

Illinois State University (ISU) is thrilled to participate in the All-In Challenge and the Voter Friendly Campus initiative. The main goals of our campus plan were to build on current civic engagement efforts by establishing a strong diverse coalition, developing faculty, staff, and students as advocates, increasing voter registration and turnout from the 2016 presidential election, and our long-term goal of moving political engagement beyond major elections.

We were able to meet our short-term goals as we have established a diverse and active Voter Engagement Coalition with representatives from the student body; faculty; staff from student affairs, university housing, academic affairs, and academic departments, athletics; and individuals from the community, including the McLean County Clerk's Office. We will continue to work with the Voter Engagement Coalition to establish a long-term structure that includes terms of service and a succession plan.

Civic Engagement Ambassadors were utilized as faculty advocates to share resources with their departments and students. Resources were developed for faculty to incorporate political engagement into curriculum during the semester housed on our [Redbird Voter Guide](#). Election Fellows and students from the Student Government Association (SGA) led the way as our student advocates by reaching out to Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) to share information on the importance of voting, how to register, and where to vote.

Until we receive the NSLVE data, we will not know if we have achieved increases in voter registration and turnout. However, based on some preliminary data from the McLean County Clerk's Office, the report showed over 71% voter turnout in precincts near campus. If this is close to an indication of voter turnout for students, this would be an increase from 2016 which was 65%.

Our long-term goals are a work in progress for 2021. They include:

- To increase student registration, education, and participation in the spring 2021 municipal elections and subsequent municipal elections.
- Advocate for learning outcomes associated with democratic engagement for core courses in the general education curriculum as the general education update is occurring.

COVID-19 was a major challenge this year as over 80% of courses were online. Almost all in-person events had to change to virtual events. We relied heavily on digital messaging that included e-mails and social media. Even with that barrier, we are excited about the success of our efforts.

Voter Engagement Coalition

Our coalition was made of representatives from the following:

- Athletics
- Campus Recreation
- Center for Civic Engagement
- Dean of Students Office
- Department of Chemistry
- Department of Health Sciences
- Election Fellows
- Health Promotion and Wellness
- McLean County Clerk's Office
- Milner Library
- Office of Admissions
- School of Communication
- School of Kinesiology and Recreation
- Student Government Association
- University College
- University Housing Services

Representatives from academic departments liaised with other academic departments to encourage department-level conversations and strategies. Other units such as Athletics and Campus Recreation liaised with their respective student populations. We used a "divide and conquer" philosophy so that all committee members would communicate with their areas of influence to broadly disseminate the information across campus. The addition of a representative from the County Clerk's office was a great addition, and one we intend to maintain. This person provided us with county level election updates at every meeting. We had a relationship that allowed us to directly ask questions as were

preparing information for our Redbird Voter Guide and student communications; we always wanted to make sure we had deadlines and procedures correct.

Students were also an integral part of the coalition. A representative from Student Government Association (SGA) was on the coalition throughout the planning process. As the plan was being finalized in the spring, the civic engagement committee chair from SGA liaised with the students on the committee to get student feedback. Two members of SGA also served on the coalition in the fall. SGA hosted their own efforts, but always communicated and coordinated with the coalition. There were also two student Election Fellows and a graduate assistant who attended the full coalition meetings when they could. These individuals also met separately every week, August through November, to focus specifically on student outreach efforts.

Our team functioned very well. The full Voter Engagement Coalition met every three weeks from July until November. Individual communication among members took place between meetings as coalition members worked on their specific tasks. The executive team met bi-weekly beginning in September and then weekly in the few weeks before the election. The executive team primarily managed communications with the County Clerk's office and worked on emerging issues related to polling places.

The coalition had broad reach across campus. A task list was developed based upon the original plan; coalition members took on various roles to accomplish those tasks. Nearly everything that was originally planned for was able to be accomplished. Most things not accomplished were the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Together the coalition was effective and a key to the success of our democratic engagement work.

Additional partners were included on specific projects:
- Student leaders of our campus Diversity Advocacy Organizations (DAOs) and three local elected officials of color provided a virtual panel presentation and discussion for students called *Your Voice Matters.*
- Heartland Community College and Illinois Wesleyan University partnered with us for a student voter registration challenge that was kicked off with a press conference on National Voter Registration Day.
- The Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) collaborated with us to host two sessions of a workshop for faculty, *Responding to Challenging Moments and Fostering Meaningful Dialogue.*
- The School of Communication Professional Development Team collaborated with us to plan the virtual debate watch party for the third presidential debate and they ran a photobooth for us on election day.

- Civic Engagement Ambassadors, comprised of faculty and staff in most departments throughout ISU, shared information with their colleagues on voter engagement.
- WGLT invited us, along with several local organizations, to host a debate between the candidates running for the 13th Congressional District.
- Student Affairs and the Multicultural Center collaborated with us to host two sessions of *#VotingIsYourVoice,* a virtual event with the group Building Strong Millenials.

The past year was foundation building in our efforts, and this foundation will make it much easier as we prepare for the mid-term elections. Resources for faculty like the Voter Restoration Initiative and voter toolkit have now been developed. In future years, those items will only need to be updated or expanded upon. Moving forward, the assistant director in the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) will lead the Voter Engagement Coalition. Regardless of who is in that position, ISU has institutionalized its commitment to electoral engagement. We are exploring the development of a Faculty Fellows Program to work with various aspects of civic engagement. Every other year (to coincide with elections), we would have a Faculty Fellow for Electoral Engagement specifically to engage faculty in the process and encourage election content within the curriculum.

CCE has a strong relationship with SGA and this was strengthened through the partnership with the Voter Engagement Coalition and the voter engagement efforts. We foresee that continuing. Based on feedback from the two Election Fellows, we will also expand student leadership opportunities by hosting several interns during key election semesters. We will also be adding a representative to the coalition from Sorority and Fraternity Life so that we can more effectively engage with that student population, which makes up almost 10% of undergraduate students.

Analysis of Work

Voter registration
We utilize TurboVote for our voter registration efforts. Most of our efforts were digital this year, but we did table during the extended Welcome Week for two hours on each of the ten days. We also tabled on five other occasions on the quad or in the student center. Two of those occasions were at the invitation of other organizations. Table 1 below summarizes data on TurboVote registrations, including specific departments or organizations who requested a customized link for their own registration efforts.

Table 1. - TurboVote Registration

Referral Link	TurboVote Registration Process	Other/Already Registered	Grand Total
General - Voter Guide	555	146	701
Academic Advisor	140	22	162
Athletics	82	29	111
Public Health Leadership	13	21	34
CampusLabs-Engage	14	12	26
Chat/Admissions	17	7	24
School of Communication	8	9	17
SGA	9	6	15
Health Sciences	9	2	11
Assoc. Of Women in Communication Student Chapter		1	1
Grand Total	847	255	1102

A few examples of how we utilized digital messaging to encourage registration included:
- Pop-up message in Redbird Life, a student organization management platform.
- Announcement in My.IllinoisState student portal.
- Campus-wide e-mails were sent from President Dietz, the Provost, and the Student Body President on the importance of registration and voting.
- Social media was utilized on various ISU platforms to send out reminders to students to register.
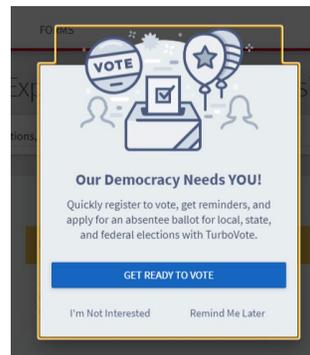
Voter Education

Our primary resource for providing education information was the [Redbird Voter Guide](). We had a page dedicated to all the candidates on the ballot. Not only did we have information and links about the offices and candidates for federal and state races, we also had information about a state referendum and county races. We provided information to help students understand what the positions do and who was running. We did this without any endorsement of candidates. We also provided links to interviews from the local public radio station for all local races and a local discussion with the county Republican and Democratic party chairs on the referendum.

In addition, we provided a link to Ballot Ready. When presenting to students, we would reference our candidate page on the website and often do a demo of Ballot Ready so students could learn how to investigate the candidates before voting.

A main resource for faculty, instructors, and staff on the Redbird Voter Guide was the [Voter Toolkit](). On that page individuals could request a presentation by one of our Election Fellows or utilize a ready-made presentation in their classroom or group meeting. In total, fifteen presentations were provided to various courses and groups throughout the fall semester, reaching 225 students. These presentations were in addition to the content presented to all first-year seminar students (approximately 400 students) about voting and the election as part of a larger presentation about civic engagement. The Redbird Voter Guide also provided many resources instructors and staff could utilize while planning classroom activities/assignments or co-curricular activities related to the election.

Social media was utilized as an educational tool with main platforms through the Center for Civic Engagement: [Facebook](), [Instagram](), and [Twitter](). Coalition members were also in regular contact with social media managers from across campus, including those

running the flagship accounts, to share relevant information and encourage posts on other accounts.

Coalition partners also had active campaigns including:
- SGA: a countdown to the election on their Instagram with videos from SGA members on the importance of voting.
- Athletics Department: voting information and videos featuring student athletes on their Instagram page leading into National Voter Registration Day.

The Voter Engagement Coalition also developed a video with students sharing what is important to them as way to encourage other students to register and vote; Election Fellows recruited students to be featured in the video. Another video was also developed to provide basic information on ways to vote.

Voter turnout

Historically, the campus polling place has been a universal polling place making it very convenient for students to vote. Students are primarily in three precincts but do also spread across an additional three precincts. Students have not paid attention to their precincts and polling places in the past because they could always vote at the campus polling place. This was not the case this year. A county-wide universal polling place was mandated by a new state executive order in response to COVID-19. It was unclear if other universal polling places were allowed in the county. Nonetheless, the fact that the campus polling place would not be universal was not communicated to the Voter Engagement Coalition. We were made aware of this issue by outside sources approximately six weeks before the election.

We knew this would be a major issue for students voting on election day. They would not know their precinct or realize that they needed to look up their polling place, given that they typically just come to the universal polling place on campus to vote. We developed a Google Map with all of the residence halls, fraternity and sorority houses and larger apartment complexes overlaid with voting precincts and polling place information. We disseminated this electronically via our website and social media. We worked with area landlords to share this with their tenants, one of the rare glimpses in private landlords more than willing to work with the university. We also put out yard signs on November 2 by residence halls and major apartment complexes to tell students where their polling place was.

Through communication efforts, we gave particular attention to voting early as a means to de-densify the polls and to mitigate any confusion about polling places on election day. Early voting occurred for five days on campus during the last week of October. There were two polling places, and they were universal, meaning anyone in the county could use them. Approximately 1,700 people voted early on campus.

We also had a specific communication effort within the residence halls that housed approximately 3,500 students this semester. Posters were displayed on every floor and small fliers were taped to every door. The content of the materials included information on early voting and election day polling places.

We asked the County Clerk's office if we could assist at the on-campus polling place in the student center on election day. They initially rejected this suggestion, but then later accepted it. Ultimately, we had 24 faculty, staff, and students volunteering throughout the day in two different locations at the student center polling place. These "greeters" confirmed students were at the correct polling place or gave them the information about their polling place and also made sure students had the necessary documentation for same day registration. We estimate 150 students had to be redirected to another polling place. Having these greeters minimized the burden on election judges and ensured those more experienced with college students could fully help students.

Yard signs posted at various off campus housing locations

If you live at **1010 The Lofts**, you vote at:

**First Assembly of God
800 E Vernon
Normal, IL 61761**

Don't live here? Find other polling locations near ISU ➜

★ ★ ★

YOU CAN REGISTER SAME-DAY AND VOTE ON ELECTION DAY - NOVEMBER 3

ILLINOISSTATE.EDU/VOTE

The Provost also made election day a holiday so there was no class. That made access to voting easier, particularly for students who had to wait in lines upwards of 30 minutes or came to the student center and then needed to travel to another polling place.

Finally, upon realizing that students in one particular residence hall would be required to travel over a mile away off-campus to access their polling place on election day, we arranged for a university van to be available to safely transport those students as necessary.

Ultimately, we will not know the results of our efforts until we get our NSLVE report. However, based on initial data from the McLean County Clerk's office on polling locations surrounding campus, they had over 71% voter turnout. We know this is not full representation of all students as many students were not on campus due to most courses being on-line this semester. However, we feel it is a good indication of voter turnout. The following table (Table 2) shows data from the McLean County Clerk's office

from the major polling locations on and around campus. Precincts 8 and 30 are comprised mainly of ISU students as these are on-campus polling locations.

Table 2. - Illinois State University Polling Locations & Voting Numbers

Year	Precinct	Registered	Voted	Percent	Early	VBM	At Site	Universal Site
2020	8	997	647	64.89%	346	41	259	1
2018	8	1449	1009	69.63%	221		788	(PP was the US)
2016	8	2091	1653	79.05%				
2020	30	273	189	69.23%	85	11	91	2
2018	30	382	228	59.69%	48		180	(PP was US site)
2016	30	581	415	71.43%				
2020	14	1428	1152	80.67%	469	200	460	23
2018	14	1379	943	68.38%	251		405	287
2016	14	1503	1245	82.83%				
2020	9	1061	772	72.76%	326	136	257	53
2018	9	1053	562	53.37%	139		235	188
2016	9	1108	755	68.14%				
2020	2	1614	1219	75.53%	541	324	341	13
2018	2	1542	973	63.10%	314		425	234
2016	2	1595	1293	81.07%				
2020	29	1125	722	64.18%	297	135	278	12
2018	29	1119	619	55.32%	158		294	167
2016	29	1311	859	65.52%				

(VBM-Vote By Mail; 2018 Early includes VBM numbers too)

Post-Election
In addition to the four main pillars of our original engagement plan (Students and Faculty/Staff as Advocates, Voter Registration, Voter Education, and Voter Turn-out), we added a post-election focus with resources and events to help faculty, staff, and students effectively process the election experience, regardless of the outcome. Faculty, staff, and graduate students were trained to lead post-election reflection circles. We partnered with ISU's Health Promotion and Wellness department to offer several virtual sessions on managing stress through mindfulness. A specific post-election resource page was also added to our Redbird Voter Guide, promoting these events and others from across campus.

Successes

While we are extremely proud of everything we did. Our top three successes are:

- **Voter education** through the Redbird Voter Guide was a key success this year as we created a "one stop shop" for voter education. Students, faculty, and staff could find information on registering to vote, polling places, early voting, candidate information, current election events, and how to be involved even if you're not eligible to vote.
- **Partnerships and collaborations** were essential to our success this year as we utilized both on- and off-campus partnerships. A few highlights included: our establishment of a focused Voter Engagement Coalition, our partnership with McLean County Clerk's office for on-site campus polling locations for early and day-of voting, and our collaboration among other local colleges and universities for the voter registration challenge.
- **Our focus on equity, inclusion, and access** was at the forefront with events and an education campaign that included the Voter Restoration Initiative and Every Voice Counts page in our Redbird Voter Guide; the Your Voice Matters event with local elected officials of color and student leaders of our Diversity Advocacy Organizations; two #VotingIsYourVoice events with Student Affairs and the Multicultural Center; and volunteers stationed at on-campus polling locations to direct students to their correct polling locations (an important function to make sure students were able to vote this year).

ISU institutionalized civic engagement with the creation of the Center for Civic Engagement four years ago. Having staff members dedicated to all aspects of civic engagement has created more presence, particularly within the academic spaces. We were able to capitalize on that momentum which was an important part of achieving our goals.

Barriers

COVID-19 was a significant barrier as we had to shift most planned in-person events to virtual. With the shift to virtual events and relying mainly on digital messages, it was hard to know our true reach to students. Events that were planned virtually were not as well attended and we suspect that had to do with the widespread virtual or zoom fatigue experienced by many students. We were able to do some in-person voter registration work, but even that was limited due to specific campus mitigation measures.

We relied heavily on our partners to help spread the messages about the Redbird Voter Guide, digital messaging, and virtual events. Presumably, by the time we get to the spring 2022 mid-term election primaries, the barrier that COVID-19 caused will be minimal.

We also realized that additional staffing support was necessary related to marketing and communication. During future election years, we plan to add undergraduate interns reporting to the CCE Assistant Director for Marketing and Communication to specifically work on election efforts.

Beyond 2020

Following November 3, we debriefed the election with the Voter Engagement Coalition, its executive team, and our Election Fellows. Feedback was compiled from all of the debriefing sessions. While we recognize that our ongoing efforts will continue to evolve, we also determined two larger modifications that are essential moving forward:

1. We will institute some minor restructuring of the Voter Engagement Coalition beginning in Fall 2021 in preparation for the mid-terms. We plan to add more student election interns to increase direct student engagement through tabling, classroom presentations, and RSO presentations. We will add additional undergraduate support for marketing duties.
2. The assistant director in the Center for Civic Engagement will serve as the chair of the coalition. There will not be a co-chair, but there will be a compensated Faculty Fellow to lead all faculty election engagement efforts.

The fall election efforts provided a launching point to encourage and support political engagement in the classroom. A survey was launched in December 2020 and sent to all faculty asking them to share if and how they utilized the Redbird Voter Guide as well as if they incorporated election conversations into any courses. We will utilize this information to craft a plan to support faculty for greater classroom content related to political engagement. We are also exploring a faculty fellows' program that would include a faculty member dedicated to advocacy and policy work. In addition, we plan to broaden the Voter Engagement Coalition by bringing in more Greek Life representation to reach more students.

Finally, our community has municipal elections April 6. We are already planning activities to encourage students to vote in local elections and providing information about the races and the importance of student voice in local matters.

NSLVE Data

We look forward to celebrating our success with the entire campus. Once we receive our NSLVE report, we will do a campus News story to feature that data and provide commentary on the campus-wide election efforts as well as publicly celebrate the Voter Engagement Coalition. We will share the report with coalition partners, and we will dissect the department level data with the Civic Engagement Ambassadors and Civic Engagement Advisory Board. The information will also be reported to department chairs and school directors across campus. As we did this past year, we will use the data to target our approaches to democratic engagement initiatives.

Unfortunately, our campus does not permit the release of demographic characteristics, so that information is not available to us in our NSLVE report. We will engage national leaders in conversations which can, hopefully, leverage campus leadership to change their position on this matter.