



Increasing Civic Learning, Political Engagement,
and Voter Participation Amongst Students at
Georgia Southern University

Action Plan

Voter Friendly Campus Program Cohort
2024-25

Executive Summary

Georgia Southern University actively supports student engagement in the communities our university serves through community service and civic engagement. We are committed to taking the action steps associated with collaboration and communication to extend our existing efforts and further develop our campus and local communities in these areas. Georgia Southern University consists of 3 campuses and this action plan aims to involve faculty/staff/students across the university as well as the local communities of Statesboro, Savannah, and Hinesville.

Georgia Southern aligns well with the tenets of the Voter Friendly Campus initiative as Community Engagement, Student Success, and Inclusive Excellence are core pillars of our university [Strategic Plan](#). This plan focuses on contributing to community engagement and inclusive excellence themes stated in Georgia Southern's Strategic Plan and the [Division of Student Affairs Strategic Plan](#). It also supports the Elections Divisions/Boards of Bulloch, Liberty, and Chatham Counties where Georgia Southern has campuses as well as the Georgia Secretary of State's Office. All aforementioned entities desire to have engaged and informed citizens working to make the state of Georgia a better place to live.

This initial action plan will have a timeline of implementation for Fall 2024 as it is scheduled to be reviewed and evaluated by Campus Vote Project in Summer 2024. Additional actions will continue beyond this timeframe and past the November 2024 election. A review and update of action steps included in this plan will occur each semester with all stakeholders listed in the **Leadership** section.

This plan was developed and led by the Division of Student Affairs and includes the following staff members:

- Jodi Kennedy, Director - Leadership & Community Engagement
- Dr. Ken Gassiot, Associate Vice President for Student Development

The Division of Student Affairs will lead organization efforts for this plan and will be coordinated by the above listed staff members.

Leadership

Name	Role	Email
Jodi Kennedy	Director Leadership & Community Engagement	jmiddleton@georgiasouthern.edu
Dr. Jamie Scalera Elliott	Department Chair & Professor Political Science and International Studies	Jscalera@georgiasouthern.edu
Dr. Ken Gassiot	Associate Vice President Student Affairs	kgassiot@georgiasouthern.edu
Shontay Jones	Local Elections Official Bulloch County	sjones@bullochcounty.net
Dr. Kimberly Martin Tecklenburg	Assistant Professor Political Science and International Studies	kimberlymartin@georgiasouthern.edu
Carry (CJ) Smith	Coastal Georgia Coordinator The Georgia Coalition of the People's Agenda	carry.j.smith@gmail.com
Haley Rhodes	Student Student Government Association	ssa-studentaffairs@georgiasouthern.edu
Sarah Deprospero	Student Moot Court Association and Alpha Omicron Pi	sd18115@georgiasouthern.edu
Paris Hall	Student Moot Court Association and Student Election Ambassador	ph07564@georgiasouthern.edu

Meeting Scope and Duration:

- 2 times in the Fall semester and 2 times in the Spring semester
- Each meeting will last for 1-2 hours
- Discussion at each meeting will include a review of this plan, programming/education efforts, and discussion of perceived progress from all team members.

Democracy Fellows

- Georgia Southern will actively recruit and seek students to apply for service as a Democracy Fellow for 2024-25. Any student who is internally viewed at Georgia Southern as a student who would meet all position description requirements as required by Campus Vote Project would be encouraged to apply. All Democracy Fellows representing Georgia Southern would be a part of the Leadership Team listed in this plan, attend all scheduled meetings, and participate in program/event/initiative planning

Commitment

Georgia Southern University includes in its mission to be a “learner-centered culture that prepares us to think, lead, teach, and serve.” It is through the university’s strategic pillars that our efforts to educate students, faculty, and staff about voter education as well as partner with the local community, align very closely and demonstrate a broad based commitment to voter education and civic engagement.

The mission statement for the Political Science and International Studies academic department is to “foster the development of civically-engaged students who will become productive citizens dedicated to serving their communities, their nations, and the world.” The department desires graduates of their program to “become life-long learners as they become cognizant of the institutions and processes of governance and the policies and historical and current events which shape their lives.”

The Office of Leadership & Community Engagement states in its mission to “utilize an integrated theoretical approach to learning, service, and leadership that empowers students to become active, global citizens who lead positive change.” The principles of Learn, Serve, and Lead are the hallmarks of this mission. This focus becomes reality for hundreds of students each year through leadership development, service to the community, and civic engagement. This framework guides decision making and supports the university commitment that all voices have space for participation, dissent and dialogue are welcomed on our campuses, and that students be actively involved in the community.

Georgia Southern University’s Statesboro campus currently serves as an early voting location for Bulloch County. This allows the university to educate students and the campus community around the importance of voting, the process to become a registered voter, how to apply for an absentee ballot, and also serve as a convenient location for students and community members registered in Bulloch County to participate in the voting process. Academic partners in this process include the University Honors College and the Department of Political Science and International Studies. Both groups are actively involved in promoting the volunteer opportunity to students so students can see both the steps needed to ensure a secure voting process and voting in action. A number of student organizations, including College Republicans, Young Democrats of Georgia Southern, and the Southern Leaders Program also organize voter registration drives for the campus community. These initiatives are led by the Dean of Students area and the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement, respectively.

The Dean of Students Office, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Student Union Facilities and Events, Student Activities, and the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement have been the primary partners in working with local officials in recent years. These departments have created programming around voter registration, voter education and how to find candidate resources, sample ballots, researching propositions; and how to be involved in the democratic process after elections have concluded.

Successes will be shared and prior/current recognition of Voter Friendly Campus status on the websites of Leadership & Community Engagement, the Vice President for Student Affairs, Student Government Association, Alumni Relations, and the Department of Political Science and International Studies. In addition, all programming and engagement efforts in 2024-25 will be shared in a number of university publications and leadership meeting groups that include Eagle Pulse (Division of Student Affairs e-Newsletters that is distributed monthly to all Georgia Southern students), 5 Things You need to Know (weekly email to all faculty/staff at Georgia Southern), Student Affairs Leadership Team (monthly leadership meeting of senior Student Affairs staff), Office of Student Activities weekly student organization leadership e-Newsletters, Department of Political Science and International Studies emails to students, and monthly meetings of SGA.

Through the leadership of the Vice President for Student Affairs, a pursuit will be made to have the President of Georgia Southern, Kyle Marrero, to sign the ALL IN's President's Commitment as well as incorporate any Vore Friendly Campus recognition into the President's Fall State of the University address that include high level accomplishments of the university and the progress on our university's goals and objectives. Dr. Marrero actively supports all efforts being made to encourage non-partisan voter education, the university serving as a host site for early voting at the largest campuses in our 3 campus university, and the university's efforts to grow a culture of engagement within the local communities where Georgia Southern has campuses....and beyond.

Resubmission

Landscape

Georgia Southern has strengths and opportunities in its pursuit to engage students in the community and be more civically engaged. Learning outcomes for students come from a variety of initiatives/departments/frameworks. Based on the alignment of those areas to civic engagement, it depends on whether or not stated goals include educating and involving students in civic engagement. Service to the community is a Georgia Southern hallmark and makes our university a distinctive experience for students. Georgia Southern students on average, collectively complete approximately 50,000 hours of service each year. This environment helps shape a culture with students that service and engagement with the community as well understanding the diverse needs of citizens are a part of being a Georgia Southern student. The listed offices in the above section also demonstrate a collective commitment to engaging students in the democratic process.

Since being designated by NASPA/Campus Vote Project as a Voter Friendly Campus in Spring 2022, we have had good efforts to help increase voter education and engagement. We have made modifications in our student engagement platform, Eagle Engage to help identify events as “Civic Engagement/Voter Education” as well as created a video series used for social media promotion, hosted webinars for students to attend on understanding voter registration and civic engagement better, attended numerous online meetings/webinars from Campus Vote Project or affiliated partners, and hosted multiple events across all 3 Georgia Southern campuses, but particularly on our Statesboro and Savannah campuses. Looking ahead, we can do a better job with hosting webinars that are engaging for students due to previous efforts not being as well attended. We could also work to strengthen our connection with the local elections office in Bulloch County due to poor attendance at meetings from their representative. We will also focus on strategically working with additional campus partners will only add to a more robust infusion of ideas as well look ahead to the next 12-24 months.

The [National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement \(NSLVE\) 2020](#) report shows strong engagement with Georgia Southern students and their voting habits. The [2022 NSLVE Report](#) indicates decreases that could be due to being a non-Presidential year, but could be due to added effort that is needed and is being addressed in this Action Plan. The additional education and outreach is intended to enhance engagement. A close look is being given to the Race/Ethnicity section of this report and work to make strategic efforts to help improve some categories of voters that did not have strong engagement compared to other groups.

In recent Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 surveys of all incoming students regarding a new university-wide transition success initiative for first year students called The Eagle Experience, a question was asked to gauge student optimism for being connected to the local community (Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville). The highest rating between the 2 semesters was a 78% Agreed or Strongly Agreed to this statement. Also asked within that survey was if students felt a sense of belonging at the university and a rating high of 84% Agreed or Strongly Agreed to this statement. Almost 650 students collectively completed this survey in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024.

According to the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) 2020 [survey results](#) for Georgia Southern University in the Campus Environment section (p. 12-13, Supportive Environment), slightly similar ratings exist between First Year students and Seniors for questions 14d (Encouraging contact among students from diff. backgrounds (soc., racial/eth., relig., etc.)) and 14i (Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues) with higher ratings occurring amongst First Year students. The number displayed indicates the percentage responding "Very much" or "Quite a bit" about how much the institution emphasized the listed statement. Much progress has been made in the last 3 years at Georgia Southern with diversity and inclusion efforts as well as voter education and perhaps the difference in ratings between those groups is a direct reflection of that.

[Student demographics](#) at Georgia Southern in Fall 2023 consist of 58% Caucasian/White, 25% Black/African American, 38% Hispanic, 5% Two or More Races, and 2% Asian. We have not as an institution held strategic conversations regarding racial or identity makeup amongst students when mapping out civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. While state politics and environmental considerations need to be considered, this would be an area in which we can give added focus to ensure promotion and communications are aimed not only at all students, but targeted student demographics that also represent the university's student profiles. We do have access to data on the racial makeup of students who engage in community service activities and can use that to create opportunity/awareness for certain identity groups that do not engage as much.

When focusing on internal and external barriers that prevent us from being successful, there are minimal obstacles in the way. Internally, we enjoy strong leadership support and stakeholder cooperation to engage in voter education efforts. There has been very little to no requests or need for funding to support voter education programming and service related experiences are connected to existing department budgets aligned with community service/engagement. We also enjoy the support of our involvement in the Voter Friendly Campus program from the Vice President for Student Affairs and the Office of the President. Externally, Georgia's voter engagement efforts have aimed to increase voter participation while ensuring there is integrity in voter participation. We also enjoy a strong partnership with local county election officials and are seen as a strong partner to assist with early voting efforts.

Goals

The following goals are in SMARTIE format in an effort to increase inclusion, ensure accountability and measurability, offer relevant outreach and programming specific to the Georgia Southern student population, and ultimately achieve the overarching goal of stronger student engagement and civic involvement.

1. Establish new campus and community partnerships to coordinate a university-wide approach to voter education and registration. Potential partnerships could include the Department of Political Science and International Studies, the Department of History, University Honors College, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) student organization, Moot Court student organization, along with politically affiliated student organizations to represent all ideas and viewpoints.
2. Establish partnerships with academic programs focused on civic engagement and democratic processes to incorporate faculty perspectives and resources, providing students with hands on voter engagement opportunities, and promoting university-wide support of voter engagement.
3. Design specific voter engagement plan to incentivize students to participate in local, county, state and national elections. This plan would include at least two large campus events in the fall semester, at least 5 voter tabling or information sessions to provide voter registration and absentee ballot process education, and a redesign of the university's Eagles Vote website to include updated and current resources.
4. Host an engaging campus event to raise awareness of National Voter Registration Day on September 17, 2024. This event will incorporate academic courses, local voter registration groups, campus departments and student organizations and be hosted on both the Savannah and Statesboro campuses. The event goal will be to attract a total of at least 300 unique student participants. Additional efforts will include the Liberty campus that involved a scaled effort focusing solely on voter registration.
5. Create unique promotional materials to promote the democratic process of voting to the Georgia Southern University student population. These items could include stickers, t-shirts, individual constitutions, signage, etc.
6. Create an Election Ambassador position for student leaders to assist with promoting voter registration, education, and resources to the student population on each campus. Recruitment for these positions will be advertised through academic courses, student organizations such as the Student Government Association, and campus departments. The goal would be to have at least 3 students in these roles.
7. In partnership with the local Bulloch County Elections Board, maintain status as an Early Voting location for Bulloch County voters with a goal to increase the number of early voters at our specific location by 10%. Specific collaboration efforts will include University Communication and Marketing, local news outlets, the Division of Student Affairs, University Housing, Office of Inclusive Excellence, Office of Multicultural Affairs, and the Office of Student Activities. Email communication will also go out to 100+ community partner agencies notifying them of early voting at the Statesboro campus location. In addition, the team will work to eliminate voting barriers such as parking on campus by waving parking citations in parking lots closest to the voting

location.

8. Identify and promote service opportunities to students related to voter engagement in Bulloch, Chatham, Liberty and surrounding counties. Specifically, we will increase the number of student volunteers for Early Voting on the Statesboro campus by 10%.
9. Explore the creation of a voter education and civic engagement certificate that includes education on how to make a voting plan, benefits of being an involved and consistent voter, and service to the community.

Resubmission

NSLVE

As mentioned in the Landscape section, the [2022 NSLVE Report](#) for Georgia Southern indicates decreases compared to 2020 that could be due to being a non-Presidential year, but could be due to added effort that is needed and is being addressed in this Action Plan.

Voting rates of registered students and voting rates (pg. 4) are all down slightly compared to the non-Presidential election year of 2018. 2018 vs 2022 data across those same markers were down, but Georgia Southern's enrollment also experienced a 410 student decrease in comparison between those 2 election years. Registration rates remained flat and the same in 2018 and also 2022.

When comparing Institution Types (pg. 6), Georgia Southern is on par with all other institution types. By Race and Ethnicity (pg. 7), Georgia Southern showed moderate to large improvements between 2018 and 2022 in all race/ethnicity categories.

When looking at Voting Method (pg. 9), Early Voting had strong increases with in person voting and non-in person voting both having decreases across all elections in 2018, 2020, and 2022. The university's efforts to grow early voting more earnestly in 2018 by partnering with Bulloch County Elections Board to host an early voting location site on our largest campus and promotion of a standalone website, Eagles Vote, could be the direct influence that has shaped that increase.

Age Group (pg. 10), report numbers indicate 2-8% point decreases across all age groups when comparing 2018 and 2022 data. As noted in the NSLVE report, younger voters (18-21, 22-24, 25-29) at Georgia Southern saw a larger gap in voting rates compared to older voters (30-39, 40-49).

Students across all noted fields of study saw decreases between 2018-2022.

Solutions to Increase Student Engagement and Action

This Action Plan has included efforts to help create upward trends in the noted 2022 NSLVE Report areas above that show decreases. Focusing on where Georgia Southern has participation gaps positions us to keep shaping campus and student culture even more intentionally than when Georgia Southern first was recognized as a Voter Friendly Campus in Spring 2023 for the efforts put in place starting Fall 2022.

Strategic efforts are identified in the Goals section to:

- grow a deeper partnership with the Department of Political Science and International Studies, local community based voter registration groups, as well as student organizations that were not previously included as partners to grow student participation and interest compared to Fall 2022.

In addition, efforts are identified in this Action Plan to:

- organize bigger events with more popular incentives/giveaways that encourage, grow, and build student participation
- explore and incorporate more student leadership and engagement opportunities with the goal of longer term sustainability and involvement succession
- remember with each small and large, simple or complicated effort to involve and embed elements of fun and excitement

Strategy

- Accomplishing short and long term goals stated above will involve utilizing the members identified in the **Leadership** section to create a task list with identification of specific members to make progress or serve as points of contact for task completion.
- Some goals may require a more measured and systematic approach due to longer periods of time associated with achieving the goal, such as the work associated with our current progress towards applying for Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement.
- Communication and accountability will be critical to achieve all above stated goals. Progress of this plan and goal completion will be noted in the [Eagles Vote](#) website that is dedicated to voter education for Georgia Southern students as well as progress updates provided to the Student Affairs Leadership Team, Deans/ Directors/Department Chairs (Academic Affairs), and President's Cabinet. A tracker and dashboard will be created to view progress and transparently communicate to the university community.
- Consider submitting an Implementation Grant with any available funding through the [Ask Every Student](#) organization.

Sustainability of any strategy to achieve goals needs long term commitment and efforts that will continue past any given election year. To ensure the efforts and goals outlined in this Action Plan continue past November 2024, the Voter Friendly Campus Steering Committee at Georgia Southern will:

- Intentionally include post November 2024 planning and outreach as an agenda topic in all scheduled meetings
- Offer bi-weekly voter registration tabling on the Statesboro and Savannah campuses to keep the presence of voting and involvement alive and on the front burner
- Partner with the Department of Political Science and International Studies faculty to include in class conversations about involvement and engagement past a midterm and Presidential election cycles
- Discuss with administration in the Provost's Office for opportunities to maximize civic engagement education and awareness across all academic disciplines.
- Partner with Georgia Southern University Libraries for programming and outreach aimed at the history and current day opportunities with civic engagement as well as literature and university resources through University Libraries to help educate students.
- Work with appropriate representatives connected to current university efforts in development of Georgia Southern's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan as well as the 2025-2030 Inclusive Excellence Action Plan.
- Consult with appropriate staff in the Office of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation to document and identify actions in this Action Plan help support identified standards or frameworks connected to compliance and effectiveness

Reporting

The 2022 [Student Voting Rates report](#) is provided by the Institute for Democracy in Higher Education because of being a participant in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). Georgia Southern is a current member of the Institute and Director of Institutional Research, Chris Olson, is the university's representative. This report will be used by the university's Voter Friendly Campus Steering Committee as a resource to assist in outreach efforts, creation of goals, and evaluation benchmarks.

In an effort to demonstrate transparency, trust, and community engagement, this Action Plan will be:

- Posted on the [Eagles Vote](#) website
- Shared via email to the following organizations:
 - Student organizations through Student Activities
 - Students involved in Leadership & Community Engagement programs
 - Students enrolled in courses and involved in programs connected to the Department of Political Science and International Studies
 - Students enrolled in First Year and Second Year Experience courses and programming
 - Alumni Relations and the Georgia Southern Alumni Association
- Presented as approved and when scheduled during in-person/virtual meetings to the:
 - Student Affairs Leadership Team
 - Deans/ Directors/Department Chairs (Academic Affairs)
 - President's Cabinet
- Shared externally with partners with local election officials in the counties Georgia Southern has campuses

Consideration will be given to share our institution's NSLVE report linked above. This report will need to be screened and approved at a variety of levels in order to be shared publicly. If approved, the NSLVE report for Georgia Southern could be posted on an appropriate institutional website such as Eagles Vote and/or shared with external stakeholders. The goal in sharing the action plan as well as the NSLVE report would be to grow our voter education/civic engagement work across all 3 of our campuses.

Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation is critical to our success in this process and demonstrating measured growth in our efforts. The evaluation process should not simply be limited to an experience that occurs after all progression points have been completed, but centered on an ongoing process that shows flexibility and responsiveness to developments or changes. The following efforts will be incorporated into the evaluation process:

- The members listed in the **Leadership** section will serve as lead members of the assessment and evaluation process and treat each meeting as an opportunity to go over plan details and make adjustments as needed.
- The [Democratic Engagement Action Plan Rubric](#) will be used to aid in assessing the effectiveness of this action plan. Each member will individually assess the plan using the rubric followed by a group discussion and consensus that leads to an overall/group rating for each section.
- Focus groups and open input will be solicited from student groups, the Student Affairs Leadership Team, Deans/ Directors/Department Chairs (Academic Affairs), the President's Cabinet, and external partners aligned with the voting process.
- Georgia Southern will review institution specific data from [NSSE](#) with a focus on specific questions in the Campus Environment section, specifically questions 14d and 14i.
- Any recent and new campus climate data will be analyzed with a focus on any questions that offer insight into sense of belonging, comfortability in engaging/discussing civic engagement/political matters, etc.
- Consider student research on this topic through the [Southern Leaders](#) program and appropriate academic departments.
- Review the ["Ask Every Student" framework](#) and take appropriate action based on results.

Collecting input is a positive and strong step, but taking action and doing something with it is an even stronger step forward. All data points and sources will be used to take further steps that fill gaps or address issues related to increasing voter education and civic engagement as well as further shaping a campus environment that welcomes all perspectives, opinions, and beliefs. All action steps associated with assessment and evaluation will include timelines for completion with measurable outcomes.

Resources

Georgia Southern University Strategic Pillars

<https://president.georgiasouthern.edu/performance-excellence/strategic-plan/strategic-pillars/>

Eagle Vote (student website to promote voter education)

<https://students.georgiasouthern.edu/eaglesvote/>

Voter Friendly Campus Google Drive folder for resource docs

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NAsN2guj1q4dpigPJOaHg4Uo-wlai0Xa?usp=sharing>

Strengthening American Democracy Guide for Action Plans

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VmSZkdYZevJK9bGbb-uksuXYcJo1kCnr/view?usp=sharing>

Democratic Engagement Action Plan Rubric

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WaXWavBK8fwWnhhvFwnf-XRLh3zX7-dN/view?usp=sharing>

Voter Friendly Campus

<https://www.voterfriendlycampus.org/>

Campus Vote Project

<https://www.campusvoteproject.org/>

All In Campus Democracy Challenge

<https://allinchallenge.org/>

Student Learn Students Vote

<https://slsvcoalition.org/about/>

Institute for Democracy in Higher Education

<https://idhe.tufts.edu/>

2020 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) - Student Voting Rates Report for Georgia Southern

https://drive.google.com/file/d/11B0uT5_m11x0Koi9lxu3PBCEoltFJBq9/view

Ask Every Student

<https://www.studentvoting.org/>

Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellows

<https://www.campusvoteproject.org/democracy-fellows>

State/County Election Offices/Boards

Bulloch: <https://bullochcounty.net/elections/>

Chatham: <https://elections.chathamcountyga.gov/>

Liberty: <https://www.libertycountyga.com/318/Board-of-Elections>

State of GA: <https://sos.ga.gov/page/about-elections-division>