



## **Elon University 2024 Democratic Engagement Action Plan**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this document is to provide a plan for Elon University to successfully prepare for and implement civic engagement activities during the 2024-2025 academic year and beyond. The plan outlines a series of nonpartisan initiatives to be implemented across Elon's campus. The primary goal of the plan is to provide students with the necessary resources to register to vote and cast their ballots in the 2024 election. We understand Elon students can choose to vote either using their campus address or their permanent address and have options to vote early, by mail, via absentee ballot, or on Election Day. It is important to educate students about their options and be prepared to provide support to students regardless of where or how they plan to vote. The broader framework behind this goal is to cultivate the next generation of informed leaders who will help strengthen communities and shape our democracy. This plan will be implemented by the students, faculty, and staff members of the Elon University Political Engagement Work Group and was drafted by the co-advisors for the Elon Votes! initiative.

### **LEADERSHIP**

#### **Elon University Political Engagement Work Group**

The Elon University Political Engagement Work Group is a nonpartisan collaborative team of students, faculty, and staff launched in 2015. Members include student leaders, faculty, administrators, student affairs staff, and national organization affiliation (Andrew Goodman Foundation) representing areas across campus including, but not limited to, the Department of Political Science and Policy Studies, Student Government Association, Residence Life, School of Communications, University Communications, and the Kernodle Center for Civic Life. The team includes members with diverse and marginalized identities. Members of this group are responsible for the implementation and execution of the plan. In addition, the Assistant Dean and Director of the Kernodle Center for Civic Life works in collaboration with the Director of the Alamance County Board of Elections and the board staff to ensure there is a seamless relationship between the board and the university.

In terms of succession planning, the Political Engagement Work Group maintains an ideal balance of consistent members and new members. This balance has provided continuity and has allowed civic engagement to be institutionalized, while also providing new energy and ideas each year. The faculty and staff members provide consistency and institutional memory, and the student members provide an infusion of innovation. Each of the student leader positions

affiliated with the Elon Volunteers! organization is hired each spring for the following year. Additionally, the Student Government Association (SGA) Civic Engagement Coordinator is appointed by the SGA President each fall, and the Paideia student representative is selected by the Paideia faculty and staff advisors each fall. Students in these roles are of different class years, so there is always a veteran student presence along with new energy.

### **Election 2024 Planning Team**

In an effort to promote citizenship and democratic participation specifically for the 2024 election, Elon University developed a special planning committee to provide recommendations for opportunities to facilitate positive and robust civic engagement in a safe and transparent environment for the Elon community and for the larger Alamance County community. The ad hoc committee, charged by President Connie Book, was assembled and began its work during the Spring 2024 semester and provided a final set of recommendations so that the campus can support the efforts over the summer months in preparation for the November elections and the Spring 2025 semester. This special committee will remain in place and guide campus efforts during the 2024-2025 academic year.

### **2024-2025 Elon University Political Engagement Work Group**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Office/Organization</i>	<i>Category</i>
Dr. Dillan Bono-Lunn (Co-chair)	Assistant Professor	Political Science and Policy Studies	Faculty
Bob Frigo (Co-chair)	Assistant Dean and Director	Kernodle Center for Civic Life	Staff/Faculty
Andrew Moffa	Assistant Director	Kernodle Center for Civic Life	Staff
Lindsay Bialecki	Elon Votes! Coordinator/Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Bo Dalrymple	Elon Votes! Coordinator/Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Jasmine Hill Evans	Community Director	Residence Life	Staff
Colin Donohue	Director, School of Communications Student Engagement and Alumni Affairs	Student Media and School of Communications	Staff/Faculty
Hillary Zaken	Interim Assistant Dean	Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life	Staff

Dinidu Karunanayake	Assistant Professor	English	Faculty
Ruby Radis	Elon Votes! Coordinator	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Emily Stuart	Lead Civic Engagement Ambassador	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Jackson Fender	Lead Civic Engagement Ambassador	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Allison Durand	Elon Votes! Director of Outreach	Elon Volunteers!	Staff
Kennedy Steiner	Civic Engagement Coordinator	Student Government Association	Student
Filled in Fall 2024	Paideia: Politics and Active Citizenship Living Learning Community Student Representative	Residence Life	Student

### 2024-2025 Elon University Election 2024 Planning Team

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Office/Organization</i>	<i>Category</i>
Dr. Naeemah Clark (Co-chair)	Associate Provost	Division of Inclusive Excellence	Staff/Faculty
Dr. Jon Dooley (Co-chair)	Vice President for Student Life	Division of Student Life	Staff/Faculty
Jeff Clark	Executive Director	Cultural and Special Programs	Staff
Owen Covington	Assistant Vice President for Strategic Communications and Media Relations	University Communications	Staff
Dr. Carrie Eaves	Associate Professor, Faculty Fellow for Civic Engagement	Political Science and Policy Studies	Faculty
Bob Frigo	Assistant Dean and Director	Kernodle Center for Civic Life	Staff/Faculty
Britt Mobley	Executive President	Student Government Association	Student
Kari Taylor	Deputy Chief of Staff for Campus Engagement	Office of the President	Staff

Josh Tillotson	Captain	Campus Safety and Police	Staff
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**INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT**

Elon University has a demonstrated and highly visible commitment to civic engagement. As part of this commitment, the university mission statement includes the following language:

*We integrate learning across the disciplines and put knowledge into practice, thus preparing students to be global citizens and informed leaders motivated by concern for the common good.*

This institutional commitment is manifested through the permanent Elon University Political Engagement Work Group and the special Election 2024 Planning Team described above. In addition, Elon University offers robust support for the Kernodle Center for Civic Life – a department that coordinates and convenes curricular and co-curricular civic and community engagement programs and initiatives involving the university and local communities. This civic and community engagement work is guided by a set of student learning outcomes informed by the Civic Learning Spiral framework. The Kernodle Center houses and provides consistent oversight in the form of two advisors for the Elon Votes! initiative. The Kernodle Center is staffed by an Assistant Dean/Director, Associate Director, Assistant Director for Community Partnerships, two Assistant Directors, Program Assistant, Graduate Apprentice, and 100+ student leaders. In addition, the university funds two Faculty Fellow positions, the Faculty Fellow for Civic Engagement and the Faculty Fellow for Community-Based Learning, to support the institutionalization of this work. Overall, this level of support and staffing is unprecedented for an institution with just under 6,500 undergraduate students.

Data from the 2022-2023 academic year provides evidence of the institutional commitment to this work:

Total Hours of Students Participating in Community-Engaged Experiences	78,002
Number of Students Participating in Community-Engaged Experiences	3,171
Hours of Student Community Engagement Through Community-Based Courses	36,688
Number of Community-Based Courses Offered	76

Elon’s president and senior leadership are clearly supportive of civic engagement on an institutional level. Elon University is currently in the process of instituting *Boldly Elon*, its strategic plan for 2030. The plan includes a charge to advance a national civic engagement model that prepares all students to engage in local communities. This charge involves preparing every student to participate in community and civic engagement where they will gain community engagement skills and an understanding of their civic responsibilities. In addition, Elon University senior leadership has committed to be an ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge campus.

Elon University served as one of the model campuses for the first cohort recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning as a community engaged

institution in 2006. The university was recertified with this designation in 2015 and is preparing for renewal in 2026.

## **Institutional Structure**

### **Council on Civic Engagement**

The Council on Civic Engagement meets monthly to discuss institution-wide goals to advance the university's commitment to civic and political engagement. This Council is comprised of faculty, staff, and student representatives, and co-chaired by the Faculty Fellow for Civic Engagement and the Director of the Kernodle Center for Civic Life. The Council on Civic Engagement has established university definitions for terms such as civic engagement, community engagement, service-learning, social innovation, community-based research, and community-based participatory research to guide the institution's work. In addition, the council has established campus guidelines and procedures for political candidate appearances and campaign events, university-sponsored political forums, voter registration and education, and student demonstrations.

### **Kernodle Center for Civic Life**

The Kernodle Center for Civic Life coordinates and convenes curricular and co-curricular civic and community engagement programs and initiatives involving the university and local communities. The Kernodle Center inspires, educates, and prepares students and campus to partner with diverse communities to address local and global challenges, and gain a deeper understanding of their responsibility to actively contribute to civic life. The center serves as the convener of community-based engaged and experiential student learning opportunities in collaboration with faculty, staff, and community partners to address the common good.

### *Elon Votes!*

Launched in 2014, *Elon Votes!* is a nonpartisan campus initiative created to provide students with the necessary resources to register to vote and cast their ballots in upcoming elections. This initiative is housed in the Kernodle Center for Civic Life and is managed by two student leaders who serve as *Elon Votes!* Coordinators and Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors. The organization is co-advised by the Assistant Dean for Campus Life and Director of the Kernodle Center for Civic Life and an Assistant Director in the Kernodle Center for Civic Life.

### *Active Citizen Series*

The Active Citizen Series is designed to cultivate the next generation of informed leaders who will help strengthen communities and shape our democracy. This initiative allows students to gain a deeper understanding of how government works and to develop the necessary skills to engage in civil discourse across political divides.

## **INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE AND NSLVE DATA**

Elon University is a private institution with 7,207 total students (6,402 undergraduate students and 805 graduate students) representing 48 states and 54 nations. The university offers 70+

majors, has a 78% 4-year graduation rate, and an 88% first-year retention rate. The student/faculty ratio is 11:1 and the average class size is 20.

The Political Engagement Work Group has used our campus National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data to determine areas of success and identify areas for improvement. Our current NSLVE report is available publicly on the Elon Votes! website. A snapshot of our 2018 and 2016/2020 voter registration rate and voting rate be found below. We are still awaiting NSLVE data for the 2022 midterm elections.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Election Type</b>	<b>Voter Registration Rate</b>	<b>Voting Rate</b>
2020	General	89.9%	74.0%
2016	General	78.8%	43.9%

<b>Year</b>	<b>Election Type</b>	<b>Voter Registration Rate</b>	<b>Voting Rate</b>
2022	Midterm	WAITING ON DATA	WAITING ON DATA
2018	Midterm	75.9%	29.4%

As a result of our institutionalized civic engagement efforts, Elon University’s student voting rate in the 2020 election significantly increased to 74% (43.9% in 2016) and the student voter registration rate increased to 90% (79% in 2016) - earning a Gold Seal for the university for the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

An analysis of this data indicates that while our institution has a solid voter registration rate, there is a gap in our voting rate. The Political Engagement Work Group has determined that one of the major contributing factors to our lower voting rate is the fact that 64% of students chose to vote using absentee ballots in 2020. This is linked to the fact that over 70% of the Elon student body comes from out of state. Without question, it is much simpler to register to vote locally and cast a ballot in-person on election day or through early voting than it is to request an absentee ballot, complete it, and return it by the corresponding state deadline. The advance planning, extra steps, and time involved to vote using an absentee ballot helps explain this gap.

While using TurboVote to help our students navigate deadlines, voter registration forms, and absentee ballot forms for all 50 states has significantly assisted with our campus efforts, there is still much work to be done. Our campus NSLVE data has been extremely beneficial in informing our voter engagement strategies. For example, we primarily focused on voter registration and efforts to provide transportation to local polling places before this data became available and was analyzed. Our new data-informed strategy involves a programmatic focus in election years to specifically target voter registration in the months of August and September and absentee ballots in the months of September and October. This happens through campus-wide marketing strategies and events hosted by Elon Votes! In Fall 2022, Elon Votes! hosted the AbsenTea event to support students in requesting absentee ballots. This singular event drew more than 50 students. In addition, we have leveraged our NSLVE data to incorporate the TurboVote link into

OnTrack – an internal university platform that allows student to schedule classes, and access grades and financial aid information. Furthermore, NSLVE data will allow us to specifically target students majors with low voting rates such as business, computer science, and engineering in the upcoming election. This past spring, Elon Votes! hosted voter registration drives in the Love School of Business for business majors and the Francis Center for nursing, physician assistant, and physical therapy students.

## **GOALS**

The following **short-term** goals have been identified:

### Communication

- Develop a university centralized communication hub about election and political related events and resources for the 2024 election.
- Review and publicize policies and protocols related to demonstration, safety, and communication, including a table-top exercise to test those measures.

### Voter Registration and Get Out the Vote

- Launch a comprehensive voter engagement campaign for the 2024 elections.
- Market and utilize the Elon Votes! website as the primary campus nonpartisan resource to help Elon students engage in our democracy by registering to vote and casting their ballots (utilizing the TurboVote platform).
- Host an on-campus early voting site in collaboration with the Alamance County Board of Elections in the South Gym.
- Market and utilize the new Elon Phoenix Voter Card through the Phoenix Card office to address the new 2023 North Carolina state voter identification requirement.

### Faculty and Staff Development

- Offer \$500 grants to faculty/staff to purchase materials, webinars, speaker honoraria, or other resources that could support their teaching topics connected to the importance of being active in local or national elections, the role of voting in a participatory government, the democratic process, or a related topic.
- Host a summer faculty/staff workshop with Executive Director of the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education/AAC&U Senior Advisor to the President for Democracy Initiatives Dr. Nancy Thomas to help attendees frame some of the key themes in the election, provide tools for professional development in civic and engaged learning, and learn techniques to handle challenging political polarization with students, colleagues, and others.

### Campus and Community Programming

- Host robust campus programming opportunities (student issues forum, speakers, dialogue programs, debate watches, etc.).

- Co-host candidate forums for the Alamance County Board of Elections and Alamance County Board of Commissioners in partnership with the Alamance County Chamber of Commerce and Impact Alamance.
- Host a campus-community lecture by Dr. Christopher Bail from Duke University on the topic of bridging political divides with artificial intelligence.
- Host a campus-community deliberative dialogue focused on the 2024 election.

The following **long-term** goals have been identified:

1. Advance a national civic engagement model that prepares all students to engage in local communities. This involves preparing every student to participate in community and civic engagement, gaining community engagement skills and an understanding of their civic responsibilities. Resources will be shared widely with other campuses.
2. Host a town hall event for candidates in the 2026 U.S. Senate election.
3. Work with the Alamance County Board of Elections to merge the two campus voting precincts into one and host an on-campus polling place on Election Day
4. Significantly increase opportunities for students to serve in paid internships in local and county government offices through the summer Campus Alamance program.

## **STRATEGY**

The following strategy has been developed and endorsed by the Elon Political Engagement Work Group and Elon Votes!:

### **Overall Strategy**

#### August/September 2024: Voter Engagement - Voter Registration Focus

- August campus-wide student voter registration email from Vice President Dr. Jon Dooley
- Elon Votes! tabling during orientation
- Send Elon Votes! voting engagement video to first-year classes
- Elon Votes! Moseley Center office staffed by Civic Engagement Ambassadors to support voter engagement (location is in highly visible area of campus)
- Kernodle Center for Civic Life office staffed to support voter engagement
- Elon Votes! campus tabling (with a special focus on low-turnout majors in locations housing business and engineering students)
- Hold weekly voter registration drives
- Promote early voting in Alamance County (specifically at the Elon University early voting site)

#### September/October 2024: Voter Engagement - Absentee Ballot Focus

- Continue Elon Votes! Moseley Center office staffed by Civic Engagement Ambassadors to support voter engagement
- Continue Kernodle Center for Civic Life office staffed to support voter engagement
- Continue Elon Votes! campus tabling (with a special focus on low-turnout majors in locations housing business and engineering students)



- Hold AbsenTEA event to support students in requesting absentee ballots
- Promote early voting in Alamance County, with a focus on on-campus early voting site

October/November 2024: Early Voting Site

- Thursday, October 17, 2024 – Saturday, November 2, 2024 in South Gym

November 2024: Voter Engagement – Election Day Focus

- Provide Election Day transportation to two local polling places using Elon Express vehicles

**Active Citizen Series**

Fall 2024

- Bridging Political Divides with Artificial Intelligence – Dr. Chris Bail (Duke University) - September 10
- Presidential Debate Watch Event – Monday, September 16
- Deliberative Dialogue – Anxiety and Elections – Monday, September 23
- Vice Presidential Debate Watch Event – Wednesday, September 25
- Alamance-Burlington School System Candidate Forum – Monday, September 30
- Alamance County Commissioner Candidate Forum – Tuesday, October 1
- Presidential Debate Watch Event – Tuesday, October 1
- Presidential Debate Watch Event – Wednesday, October 9
- Election Night Watch Event – Tuesday, November 5
- After the Election Event – Thursday, November 12

Spring 2025

- Living Room Conversation Deliberative Dialogue
- Conversation events with newly elected officials
- Political Polarization with Dr. Adi Wiesel

**EVALUATION**

The purpose of the campus evaluation strategy is to determine how and what information will be collected and analyzed which will be used to determine success and make improvements. The evaluation process will be guided and implemented by the Elon Political Engagement Work Group. This will happen during the plan implementation as well as after the 2024 Election.

An evaluation conducted of the goals identified in the 2022 campus action plan yielded the following results:

Goal	Evaluation Summary
1. Launch a comprehensive voter engagement campaign for the 2022 midterm elections	The comprehensive campaign during the 2022 midterm elections included tabling, posters, yard signs, and campus-wide emails. Without

	the 2022 NSLVE data, it is difficult to measure how successful this campaign was. However, anecdotally, more students seemed aware of how to register to vote and cast their ballot.
2. Host an on-campus early voting site in collaboration with the Alamance County Board of Elections	Elon hosted an on-campus, one stop early voting site on South Campus for the 2022 midterm elections that was utilized by 4,605 voters.
3. Work with University Communications to create and launch a new video to provide step-by-step instructions for completing voter registration forms and absentee ballots (to be shown in classrooms across campus)	This video was filmed and edited in the summer of 2022 and was shown in Elon 1010 and COR 1100 classes during the Fall 2022 semester. Due to changes on the TurboVote interface, the video is now a bit less useful, but we plan to re-introduce it in the Fall of 2024.

Moving forward, the Elon Political Engagement Work Group will monitor and evaluate the short-term and long-term goals identified above in this action plan. This will happen during monthly meetings in addition to more focused reflection after the election in mid- to late November.

In addition, one new institutional development will involve beginning to measure the cultivation of students as active citizens through community-based learning experiences as part of Elon University’s 2026 Carnegie Community Engagement Reclassification application process. A new assessment instrument is being administered to students participating in curricular and co-curricular community-based learning opportunities. The instrument is informed by a set of student learning outcomes framed by the Civic Learning Spiral (Musil 2009). Data will be used to enhance existing experiences and help develop a model to better prepare students to participate in community and civic engagement opportunities and gain a deeper understanding of their civic responsibilities.