

Bethune-Cookman University Campus Vote Action Plan

“I leave you finally a responsibility to our young people [...] We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may divert their power towards good ends”

Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, *Last Will and Testament*

I. OVERVIEW

On October 3, 1904, with \$1.50 to her name, a firm faith in God, and five little black girls along with her son Albert, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune’s vision for an institution of higher learning dedicated to educating African Americans and transforming society became a reality. Despite adverse trials and tribulations, Dr. Bethune’s resilience, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, and commitment to service remained unwavering. Recognized both nationally and internationally for her accomplishments, to include, advisor to U.S. presidents, civil rights activist who played a pivotal role in the founding of the United Nations and the United Negro College Fund, Dr. Bethune was a transformative educational leader and social justice advocate, whose commitment to service remains a cornerstone and staple of the University’s mission, vision, and core values. Since its inception, Bethune-Cookman College/University has graduated more than 19,000 student leaders who work in a range of fields, including the arts, business, education, government, sciences, and religion. Through its dedication to service and higher education, Bethune-Cookman University preserves and continues the legacy of academic excellence and civic engagement pioneered by its founder. As a testament to this legacy, a marble statue of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune was unveiled on July 13, 2022 in the nation’s Capital, as she became the first African American represented in the National Statutory Hall Collection.

As reflected in the University’s motto, “*Enter to Learn. Depart to Serve,*” and our core values of *faith, integrity, respect, service, and thirst for knowledge*, civic engagement is a hallmark of Bethune-Cookman University. Through the University’s Student Affairs unit which houses the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE), Student Government Association (SGA), and all other student-led organizations including Greek life, and the Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) housed within the College of Arts and Humanities, Bethune-Cookman University actively embraces civic engagement as a monumental facet of the University’s mission and vision for academic excellence and student success. Although current data on student voter registration was unavailable at the time of this report, previous data and antidotal evidence suggest student voter registration is moderately high while actual voting patterns appear lower.

To this end, the Bethune-Cookman University’s Campus Vote Action Plan will serve as a blueprint for strengthening the University’s current civic engagement efforts under the collaborative leadership of the University’s Political Engagement Committee (PEC), the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE), and the Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ). Bethune-Cookman University will continue to build upon this blueprint in hopes of establishing a sustainable plan that boosts the participation and engagement of students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community partners in the democratic process.

University Mission Statement:

The mission of Bethune-Cookman University is to educate a diverse community of learners to become responsible, productive citizens and solution seekers through the promotion of faith, scholarship, creative endeavors, leadership and service.

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University Vision Statement:

Bethune-Cookman University will define new standards for academic excellence and student success by educating and empowering learners who will seek their own solutions; advocate opportunities for all citizens to improve their quality of life; and inculcate global perspectives and realities to people worldwide.

In alignment with the University's mission and vision, the Bethune-Cookman University's Campus Vote Action Plan and the Voter Friendly Campus designation will help our students develop and expand their skills and competencies, prepare for their role as global citizens, and facilitate change in society through their active involvement and participation in their respective fields as well as civic life.

For the Fall 2022 semester, the top three (3) goals for democratic engagement are:

1. **Strengthen** the University's civic engagement efforts in the areas of voter registration, voter education, and voter turnout.
2. **Enhance** the civic knowledge, competencies, and skills of students and the wider campus community.
3. **Serve** as a community resource to include voting location, source of information, social justice advocate, and host of virtual and in-person discussion panels and forums.

II. COALITION

Several diverse entities throughout the campus including Student Affairs, Government Affairs, the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE), Student Government Association (SGA), Student and Greek life, the Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) and other academic units housed within the College of Arts and Humanities have been working collaboratively to advance civic education and participation on campus and in surrounding communities. Representing these various units are Mr. Jermaine McKinney, Dean of Students and Executive Director of Civic Engagement, Mr. Kahreem Golden, Manager of Government Relations & Strategic Initiatives, Mrs. Kimberly Lyn, Director of Student Services Initiatives and Conduct, Dr. Kideste Yusef, Director of the Center for Law and Social Justice and Department Chair of Criminal Justice, Dr. Frank Wood, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, Dr. Claudette McFadden, Founder and Director of the Thurgood Marshall Speech and Debate Society, and Associate Professor of Communication Studies, Theatre, and Dance, and Dr. Bradley Gardner, Department Chair of Social Sciences.

III. DESCRIPTION OF YOUR WORK

To bolster civic participation, numerous campus events and initiatives have been held including March to the Polls events in 2017 and 2018, which featured local candidates, university-sponsored political debates in 2018 and 2020, faculty participation as moderators and interviewees during non-partisan candidate forums in 2020, student political education Professional Seminar sponsored by the Department of Justice and Political Studies in 2020, voter registration drives, and the use of the CCE as a main voting location for Daytona Beach. During the Fall 2021 semester, for example, Bethune-Cookman University participated in the Florida HBCU Ready Set Vote Bus Tour, an initiative

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organized by Florida Memorial University's Social Justice Institute (FMU SJI), the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC), the Black Youth Vote (BYV), and the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). Through this collaboration led by the Center for Law & Social Justice (CLSJ), to include the involvement of Student Government Association (SGA), Government Affairs, and Student Life, Bethune-Cookman University was able to educate, energize, and engage our students and the surrounding community on the importance of social justice and voting rights, as well as mobilize our students and the surrounding community to pledge and cast their votes in the upcoming elections.

Outlined below are the activities that Bethune-Cookman University will be undertaking during the Fall 2022 semester.

A. Voter Registration

- a. On September 13, 2022, Bethune Cookman University's Student Government Association (B-CU SGA) and Black Voters Matter (BVM) are hosting the **Life Every Voice and Vote Rally**. Situated in the heart of campus (i.e., the Quad), students, faculty, staff, and administrators will have the opportunity to register to vote, learn about pressing political issues, to include the importance of being civically engaged, and fellowship with each other, all while enjoying various food vendors and music.
- b. On September 20, 2022, Bethune-Cookman University will be participating in **National Voter Registration Day**. This day-long event aims to get B-CU students and members in the surrounding community registered to vote. Currently, flyers for National Voter Registration Day have been posted across B-CU campus and social media platforms, to include announcements in class and professional seminars.
 - i. Additionally, information about National Voter Registration Day will be shared on the University's radio station and disseminated university-wide through the Communications team.

B. Voter Education

- a. Democracy Fellows will discuss with students at the **Life Every Voice and Vote Rally** on Tuesday, September 13, 2022, the importance of civic engagement, to include sharing with students current voting rights issues and pressing political issues in preparation for the upcoming general elections.
- b. Black Voters Matters will share voting information and resources to students, faculty, and administrators at the **Life Every Voice and Vote Rally** on Tuesday, September 13, 2022.

C. Voter Turnout

- a. On Saturday, November 5, 2022, Bethune-Cookman University will host the **Ready Set Vote HBCU Tour**. The Tour will feature several volunteers from Equal Ground Florida, Florida Student Power Network, Black Voters Matter, and the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition who will provide students, alumni, and participating game goers with voting-related merchandise, giveaways, informational resources, and the motivation and enthusiasm to cast their votes on November 8, 2022. In doing so, this event will boost voter turnout, particularly amongst the students.
- b. Democracy Fellows will remind students and the wider campus community about upcoming deadlines for voter registration, the need for them to vote on November 8, 2022, and relevant information concerning issues on the ballot.

D. Students as Community Advocates

- a. Democracy Fellows, student-led organizations, and Resident Assistants will announce and post reminders about the **Life Every Voice and Vote Rally, National Voter**

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- Registration Day**, and the **Ready Set Vote HBCU Tour** in residence halls, during organization meetings, and through various social media platforms.
- b. Democracy Fellows will serve as Campus Ambassadors for the **Ready Set Vote HBCU Tour**. In this role, Fellows will be responsible for mobilizing and encouraging students and participating alumni at the Homecoming Football (i.e., Saturday, November 5, 2022) game to get out and vote on November 8, 2022.
 - c. Democracy Fellows will receive training from the Campus Vote Project (CVP), Black Youth Vote (BYV) and the Florida Student Power Network on the history of voting rights, current voting rights issues, and equitable and inclusive campus organizing.

IV. TIMELINE

As previously mentioned, there are currently three event schedules for the Fall 2022 semester. Next semester, the committee hopes to identify community partners, increase support of Democracy Fellows, and work collaboratively to identify next steps and an action plan for Spring 2023.

V. SUCCESS

Success in this initiative will be evidenced by increased student voter registration, voter participation, and increased student attendance and participation in campus civic engagement events. The establishment of university-community partners will also be a measure of success. Lastly, the committee hopes to begin the institutionalization of civic engagement across multiple university units. This should include a streamlined process to advance civic engagement from university recruitment and acceptance through graduation. For example, voter registration forms can be included with Admission documents via a QR code, voter education can be included as part of Freshmen Seminar, and student organizations can be required to participate in at least one campus civic engagement event. Efforts should also be made to evaluate these objectives.

VI. BETHUNE-COOKMAN UNIVERSITY POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE (PEC) MEMBERS AND CONTACT

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