

## **BENNETT COLLEGE**

### **Voter Engagement Action Plan 2024**

#### **Executive Summary**

In 1873, Bennett College had its beginning in the unplastered basement of the Warnersville Methodist Episcopal Church (now known as St. Matthews United Methodist Church). Seventy young men and women started elementary and secondary level studies. In 1874 the Freedmen's Aid Society took over the school which remained under its auspices for 50 years.

Within five years of 1873, a group of formerly enslaved people purchased the present site for the school. College level courses and permanent facilities were added. In 1926, The Women's Home Missionary Society joined with the Board of Education of the church to make Bennett College in Greensboro, N.C., formerly co-educational, a college for women. The challenges that were overcome to establish Bennett demand that today's challenges be met and overcome to ensure her survival.

For nearly 150 years, since its founding as a co-educational institution, women have found Bennett to be the ideal place to foster the constant rhythm of ideas. Each student's individual need for self-expression and desire for achievement is constantly nurtured. The College fosters a strong respect for every student. Today, Bennett is preparing contemporary women to be well educated, productive professionals, informed, participating citizens, and enlightened parents. Bennett College confers the degrees of Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts and Science in Interdisciplinary Studies, and the Bachelor of Social Work and currently offers 15 majors. Numerous opportunities to study at other higher education institutions at home and abroad are available to continue the educational enrichment of Bennett's students. From its founding in the basement of a Methodist Church, Bennett College remains affiliated with the [United Methodist Church](#).

The goals of the College continue to focus on the intellectual, spiritual and cultural growth of young women who must be prepared for lifelong learning and leadership. Since 1930 more than 5,000 women have graduated from Bennett College. Known as Bennett Belles, they continue to be among contributing women of achievement in all walks of life.

#### **Presidents**

1. W.J. Parker (principal) (1874–1877)
2. Edward O. Thayer (1877–1881)
3. Wilbur F. Steele (1881–1889)
4. Charles N. Grandison (1889–1892)
5. Jordan D. Chavis (1892–1905)
6. Silas A. Peeler (1905–1913)
7. James E. Wallace (1913–1915)
8. Frank Trigg (1915–1926)

9. David Dallas Jones (1926–1955)W
10. Willa Beatrice Player (1955–1966) – Bennett’s first female president
11. Isaac H. Miller, Jr. (1966–1987)
12. Gloria Randle Scott (1987–2001)
13. Althia F. Collins (2001–2002)
14. Johnnetta B. Cole (2002–2007)
15. Julianne Malveaux (2007–2012)
16. Esther Terry (2012 – June 30, 2013) – Bennett’s first alumna president
17. Rosalind Fuse-Hall (July 1, 2013 – 2016)
18. Phyllis Worthy Dawkins (July 5, 2017 – 2019, President; August 15, 2016 – July 4, 2017, Interim President)
19. Suzanne Elise Walsh (August 1, 2019 – present)

### **Leadership**

There are several faculty and staff members who help coordinate and oversee the institutions work to increase civic engagement. Key leaders are:

Gwendolyn Bookman, JD Associate Professor of Political Science

Rachel Pridgen, Executive Director of Student Experience

### **Student Leadership**

Bennett College and other student organizations work together to organize campus wide civic learning opportunities to keep their peers informed about voter information. They build alliances with on and off campus groups doing similar work. We also work closely with Academic Affairs and other departments to coordinate events. They include:

Shelby Fogan, SGA President

Zairen Jackson, Common Cause Fellow

Rebecca Mitchell, Common Cause Fellow

Lannell Jones Huddleston, Common Cause Fellow

Johana Clarke, Freshwoman Class President

Agury Suazo, Sophomore Class President

Vinetta Garrett, Junior Class President

Jada meadows, Senior Class President

In our ongoing efforts to build and ensure diverse and inclusive representation, invitations have been extended to the following campus constituencies:

- Bennett College President, Suzanne Walsh, JD
- Office of Student Engagement, Rachel Pridgen
- Office of Student Success, Tonya Doane
- Enrollment Management, Dr. Yvette Wimberly
- Student Government Association
- Student Union Advisory Board
- Dean of Faculty, Dr. Sara Wrenn
- Alumni Relations, Yolande Johnson
- Bennett College Board of Trustees

### **Local and National Partnerships**

- Common Cause
- The NC Board of Elections

### **Commitment**

Civic learning and developing lifelong informed and engaged citizens are the cornerstone of

Bennett College's student experience. Our history has been rooted in developing leaders who are change agents and who make a difference in all spaces where they are found.

**Mission Statement:** "Bennett College prepares women of color through a transformative liberal arts education to lead with purpose, integrity and a strong sense of self worth. Bennett provides educational access to students while promoting inquiry, civic engagement, social justice, lifelong learning and equity for all."

**Vision Statement:** "Bennett College is renowned for its intimate, engaging learning community that produces phenomenal women scholars and global leaders."

**Philosophy:** "Bennett College's undergirding philosophy is that a high quality college experience should provide its women students with strong academic and co-curricular programs that encourage their personal development, endorse lifelong learning, and prepare them to meet the needs of an ever changing society."

### **Strategic Plan**

- Strategic Priority #1-Increase Voter Awareness and Activism
- Strategic Priority #2-Develop a Sustainable Plan

- Strategic Priority #3-Institutionalize Civic Engagement

As a part of our ongoing and growing commitment to civic engagement, we've participated in All In HBCU, Common Cause, on campus polling activities, campus leaders promoting voting and voter registration, We've hosted town halls, march to the polls, voter registration and political speakers.

### **Landscape**

The Bennett Belles are Voting Belles plan is supported by the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement report. The following report contains data about Bennett College voting patterns from 2016-2020.

2016-

- Number of students registered to vote-318
- Number of students who voted-214
- Voting Rate of Registered Students-67

2018-

- Number of students registered to vote-386
- Number of students who voted-160
- Voting Rate of Registered Students-41

2020-

- Number of students registered to vote-192
- Number of students who voted-138
- Voting Rate of Registered Students-72

### **Goals**

#### **Short Term Goals**

- Increase participation in National Voter Registration Day
- Activate Early Voting Day participation
- Increase voter registration and turnout

#### **Long Term Goals**

- Institutionalized Voter Engagement
- Develop a voting program model that can be sustained independent of staff and student turnover
- Maintain presidential turnout numbers in midterm voting years

