



## Voter Friendly Campus Designation 2016-2018 KSU Institutional Plan

### **About Kennesaw State University**

Kennesaw State University is a comprehensive university recognized for its entrepreneurial spirit, global engagement and sense of community. As Georgia's third-largest university and one of the fifty largest public universities in the country, Kennesaw State offers more than 100 undergraduate and graduate degrees, including an increasing number of doctoral programs. KSU is committed to becoming a world-class academic institution positioned to broaden its academic and research missions and expand its scope on a local, national and global level.

In January 2016, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia approved the consolidation of KSU with nearby Southern Polytechnic State University. The new consolidation university serves approximately 33,000 students on two primary campuses located in Kennesaw and Marietta, within Cobb County. Cobb County has been one of the fastest growing counties within the Atlanta metropolitan area. The university has additional smaller educational sites around the metro area and one international education site in Montepulciano, Italy. In addition to degree seeking students, KSU serves over 17,000 students through continuing and professional education courses.

The university is relatively young, with the Kennesaw campus starting as a junior college in 1963, serving primarily a non-traditional population, predominantly women from the local community. On-campus housing was added to the Kennesaw campus in 2012, and NCAA Division I football began in 2015. The current NSLVE data only reflects the Kennesaw campus from before the consolidation.

### **Overview**

KSU's former president, Dr. Daniel Papp, shared a reflection and concern during a State of the University address noting how the term "academic" has become synonymous with "irrelevant" resulting in a perceived diminished value of academic pursuits and the contributions higher education makes to society. The reflection became a charge and led to the creation of Engage KSU. Through the consolidation process, an even stronger commitment emerged with the creation of the Division of Economic Development and Community Engagement. However, we continue to face the challenge of fully engaging our broad, diverse, and growing student body. This sparked our application to join NASPA's Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement lead

initiative project, and connected that work to our long-standing American Democracy Project work with AASCU. This created an exceptional opportunity for collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

KSU's interest in this designation is to recognize the good work we have already been doing, but more importantly as a vehicle to enhance the democratic engagement of our students, particularly related to voting and participation in the civic life of their communities. Our NSLVE data indicates a 75.9% registration rate for 2012 and 66.2% registration rate for 2014. The voting rates were 51.6% in 2012 and 21.2% in 2014. While these numbers exceed the national averages across all institutional types, we strive to greatly improve this outlook for 2016.

Our three top goals for democratic engagement during the Fall 2016 semester are:

1. Increase the number of students registered to vote through enhanced marketing of TurboVote and increased voter registration and education drives.
2. Increase the number of students who vote through enhanced multi-modal voter education effort.
3. Significantly expand the network of partners engaged in CLDE work, with a particular focus on peer engagement and deliberative dialogues.

### **Coalition**

Building on the American Democracy Project team that has served as primary coordinators of our annual Constitution Week activities, the Office of the Dean of Students has assembled a multi-disciplinary team of institutional partners who have all committed to support this effort and our ALL IN Challenge pursuits. The KSU coalition includes:

- Associate Vice President for Student Affairs & Dean of Students (who also serves as Deputy Registrar for Cobb County Board of Elections and Registration)
- Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
- Director of Community Engagement
- Director of Government Relations
- Student Government Association President & SGA Senators
- Chair of the Department of Political Science & Faculty representatives
- Assistant Dean of Students for Student Life
- Executive Director for the Center for Student Leadership
- Coordinator for Thrive Leadership Program, Center for Student Leadership
- Director of Student Engagement
- Dean of University College
- Director of First-Year Seminars & Assistant Professor of English
- Associate Director for Student Advocacy
- Assistant Director for Volunteerism and Service Learning
- Coordinator of Assessment and Strategic Planning
- Assistant Professor of Leadership Studies and Assistant Director of Engagement
- Outreach Coordinator, Office of the Georgia Secretary of State

We strategically engaged a wide diversity of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, along with external partners from the League of Women Voters, County Board of Elections and Registration, and Office of the Secretary of State to ensure comprehensive buy-in and multi-layered support. Internal partnerships across multiple Student Affairs and Academic Affairs units is critical for infusing our marketing efforts in the classroom, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities. We are also partnering with Alumni Affairs and Parent & Family Programs to reach broad audiences that both contribute to civic engagement in their own right but also have influence upon our students.

The primary point of contact for this initiative and the coalition is:

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### **Fall 2016 Plan**

Building upon our past traditions, much of our work will focus on Constitution Week, a theme programming experience that will kick off on Constitution Day & Citizenship Day (September 17) and conclude on National Voter Registration Day (September 27). The extended week will include a variety of speakers, debates, registration and education activities to both promote this year's presidential election but also encourage on-going democratic engagement.

#### **Voter Registration:**

KSU has partnered with TurboVote and is encouraging everyone to create a TurboVote profile, even if already registered to vote, to ease coordination of absentee ballots when needed, change to a new local address to engage local issues, and/or receive election reminders via text and/or email. We have pre-loaded in the local addresses for all on-campus residents into the system to make it easier and increase accuracy, and provided these details to the county Registrar to ensure there are no accidental rejections due to address match errors.

The Office of the Dean of Students has created a dedicated Voter Registration and Education website with the links to both TurboVote and the Georgia My Voter Page. The direct link is:

<http://studentaffairs.kennesaw.edu/deanofstudents/resources/voter-registration.php>

For students preferring to register with a hardcopy form, those forms are available in the Office of the Dean of Students as well as all hosted Voter Registration Drive sites held in multiple locations across both campuses. Since Constitution Day falls on a Saturday this year, we will kick off our theme week in on-campus housing with voter registration and education activities in

our residence halls on both campuses. On National Voter Registration Day, representatives from the Office of the Secretary of State will be on campus to promote their new voter app and distribute materials (supporting both voter registration and education).

In addition to “full service” voter registration drives scheduled during Constitution Week, we are utilizing peer leaders to serve as “Roving Registrars” with iPad to encourage students to sign up for TurboVote on the spot.

The Dean of Students sends multiple dedicated blast emails to all students and employees with reminders of upcoming registration deadline, advantages of using TurboVote, and the direct link. Past email blasts have proven very successful in sparking one-day sign-up spikes. Four email blasts are currently scheduled for Fall – one within the first week back in August, one leading into Constitution Week, one right before the deadline to register (early October), and one before election day with reminders of early voting poll locations and how to verify election day polling locations.

The Dean of Students is currently working with UITS to either embed TurboVote into the D2L learning management system or add an alert message upon log-in to promote TurboVote and Voter Registration, along with election-day information. Last year the Dean of Students and SGA President created a YouTube video to promote TurboVote and asked professors to share the video either during class or post the link in D2L. We will do the same this year, and are discussing how best to script the video for this year, and who best to deliver the message.

#### Voter Education:

Through our partnership with the New York Times Readership Program, we will host a New York Times reporter to speak during Constitution Week about the upcoming election and potential local, national, and global impact of the potential outcomes. Each year we choose a theme for Constitution Week depending on hot topics, and in the past have had discussions focusing on sustainability, food/water sourcing, climate change, human trafficking, to name a few. This year the current theme is focusing on civil rights and student advocacy.

Working with Political Science, SGA, and the Center for Student Leadership, along with other partners, we are hosting both mock debates on the candidates and issues, and hosting debate watching parties with virtual participation through iCitizen.

During Constitution Week there will be Democracy Boards placed in strategic locations to pose critical questions and encourage dialogue on current issues. The activity on these boards will then inform social media feeds to broaden the conversations and engage the larger university community through multiple social media outlets. In addition to the Constitution Week speakers, an expanded speaker and debate series will include activities in October and November to keep the momentum from September going through the election.

To address the concern of new voters feeling anxious about the mechanics of voting, we will have the actual ballot voting machine on campus during the Constitution Week registration drives, along with sample ballots available throughout October and November leading up to

election day. KSU is home of the Center for Election Systems, which was established to provide services for Georgia Election Officials and poll managers to assist with the operation of the voting system. The core functions of the Center include outreach, testing, educating, training, consultation, technical support, and ballot building.

Through SGA and other on and off campus partners, like the League of Women Voters, we will focus on non-partisan messaging, but have also invited our politically-affiliated student organizations (College Republicans, Young Democrats, Libertarian and Green party organizations) to host activities that promote education and awareness of the platforms they support.

Based on feedback received that the current Voter Registration and Education dedicated website can be difficult to find, the Dean of Students is working with the university webmaster to create a more user-friendly URL. The website content will also be enhanced as the activity details are finalized for Constitution Week and beyond.

#### Ballot Access:

Through TurboVote student who need absentee ballots will automatically receive those at no cost. We will also be promoting early voting poll locations and providing details on how to find the right polling location for election day. Through SGA we are researching the feasibility of designating one or both of our campuses as early voting sites (likely for future election years). We had previously attempted to create an election day polling site on campus but did not have sufficient critical mass of local registered voters to support it. Hopefully voter registration efforts will yield the numbers to explore that option going forward. There are two polling locations within walking distance for on-campus residents, and those students will be reminded of which polling place is affiliated with their specific residence hall.

Through our long-standing partnership with the county Board of Elections and Registration, we have hosted representatives of that office on our campuses, and will do so again during Constitution Week this year. The staff members have been very helpful in ensuring that our student registration forms are carefully reviewed and processed in a timely manner.

We are also distributing a call for volunteers to work at the polls. Having students at the polling locations helps ensure a more student-friendly experience and serves to remind other volunteers that university ID cards are a valid form of ID, and the address on a drivers license (or lack of drivers license) should not impede the ability to register and vote locally.

The week prior to election day the university will distribute a reminder to all faculty members that the USG policy allows students to receive excused absences on election day if the only time they are able to vote is during their class time. We also encourage professors to consider the nature of required academic activities held on election day.

## Get Out The Vote:

The Dean of Student currently distributes at least one blast email each semester but that will be increased to four email blasts this Fall, scheduled for August after the start of school, September prior to Constitution Week, October prior to the final registration deadline for this election, and then November before the election with early polling details and information on how to find election day polling locations.

Knowing students do not always check their emails in a timely manner, all activities will also be promoted through OwlLife (online student activities portal), and multiple social media sites.

The TurboVote YouTube promotion video will continue with add-on blasts and multi-layered social media presence. Targeted hardcopy marketing will also be incorporated into the awareness campaign.

Through TurboVote, email and text blasts will be delivered to all those who created an account with voting reminders.

Student volunteers encouraged to work the local polls will also be encouraged to help promote their volunteerism and the details about voting locations.

The university shuttle service has multiple routes to nearby housing complexes, business, and between campuses. We will determine which polling locations are along the shuttle routes and promote that to those students who vote at those polling locations.

## Timeline

The full coalition will meet at least monthly with targeted sub-teams meeting more frequently (weekly at first) to focus on specific elements of the plan. The coalition's initial planning meeting this summer was very productive and specific task assignments are already being delegated.

Fall classes begin August 15 and on-campus residents move in August 12 and 13, so initial marketing planning and save-the-dates will be ready before then. Constitution Week full promotion will begin Labor Day weekend. Assessment of previous communication plans have indicated that our students do not respond to information distributed too far in advance of an activity, but are more likely to engage in "real time."

Parent and Family Weekend is September 9-11 and a promotional blast will be done that weekend to encourage parents to encourage their students to register and vote. Homecoming is October 12-16, right after the deadline to register, so the marketing will shift to voting engagement and cease any promotion of registration activities. Halloween week is historically a significant programming week at our institution, and we will partner with the organizations hosting Halloween events to promote theme-related messaging to promote voting, with final push the first week of November (e.g., "It's Frightening What Can Happen to Your Freedom if you don't Vote"; "Don't Let Voting Frighten You"; "Halloween is Scary, Voting Isn't").

## **Measures of Success**

To ensure successful assessment of our efforts and integration with larger institutional assessment efforts, we invited the Coordinator of Assessment and Strategic Planning to join our coalition. We are seeking a 5% increase in both registration and voting rates in 2016 compared to the NSLVE results from 2012. Now that all USG schools are participating in NSLVE we hope to gain some valuable comparative data from across our USG peer group for 2016.

We also want to begin efforts immediately to instill a sense of moral obligation for democratic engagement and participation in every election, whether national, state, or local, to significantly improve the 2018 results compared to the 2014 NSLVE report. One tool for achieving this goal will be our Student Creed. Currently the creed is not promoted and lives as a static document in our Student Handbook. Given the link to civic engagement we are seeking ways to bring the code to life, engaging a crowdsourcing philosophy to allow the creed to evolve organically to reflect our evolving student body.

Another desired assessment tool is the Civic Engagement module of NSSE. Currently KSU participates in the USG schedule for NSSE administration but does not include any area-specific modules. Adding the Civic Engagement module will provide a baseline against which we can measure future student responses.

The coalition itself is also a critical measure of success. Simply bringing together such a diverse group of partners from across the institution and community has intrinsic value, and through the coalition we seek to strengthen not only this work but future collaborations in service to our students and community.

Date of this Iteration of the Plan: July 29, 2016