

# **Obie Vote: Oberlin College's Voter Friendly Campus Plan**

## **Institutional Leadership**

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## **I. OVERVIEW**

Why your school is interested in the designation and the top three goals for democratic engagement during the fall semester.

Oberlin College strongly embraces civic participation as part of its mission and a core element of a liberal education. Through our Bonner Center for Service and Learning, students play an active role in a wide range of civic organizations. Further, the Division of Student Life is creating new programming on being a good neighbor/good member of the the town of Oberlin community as well as the college, reflecting our active embrace of both the opportunities and challenges when colleges are situated in small towns. This work has become especially important after recent conflicts sometimes characterized as "blue college red state" tensions. The reality is of course much more complicated, and democratic engagement presents a primary element of the College's current development of a plan to promote open discourse within a diverse and equitable community. Recognizing that these are challenges not just for college campuses but also the world in which we live, helping students apply their critical thinking, communication skills, and leadership skills to their sense of responsibility to others and to practical strategies for crafting a better world is an ever-more-important part of our institutional mission.

Oberlin has pursued democratic engagement in a wide range of arenas - through student

internships with elected officials, through participation in community-based organizations, through academic courses on democracy with applied learning components, and through co-curricular participation and programming about democratic engagement. As only one example, the Division of Student Life hosted a series of forums beginning the day after the 2016 presidential election that motivated students to form working groups to explore highly contentious issues from fracking and extractive industries to AIDS activism. Through a collaboration with the local ACLU, the College also hosted a series of workshop on the travel ban and DACA designed for both non-citizens and citizens that included practical organizing strategies. Students also organized a series of "deep canvassing" conversations with residents of the town of Oberlin to understand better the concerns and perspectives of residents. This example demonstrates ways that Oberlin is embracing its location as a critical site to educate students in democratic engagement - not just during national elections, but also because the work that communities in this region are doing to rebuild a sustainable economy in the wake of industrial manufacturing collapse represent some of the most important opportunities to participate in the hard work of building an economically equitable and sustainable society. For this reason, Oberlin is in the first phases of developing a stronger academic and applied learning presence in Cleveland. For our 2018 New Student Orientation, we will take all first year students for a day of engagement at a range of Cleveland institutions including political and legal organizations, sports and entertainment, arts and culture, healthcare and nonprofits, and business and finance.

For young people today who want to be on the cutting edge, some of the most powerful opportunities to be part of the solution lie not on the coasts, but in cities like Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Milwaukee. Because Oberlin also includes a conservatory of music, the role of the arts in democratic engagement is a particularly strong interest on campus, and one that we continue to explore from organizing around hurricane relief to theater with incarcerated individuals.

Our top 3 goals for democratic engagement during the fall 2018 semester are:

1. Coordination of campus efforts to maximize participation in electoral politics with the outcome of significantly improving rates of voter participation.
2. Improvement of the relationship with the local community by demonstrating deep campus engagement in local political issues, from schools to the opioid crisis.
3. Increased enthusiasm and understanding of the ways in which the electoral and political process can be a site of positive change and promote conversations across differences of opinion, countering cynicism and retreat to zones of

like-mindedness.

## **II. COALITION**

Who is on your coalition and why they are key to your democratic engagement work (a well rounded coalition will include students, faculty, administrators, and election partners).

Oberlin's coalition will include:

Student Life Offices:

- Dean of Students Office
- Residential Education Office
- Multicultural Resource Center
- New Student Orientation
- Student Organizations: OC Dems, Young Republicans, Student Senate

Administrative/Academic Affairs:

- Community & Government Relations
- Politics Department
- History Department
- Comparative American Studies Department
- Bonner Center for Service & Learning

Community Partners

- League of Women Voters
- United Citizen Power
- Coalition for Hispanic/Latino Issues and Progress
- Propel Ohio

Staff from the Dean of Students Office and Community & Government Relations, as well as a community organization already mobilizing student leaders, have started meeting to support voter engagement efforts. In the next two weeks we will be meeting with interested faculty, including members of the History Department and Politics Department.

Second-year student and Posse Scholar Brendan Aleman will be hired by the Dean of Students Office and serve as our Democracy Fellow. Brendan interned for Congressman Luis Gutierrez (IL) and will regularly check in with faculty, staff, and students who commit to participating in voter engagement activities. Brendan will engage his peers as voters and carry out registration/education activities on campus. Brendan will help share voter education resources and track the progress of our plan. Assistant Vice President Bautista has committed to overseeing Aleman. We hope to hire an additional student leader during the first week of classes.

## **III. DESCRIPTION OF YOUR WORK**

What will you be doing in the fall and how will you be doing it. Make sure to try and include all four pillars:

### **Voter Registration**

- During New Student Orientation, a representative from the League of Women Voters will be at our campus resource fair to help register first-year students
- Members of our student organization OC Dems will conduct voter registration activities once classes begin as well as an event during New Student Orientation (Saturday, Sept. 1)
- The Vice President of Student Affairs will send out an all-campus student email with voter registration information
- The College's "Student Voting" website will be updated with relevant information ● The Office of Community and Government Relations assists students with establishing proof of residency and providing documentation to vote.

### **Voter Education**

- Voter registration posters will be hung up throughout campus and circulated on the informational digital televisions around campus
- Sept. 17 Constitution Day activities around a visit by State Supreme Court Justice Pat DeWine
- Twitter and Facebook pages will be created specifically for voter engagement/education and will be monitored/utilized by our Democracy Fellow
- RAs will distribute voter location and local issues information
- Information will be given out at the Annual Connections Fair (Sept)
- Coalition will work with campus newspaper (The Oberlin Review) to publish "A Guide To Voting In Oberlin"

### **Voter Turnout**

- Student leaders will be stationed at the polling location to assist students; student leaders will give out directions and transportation information.
- The Lorain County Community Organizer from United Citizen Power will be coordinating a team of student volunteers at polling sites.
- The Student Union will host an Election Day Party

### **Students as Voter Advocates/Get Out The Vote**

- Democracy Fellow will send voter reminders via social network platforms ● RAs will post voter reminders in residence halls
- Student volunteers with United Citizen Power will be present across campus to remind students to vote and provide relevant information

#### **IV. TIMELINE**

When will you be carrying this work out on your campus including dates and resources that would be helpful to complete that work (i.e. voting information posters, student voting guides, nonpartisan ballot guides)

July to Mid-August

- AVP Bautista and Coalition members will meet with interested campus and community partners to plan events (e.g., Constitution Day)
- United Citizen Power student volunteer sign-up

Late-August

- Democracy Fellow will begin on-campus duties
- August 25: Women's Equality Day Luncheon (League of Women Voters) ●

August 27-30: Initial programming will begin during New Student Orientation

September

- September 6: Connections Fair: Student and Community Organizations
- September 17: Constitution Day Activities (Guest: Ohio Justice Pat DeWine) ●

September 27: National Voter Registration Day - VP/Dean of Students Campus

Email

November

- November 6: Election Day Party; Campus Email #2
- Student volunteers at polling site(s)

#### **V. SUCCESS**

What does success look like for your campus? How do we measure our efforts?

The VFC Oberlin Coalition group will meet after election day to assess its efforts and self evaluate. Additionally, Oberlin is a participating campus in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement. The Coalition will work with our Director of Institutional Research to review results of this survey and consider them in relationship to the results from the previous election survey as an indicator of the success of our campus plan. We will also gauge total voter registration numbers through the work of United Citizen Power and other voter registration activities.