

MERCER UNIVERSITY

CAMPUS

ACTION PLAN

2023-2025



Executive Summary

The Mercer University 2023-2025 Campus Action Plan was written by Lauren Shinholster, associate director of engaged learning from fall 2023 to fall 2024. The action plan provides a space for reflection on the successes and challenges experienced during the 2020 and 2022 elections. Additionally, the action plan guides the development of goals and strategies to advance civic learning and democratic engagement during the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years. The campus action plan reflects the shared commitment of Mercer University faculty, staff, students, and community partners. Members of the Mercer Votes coalition will execute the strategies included in this action plan, which has a targeted focus on voter engagement for traditional undergraduate students on Mercer's Macon campus. However, the Mercer Votes coalition is primed to share voter engagement strategies, tools, and resources with colleagues on Mercer's Atlanta, Savannah, and Columbus campuses and the Regional Academic Centers.

As Mercerians prepare to cast their ballots in 2024, we remain encouraged by our success and growth since 2016. Participation in ALL IN, SoCon Votes, Ask Every Student, and Campus Vote Project signifies that Mercer is committed to advancing voter participation year-round and beyond "major" election seasons. Through the coordinated efforts of the Mercer Votes coalition, Mercer aims to reach full participation, a lofty but attainable goal. Because we believe that every Mercerian majors in changing the world, we also believe in their ability and right to effect change by engaging in the democratic process. Therefore, it is the charge of the Mercer Votes coalition to foster an inclusive and equitable environment that closes voter participation gaps. In service of this mission, Mercer Votes has established the following campus goals:

2023-2025 Campus Action Plan Goals:

- The Mercer Votes coalition will meet a minimum of three times (six total meetings) during the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years.
- Mercer Votes will launch the website vote.mercer.edu in spring of 2024.
- Mercer Votes will reaffirm its commitment to full participation through Ask Every Student. On August 16-17, 2024, Mercer Votes will host the Opening Day Voter Registration Drive and will verify the voter registration status of first-year students as they move into their residence halls.
- The Mercer Votes coalition will strengthen its student participation by adding three student organizations to the coalition in the fall of 2024.
- By November 2024, the Mercer Votes coalition will host one event or initiative promoting voter engagement for Asian American students.
- Mercer's Democracy Fellows will advance civic learning and democratic engagement by presenting at one conference or voting summit by the end of 2024.
- The Mercer Votes leadership team will recruit at least 8 students for the inaugural Voter Ambassador program in fall 2024.

- Mercer will reach a 95% voter registration rate during the 2024 general election; a percentage increase of 4 points since 2020.
- Mercer will increase the voter turnout rate for students ages 18-21 by six percentage points; moving from a 67% turnout in the 2020 election to 73% in the 2024 general election.

Leadership

The 2023-2025 campus action plan is supported by Mercer University students, faculty, staff, and community partners on Mercer's Macon campus. Lauren Shinholster, associate director of engaged learning, and Margaret Rooyakkers, assistant director of service and civic engagement, serve as co-leaders for the campus action plan and Mercer Votes initiative. Joining Lauren and Margaret as core leaders of Mercer Votes are Dr. Kathryn Klopper, vice provost of engaged learning, and Mrs. Meredith Keating White, executive director of campus life and student involvement. Additionally, the goals and operations of Mercer Votes are led by Mercer's Democracy Fellows. Our Democracy Fellows are funded and supported by Campus Vote Project. The fellows are undergraduate students who advance nonpartisan voter engagement by strengthening communications, partnership development, and event implementation.

About Mercer Votes

Mercer Votes is a nonpartisan campus coalition designed to advance Mercer University's voter registration, education, and mobilization efforts. The Mercer Votes coalition was formed during the 2021-22 academic year; however, the roots of its formation began in 2016 with the launch of SoCon Votes, the first NCAA Division I athletic conference championship for voter participation. In 2016, Mobilize Mercer, a nonpartisan student organization, was founded to support Mercer's engagement in SoCon Votes and national voting challenges. To advance the operations of Mobilize Mercer and achieve Mercer's long-term goal of full participation, a coalition model was implemented.

At a minimum, the Mercer Votes leadership team meets bi-weekly during the fall and spring semesters, while the coalition meets at least twice each semester. Invitations to join the Mercer Votes coalition remain open throughout the academic year. Recruitment for membership in the coalition is completed through campus advertisements and targeted emails to campus departments, student organizations, and community partners.

Strengthening and sustaining engagement in Mercer Votes is a top priority for the 2023-2025 campus action plan. Specifically, the leadership team is invested in growing student participation in the coalition and aims to ensure that representation from multicultural student organizations is present ahead of the fall 2024 election. Additional student buy-in will be attained through the launch of the Mercer Votes Ambassador program in the fall of 2024. The voting ambassadors will be work-study students hired to conduct class presentations, promote the pledge-to-vote campaign, and assist the Democracy Fellows with voter engagement events.

Leadership Succession Plan

Continuity in voter engagement operations is maintained through a shared leadership model. Voter engagement is explicitly included in the job descriptions of the assistant director of service and civic

engagement and the associate director of engaged learning. In the event of a transition in leadership, the functions of each role would be maintained by the senior leaders of the Office of Campus Life and Student Involvement (co-curricular programming) and Center for Engaged Learning (curricular initiatives) until a replacement was hired. To support any leadership transitions, Mercer Votes documents its work, including outreach efforts, event planning documents, and coalition meeting agendas in departmental share drives and Microsoft Teams. Both professional staff and student members of the leadership team have access to these documents. In addition, transition manuals are regularly maintained and are available to support any onboarding of new staff. As student leadership changes, new fellows and ambassadors are provided adequate training to support their understanding of Mercer's voter engagement history, current landscape, and ongoing strategies and tactics.

Mercer Votes Leadership Team:

- Lauren Shinholster, Associate Director of Engaged Learning
- Margaret Rooyackers, Assistant Director of Service and Civic Engagement
- Dr. Kathryn Kloepper, Vice Provost of Engaged Learning and Professor of Chemistry
- Meredith Keating White, Executive Director of Campus Life and Student Involvement
- Sophia Hall, Undergraduate Student, Democracy Fellow (2024-2025)
- Brandon Biel, Undergraduate Student, Democracy Fellow (2024-2025)
- Harris Wallace, Undergraduate Student, Democracy Fellow (2024-2025)
- Zainab Shaik, Undergraduate Student, Democracy Fellow (2023-2024)
- Jaquin Mack, Undergraduate Student, Democracy Fellow (Fall 2023)
- Carmen Benjamin, Undergraduate Student, Democracy Fellow (Fall 2023)
- Denerica Chappell, Undergraduate Student, Democracy Fellow (Fall 2023)

Mercer Votes Coalition Champions & Supporting Offices:

- President Bill Underwood, University President
- Dr. Douglas Pearson, Vice President and Dean of Students
- Dr. Ansley Booker, Director of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives
- Dr. Carol Bokros, Director of Pre-Health Advising Services
- Dr. Christian Wells, Associate Director of Housing and Residence Life
- Delaney Ryan, Director of Student-Athlete Support Services
- Adam Penland, Assistant Director of Campus Life and Student Involvement
- Department of Political Science
- Tarver Library
- Access and Accommodations
- Marketing and Communications
- Student Government Association
- College Republicans
- Young Democrats
- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated

Mercer Votes Community Partners:

- Campus Vote Project
- The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
- Ask Every Student
- Students Learn Students Vote Coalition
- New Georgia Project
- Georgia Muslim Voter Project
- Georgia Women (And Those Who Stand With Us)
- League of Women Voters
- Macon Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
- Macon-Bibb County Board of Elections

Commitment

Mercer University's mission is “To teach, to learn, to create, to discover, to inspire, to empower, and to serve.” The University’s vision is “To change the world, one student at a time.”¹ Advancing civic learning and democratic engagement are clear priorities for our institution. This commitment is demonstrated throughout the University’s strategic plan, curriculum, and co-curricular initiatives. Whether through voter engagement, volunteerism, general education, or engaged learning experiences such as study abroad, Mercer on Mission, undergraduate research, or service learning, Mercerians are always challenged to think critically and explore how they can impact societal issues.

Mercer University Strategic Plan

Mercer University adopted a new strategic plan to outline an institutional vision for the decade ahead in 2018². At the heart of the strategic plan is a commitment to equip students with the foundational skills to positively impact communities. Strategic plan imperatives are the following:

- Imperative 1: Being an Intimate and Diverse Community of Gifted Scholars Committed to Changing the World
- Imperative 2: Being a Place of Discovery and Innovation
- Imperative 3: Being a Global University
- Imperative 4: Being Relevant
- Imperative 5: Achieving Meaningful Outcomes
- Imperative 6: Competing with the Best
- Imperative 7: Being True to Our Heritage

Since 2018, Mercer has made significant progress in advancing its strategic imperatives. Key achievements include record undergraduate enrollment for fall 2023; increased mentorship and access to engaged learning experiences for undergraduates; national recognition through prestigious

¹ Mercer University Mission and Vision. <https://www.mercer.edu/about-mercer/mission-and-vision/>

² Inspire Mercer’s Vision for the Decade Ahead. <https://strategicplan.mercer.edu/>

fellowships, scholarships, and awards; and an intentional commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout all University campuses and programs.

Core Curriculum

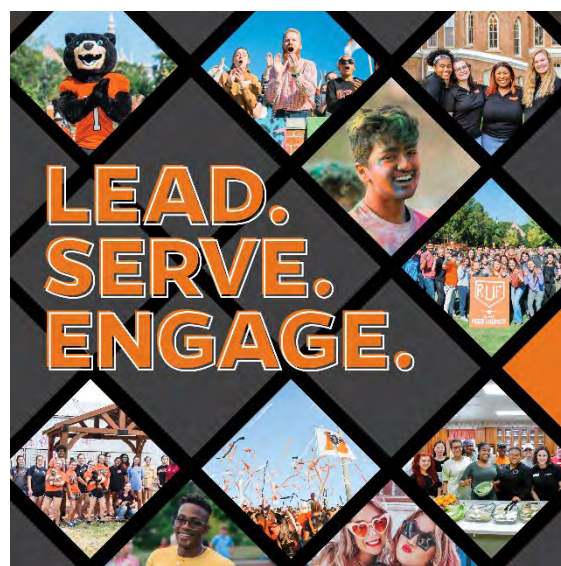
Mercer’s core curriculum for General Education builds on the commitment to civic learning by offering two interdisciplinary tracks— the Great Books Curriculum and the Integrative Curriculum.

The Great Books program consists of eight seminar-based courses. These courses allow students to explore complex issues of race, class, and gender. A description of the Great Books Curriculum reads, “Through this survey of political, religious, philosophical, and scientific thought, students can increase their skills in disciplined thinking and effective writing, can heighten their moral and ethical reflectiveness, and can understand how the seminal ideas of the past have formed our twentieth and twenty-first-century selves.”³

The Integrative Curriculum program features three multidisciplinary courses— INT101: Understanding Self and Others, INT 201: Building Community, and INT 301: Engaging the World. Class discussion and engagement activities are hallmarks of the Integrative program. The description of INT 201 reads, “The broad topic for this sophomore level course is community – how communities are formed, cultivated or threatened, and the role citizens play in preserving public good in communities and nations.”⁴ Several ‘Building Community’ classes incorporate service learning and include opportunities to tutor in local schools, volunteer at shelters for persons experiencing homelessness, or support Little Free Library initiatives.

Co-curricular

In addition to coordinating student programming for the Mercer Votes initiative, the Office of Campus Life and Student Involvement oversees leadership programs, student organizations, fraternity and sorority programs, and three programming boards—QuadWorks, Mercer Maniacs, and MerServe. The mission of Campus Life is “To enhance the overall educational experience of all students through involvement within the Mercer and Macon communities including campus-wide cultural, educational, and social programming, leadership development, civic and community engagement, fraternity and sorority programs, and student organization participation.”⁵ Co-curricular initiatives such as Homecoming, Bearstock, Service Saturday, and Be a Good Neighbor cultivate a sense of belonging and teach Mercerians how to “Be the Bear.”



³ The Program. <https://greatbooks.mercer.edu/the-program/>

⁴ INT 201: Building Community. <https://liberalarts.mercer.edu/about/core-curriculum-for-general-education/integrative-curriculum/int-201/>

⁵ Campus Life Macon. <https://campuslife.mercer.edu/macon/>

A Commitment to Full Participation

Since 2016, Mercer has taken great strides to deepen our institutional commitment to voter engagement. While the founding of SoCon Votes by former Mercer student, Joey Wozniak, served as a catalyst, momentum has been maintained by several campus champions including President Bill Underwood; Vice President and Dean of Students, Dr. Douglas Pearson; and the leaders of the Mercer Votes coalition.



Since higher education is a significant investment of time and money, it is important to provide a return on the investment through meaningful student outcomes and university programs, services, and commitments. When President Underwood signed the Higher Education Presidential Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation in 2020, this commitment signified the importance of voting and democratic engagement for every Mercerian.⁶ As leaders of the Mercer Votes coalition, we can point to this presidential commitment when Mercer Votes pursues initiatives such as Ask Every Student and Voter Friendly Campus.



In 2021, Mercer was ranked #14 among Washington Monthly’s ‘Best Colleges for Student Voting’.⁷ In 2022, the University received MTV’s “Voting Early is Easier” grant which funded early voting celebrations on campus.⁸ In spring 2023, Mercer was named one of 258 Voter Friendly Campuses in the United States.⁹ Finally, in the spring of 2024, Mercer was awarded a \$5,000 implementation grant from Ask Every Student.¹⁰ As an Ask Every Student Commitment Campus,

Mercer has integrated voter registration into the operations of the Office of Housing and Residence and the Office of Academic and Advising Services via the Opening Day Voter Registration Drives and Bear Beginnings.

Landscape

As Mercer prepares for the 2024 general election, it is important to consider shifts in our institutional landscape and the broader political environment. In 2020, Mercer achieved a record turnout rate of nearly 73% in the general election. While the success experienced in 2020 provides invaluable insight, we recognize that there are many internal and external factors impacting the landscape of voting in 2024 and beyond.

⁶ ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Participating Campuses- Mercer University.
<https://allinchallenge.org/campuses/mercer-university/>

⁷ Mercer ranked No. 14 among Washington Monthly’s ‘Best Colleges for Student Voting’

⁸ <https://den.mercer.edu/mercer-a-national-leader-in-student-voter-engagement-efforts/>

⁹ <https://den.mercer.edu/mercer-named-1-of-258-voter-friendly-campuses-in-the-u-s/>

¹⁰ <https://den.mercer.edu/mercer-votes-helps-students-prepare-to-vote-in-upcoming-presidential-election/>

Campus Climate

University Facts and Figures

Mercer University is a private, comprehensive, R2 research institution. The University operates throughout Georgia. There are Mercer campuses in Macon, Atlanta, Savannah, and Columbus, and Regional Academic Centers in Douglas County and Henry County. While Mercer students represent 49 states and 38 countries, 87% of our students are Georgia residents. The total enrollment for the University exceeds 9,100 students, but this campus action plan will focus on the ~3,400 undergraduate students on Mercer's Macon campus.¹¹

Internal-Strengths and Weaknesses

- National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE)—Mercer students demonstrated increased rates of service-learning and civic engagement on the 2019 National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE). Comparing first-year students to seniors, 76% of seniors reported that service-learning or community-based projects were integrated into “some” or “most” of their Mercer courses, while this value was 52% for first-year students. The 2019 NSSE indicated that Mercer is successful in helping students connect their learning to societal problems. Seventy-three percent of seniors surveyed in 2019 made these connections “often” or “very often”. The 2022 combined report, which uses data from the 2021 Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the 2022 NSSE showed that 72.1% of surveyed students engage in discussions with people who hold political views that are different from their own; 86% hold discussions with people from different racial backgrounds.
- Senior Survey-- Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS)— In the spring 2021 HEDS survey, graduating seniors were asked to what extent has Mercer contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in the area of civic engagement. Twenty-three percent of surveyed seniors indicated “some”, 27% said “quite a bit”, and 34% responded, “very much”. Only 15% of surveyed students responded with “very little”.
- Campus Programming and Curriculum—In addition to the programs and activities captured in the “Commitment” section of this action plan, Mercer’s civic learning and democratic engagement climate benefits from a variety of speaker series, conferences, events, and initiatives. In 2022, the Center for America’s Founding Principles hosted "Dueling Constitutions: The Conflict over Slavery in the Early Republic" by James Oakes, Professor of History at City University of New York.¹² In 2023, Dr. Matt Harper, Associate Professor of History and Africana Studies, debuted “Refounding Macon” a four-part series on Macon’s racial history during the 18th annual Beloved Community Symposium¹³.
- Voter Engagement Resources— Mercer benefits from tremendous buy-in from university faculty, staff, and senior leaders. Having dedicated personnel in the Center for Engaged

¹¹ <https://www.mercer.edu/about-mercer/facts-and-figures/>

¹² The McDonald Center for America’s Founding Principles. Annual Speaker Series.

<https://afp.mercer.edu/events/2022-23/2022-23-speaker-series.cfm>

¹³ 18th Annual Beloved Community Symposium. Refounding Macon. <https://religiouslife.mercer.edu/beloved-community-initiative/>

Learning and Campus Life office, whose roles explicitly support voter engagement, aids in the sustainability of voting initiatives. However, in contrast to this sustained momentum, engagement from students ebbs and flows. Waning student participation was a major deciding factor in making the shift from a student organization to a coalition model. Expanding the network of voting champions throughout campus and the broader community has increased our voter engagement capacity and opened doors to external funding. In addition to these external opportunities, our voting initiatives have benefitted from a \$2,000-\$4,000 annual funding allocation from Mercer’s Board of Appropriations (BOA). By coupling BOA funds with departmental and coalition resources, there are sufficient monetary resources available to carry out the strategies indicated in this planning document.

Re-engaging Mercer Voters

When reflecting on the challenges of the 2020 election, the COVID-19 pandemic served as both a motivator and barrier to engagement. Concerns about health and safety, the economy, and climate change were frequently voiced at voting events in the months before the 2020 election, but post-election students shared fears about political polarization, misinformation, and distrust. In response to this shift, Mobilize Mercer partnered with Real Talk to host “Middle Ground” on January 18, 2021, an event centering on collective healing through dialogue rooted in empathy and understanding. The inaugural Middle Ground event was followed up with additional events on race and economic inequality (February 17, 2021) and policing and criminal justice reform (February 26, 2021).



In 2022, Mercer achieved a voter turnout rate of 44%, which was 13.6 percentage points higher than the average for participating NSLVE institutions. We believe that our voting numbers were boosted by our institutional commitment to year-round voter engagement programming. In addition, with most Mercerians being Georgia residents, we believe our 2022 voting rates were aided by Georgia’s 2022 gubernatorial rematch between Brian Kemp and Stacey Abrams, along with the Senate race and subsequent runoff between Raphael Warnock and Herschel Walker.

External-Opportunities and Threats

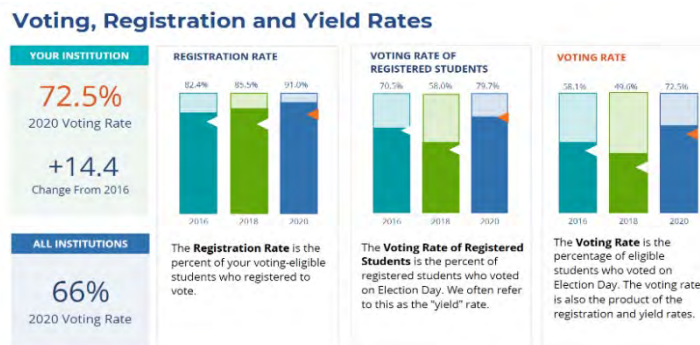
Much like 2020 and 2022, Georgia is once again a state to watch in the upcoming election. The Mercer Votes coalition believes that voter turnout in Georgia benefits from policies such as

automatic voter registration, early in-person voting, and no-excuse absentee ballot voting. Yet, considerable external barriers are also present. As a private institution, Mercer students are unable to use their student IDs to vote. While students are presented with the option to register to vote using their campus address, many prefer to register to vote with their permanent home address. In 2022, we witnessed some students struggle with the absentee ballot process, citing slow mail delivery and delays in receiving their ballots. Finally, there are concerns that recent changes to Georgia election laws could pose additional challenges for youth voters. To counter these potential barriers, all Mercerians will be encouraged to make a voting plan and check their voter registration status in September. With many students opting to vote by mail, they will be prompted to request their ballots no later than October 15, 2024, although Georgia’s deadline for ballot requests is October 25th. Finally, students will be encouraged to return their completed ballots no later than October 29th, which is Vote Early Day.

National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Mercer University’s voter engagement action planning and programming benefits significantly from participation in NSLVE. Mercer has an NSLVE voting record dating from 2012. These reports have been essential for identifying gaps and trends in participation and formulating targeted strategies to reach underrepresented groups. In 2016 and 2018, Mercer’s NSLVE data indicated lower participation for Asian students, STEM majors, students identifying as male, and students ages 18-21. Because of these results, in 2020 voting presentations were conducted in UNV 101 classes and LSK 185, a course reserved for first-year student-athletes. Voter registration was promoted year-round. Additionally, tabling events near STEM buildings were held, and engineering faculty were encouraged to promote voter engagement in their classes. While it is difficult to point to a single initiative as an influencing factor, Mercer was proud to reach record participation in 2020. Using the 2020 NSLVE report as a basis for this action plan, the following trends or voting figures stand out¹⁴:

- Mercer reached a 91% voter registration rate in 2020, which is a 9-percentage point increase from 2016.
 - External factors such as Georgia’s automatic voter registration could explain this increase. Internal factors could include initiatives such as Mercer’s Opening Day voter registration drives in 2018 and 2019. Collectively, more than 600 first-year students were registered to vote during the 2018 and 2020 Opening Days. This initiative was halted due to the pandemic and changes

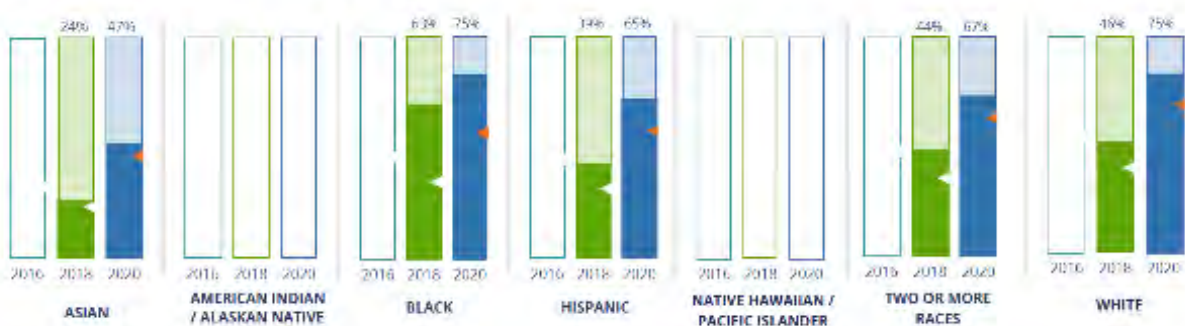


¹⁴ Institute for Democracy & Higher Education: National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement. (2021). 2016, 2018, and 2020 report for Mercer University. Medford, MA. <https://allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/Mercer-University-NSLVE-Report-2020.pdf>

to the move-in process, but this event will return in August 2024.

- Mercer achieved a 72.5% voter turnout rate in 2020, a 14-percentage point increase and 7 points higher than the national average of participating NSLVE institutions.
 - Eighty percent of Mercer’s registered voters participated in the 2020 election. Encouraging every student to check their voter registration status and register to vote, could close voting gaps.
- Asian American students at Mercer had a 47% voter turnout rate in 2020.
 - Compared to other racial/ethnic groups, voter participation amongst Asian students was 18 percentage points lower than Hispanic students, 20 points lower than students indicating two or more races, 28 points lower than Black students, and 28 points lower than white students.
 - Increasing coalition participation for multicultural student organizations is a priority for fall 2024. Mini-grant awards will be available to student organizations through the Ask Every Student implementation grant. Priority consideration will be given to organizations that propose strategies for engaging low-propensity voting groups.
- Voter engagement for students ages 18-21 experienced the greatest growth in 2020. There

By Race / Ethnicity



was a 19-percentage point increase for this age group from 2016 to 2020. Students ages 22-24 experienced a 17-point increase.

- Mercerians vote early or via absentee ballot. In 2020, 51% of Mercerians participated in early voting, while 32% voted by mail.
 - Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students were encouraged to avoid long lines by voting early or utilizing drop boxes and other absentee voting methods. While voting habits and laws in Georgia have changed since the pandemic, Mercer Votes anticipates that many students will opt to take advantage of Georgia’s in-person early voting period from October 15-November 1.
 - Mercer’s Voting Ambassadors will assist students with making their plans to vote. Receiving information on how our students plan to vote will allow Mercer’s Democracy Fellows to create targeted outreach and education events beyond the planned civic holiday programming.

- STEM majors participated! Voter turnout was improved significantly for science and engineering majors. Respectively, students majoring in biological and physical sciences experienced a 15-point and 18-point increase from 2016. Engineering majors at Mercer had a 20-percentage point increase.

Goals

Mercer Votes has identified several goals to strengthen its voter registration, education, and mobilization efforts.

Long-term Goals

The ultimate vision of the Mercer Votes coalition is to achieve full student voter participation. Currently, Mercer's Ask Every Student model supports full participation by integrating voter registration into processes that reach first-year students during fall semester move-in. However, transfer students and upperclassmen are often reliant on other methods, such as tabling events, mass emails, and peer-to-peer communication. By 2028, Mercer Votes will integrate the Ask Every Student strategy into the course registration and advising process, so that all students may be reached.

In addition to the Ask Every Student tactic, Mercer Votes aims to reach full participation by securing an on-campus polling location. While the current building infrastructure does not support a polling location, the coalition aims to secure a campus polling space by the 2030 midterm election.

Short-term Goals

- The Mercer Votes coalition will meet a minimum of three times (six total meetings) during the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years.
- By the end of spring 2024, Mercer Votes will launch the website vote.mercer.edu.
- Mercer Votes will reaffirm its commitment to full participation through Ask Every Student. On August 16-17, 2024, Mercer Votes will host the Opening Day Voter Registration Drive and will verify the voter registration status of first-year students as they move into their residence halls.
- The Mercer Votes coalition will strengthen its student participation by adding three student organizations to the coalition in the fall of 2024.
- By November 2024, the Mercer Votes coalition will host one event or initiative aimed at promoting voter engagement for Asian American students.
- Mercer's Democracy Fellows will advance civic learning and democratic engagement by presenting at one conference or voting summit by the end of 2024.
- The Mercer Votes leadership team will recruit at least 8 students for the inaugural Voter Ambassador program in fall 2024.
- Mercer will reach a 95% voter registration rate during the 2024 general election; a percentage increase of 4 points since 2020.
- Mercer will increase the voter turnout rate for students ages 18-21 by six percentage points; moving from a 67% turnout in the 2020 election to 73% in the 2024 general election.

Strategy

Ahead of the 2023-24 academic year, the Mercer Votes leadership team identified three coalition considerations and strategic priorities for the larger working group. These considerations serve as the foundation for developing short-term and long-term strategies to strengthen voter engagement on the Macon undergraduate campus.

2023-24 Coalition Considerations

- Mapping Our Democratic Ecosystem- Who are the people, organizations, departments, or networks essential for advancing full participation at Mercer? How can we work together?
- Strengthening Communication- What strategies or approaches can we take to promote democratic engagement, particularly for low-propensity voting groups?
- Advancing Participation- What tools and resources can we build upon to reach full participation?

Short-term Strategies

Student Leadership

- To complement Mercer's Democracy Fellow program, Mercer will recruit undergraduate students for the inaugural voting ambassador initiative. Recruitment of ambassadors will begin in mid-June 2024 and will be finalized at the end of August 2024. Ambassadors will be compensated through federal work-study funding and the Ask Every Student implementation grant. Ambassadors will earn \$14 per hour and work a total of 25-30 hours in the fall semester. This short-term leadership opportunity will support class and student organization presentations, Mercer's pledge-to-vote campaign, and civic holiday programming. **Evaluation measures: Number of ambassadors recruited, total number of hours worked, number of presentations conducted, number of voting plans completed, and number of pledges collected.**

Ask Every Student

- Check the voter registration status of first-year students during Opening Day 2024 and facilitate voter registration for students who opt into the process. **Evaluation measures: Number of registration statuses checked and registration forms completed.**
- Integrate the Ask Every Student strategy in Mercer Votes class presentations. The Mercer Votes Ambassadors will focus on UNV 101 classes but will present to other classes if scheduling permits. **Evaluation measures: Number of presentations conducted and students reached.**
- To increase engagement amongst student organizations, Mercer Votes will allocate \$1000 in Ask Every Student funding to student organization mini-grants. **Evaluation measures: Number of funding applications received, number of student organization events supported, and amount of funding utilized.**

Voter Education Programming

- Voting 101: Mercer Votes will work with campus partners such as the Office of Global Services to educate Mercer undergraduates, including international students, on the voting process.

- Civic Engagement Week: Mercer Votes will participate in the second annual civic engagement week from September 15-21.
- Civic Conversations: Mercer Votes will promote dialogue amongst students with diverse perspectives through programs such as Unify America’s Unify Challenge College Bowl. Additionally, Mercer Votes will aim to host an event with Mercer’s Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS) to prepare students for challenging political conversations before fall break or the Thanksgiving holiday.
- Debate Watch Parties continue to be a hallmark of voter education programming at Mercer. Mercer Votes will host debate events in September and October.
- Mercer Votes Tailgate: Mercer Votes will work with Campus Life personnel and Mercer Athletics to host a voting-themed football tailgate in fall 2024. **Evaluation measures: Number of voter education events hosted, event attendance at each event, and event satisfaction/feedback results. Participation will be tracked using BearPulse (GivePulse) or paper-based sign-in sheets.**

Civic Holidays

- Mercer’s civic holiday programming has been sustained for several years. In 2024, Mercer Votes will continue to lead National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, Vote Early, and Election Hero Day programming for Mercer’s Macon campus. **Evaluation measures: Number of tabling events held and number of students reached.**

Coalition Communications

- Mercer Votes website: Providing a central and trusted location for voting resources was a priority for the Mercer Votes coalition. As of May 2024, the Mercer Votes website is live and has been promoted in a recent Den story. **Evaluation measures: Website traffic and article views promoting the website's launch.**
- “A Voter’s Complex” video series: The Mercer Votes Communications Director will guide the launch of “A Voter’s Complex,” a video series featuring trivia and candid conversations about politics and voting. **Evaluation measures: Number of videos produced and social media views.**

Long-term Strategies

Strengthening engagement in Mercer Votes is not limited to student participation. To achieve our long-term goals, Mercer Votes will identify faculty champions and voting champions in the Registrar’s office, undergraduate advising, and throughout Mercer Athletics. Furthermore, while the 2023-2025 campus action plan focuses on Macon undergraduates, the University can achieve greater voter engagement outcomes by unifying operations throughout all campuses. Sharing the repository of Mercer Votes documents, including our existing action plans could be the catalyst for growing our current coalition or establishing campus-specific coalitions across the state. To jumpstart our progress in reaching the long-term goals detailed in this campus plan, the Mercer Votes coalition has identified the following long-term strategies:

Deepening Leadership Investment

- Administrators in the Mercer Votes core leadership team will meet bi-weekly to discuss curricular and co-curricular initiatives, including funding allocation, university-wide communications, faculty involvement in democratic engagement, and working with athletics.

Understanding Student Voting Behaviors

- Although Mercer benefits greatly from participation in NSLVE, we recognize that this study limits us to analyzing voter turnout and registration data 1-2 years following each election. Gaining an understanding of our current students' voting behaviors, including their intentions and motivations to vote, along with the factors influencing their preferred method of voting would assist us in formulating targeted strategies and could allow coalition leaders to advocate for resources such as an on-campus polling location. During the fall 2024 semester, Mercer's Center for Engaged Learning will work with students in the following courses to strengthen our understanding of student voting: ANT 362: Anthropology and Activism and WGS 301: Methods in Gender Studies Research. These students will conduct interviews, host student forums, and volunteer with the Mercer Votes coalition.

Leveraging Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

- The Center for Engaged Learning is overseeing Mercer's application for Carnegie's Elective Classification for Community Engagement. Mercer received this classification in 2008 and was reclassified in 2015. With the 2026 reclassification application due in April 2025, we are carefully considering our institutional culture and identity, curricular integration of civic learning and democratic engagement, and how we can leverage the results of this self-study to strengthen access to funding, civic learning, and community-engaged scholarship.

Reporting

The 2023-2025 campus action plan and 2022 NSLVE report will be shared with ALL IN and the Voter Friendly Campus program. These reports are shared with the campus community through the [Mercer Votes website](#), coalition meetings, and trainings. Mercer's voter engagement data is commonly featured in targeted social media outreach, campus emails, and print materials such as flyers, posters, and yard signs. Finally, Mercer's marketing department publicly promotes the University's voter engagement data as illustrated in the Den article highlighting our 2022 voter engagement rates "Mercer wins third SoCon Votes competition and is recognized for excellence in student voter engagement."¹⁵

Evaluation

NSLVE will be the primary tool for assessing Mercer's voter registration and turnout rates. Additional evaluation measures are listed in the "Strategy" section of this campus action plan and include the number of ambassadors recruited, events/presentations conducted, pledges to vote, and social media and website traffic. The Mercer Votes leadership team will evaluate the campus action plan and its included strategies and tactics. Lauren Shinholster will lead evaluation efforts related to the Mercer Votes Ambassador program and curricular initiatives. Margaret Rooyakkers and the Mercer Votes Democracy Fellows will oversee data collection related to student programming events. Data collected by the Mercer Votes Coalition will be captured through paper logs and maintained in online spreadsheets. Mercer Votes event and impact data will be shared with the campus community through the following reports and venues: Board of Appropriations (Division of

¹⁵ [Mercer wins third SoCon Votes competition and is recognized for excellence in student voter engagement - The Den](#)

Student Affairs), By the Numbers (Division of Student Affairs), and the Mercer Votes website. Additionally, data will be shared with community partners via the Ask Every Student implementation grant final report and Voter Friendly Campus report.