



Elon University 2022 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 2022-2023 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 2022 election. 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-chairs of this group.

LEADERSHIP

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. While not a member of the Political Engagement Work Group, the Assistant Dean and Director of the Kernodle Center for Civic Life works closely with the Director of the Alamance County Board of Elections.

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.

2022-2023 Elon University Political Engagement Work Group

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Office/Organization</i>	<i>Category</i>
Carrie Eaves (Co-chair)	Associate Professor	Political Science and Policy Studies	Faculty
Bob Frigo (Co-chair)	Assistant Dean and Director	Kernodle Center for Civic Life	Staff/Faculty
Sydney Barlow	Elon Votes! Coordinator/Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Jordan Buie	Community Director	Residence Life	Staff
Bo Dalrymple	Elon Votes! Coordinator/Andrew Goodman Foundation Ambassadors	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Colin Donohue	Director, School of Communications Student Engagement and Alumni Affairs	Student Media and School of Communications	Staff/Faculty
Hugh Goldstein	Deliberative Dialogues Coordinator	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Tori Keheller	Voting Ambassador Coordinator	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Katherine McCormick	Voting Ambassador Coordinator	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Trajan Warren	Assistant Director	University Communications	Staff
Clara Watkins	Deliberative Dialogues Coordinator	Elon Volunteers!	Student
Filled in Fall 2022	Civic Engagement Coordinator	Student Government Association	Student
Filled in Fall 2022	Paideia: Politics and Active Citizenship Living Learning Community Student Representative	Residence Life	Student
Filled in Fall 2022	New Faculty Representative	Academic Department	Faculty

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 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 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. 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 60+ student leaders. In addition, the university funds two Faculty Fellow positions, the Faculty Fellow for Civic Engagement and the Faculty Fellow for Academic Service-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 2020-2021 academic year provides evidence of the institutional commitment to this work:

Total Hours of Students Participating in Community-Engaged Experiences	61,098
Number of Students Participating in Community-Engaged Experiences	2028
Hours of Student Community Engagement Through Community-Based Courses	19,192
Number of Community-Based Courses Offered	60

Elon’s president and senior leadership are clearly supportive of civic engagement on an institutional level. The institution recently launched *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. This civic and community preparation work will advance during the 2022-2023 academic year through a new grant received through the Colonial Athletic Association grant in collaboration with the University of Delaware, University of North Carolina-Wilmington, and Drexel University. 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, and 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, and advised by the Assistant Dean for Campus Life and Director of 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 7,127 total students (6,302 undergraduate students and 825 graduate students) representing 46 states and 49 nations. The university offers 70+ majors, has a 78% 4-year graduation rate, and a 88% first-year retention rate. The student/faculty ratio is 12:1 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 2014/2018 and 2016/2020 voter registration rate and voting rate be found below.

Year	Election Type	Voter Registration Rate	Voting Rate
2020	General	89.9%	74.0%
2016	General	78.8%	43.9%

Year	Election Type	Voter Registration Rate	Voting Rate
2018	Midterm	75.9%	29.4%
2014	Midterm	66.2%	10.7%

As a result of our institutionalized civic engagement efforts, Elon University the 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. In addition, we have leveraged this 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.

GOALS

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

1. Launch a comprehensive voter engagement campaign for the 2022 midterm elections
2. Host an on-campus early voting site in collaboration with the Alamance County Board of Elections
3. Host a town hall event with U.S. Congressional District 4 Candidates Valerie Foushee (D) and Courtney Geels (R)
4. 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)

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 Elon Votes! and the Elon Political Engagement Work Group:

August/September 2022: Voter Engagement - Voter Registration Focus

- August voter registration email from Vice President Dr. Jon Dooley
- Elon Votes! magnets distributed to all on-campus residents during orientation
- Elon Votes! tabling during orientation
- Push out new Elon Votes! voting engagement video across campus
- Elon Votes! Moseley Center office staffed by Voting 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 additional focus on low-turnout majors in LSB and the Innovation Quad)
- Promote early voting in Alamance County

September/October 2022: Voter Engagement - Absentee Ballot Focus

- Continue Elon Votes! Moseley Center office staffed by Voting Ambassadors to support voter engagement
- Continue Kernodle Center for Civic Life office staffed to support voter engagement
- Continue Elon Votes! campus tabling (with additional focus on low-turnout majors in LSB and the Innovation Quad)
- Promote early voting in Alamance County

November 2022: Voter Engagement – Election Day Focus

- Provide Election Day transportation to two local polling places
- Host Election Night Watch Event

Fall 2022: Active Citizen Series

- National Issues Forum Deliberative Dialogue on September 26: *Policing What Should We Do to Ensure Fair Treatment and Keep Neighborhoods Safe for Everyone?*
- Town hall event with U.S. Congressional District 4 Candidates Valerie Foushee (D) and Courtney Geels (R)
- Department of Political Science and Policy Studies Post-Election Event on Thursday, November 10

Spring 2023: Active Citizen Series

- National Issues Forum Deliberative Dialogue
- Conversation events with newly elected officials

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.

An evaluation conducted of the goals identified in the 2020 campus action plan yielded the following results:

Goal	Evaluation Summary
1. Increase the student voting rate from 43.9% to 50%	NSLVE data indicated an increase in the student voting rate to 74.0% in the 2020 election. This was a significant increase over the projected goal of 50%.
2. Launch the new student voting ambassador pilot program	The new student voter ambassador pilot program involving 15 students was identified as a key factor in increasing our campus student voting rate in 2020. As a result, the program has continued beyond the pilot and

	two new dedicated student positions have been created to provide leadership for this initiative.
3. Expand the focus on absentee ballots	Using our previous NSLVE data, we made a significant structural shift in our voter engagement efforts when we were made aware that the majority of our students voted absentee prior to 2020. This allowed us to change our 2020 strategy to have an equal focus on voter registration and absentee ballots. As a result of this data-informed structural shift, we reduced the voter registration to voting rate gap from 35% in 2016 to 16% in 2020.

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.

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.