

Voter Friendly Campus Designation 2025-2026 Kennesaw State University Institutional Plan

About Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw State University is a comprehensive university recognized for its entrepreneurial spirit, global engagement, and sense of community. As Georgia's third-largest university, Kennesaw State offers more than 130 undergraduate and graduate degrees. Kennesaw State is a Carnegie-designated doctoral research institution (R2) placing it among an elite group of U.S. colleges and universities with an R1 or R2 Status.

Serving over 45,000 students on two primary campuses located in Kennesaw and Marietta in Cobb County Georgia, Kennesaw State has seen consistent growth in one of the fastest growing counties in the Atlanta Metropolitan area.

Overview

Dr. Kathy S. Schwaig continues to lead Kennesaw State University's with unwavering dedication as its president. Throughout her time at KSU, she has done a great job at effectively executing the strategic plan she announced upon beginning office. Central to this plan are pillars focused on student success, enriching student experiences, fostering research endeavors, and nurturing a strong sense of community.

At KSU, the Division of Student Affairs upholds its mission to empower students as engaged and ethical citizens. Indeed, Kennesaw State University remains committed to cultivating civic involvement among students. Notably, the Division of Student Affairs is spearheading initiatives aimed at facilitating difficult conversations, ensuring students can share their perspectives confidently and courageously.

Looking ahead to the 2025 – 2026 academic year, students will face a pivotal opportunity to exercise their voting rights in the Georgia Governor election of 2026. As we prepare for this significant election, it becomes imperative to share the importance of actively participating in local elections. KSU is proud of the good work we have already been doing but used this process as a vehicle to enhance the democratic engagement of our students, particularly related to voting and participation in the civic life of their communities.

Our NSLVE data reveals a 91.6% registration rate for 2020, yet with voting rates at 72.4%, there's a noticeable gap. As we look ahead to the 2025 and 2026 academic years, KSU remains committed to addressing this issue.

Continuing our collaboration with TurboVote, we're dedicated to enhancing voter education and engagement. Through TurboVote, students can easily request absentee ballots at no cost, especially beneficial for on-campus residents unable to return home to vote. Additionally, leveraging the Georgia Secretary of State's My Voter Page, students can conveniently access essential voting information and services.

In our pursuit of fostering a voter friendly campus, we're focusing on institutional climate and cultural enhancement. The recent rebranding of the Owl Creed and the introduction of principles crafted by KSU students support our commitment to unity and shared values.

Ease of Access to Voting: Through our partnership with TurboVote, there is an easy process to request absentee ballots at no cost to students. This is promoted as a key advantage of signing up for TurboVote and is particularly marketed to on-campus residential students who preferred not to register using their local on-campus address but would not be able to return home to vote at their designated polling location.

We also utilize the Georgia Secretary of State's My Voter Page. Through this site, it is easy to verify voter registration status, poll location, early voting locations, current elected officials, update registration information, request an absentee or provisional ballot, verify ballot status, and review a sample ballot for the upcoming election.

Commitment to Civility: Assess and enhance the institutional climate and culture. In past years, KSU experienced changes in leadership coupled with a variety of high-profile conflicts, many ways mirroring the national climate during presidential elections. The rebranding of the Owl Creed has also helped in creating a sense of belonging, along with principles – created by KSU students – that they believed all KSU Owls should uphold during their time at KSU.

Leadership/Coalition

We have assembled a multidisciplinary team of institutional partners who committed to supporting this action plan and all civic engagement efforts on KSU's campus. To ensure all invited can help encourage civic engagement on KSU's campus, there will be 2 groups that will work towards fulfilling these goals. An advisory group for those that would like to collaborate with others on campus to drive the direction of campus-wide efforts. However, the Programming Group contributes to the shared mission through event planning and programming. Some also have the option to do both or choose to only participate in Constitution Week.

1. Student Groups
 - a. Human Services Club
 - i. Registered Student Organization (RSO) that focuses on community outreach and service-oriented experiences promoting social advocacy.
 - ii. A part of Advisory group and Programming group
 - b. Civic Engagement Team
 - i. Recruited on campus and selected by the Department of Student Leadership staff.
 - ii. Plan and implement voter registration and engagement initiatives.
 - iii. A part of Advisory group and Programming group
2. Faculty
 - a. Carl Snook – Senior Lecturer of Political Science (School of Government and International Affairs)
 - i. A part of Advisory Group

- b. Dr. Monica Nandan – Director of Strategic Partnerships and Social Impact and Professor of Social Work and Human Services (WellStar College of Health and Human Services)
 - i. Apart of Advisory Group
- 3. Staff
 - a. Karen Boettler – Assistant Director of Leadership Development (Department of Student Leadership)
 - i. Advisory and Programming Group
 - b. Melanie Badoo – Program Coordinator, Leadership Development (Department of Student Leadership)
 - c. Maggie LaForge – Program Coordinator, Fraternity and Sorority Life (Department of Fraternity and Sorority Life)
 - i. Advisory Group
 - d. Khyla Guishard – Program Coordinator, LGBTQ+ Resource (Department of Engagement and Belonging)
 - i. Advisory Group

While we've previously benefited from partnerships with external organizations like the League of Women Voters and Cobb County Board of Elections and Registration, we acknowledge the need to rebuild these connections. Internally, collaboration across Student Affairs and Academic Affairs units remains essential for integrating our initiatives into every aspect of campus life.

Our top three goals for democratic engagement during the Fall 2025 semester:

- I. Elevate KSU's voting rate by 4% from 72.4% based on our 2020 presidential election NSLVE data.
- II. Increase student participation in civic initiatives, emphasizing local and state elections through social media, and on-campus/virtual programming.
- III. Forge at least two partnerships with internal and/or external stakeholders to drive civic engagement both on campus and within surrounding communities.

Fall 2025 Plan

2020 Analysis

Due to the everchanging of leadership and reorganization of the Department of Student Leadership, data from 2020 was utilized to continue the development and implementation of core programs focused on voter engagement and education. A highlight of Kennesaw State each year is our Constitution Week which spans from Constitution and Citizenship Day (September 17th) to National Voter Registration Day (September 24th). We utilize this week to conduct voter

registration and education activities, host civil discourse programs, policy-focused education sessions, and interactive experiences to engage students. During the 2019 Constitution Week, we were able to host a new initiative called Field Trip Friday which hosts a trip to the Georgia State Capitol during the week of programming. Due to limited resources, the Department of Student Leadership will have to postpone any future Field Trip until funds become allotted for this initiative again. In the past, we hosted an individual from the Cobb Board of Elections to educate students on employment and volunteer opportunities. Due to the global pandemic in 2020, our civic engagement efforts were cut short.

Voter Registration

Kennesaw will continue to utilize our partnership with TurboVote to provide easy access to registration. The campus mailing system was updated during 2019 to centralize all mailing per respective campus. With this, each of our two campuses has one single mailing address on-campus students will use to register. This adjustment will also influence the polling location for students which in turn makes providing transportation to the polls much easier. These addresses are preloaded in TurboVote to make it easier and increase accuracy and provided these details to the County Registrar to ensure there were no accidental rejections due to address match errors. The Office of the Dean of Students hosts a dedicated Voter Registration and Education website with links to both TurboVote and the Georgia My Voter Page and uses that page as a landing site to then direct visitors to other related activities. The direct link to that site is <http://deanofstudents.kennesaw.edu/resources/voter-registration.php> but given the length of the URL we created an easier “mask” site to auto-direct users, so for marketing purposes, we promoted the site as vote.kennesaw.edu.

I. Elevate KSU’s Voting Rate

We are seeking an 8% increase in voting rates in 2025 compared to the NSLVE results from 2020. We also want to begin efforts immediately to instill a sense of individual responsibility for democratic engagement and participation in every election, whether national, state, or local. One tool for achieving this goal will be our Owl Creed. The Owl Creed was redeveloped by a student focus group to reflect the current student population and has been promoted around the university. Given the link to civic engagement, we are seeking ways to bring the Creed to life, engaging a crowdsourcing philosophy to allow the Owl Creed to evolve organically to reflect our evolving student body. Simply bringing together such a diverse group of partners from across the institution and community has intrinsic value, and through the Civic Engagement working group, we seek to strengthen not only this work but future collaborations in service to our students and community.

Ballot Access:

Through our partnership with TurboVote, there is an easy mechanism to request absentee ballots at no cost to students. This is promoted as a key advantage of signing up for TurboVote and is particularly marketed to on-campus residential students who preferred not to register using their

local on-campus address but would not be able to return home to vote at their designated polling location.

We also utilize the Georgia Secretary of State's My Voter Page. Through this site, it is easy to verify voter registration status, poll location, early voting locations, current elected officials, update registration information, request an absentee or provisional ballot, verify ballot status, and review a sample ballot for the upcoming election.

In the past, we have invited the Cobb County Board of Elections and Registration to bring their sample ballot machine but with the update in technology in Georgia, we will be updating what this will look like so students are prepared to complete their ballot appropriately.

Voter Turnout:

The Dean of Students facilitates a mass email and social media postings to promote all the voter registration, education, and awareness activities that ultimately reinforced the desired end goal: voting! Each election cycle there is at least one mass email with appropriate details and reminders. Knowing students do not always check their emails in a timely manner, all activities were also promoted through OwlLife, KSU's online student activities portal and other traditional promotion mechanisms are used (distributing flyers around the campuses, asking faculty to make announcements to their classes, encouraging student leaders to use peer-to-peer communication channels).

We also encourage students to become involved in voter registration and education by providing opportunities for students to volunteer their time by participating in text campaigns, and other opportunities that may arise centered around voting.

We also educate students about the ease and availability of absentee ballots but more importantly ensure they understand how polling locations are designated. A challenge we have faced in years past is students not realizing on election day they can only vote at their designated polling location and end up unable to vote because they went to the wrong location. To proactively address this issue, we focused on an early voting campaign to encourage students who were not choosing an absentee ballot option to go to the advance voting locations designated for the county. Unlike on election day, the only restriction when choosing a location for advance voting is that the voters must choose a location within the county in which they are registered. Since most of our students are from the local area, mostly within the county in which the two campuses are located, this provided easily accessible locations with convenient hours across multiple days. The state also provided Saturday voting options.

II. Increased Participation

Our second goal for the year 2025 will be to increase the number of students we see participating in our programs focused on civic learning and democratic engagement. Participation in the past has been low but we believe by leveraging our resources, we will be able to create more student-to-student connections to drive engagement. Through collaboration with on-campus departments and student organizations, we plan to reach more of the KSU student population. Overall, we aim to expand programming and engagement beyond Constitution Week, so students are engaged throughout the year and not just around major election cycles.

We will continue our traditional efforts by engaging students on social media postings to guide students to TurboVote but will also increase our efforts in Voter Education programming earlier

than our normal timeframe of September when Constitution Week occurs. Through the CET Team, we plan to continue hosting and host:

- What's the Tea on Democracy? - Student hosted conversation hours hosted by our campus Democracy Walls.
- Action Planning for Presidential Elections
- Student Government Policy Poster and Letter Writing Campaigns: Posters that highlight specific policies of interest to students and templates for writing letters to local representatives.
- Constitution Week Panel: Hosted by the Sturgis Library, this event includes a panel discussion reviewing the important influence of the Constitution on our current systems, voter registration information, and pocket constitution booklets.
- Speak Up Series: Partnership with Residence Life, Student Engagement and Belonging, and Advocacy and Prevention. This program hosts a relevant topic for students to practice civil discourse.
- Voter Planning Cards: Business cards that students complete to develop their "voting action plan."

All programming offered directly through the Civic Engagement Collaborative Working Group and/or the Student Government Association was specifically designed to be nonpartisan. Other politically and socially affiliated registered student organizations were free to choose whatever programmatic approaches and/or content they wished, though most opted for nonpartisan approaches to engage a broader audience.

III. Internal and External Community Stakeholders:

As the 2026 Georgia Governor's election looms on the horizon, the significance of engaging both internal and external community stakeholders cannot be overstated. Forging and maintaining connections with the Cobb County local government will be instrumental in bolstering our efforts to educate students on the importance of local elections.

Internal Stakeholders:

- 1. University Administration, Faculty, and Staff:** The guidance and expertise of university administrators and faculty members are crucial in integrating civic education into the higher education curriculum. By incorporating discussions, projects, and experiential learning opportunities related to local elections, we can empower students to become informed and engaged citizens.
- 2. Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) and Student Leaders:** Student led initiatives are powerful drivers of civic engagement on campus. Collaborating with RSOs allows us to tap into the things students truly have a passion for. Together, we can organize events, voter registration drives, and educational workshops to foster a culture of civic responsibility.

3. **Academic Departments:** Academic departments provide valuable expertise and resources for studying and analyzing the impact of local elections. By facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, we can deepen our understanding of civic participation and contribute meaningful insights to the broader academic community.

External Stakeholders

1. **Cobb County Local Government:** Establishing partnerships with the Cobb County local government opens doors to collaborative initiatives and community engagement opportunities. Working closely with elected officials, and community leaders, we can develop programs that bridge the gap between the university and the local community.
2. **Community Partners and Nonprofit Organizations:** Collaborating with community partners and nonprofit organizations enhances the reach and impact of our civic education efforts. By leveraging their connections, resources, and grassroots networks, we can extend our outreach beyond the campus borders and engage diverse segments of the community in conversations about local elections and civic participation.

Evaluation/Measurement of Success/Commitment:

The Civic Engagement Collaborative Working Group at KSU has sustained a member of our assessment team to provide guidance in evaluating student and program outcomes. We've received reasonable responses to our programming that shows students are being influenced to become more engaged in the democratic process, but we hope to increase the response rate we receive and begin to dive into deeper conversations with students. A noted trend is a loss of efficacy to influence change which can be linked to students involved in civic learning and democratic engagement. We hope to measure the rate at which our efforts increase student efficacy in the democratic process.

Kennesaw State University and the Department of Student Leadership and Service has fostered an institutional commitment to advancing civic and democratic engagement at KSU. Our Program Coordinator has worked diligently within the Department of Student Leadership to specifically develop a culture of awareness and engagement around civic learning and democratic engagement. For instance, Field Trip Fridays were created to have students learn about civic engagement in metro Atlanta and connect the learning back to campus. Also, our Mock debates create collaborations with university constituents to keep students interested in the policies and laws on our ballots.

The KSU student newspaper, The Sentinel, OwlLife News Page, and Student/Faculty Informs are possible ways to promote and share the NSLVE reports with university constituents.

In Conclusion:

Our commitment at Kennesaw State University is steadfast as we propel forward with our momentum. Building upon the foundation laid during Constitution Week, we are poised to expand our efforts throughout the academic year, offering a variety of opportunities for student

engagement. This expansion marks the beginning of a more consistent programming schedule, ensuring that civic education remains a focal point beyond designated events.

Moreover, we eagerly anticipate the establishment of the Civic Engagement Collaborative Working Group. This interdisciplinary initiative promises a holistic approach to voter education and registration efforts on our campus. By uniting diverse perspectives and expertise, we aim to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of civic responsibility among our student body.

As our institution continues to experience exponential growth, our paramount goal remains unchanged: to cultivate an environment where every student's voice is not only heard but valued. Through our collective efforts, we strive to empower students to participate in the democratic process safely and confidently, fostering a community where civic engagement thrives.