

# Bennett College

## Voter Engagement Action Plan

### Executive Summary

This action plan was developed in September 2022 by The Voting Belles to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and the turnout rates of voters at Bennett College. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over the next four years on and around our Greensboro, North Carolina campus. This plan will be implemented by the faculty, staff, students, and partners recruited by The Voting Belles to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize Bennett College's commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections.

For nearly 150 years, 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, in the midst of a very active renaissance, Bennett is preparing contemporary women to be well-educated, productive professionals, informed, participating citizens, and enlightened parents. The College offers liberal arts and STEM areas of study in Education, the Social Sciences, the Humanities, and in Natural and Behavioral Sciences and Mathematics. Numerous opportunities to study at other higher education institutions at home and abroad are available to continue the educational enrichment of Bennett's students

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.

Bennett Belles were central to the Sit-in Movement in the 1960s. The saying at Bennett is *Bennett Belles are Voting Belles*.

## Leadership

There are several faculty and staff members who help coordinate and oversee the institution's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement. Key leaders are:

Gwendolyn McLaughlin Bookman, J.D.  
Associate Professor, Political Science

Rachel Pridgen  
Director of Campus Life and Student Activities

### Student Leadership

Bennett College and other student organizations work together to organize campus-wide civic learning and democratic engagement opportunities to keep their peers informed about voter information and build alliances with on and off campus groups doing similar work. We also work closely with the Office of Campus Life, Interdisciplinary Studies and other departments to coordinate events.

**Student Name: Zakhya Jones Walker, SGA President**

**Student Name: Keva Hernandez, Common Cause Fellow**

**Student Name: Nya McNairy, Freshwoman Class President**

The 2022 coalition has been created with invites to various stakeholders on and off campus. Charged by the president's commitment, the coalition's objective is to unite students, faculty staff, alumni, and community organizations with a mutual vested interest in student's democratic engagement. The desire of the Voting Belles is to operate as an advisory board, providing direction for coordinated efforts and support the strategic initiatives to inform, educate and engage students around voting. The Voting Belles will hold **monthly meetings virtually and in person** to make sure everyone has an opportunity to stay connected, ask questions and offer ideas/ suggestions.

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 Campus Life - Rachel Pridgen**

- Office of Student Success - Tonya Doane
- Enrollment Management-Dr. Yvette Wimberly
  - SGA
  - Royal Court
  - Greek Life
- Bennett College Honors Program -
- Dean of Faculty- Dr. Sara Wrenn
- Alumni Relations - Deborah Love
- Bennett College Board of Trustees

#### Local and National Partnerships

- NC Black Alliance
- Common Cause
- GovT
- The NC Board of Elections

Since institutionalizing campus voting requires maintaining consistent and ongoing democratic engagement, members of the team have been provided a directory of important partners' contact. Copies of our action plan are easily accessible to others on campus.

## Commitment

Civic learning, democratic engagement, 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 part of our ongoing and growing commitment to civic engagement, we've participated in: **All-In, Ask Every Student, Student's Learn, Student's Vote, on campus polling activities, campus leader's promoting voting, political clubs, such as the political science Political Pacesetters, and voter registration tables. We've also hosted town halls, march to the polls, voter registrations, political speakers and GOTV rallies.**

## Landscape

The Bennett Bells are Voting Belles plan is informed by the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement report. The research is intended to assist institutions in creating strategies that increase student participation in the democratic process. The following report contains data about Bennett College voting patterns in key elections from 2016 – 2020, as well as the percentage change during that time.

### Bennett College

Brief Summary	2016	2018	2020	Change
Number of students registered	318	386	192	-126
Number of students who voted	214	160	138	-76
Voting Rate of registered students	67	41	72	5

What the Voting Belles has observed is that the need for a campus cultural shift to not simply have high/improving voter registration numbers, but equal voter turnout. By focusing on a holistic student education that includes civic engagement as part of the academic and community culture, and voter education to keep students informed about the candidates and issues, we anticipate improved voter turnout.

# 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 mid-term voting years.

Election Season	Presidential	Off Year	Mid-Term
Phase 1	May-June Planning & Prep	May-June Planning & Prep	May-June Planning & Prep
Phase 2	Aug-Sept Voter Registration	Aug-Sept Voter Registration	Aug-Sept Voter Registration
Phase 3	Sept-Oct Voter Education	Sept-Oct Voter Education	Sept-Oct Voter Education
Phase 4	Oct-Nov GOTV	Oct-Nov Civic Engagement	Oct-Nov GOTV
Phase 5	Jan-April Civic Engagement / Learning	Feb-March Voter Reg & Education	Jan-April Civic Engagement / Learning

### **Year Round: Voter Educations Series**

**Purpose:** To get new students registered to vote in Greensboro, NC

### **August: Voter Registration/Engagment Activities for Freshwomen during New Student Orientation**

**Purpose:** To get all enrolled students registered to vote

Bennett College Action Plan: Bennett Belles are Voting Belles

September : National Voter Registration Day

Purpose: This serves as our biggest voter registration push for the semester. We will have a registration table that will also serve as a promotional opportunity for the Voting Belles.

October: "Vote Coming" Early Voting Day with North Carolina Agricultural & Technical University

Purpose: Join with North Carolina Ag & Tech in their Early Voting Day celebrations. The Belles will march with the Aggies to the early voting location.

November: Voting at our local precinct. Voter Rally and March to the Polls

Purpose: For enrolled registered student to vote

## Reporting

The plan will be an open document and shared with any party interested. Including the campus, the coalition, and community partners relevant to the Democratic Engagement Plan.

Additionally, the NSLV data will be shared with all stakeholders and partners upon request. We will share all data via department meetings, student organization meetings, website and individual area reports.

<b>To</b>	
<b>Cc</b>	
<b>Bcc</b>	
<b>Subject</b>	

## Evaluation

We are looking forward to having our first plan evaluated annually to determine if goals are being met or progression towards the goals are being accomplished. We will also use our ambassadors and fellows to conduct their own evaluation of how student centered they feel the plan is.