



***Winthrop University's Campus Vote Plan***

***Submitted to the Campus Vote Project***

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**Decision 2016 Team Leaders/ Contact Persons**

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## Introduction

Winthrop University is a regional, public, Master's level institution dedicated to improving the state of South Carolina. Promoting civic engagement is a key value of the institution shared by the Divisions of Student Life and Academic Affairs alike.

According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), in recent elections Winthrop University students cast ballots at a slightly higher rate than students at other public, Master's level institutions and the national average. In 2012, 53.4 percent of Winthrop students voted, compared to 46.9 percent nationally and 48.9 percent at other public, Master's-level institutions. In 2014, 19.9 percent of Winthrop students voted, compared to 18.8 percent nationally and 18.5 percent at public, Master's-level institutions.

Even though Winthrop students vote at higher rates than the national average, these turnout rates still leave much room for improvement. Our hope is that the coordinated efforts planned for the 2016 election season will generate interest in and enthusiasm for the general election on campus.

This report details Winthrop University's Campus Vote Project Action Plan for the 2016 General Election, collectively branded as *Decision 2016*.

## Team Members

Starting in 2013-14, Drs. Ardaiole and Kedrowski convened a campus task force that inventoried and began to consciously coordinate civic engagement initiatives at Winthrop University, using the NASPA/AASC&U report, *A Crucible Moment*, as a starting point. Members of the Task Force became the core of the Decision 2016 team. Team members, other campus leaders, and community partners are listed below. This group will expand as appropriate to incorporate other campus and community partners.

Decision 2016 Team Leaders	
Frank Ardaiole Vice President of Student Life	Karen M. Kedrowski Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
Decision 2016 Team Members	
Ellin McDonough, Career Services and Civic Engagement Patricia Riley, Student Activities Anthony Davis, Advisor to Council of Student Leaders Beth West, Chair, Council of Student Leaders	Katarina Moyon, West Forum Summersby Okey-Hamrick, West Forum Jennifer Disney, Political Science and Women's and Gender Studies Tyra Holcombe, Student
Other Campus Partners	
Winthrop NAACP College Democrats College Republicans Pi Sigma Alpha (Political Science Honor Society)	Bethany Marlowe, Dean of Students Angelo Geter, Campus Programming <i>The Johnsonian</i> (Campus newspaper)
Community Partners	
South Carolina Campus Compact South Carolina Liberty Fellows	York County Election Commission York County Democratic Party York County Republican Party York County NAACP

## ***Areas of Activity (The Four “Buckets”)***

The Decision 2016 team has identified a number of activities to promote student voter registration, voter education, and voter turnout and has designated point person(s) for each activity. This agenda converges nicely with existing areas of responsibility. For instance, the West Forum, which provides substantial academic programming focused on civic engagement, will take the lead on voter education efforts. Student Life personnel who work with student groups will coordinate activities with student clubs and organizations. The Political Science department will collaborate with Office of Career and Civic Engagement to organize watch parties. The Decision 2016 team ensures communication and coordination between the various campus entities who share the goal of increasing student participation in the 2016 election.

The West Forum web site ([www.winthrop.edu/westforum](http://www.winthrop.edu/westforum)) will house a comprehensive list of all Decision 2016 events and activities, irrespective of sponsorship.

***Voter Registration:*** In South Carolina, the deadline to register to vote in any election is 30 days prior to election day. For the 2016 general election, the deadline is Saturday, October 8, 2016. The Decision 2016 team has identified the following voter registration activities:

- Securing voter registration forms and literature (posters, web site “buttons,” etc.) from the South Carolina Election Commission and the York County Election Commission.
- Creating a student Voter Ambassador Program, whereby students are trained on South Carolina voter registration and absentee voting laws and coordinate voter registration efforts throughout the fall. The Voter Ambassadors will staff tables at all Decision 2016 voter education events; at campus activities such as the opening community picnic, held annually after convocation; and distribute voter registration forms.
- Updating the West Forum web site and developing other materials for students with voter registration information.
- Sending campus-wide emails with information about voter registration in the weeks prior to the registration deadline.
- Exploring the possibility of hosting a mobile voter registration van.
- Hosting events/activities on National Voter Registration Day.

***Voter Education:*** The Decision 2016 team will host a series of voter education events that will begin with Constitution Day and continue through the Inauguration. In an effort to “work smarter, not harder,” the Decision 2016 team will have voter registration forms available at all voter education events held prior to the registration deadline and provide information about absentee voting at all voter education events prior to Election Day. All events will be free and open to the public and host organizations will apply for cultural event credit as appropriate.<sup>1</sup> Decision 2016 voter education events will include the following:

- A “Democracy Wall,” outdoor chalkboards to promote free speech and civil discourse. This effort will include outreach to classes to encourage participation. (In place by August 19)
- Constitution Day public lecture on voting laws (September 15)
- NAACP Candidate Forum (September 15)

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Winthrop University cultural event requirement, see page 5.

- Women in Presidential Election Politics public lecture (September 20)
- History of Presidential Debates public lecture (October 4)
- (Vice) Presidential Debate watch party (TBA, Fall)
- Winthrop Poll<sup>2</sup> current results public lecture. (TBA, Fall)
- Public forum on Free Speech and Civil Discourse (TBA, Fall)
- Public forum on 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Act 388, a law that changed education funding formula in South Carolina (TBA, Fall)
- Public forum on health care politics and policy in South Carolina (TBA, Fall or Spring)
- Electoral College public lecture and Election Night Watch Party (November 8)
- Inauguration History public lecture (January 19)
- Inauguration watch party (January 20)

**Ballot Access:** In this context, “ballot access” refers to reducing barriers to student voting. Compared to some other states, South Carolina election laws pose significant barriers to voter participation, including an early registration deadline, voter ID requirements, and no option for early voting other than voting absentee in person. The process for requesting absentee ballots, while simplified with an online form, remains burdensome. Students registered to vote in York County may vote absentee in person at the York County Election Commission offices prior to Election Day. However, this office is located nearly 20 miles away, making hosting a shuttle impractical.

Given these constraints, the Decision 2016 has identified the following activities related to ballot access:

- Inviting York County Election Commission officials to set up a voting booth on campus and register voters.
- Distributing campus wide emails with information about voting absentee.
- Developing materials with QR codes or hyperlinks to the South Carolina Election Commission’s online absentee ballot request form.
- Encouraging students to vote absentee in person during Fall Break.
- Updating the West Forum “Voting FAQs” web site with up to date information about voter ID requirements, voting absentee, and voter registration deadlines.
- Distributing “My Vote Matters” campaign materials.
- Publicizing local organizations providing rides to polls on Election Day.

**Get Out the Vote:** By state law, South Carolina public schools -- including colleges and universities – are closed on Election Day. Thus, Winthrop University will not hold classes on Election Day and campus will be largely deserted. Given these constraints, the Decision 2016 team has identified the following Get Out the Vote Activities, most of which will occur before Election Day:

- Get Out the Vote public information campaign utilizing posters, slides on monitors in the DiGiorgio Campus Center, the student newspaper, *The Johnsonian*, and social media.
- Day-before and Day-of campus wide email reminders.

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<sup>2</sup> Winthrop University sponsors the Winthrop Poll, the only regular source of public opinion data in South Carolina. The West Forum underwrites the Winthrop Poll. In exchange, the Poll Director gives regular public lectures focusing on the Poll’s key findings.

## **Resources**

The Decision 2016 team has identified a number of existing campus resources that will help Winthrop University's campus vote efforts succeed:

**Administrative Support:** The Decision 2016 team is led by a vice president and an academic dean. In addition, the University's executive officers (all vice presidents and the president) have endorsed Winthrop's participation in the Campus Vote Project.

**Cultural Event Requirement:** Winthrop undergraduate students are required to attend 18 "cultural events" prior to graduation. Cultural events include musical, theatrical, and dance performances; art gallery talks; and public lectures and forums on topics of significance. The public lectures and forums described in the Voter Education "bucket" above are eligible for cultural event credit. Cultural event designation helps generate audiences. In addition, faculty members will be encouraged to publicize events and/or offer extra credit or other incentives to students to attend.

**Dedicated Personnel:** Winthrop University has existing programs and personnel dedicated to promoting civic engagement. Most prominent in the Division of Student Life is the Office of Career and Civic Engagement; however, other student affairs divisions are heavily involved in campus programming, student clubs and organizations, student government, and more. In the Division of Academic Affairs, the John C. West Forum on Politics and Policy is dedicated to "training South Carolina's next generation of civic leaders," and regularly provides campus programming on public issues. Together, these offices and their staff provide an infrastructure to coordinate the Decision 2016 efforts.

**Faculty Experts:** Faculty, especially in Political Science, have expertise in state and national politics and will be tapped to participate in voter education efforts.

**Trained Student Leaders:** Tyra Holcombe and Beth West participated in "CollegeDebate2016" conference as South Carolina delegates in June 2016. They are now trained in civic engagement techniques that they use as members of the Decision 2016 team.

**South Carolina Election Commission:** The South Carolina Election Commission has already designed flyers, posters, web site "buttons" and other materials to promote voter registration and Get Out the Vote efforts. These are available for free on the commission's web site.

**Financial Resources:** The Office of Career and Civic Engagement, Department of Political Science, South Carolina Campus Compact, and the Division of Student Life have pledged resources for printing and catering. The West Forum has committed resources to support honoraria and/or travel for speakers at public lectures and forums, as necessary. In addition, it has a partnership with the Liberty Fellows program to support the health care issues forum.

**Logo:** The Decision 2016 team has an approved logo to use on all of its publicity as a means to identify its coordinated activities.

**Assessment:** Decision 2016 team members will record attendance at all Decision 2016 events and monitor the number of voter registration forms distributed. Records and Registration can provide

precise counts of students who earn cultural event credit at each approved cultural event. NSLVE analyses, when available, will be used to determine voter registration and voter turnout rates.

### ***Additional Helpful Resources***

The Decision 2016 team has identified the following as additional resources that would be helpful to Winthrop University as it implements this Action Plan:

- National data supporting the efficacy of the Best Practices listed on the Campus Vote Project web site.
- Plans from similar institutions.
- Assessment tools used by similar institutions.

### ***Anticipated Challenges and Strategies to Overcome***

The Decision 2016 team has identified the following implementation challenges and means to overcome them:

***Compressed Calendar:*** A significant challenge is the short span of time between the beginning of the academic year (August 19) and the South Carolina voter registration deadline (October 8). The calendar is already full with many annual events -- Orientation, Welcome Week, Residence Hall Move-in, Convocation and Community Picnic, and Homecoming – thus working in Decision 2016 activities is difficult. The team’s solution is to “work smarter, not harder” and to piggyback voter registration and education efforts whenever possible onto existing activities. In addition, the team will work in July and August to have pieces in place prior to the academic year, such as installing the Democracy Wall and updating the West Forum web site.

***Charlotte Media Market:*** Winthrop University is in the Charlotte, North Carolina media market. Prior to Election Day, the media are saturated with information about North Carolina’s voting laws, which permit easier access to absentee ballots and permit early voting. This can confuse South Carolina residents who may not realize that South Carolina’s laws differ significantly. The Decision 2016 will highlight these differences in its voter education efforts and communications.

***Voter ID Laws:*** South Carolina law requires that voters provide an ID in order to cast a ballot on election day. Student IDs are not considered valid identification. The Decision 2016 team and Voter Ambassadors will use South Carolina Election Commission materials to publicize the voter ID requirements to students.

***Absentee Voting:*** Absentee voting in South Carolina requires voters to either request an absentee ballot by mail and return the ballot by mail by 7:00 p.m. on Election Day, or to report to a county election commission office during regular business hours to vote absentee in person. This requires Voter Ambassadors, emails, and publicity to remind students to allow ample time for ballots to be delivered through the postal service.

## **Meeting Schedule and Benchmarks**

By the end of the Summer 2016 semester, the Decision 2016 team will have its action plan finalized, scheduled all voter registration and voter education events, and Voter Ambassadors identified. The Fall 2016 semester will see major action, especially between August 19 and October 8.

By the mid semester point (October 8), the Decision 2016 team will have completed its voter registration efforts and have many voter education efforts underway.

The Decision 2016 team will meet monthly in July and August, weekly until October 8, and twice more between October 8 and November 8. The coalition will meet again in late January, 2017 to develop its final report.

### **August 2016**

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8 Week of: Team meeting Distribute posters and flyers around campus	9	10	11	12	13
14	15 Democracy Wall installed. Web site updated	16	17	18	19 Welcome Week. Registration forms in residence halls. Recruit and train Voter Ambassadors	20
21	22 Community Picnic/ Voter registration tables	23 Begin outreach to courses  Begin Democracy Wall efforts	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

**September 2016**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5 Labor Day. Winthrop closed	6 Week of: team meeting	7	8	9	10
11	12 Week of: team meeting  DIGS slides and table tents on voter registration and absentee voting	13	14	15 Constitution Day/ Voter registration table.  NAACP Forum/Voter registration table	16	17
18	19 Week of: team meeting  Voter registration reminder email.	20 Women and Presidential Election Politics event/voter registration table	21	22	23	24
25	26 Week of: team meeting  Voter registration reminder email	27 National Voter Registration Day	28	29	30	



**October 2016**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3 week of: Team meeting.  Final voter registration reminder email	4 History of Presidential Debates  Possible debate watch party  Absentee ballot information table	5	6	7	8 SC voter registration deadline
9	10 Week of: Absentee ballot reminder email	11	12	13	14 <b>Fall Break. Winthrop closed</b>	15
16	17 <b>Fall Break. Winthrop closed</b>	18	19	20 Absentee ballot reminder email	21	22
23	24 Week of: Team meeting	25	26	27	28	29
30	31 Week of: Final absentee ballot reminder email					

**November 2016**

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7 Day before reminder email.	8 <b>Election Day:</b> <b>Winthrop</b> <b>closed.</b>  Day of reminder email.  Electoral College public lecture.  Election night watch party	9	10	11	12

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