



GW VOTES –  
2020 ACTION PLAN

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**GW VOTES TASK FORCE**

HONEY W. NASHMAN CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND  
PUBLIC SERVICE

DECEMBER 15, 2019

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This plan reflects the strategy and grounding for the GW Votes initiative at George Washington University. GW Votes is the primary University-supported voter promotion and assistance effort on campus. The plan creates a strategic framework for the GW Votes Task Force, the Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service (Nashman Center), and our partners to increase voter participation and civic engagement on campus. This plan is focused on the goal of 65% of GW students participating in the 2020 Presidential election and, within the broader framework of long term voter participation, contains detailed plans from now until the election in November 2020. We outline goals for the 2022 midterms as well.

The plan was developed by Jonah Lewis, Program Manager for Immersion Service in collaboration with the Nashman Center's Assistant Director Jovanni Mahonez, Executive Director Amy Cohen, and the campus-wide GW Votes Task Force. It builds on the plans developed by the GW Votes Task Force in past years and will be used to inform the work of the GW Votes Task Force, and GW staff, students, faculty, and community partners.

## LEADERSHIP

The GW Votes Task Force is chaired by Amy Cohen, Executive Director of the Nashman Center. The role of the task force is to solicit ideas and talent in planning and implementing voter engagement activities on campus and in the surrounding community. In addition, the Task Force is the campus-wide body that represents stakeholders and disseminates information about voting.

GW has been a part of the All In Challenge since 2016 and the GW Votes Task Force has been in place since 2017. The Task Force is continually refreshed to update the student members as well as new faculty and senior administrators. In January 2020, we will expand and update the Task Force membership and convene them to more actively engage members and bring in unrepresented stakeholders. We expect to convene the Task Force monthly through the Spring semester and more often in the Fall semester. Members will include individual students, faculty, and staff previously involved with GW Votes as well as representatives from a variety of offices and student organizations, with special emphasis on groups whose voter participation has been historically lower, including STEM and Business students. Representatives include:

- **Academic Departments and Faculty**
  - Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs
  - Academic Deans, including particularly Engineering, Arts and Sciences, Business
  - Director of Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration
  - Faculty in Political Science, Political Management, University Writing, School of Media and Public Affairs
  - Office of the Registrar
- **Office for Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement**
  - Multicultural Student Services Center

- Nashman Center
  
- **Student Affairs Units:**
  - Office for Student Engagement
  - Admissions
  - Financial Aid
  
- **Student Organizations and Student Leaders:**
  - GW Student Association
  - GW Joint Elections Commission
  - College Democrats
  - College Republicans
  - Residence Hall Association

**Multicultural Student Organizations**

- Black Law Students Association
- Organization for Latino-American Students (OLAS)
- League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
- GW South Asian Society
- Asian American Student Association

**STEM students**

- Association for Women in Mathematics
- National Society of Black Engineers
- GW Math and Stat Association

**Business students**

- Undergraduate Business Association
- Multicultural Business Student Association
- Black Business League
- GW Women in Business

The Task Force consults with and uses the resources of a variety of external organizations to support our efforts, including TurboVote and Young Invincibles.

As a national university with many online students, students frequently vote at their permanent addresses, which generally means that undergraduates who live on-campus vote early, absentee, and/or by mail in jurisdictions other than the District of Columbia. Some undergraduate students and most of our graduate students live off campus nearby in DC, Maryland, or Virginia and vote locally, mostly same day.

We will explore partnerships with DC and the nearby Virginia Boards of Elections. However, the number of jurisdictions in our region, the lack of congressional representation in the District of

Columbia, and the national character of our student body leads us to focus our efforts more broadly.

## COMMITMENT

GW is highly committed to democratic participation, voting, and civic engagement. Because of our location and student interests, GW is frequently listed as one of the most politically engaged campuses in the country by the Princeton Review. GW's location in our nation's capital draws a large share of students interested in politics and policy.

GW Votes is an initiative of the Nashman Center, a university-wide hub for community and civic engagement whose mission includes "promot[ing] equity and active citizenship in a diverse democracy." The Nashman Center is supported by the university and is an integral part of campus life. The office is located prominently and is well known. The Nashman Center is part of the Office for Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement, reporting to the provost.

GW emphasizes democratic and civic learning through its curricula, particularly in its largest school—the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences. Undergraduates in the college are required to take one "Local or Civic Engagement" course which is defined as a course that "develops the values, ethics, disciplines, and commitment to pursue responsible public action." While this requirement is not found in other schools at the university, many schools do emphasize community engagement, particularly the professional schools, Milken Institute School of Public Health, the School of Nursing, the School of Law, and the School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

Other parts of the university are extremely engaged and committed to civic education and engagement. For example, the Office of Student Affairs' GWxDC program, a co-curricular program for first-year students, has engaged students in numerous civic events this year, including a conversation with Eric Holder and Ari Berman, and tours of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Likewise, the Division of External Relations has promoted civic conversations with many speakers, including Hillary Clinton, Nikki Haley, and other officials who have discussed elections, gerrymandering, and more. A panel in March, sponsored by the GW Graduate School of Political Management in collaboration with the School of Media and Public Affairs and the AT&T Center for Indigenous Politics and Policy, was titled "More Than a Vote" and featured U.S. Reps. Will Hurd (R-Texas) and Deb Haaland (D-NM). Events like this happen regularly on campus and are popular with students, who sometimes compete to attend.

Our Mail Services team has been uniquely supportive in ensuring that students directly receive forms and ballots without delay. The commitment to voting can be found across the academic, student support, and operations divisions across the university.

## LANDSCAPE

GW is a comprehensive research institution offering a breadth of academic and professional programs. GW enrolls over 15,000 graduate and professional students and 11,000 undergraduates annually. These students are spread out over three campuses and two satellite academic centers in DC and Virginia, as well as online.

In reviewing and analyzing GW's civic engagement and voting, we have relied on the information in the NSLVE and have included some findings from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL).

### **NSLVE Report 2016**

- Overall GW voting rate 2016: 57.9%
  - 7.5 percentage points **higher** than the national average
  - 6.2 percentage points **higher** than the other private research institutions
  - 3.3 percentage points **higher** than in 2012
- Registration rate: 79.0%
  - 6.4 percentage points **lower** than 2012
- Voting rate among those registered: 73.3%
  - 9.3 percentage points **higher** than 2012
- Voting methods:
  - Absentee: 29.7%
  - Early Vote: 10.3%
  - Mail: 9.6%
  - In-Person, Election Day: 34.5%
- Educational Level:
  - Graduate: 49.8%
  - Undergraduate: 48.7%
- Fields of Study
  - Highest proportion voting:
    - Area, Ethnic, Cultural, Gender, and Group Studies: 60.3%
    - Architecture: 62.0%
    - Communication and Journalism: 62.6%
    - Education: 65.4%
  - Lowest proportion voting:
    - Mathematics and Statistics: 11.0%
    - Computer and Information Sciences: 28.0%
    - Physical Sciences: 36.4%
    - Business, Management, & Marketing: 41.4%

### **NSLVE Report 2018**

There were historic increases in the youth vote in the 2018 election across the country, including at GW. We hope to be able to grow this momentum in the presidential election and sustain it for the midterm elections as well.

- Overall GW voting rate 2018: 46.8%
  - 7.7 percentage points **higher** than the national average
  - 4.3 percentage points **higher** than the other private research institutions
  - 24.8 percentage points **higher** than in 2014
- Registration rate: 78.9%
  - 7.9 percentage points **higher** than 2014
- Voting rate among those registered: 59.3%
  - 28.4 percentage points **higher** than 2014
- Voting methods:
  - Absentee: 29.3%
    - 13.5 percentage points **higher** than 2014
  - Early Vote: 7.4%
    - 2.0 percentage points **higher** than 2014
  - Mail: 13.4%
    - 6.0 percentage points **lower** than 2014
  - In-Person, Election Day: 37.0%
    - 21.6 percentage points **lower** than 2014
- Educational Level:
  - Graduate: 41.5%
  - Undergraduate: 37.5%
- Fields of Study:
  - Highest:
    - Area, Ethnic, Cultural, Gender, and Group Studies: 52.5%
    - Communication and Journalism: 54.0%
    - Education: 55.6%
    - Architecture: 60.4%
  - Lowest:
    - Business, Management, & Marketing: 30.5%
    - Computer and Information Sciences: 28.7%
    - Physical Sciences: 24.7%
    - Mathematics and Statistics: 9.7%

While the NSLVE reports shows a clear increase in political engagement over time, all groups were not a part of this trend. GW STEM and Business students vote at significantly lower rates in both presidential and midterm election years. In addition, the older the student, the more likely they are to vote, so there is opportunity to expand voting among our undergraduate students in particular.

### Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL)

- The MSL is an international research program focused on understanding the influences of higher education in shaping socially responsible leadership capacity and other leadership related outcomes (e.g., efficacy, cognitive skills, resiliency).
- GW implemented the survey in 2018, just over 1,000 undergraduate students completed the survey online.
- The MSL measures certain self-reported indices of leadership outcomes and how students rate these skills over time. The results for citizenship are uniquely relevant to our efforts:
  - **In relation to other private research institutions:** GW students rated their citizenship statistically significantly higher than their peers. GW students' first year **beginning** college ratings were higher than peer schools' students' **end** of college ratings. GW students are active citizens who feel responsible for their communities.
  - **Over time:** GW students indicate **no change** in their citizenship from their beginning of college to the end. GW students are active citizens when they start GW but they do not grow more while here. **There is an opportunity to continue to engage students in citizenship and build upon their already impressive attitudes and skills upon entering GW**
- **Opportunities**
  - GW's STEM and business students vote at significantly lower rates than their peers. With GW's goal to increase STEM enrollment from 19% to 30% of the undergraduate population, increasing the STEM student voting rate is a pressing need. We have increased Task Force membership in STEM and will target outreach in those schools and programs.
  - While GW's 15,000 graduate students do vote at a higher rate than undergraduate students, we believe there is still room for growth. There remains an opportunity to innovate our programming to reach more graduate and professional students, particularly through a greater focus on getting out the vote for same day voting in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. We will work closely with the Virginia campuses in Loudon county, Arlington, and Alexandria, as well as the DC-based Graduate Student Services office. We will incorporate voting into the university-wide and individual school-level orientation programming for graduate students.
- **Resources**
  - GW Votes is housed in the Nashman Center, a part of the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement. The office is well supported within the university. As part of this office, we have a university-wide reach and strong connections with the Multicultural Student Services Center. The GW Votes Task Force also ensures a broad reach for GW Votes.

- The Division of Student Affairs is highly supportive of our work. Staff in student life, residential life, housing, and other office help to plan and support GW Votes initiatives. The student engagement team has highlighted our events to student organizations and have made TurboVote a promoted feature on the online GW Engage tool all student organizations must use. Residence life staff have provided GW Votes access to dorms for tabling and advertising and have actively supported these efforts during move-in and beyond.
- Faculty and administrators support the GW Votes Task Force, posting information online and in campus academic offices, inviting Task Force members to speak in their classes, and promoting voting in campus publications.
- GW's undergraduate population is highly residential, and the two main campuses are compact. Accordingly, GW's student population is reachable via traditional tabling and in-person outreach events, as well as through social media.
- GW Mail Services has helped to ensure that students are able to receive blank absentee ballots and mail ballots in a timely and efficient manner.

## GOALS

### **Short-term:**

- Increase the voting rate in the presidential election from 57.9% in 2016 to 65.0% in 2020.
- Maintain the momentum in the midterm election voting rate by increasing from 46.8% in 2018 to 50% in 2022.
- Increase the registration rate of GW students from 79% in 2016 to 85% by 2020, in line with our registration rate in 2012.
- At least 3,000 individuals will use TurboVote to check their registration status, request registration assistance, or request absentee ballot assistance in the 2020 election cycle.

### **Long-term:**

- By **Fall 2022**, each incoming first-year undergraduate student will be exposed to voter information **five unique times** during their first month on campus: move in; New Student Orientation; Convocation and Welcome Day of Service; University Writing course; and National Voter Registration Day programming.
- GW wants students to not only understand the logistical processes of democracy but also the importance of democratic participation at the personal and societal levels. Therefore, we have established the following learning outcomes for all GW students.
  1. GW students will learn how to register to vote.
  2. GW students will learn about the resources available to them to inform their voting decisions.
  3. GW students will learn how to find out when and where to vote.

4. GW students will have an opportunity to explore the importance of voting in their own lives.
5. GW students will have an opportunity to explore the importance of being civically and democratically engaged.

## STRATEGY

Our strategy for this initiative is to register as many students as possible, make voting a normalized behavior on campus, and make voting as easy as possible in the student's preferred method. Below is an outline of the activities the GW Votes Task Force and the Nashman Center will implement as part of this strategy. This is a preliminary plan; we expect the continuing involvement of Task Force members will bring new ideas and activities. The Task Force will provide expertise to reach across the campus community, supported by Nashman Center staff and resources. One of the most important aspects of this strategy is regular Task Force meetings throughout the 2020 year to continue to expand on strategy.

We will focus on multiple avenues to **Get the Word Out**, reminding students to register and to vote through social media, campus-wide emails, tabling, word of mouth, presentations in class and at student organization meetings. We will ask faculty, administrators and students to be voting ambassadors. Students will be more likely to vote if they are asked by people they know and if we make it easier for them to do so.

We will **target specific groups of students**. Among GW students, the groups with the lowest proportion of voter participation are STEM and Business students. We will focus our efforts in these departments, recruiting additional student and faculty representatives to the GW Task Force in these areas, and focusing efforts in these schools and organizations.

We will **register voters and convert registrants into participants**. In addition to the use of TurboVote, which allows students to access voter forms and information for all states, we will provide the absentee forms for the states where most GW students are from. Ten states plus the District of Columbia account for **75%** of the undergraduate population:

- New York: 1,236
- Virginia: 1,083
- New Jersey: 1,078
- California: 880
- Massachusetts: 723
- Pennsylvania: 625
- Maryland: 621
- Florida: 505
- Washington, D.C.: 400
- Connecticut: 373
- Texas: 335

## 2020 Workplan

### Spring 2020

#### January

- Increase capacity by hiring GW Votes Graduate Assistant
- Get the Word Out at MLK, Jr. Day of Service
  - During check-in for MLK Day of Service, all 800 attendees are encouraged to grab coffee and register to vote before the opening ceremony.
  - One MLK Day service project will train at least 50 students as “GW Votes Ambassadors.” Students will be trained on:
    - general voter registration process and voting process in the United States
    - how to use and assist others in using TurboVote
    - how to register and assist others in using the national voter registration form
    - how to register and assist others in DC voter registration
- Promote GW Votes at all MLK Week events, through end of January.
- Meet with GW Votes Task Force. Introduce GW Votes to new members to the Task Force; brainstorm, develop new programming
- Ensure election-related mail is delivered efficiently to students with GW Mail Services
- Provide stamps, access to TurboVote, and some ballots at offices across campus, including Office of Student Affairs, Academic Advising Offices, Career Centers, and Deans offices
- Promote TurboVote link
- Engage GW Votes Ambassadors at offices and events to provide voter information and facilitate registration

#### February and March

- Get the Word Out through mass email, social media, newsletters to all students, faculty, and staff including information on:
  - How to register to vote or request an absentee ballot using TurboVote
  - Locations and hours of locations to receive stamps and mail registration and ballot forms
- Register students through tabling. Use TurboVote, the national voter registration paper form, and absentee ballot request forms for the 10 states with the most students at GW. Target traditional undergraduate students in the most trafficked buildings on campus
- Table at Black History month celebrations and civic engagement events, as available
- Provide stamps and envelopes at multiple campus locations including:
  - Nashman Center
  - Center for Student Engagement
  - Center for Career Services

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- Academic Advising offices
- Residence Halls
- Dean's offices
- Athletics

April

- Ongoing as February and March
- GW Votes Ambassadors attend academic advising hours to tie voter registration with class registration. Include TurboVote link on class registration websites.
- Host a Census Day tabling event to promote the Census and assist students in registering to vote.
- GW Votes participates in the-mandatory pre-departure orientation for Fall study abroad students. Assist students in registering to vote and provide information on how to vote while abroad.
- GW Votes at Spring Fling
- Present a NEW Award at annual Excellence in Student Life Awards for leadership in GW Votes
- May
  - GW Votes will include information for students at move-out on how to:
    - Forward mail
    - Register to vote
    - Request an absentee ballot

Summer 2020

- Design and produce collateral to provide to students throughout the fall including:
  - How-to register and vote absentee sheets for the 10 states sending most students to GW
  - TurboVote one-pagers
  - T-shirts, buttons, posters, stickers, mail boxes, etc.
- Plan for fall programming
  - Event locations and support
  - All materials available and ready

Fall 2020

August

- Table at residence halls at Move-In
- New Student Orientation
  - Voter information in welcome packets
  - GW Votes stand-alone and/or included in other orientation presentations
  - All Nashman Center presentations include TurboVote
- Convocation and Welcome Day of Service
  - Senior leadership will note importance of voting during their remarks.
  - Include video on voting

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- Student leaders will be trained on voting and TurboVote and will encourage students to access TurboVote

September

- GW Votes Ambassadors will give brief 5-minute presentations about GW Votes and voting resources:
  - University Writing courses
  - Large lecture classes
  - Student organization general body meetings
  - Student organization Executive Board meetings
- Stamps and envelopes will be available across campus
- National Voter Registration Day: September 22
  - Mass email to all GW students, faculty, and staff with information on voter registration
  - GW Votes will take over GW social media and the Nashman Center social media to promote voter registration and TurboVote
  - GW Votes Ambassadors will table all day over campus to promote voting, including
    - Computers to use TurboVote
    - National voter registration forms and absentee ballot request forms
    - Information on voting in DC
    - Information on receiving and sending ballots by mail
    - Stamps and envelopes
    - Cupcakes
- Get the Word Out through mass email, social media, newsletters to all students, faculty, and staff

October

- Absentee Voter Celebration Week
- Party at the Mailbox. GW Votes will celebrate voting absentee by setting up large mailboxes to collect absentee ballots and absentee ballot request forms. Included in this event will be:
  - Free stamps and envelopes
  - Absentee forms for ten states
  - Cupcakes and coffee
  - Stickers, buttons, and other collateral
  - Photobooths
  - Balloons and decoration
- Stamps and envelopes will be available across campus
- Get the Word Out through mass email, social media, newsletters to all students, faculty, and staff

## November

- Get the Word Out through mass email, social media, newsletters to all students, faculty, and staff
- Election Day:
  - GW Votes will be stationed near the polling place for the Foggy Bottom campus to support voters
  - GW Votes will provide shuttle transportation from the Mt. Vernon campus to the nearest polling place for students
  - GW Votes will ensure flyers with voting information are available at our Virginia campuses
  - Election night watch party: As polls close, we will cohost election night watch parties with the College Democrats and Republicans in the two large, centrally located ballrooms on campus.

## REPORTING

This plan will also be a guiding document for all work done on GW Votes.

We will use this plan to guide and support the Task Force and related activities while continually adapting to opportunities that arise.

We will promote our work through GW's internal media, GW Today. Examples of coverage of our events and successes can be found [here](#) and [here](#). We will work to have this plan and the new Task Force featured in this media and for all follow-up events to receive similar reporting across the university.

## EVALUATION

The Learning Outcomes described in the Goals section will inform our evaluation. We will distribute a survey to students to assess those learning outcomes. Using a Likert scale survey students will be asked how confident they are that:

1. I know how or have learned how to find out how to register to vote.
2. I have an understanding of the resources available to inform my voting decisions.
3. I know how to find out when and where to vote.
4. I understand the importance of voting.
5. I understand the importance of being civically and democratically engaged.

The survey will be distributed at GW Votes events on campus and we will also use our online service impact system, GW Serves, and our newsletters and other social media to promote survey completion.

In addition, we will count the number of participants at events and will use TurboVote's administrative control panel to review use in real time. We will create specialized URLs for each event or program so we can track program uptake.

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Indicators of success in programming will include:

- High Likert scale ratings of learning outcomes, especially over time
- High rate of absentee voting
- Increased voter participation over 2016
- TurboVote reports showing progress towards the goal of 3,000 users before the end of the 2020 election cycle