



# BEARCATS VOTE

## Campus Action Plan

May 2022





McKendree University Voter Registration Drive, Fall 2020

### **TEAM LEADERS/CONTACTS:**

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# SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

McKendree University is a small liberal arts institution in Lebanon, Illinois, originally founded in 1828 as a Methodist seminary. The Fall 2021 enrollment included 1443 undergraduate and 515 graduate students. McKendree University has a long history and commitment to civic engagement and service learning. Based on the University's mission and strategic plan, we seek not only to provide an excellent academic experience but also to offer a wide variety of intellectual opportunities beyond the classroom by sponsoring forums for presentations and discussions about current issues and events. We offer numerous opportunities for civic engagement and learning.

McKendree's ALL IN committee is comprised of students, staff, and faculty and co-chaired by political science Professor Ann Collins and Access Services Librarian & Assistant Professor Jennifer Funk. Moving forward, we will build on the activities we have organized over the last few years, while also cultivating partnerships with organizations such as Illinois Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), Campus Compact, and the St. Clair County Clerk's Office, in the hopes of hosting debate-watching parties, campus forums, and other events. Our immediate goals center on:

- establishing an early voting polling place on campus for the 2022 and 2024 primary and general elections
- increasing 2022 student voter turnout from 34% to 37%
- registering 75 students to vote in the 2022 elections
- targeting specific student groups (majors, organizations, sports) to spur increased interest in voting

Our long-term goals include continuing to foster a strong sense of civic engagement among our campus community with the expectation of student voter turnout and involvement in the political process.

The 2020 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement report and other tools will help us guide our efforts on the McKendree University Lebanon campus. We will update our action plan as we receive new data from future NSLVE reports.

Overall, by partnering with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and other initiatives, we are encouraging students to use their voices in the electoral process and to cultivate a practice of community engagement so that after graduation they will be lifelong responsible citizens. Campus events and outreach will prepare them for these conversations in their homes, workplaces, and social settings. This undertaking ties in well with McKendree's mission to "encourage broader vision, enriched purpose, engagement with community, commitment to responsible citizenship, openness to new ideas and dedication to lifelong learning." (McKendree University Mission Statement) Our intention is to be inclusive and to reach all of our students, who come from different backgrounds and life experiences including those who have been historically marginalized.



# SECTION II: ALL IN CAMPUS LEADERSHIP

McKendree's Bearcats Vote team is led by Dr. Ann Collins, Professor of Political Science, and Jennifer Funk, Access Services Librarian & Assistant Professor. These leaders work with a larger committee of individuals committed to strengthening civic engagement on our campus.

McKendree's ALL IN Campus committee includes students, staff, and faculty from a variety of disciplines and organizations:

## Faculty:

- Dr. Ann V. Collins, Professor of Political Science
- Dr. Darryn Diuguid, Professor of Education
- Jennifer Funk, Access Services Librarian & Assistant Professor
- Dr. Lauren Thompson, Associate Professor of History

## Staff:

- Krysti Connelly, Executive Director of University Communications and Marketing
- Elizabeth Crabtree, Director of the Hettenhausen Center for the Arts
- Craig Robertson, Director of Campus Activities

## Students:

- Dylan Kirchoff, Sophomore Political Science major; Member of Phi Eta Sigma; Member of Golf Team
- Shelby Nash, Junior Biopsychology major; Member and Student Officer of Phi Eta Sigma; Student Government Association Senator
- Peyton Osgood, Senior Psychology major; Member of Phi Eta Sigma, Pi Gamma Mu, Psi Chi; New Student Orientation Leader and Peer Mentor for University 101; Resident Assistant



McKendree University  
Debate Watching  
Gathering, Fall 2020

The ALL IN Committee will continue to organize voter registration drives, offer educational opportunities, and coordinate voter turnout initiatives to fulfill its mission of civic engagement. Partnering with Residence Life to create floor competitions for voter registration while educating about the pending elections, for example, fulfills several goals. The group will also work with other campus organizations, such as Student Government Association (SGA), Black Student Organization (BSO), United Feminists, Phi Eta Sigma (First Year Student National Honor Society), and Athletics to create more buy-in among our campus community.

In addition, the committee will work with the St. Clair County Clerk's office and other local organizations to make connections within the broader community. Team co-leader Ann Collins serves as a Deputy Registrar in St. Clair County, which helps facilitate these collaborative efforts. Team co-leader Jennifer Funk serves as an election judge in the local area. The committee will recruit additional faculty and staff to serve in these ways to serve our campus community and to model civic engagement to our students.

## SECTION III: COMMITMENT

All levels of our campus community are dedicated to civic engagement. President Daniel (Dan) Dobbins and Provost Tami Eggleston have provided strong leadership in their commitment to educating an informed and involved electorate. President Dobbins signed ALL IN's Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation initiative.

Moreover, both the University's Mission Statement and Strategic Plan emphasize the significance of civic learning and democratic engagement.

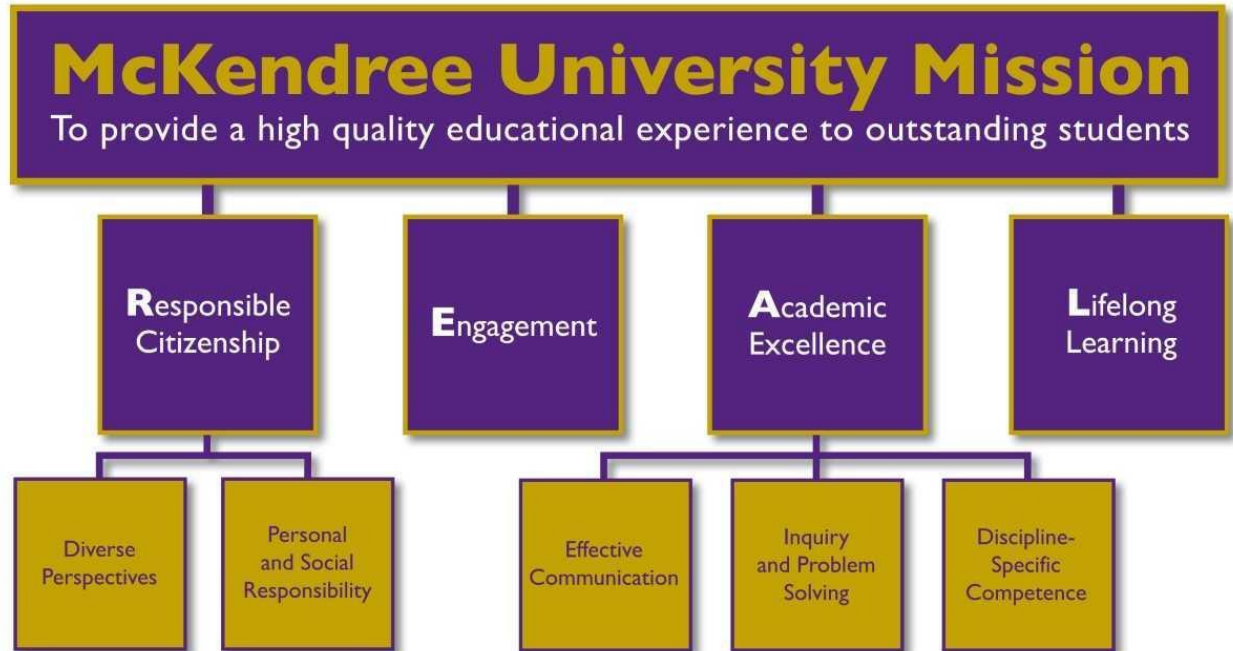
Our mission statement opens with, "The mission of McKendree University is to provide a high quality educational experience to outstanding students. We guide our students in the pursuit of academic excellence which will prepare them for leadership roles in our society. To achieve this end we encourage broader vision, enriched purpose, engagement with community, commitment to responsible citizenship, openness to new ideas and dedication to lifelong learning." (McKendree University Mission Statement, <http://www.mckendree.edu/offices/president/mission.php>)

McKendree's Strategic Plan supports these ideals: "We believe a college education should not be the final culmination of one's educational pursuits; it should be a springboard to lifelong learning. We therefore seek not only to provide an excellent academic experience but also to offer a wide variety of intellectual opportunities beyond the classroom. Our students, faculty and staff will come together as a community of scholars through lectures, theatre, film, art, music, literature and current topics to exchange ideas, express differing points of view or simply enjoy a work of art or a great performance. Our goal in creating this environment is to enrich the life of our campus and local community, and to inspire in our students the desire to continue to engage in intellectually stimulating activities beyond their formal academic experience." Specifically, Goal 4 under the Intellectual Climate section of our Strategic Plan focuses on an important aspect of fostering civic engagement: "We will develop a forum for presentations and discussions about current issues and events to further engage our campus community and to encourage greater intellectual dialogue and debate regarding issues of the day." (McKendree University Strategic Plan, <https://www.mckendree.edu/strategicplan/intellectual-climate.php>)

## SECTION IV: LANDSCAPE

McKendree University's Student Learning Outcomes also speak to civic engagement, particularly the ones that center on Responsible Citizenship—Diverse Perspectives and Personal and Social Responsibility:

- Diverse Perspectives: "Students will understand human and cultural differences, engage with diverse individuals, and embrace variety in viewpoints."
- Personal and Social Responsibility: "Students will exhibit personal and social responsibility." (<http://www.mckendree.edu/offices/provost/assessment/student-learning-outcomes.php>)



The University's required General Education curriculum is designed to offer students the tools to develop the skills necessary for responsible citizenship. We offer courses in disciplines such as Philosophy, Religion, History, Political Science, and Sociology to "stimulate [students] to examine their own values and the values of society through a variety of subjects outside their major program of study." (2021/2022 Undergraduate Catalog, p. 45, <https://www.mckendree.edu/academics/info/course-catalogs/undergraduate-catalog-2021-2022.pdf>)

McKendree assesses civic learning several ways by:

- gauging Student Learning Outcomes at the course, program, and institutional level,
- evaluating feedback from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and
- analyzing data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).

This information is shared at workshops and meetings in order to build on the progress we have made over the years in the realm of civic engagement.

### **Climate**

McKendree's campus climate is encouraging. We have substantial buy-in from the administration, faculty, and staff. Many students are also passionate about the political scene and social justice issues. Moreover, many of our students participate in service and engage in social justice initiatives both on and off campus.

## **Engagement**

Since its launch, McKendree has participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE). We used these data to gain insight into student participation in the 2012, 2016, and 2020 presidential elections. In 2012, McKendree University had a 78.9 percent student voter registration rate, and in 2016 and 2020, that rate stood at 75.8 percent and 78.5 percent. Of the students eligible to vote, 52.6 percent voted in the 2012 presidential election, 49.5 percent did so in 2016, and 60.5 percent did in 2020.

In the 2014 midterm election, 68.7 percent of McKendree students were registered to vote, however only 25.1 percent of eligible student voters actually voted. Our numbers for the 2018 midterms improved: 73.7 percent of students were registered to vote, and the voting rate was 34.4 percent. We attribute these increases to the changing political climate and the new on-campus polling place, and we hope to build on this success in the 2022 midterm elections by attaining a voting rate of 37 percent.

All demographic groups saw an increase in the voting rate between 2018 and 2020 (unfortunately, the 2016 data is not broken down by race and ethnicity in our NSLVE report). According to our report, in the 2018 elections McKendree had 108 Black student voters (33% of Black enrolled students), 20 Hispanic student voters (17%), 27 self-identified multiple race student voters (33%), and 638 White student voters (37%). Across these categories, the voting rate increased for the 2020 elections. In that year's elections McKendree had 153 Black student voters (55%), 58 Hispanic student voters (43%), 44 self-identified multiple race student voters (47%), and 951 White student voters (63%). We are pleased with the rate of increase and hope to build on it.

In 2016, we joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and earned a Bronze Seal for our student voting participation rate in the November elections. In 2019 and 2021, we earned Silver Seals. Washington Monthly also recognized McKendree as one of its "Best Colleges for Student Voting" in 2020 and 2021, and our institution was designated as a voter friendly campus as well. McKendree has also joined the Ask Every Student initiative and signed on to the new ALL IN student voter portal. While McKendree has made some strides in voter engagement, work remains to be done on our campus. Our ALL IN Committee is dedicated to fostering a strong sense of civic engagement on our campus by expanding our reach, thinking creatively about programming, and engaging students earlier in the process.

## **Curriculum and Co-Curricular Initiatives**

McKendree University remains resolute to civic engagement being a pervasive component of the student experience on campus. See Section III of this action plan for our commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement. The University has a good track record of sponsoring events during election years. Over the last few election cycles, we have held numerous on-campus voter registration drives, Constitution Day activities, presentations, discussions, and debate-watching gatherings. The current buy-in to expand these programs is strong within campus constituents. McKendree provides all eligible students the opportunity to register to vote during new student orientation and throughout their first semester in the University 101 class. In addition, some courses offer a service learning component to engage students more deeply in the democratic process. For example, in State and Local Government, students have been required to design and implement a service learning assignment related to civic engagement. For example, some students trained and served as election judges. Another course that provides a related opportunity is the Honors section of American Politics.

## **Barriers**

Our campus faces a few challenges. Like other small, liberal arts institutions, McKendree does not have a vast number of resources. Funding is limited and mostly earmarked for other projects and organizations. Moreover, some students—like many Americans—are apathetic and cynical toward politics and government. We were

successful in adding a polling place on campus, one of our goals from our May 2018 action plan. While we believe this made it easier for students to vote, we still had work to do. Some students encountered problems such as being told that they need a photo ID which is not required in Illinois, and being turned away for same-day registration, even though Illinois law provides that opportunity. Also, some students who requested absentee ballots never received them. We worked closely with the St. Clair County Clerk's Office to remedy these issues, and the 2020 elections appear to have gone more smoothly.

#### **Available Resources**

Despite these hardships, we have a dedicated team of concerned individuals and other advocates who are intent on ensuring a campus devoted to civic engagement. Furthermore, Illinois has relatively friendly election laws that allow for easy registration and voting. These factors will no doubt help us fulfill our goals.

#### **Additional Required Resources**

To help us be successful, our team will need a small amount of funds for marketing and publicity, time and energy from the campus community, and involvement from student groups and organizations to engender more enthusiasm among their classmates.

## **SECTION V: GOALS**

McKendree's goals regarding civic learning and democratic engagement revolve around the basic tenets of its mission and strategic plan: Responsible Citizenship, Engagement, Academic Excellence, and Lifelong Learning. Our long-term goal is to make steady progress in student voter registration and turnout rates.

Long-term goals center on specific actions:

- Reaching as many students as possible, particularly those who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised. By 2028, McKendree will have the students of color voting at the same rate as white students.
- By 2028, McKendree will incorporate a required civic engagement component in our University 101 course (this component is currently optional).
- By 2028, McKendree will be an early voting location.

Short-term goals center on specific actions:

- Continuing voter registration efforts and increasing the number of students who register and turn out to vote in the 2022 and 2024 general elections. We increased our voting rate from 49.5 percent to 60.5 percent between 2016 and 2020. While we might not achieve another 11-point increase in 2024, we hope to move in that direction. We would also like to achieve a 37 percent voting rate for the 2022 midterms (up from 34.4 percent in 2018).
- Collaborating with on-campus and off-campus organizations to improve democratic engagement.
- Actively soliciting members from our Student Government Association, Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Eta Sigma, Residence Life, and the Lyn Huxford Center for Community Service to take on leadership roles and assist in our voter registration and education efforts.
- Working with St. Clair County Clerk's office to hold voter registration drives, train election judges, and build an opportunity to host early voting on McKendree's campus.



- Increasing out of state absentee voting and registration by targeted outreach and events for these students. Further development and implementation of voter awareness and democratic engagement campaigns entitled “Bearcats Vote.” This initiative will create a variety of opportunities to actively engage and discuss current issues and civic responsibility with students.
- Planning programs and activities aimed at targeting incoming first-year students, on-campus students, and student athletes.
- Building a webpage dedicated to McKendree’s ALL IN group, action plan, and overall civic engagement on campus.



McKendree University  
Voter Registration Drive,  
Student ALL IN Members,  
Fall 2020

# SECTION VI: STRATEGY

McKendree University will carry out several short-term and long-term strategies to boost student voter registration and turnout in 2022 and beyond.

## **Strategy #1: Continue what we have been doing and expand it, including:**

- Investigate how to host early voting on McKendree's Campus.
- Inform out-of-state residents how to absentee vote and register through the new ALL IN student voting portal.
- Increase interaction with new students through New Student Orientation, Involvement Fair, and University 101.
- Find ways to reach incoming students, such as at New Student Orientation and the Involvement Fair.
- Partner with Residence Life to have contests on each residence hall floor.
- Plan programs, speakers, and events that are supported by students.
- Collaborate with faculty to allow programming to be required or serve as extra credit.
- Visit University 101 courses to promote events. Ensure that all University 101 faculty and student peer mentors are notified of upcoming events. In the long term, add this component as a requirement to all University 101 classes.
- Schedule Brown Bags to discuss voting and elections.
- Work with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to better reach and engage with historically disenfranchised student populations.
- Continue voter registration and education days on National Voter Registration Day and Constitution Day.

## **Strategy #2: Use student resources more effectively:**

- Form an ALL IN student subcommittee for publicity to enhance student engagement through social media.
- Partner with student organizations to co-sponsor events.
- Create an interest survey to distribute to gauge student interests.
- Collaborate with the Debate Team to host events on campus.
- Encourage students to take more ownership as civic engagement ambassadors.
- Communicate with diverse campus groups to inspire politically minded students.
- Motivate students to be election judges and involved in the process of voting.
- Work with student organizations and Athletics to reach more of our campus community.
- Work with Athletics to promote ideas and possibly participate in contests to see who could get the most members registered to vote.

## **Strategy #3: Branding and marketing:**

- Work with University Communications and Marketing to spread the message of civic engagement on campus. Build a webpage dedicated to McKendree's ALL IN group, action plan, and overall civic engagement on campus.
- Make buttons and t-shirts to advertise and generate curiosity about events and activities.
- Create a hashtag, snapchat filter, and other items to increase social media presence.

## SECTION VII: NSLVE

McKendree University began participating in NSLVE in 2014 and recognizes it as an important tool in assessing civic engagement on our campus. We rely on this data to help us build our long- and short-term goals for our action plans.

## SECTION VIII: REPORTING

McKendree's ALL IN group will share this action plan with our provost, who will then share it with the President's Cabinet. We will also disseminate information from this plan to the broader campus community through our Brown Bag forums (a campus-wide speaker series on various topics such as civic engagement). By providing this information to our students and colleagues, we hope to include more stakeholders on campus in the work of civic engagement. Building upon our goals and strategies we will also feature this action plan on our budding webpage dedicated to voter engagement.

## SECTION IX: EVALUATION

We will measure success in several ways to determine if we have met our goals in fostering civic engagement on McKendree's campus. NSLVE feedback will give us data to compare past student registration and voting rates with current ones. We will also tally participation in voter education efforts. Beyond campus, we will count the community partnerships we develop to encourage engagement between our students and the surrounding municipalities and political campaigns. Finally, we will seek feedback from committee members, faculty, and staff on successful initiatives and areas that can be improved. Resources needed for next year include webpage support, mini-grants for civic engagement activities on campus, and training for students, staff, and faculty who want to become election judges or deputy registrars. The next step is to share evaluation information with the provost to disseminate to the President's Cabinet. This information will also be shared through our newly developed webpage.



McKendree University,  
National Voter Registration Day,  
September 2021