



## **Voter Registration and Engagement Action Plan 2024**

### **I. Executive Summary**

The following action plan has been created as a working document to help guide voter engagement and education at Mississippi State University (MSU). A task force has been established with members from the Center for Student Activities, Student Leadership and Community Engagement, Political Science, and Student representatives from multiple organizations that focus on voter education and engagement. Kylie Forrester, Director of the Center for Student Activities ([kylie.forrester@msstate.edu](mailto:kylie.forrester@msstate.edu)) and Dr. Leslie Baker, Instructor & Undergraduate Coordinator, Department of Political Science and Public Administration ([lbaker@pspa.msstate.edu](mailto:lbaker@pspa.msstate.edu)) were the two main collaborators on this action plan.

Mississippi State University is committed to providing an environment for increased voter education and engagement at the local, state, and federal levels. As we look towards the challenges ahead this year, we want to not only educate students and register them to vote, but we want to continue to increase our voting rates. We are committed now, more than ever, to engage our students to become responsible citizens and let their voices ring true.

With the implementation of this action plan, MSU hopes to improve the voter registration rate among our students as well as increase overall turnout for not only federal elections, but also local and state elections. The plan will be implemented on the Mississippi State University campus in Starkville, MS for the 2024-2025 academic year and will be evaluated and modified as needed to increase the impact on our student population. The plan will be implemented through three strategic areas: voter registration, voter education and outreach and voter turnout. Task force discussed a variety of different ways that our efforts would be carried out to reach all students at MSU, such as, hosting voter registration drives in a variety of high traffic areas on campus, offering voter registration training in order to encourage more groups to host their own voter registration drives, incorporating some engaging events with speakers from local and state agencies to get students excited about voting and educate them on the importance of voting.

## **II. Leadership**

The MSU Voter Friendly Campus Task Force make recommendations for increased engagement and education, as well as assess the current and future initiatives outlined in this document.

**Kylie Forrester** – Associate Director, Center for Student Activities

**Dr. Leslie Baker** – Department of Political Science and Public Administration (PSPA)

**Lee Weiskopf** - Chief of Staff and Director of Government Relations

**Bailey Sennett** – Coordinator, Student Leadership & Community Engagement

**Rod Holmes** – Coordinator, Student Leadership & Community Engagement

**Carson McFatridge** – Undergraduate Student (President, Student Association)

**Hunter Yelverton** – Undergraduate Student (Director of Policy, Student Association)

**Timothy Hopkins** – Executive Director, Holmes Cultural Diversity Center

**Madeline McKnight** – Undergraduate Student (Chairman, College Republicans)

**Alex Carraway** – Undergraduate Student (President, College Democrats)

Representatives from Center for Student Activities, MSU Student Association, Student Leadership & Community Engagement, Holmes Cultural Diversity Center, and the Department of Political Science & Public Administration.

We also plan to partner with our local County Circuit Clerk, Mr. Tony Rook, who will lead the voter registration trainings, as well as Mr. Michael Watson, Mississippi Secretary of State, who will come speak at event this fall.

As student leaders roll-off and new officers are installed for the various student groups represented, this Task Force will be part of their transition report in order to ensure the new student leaders are aware of the work being done with voter registration efforts and to make sure they continue to be involved with the task force.

### **III. Commitment**

Over the past several years, MSU has implemented many strategies for getting students registered to vote. MSU is proud of our “Voter Friendly” designation and the university has done some MSU announcements and news articles boasting this status. Voter registrations have increased due to these strategies, but we are far from reaching every student in our outreach efforts. We have been working closely with the Oktibbeha County Circuit Clerk and the Secretary of State of Mississippi to increase voter registration. Those offices have assisted us in creating several voter registration drives across campus, often attended by representatives of their offices. In Fall 2023, Dr. Leslie Baker was able to get a community service-learning designation for the Campaign Politics course. Her students started a social media campaign for MSU as part of their registration outreach, as well as creating flyers that were distributed to all residence halls. It is estimated that we reached approximately 30% of the student population through these combined efforts.

### **IV. Landscape**

MSU’s total enrollment for Fall 2023 is 22,657. The majority of our students are in-state residents, making up 62.9% of our campus community. Our out-of-state population is 33.32% and we have a 3.78% population of foreign students. 71.9% of our student population is white, 15.4% is Black or African American, 4.3% is Hispanic, 3.2% is Asian, 2.5% is Multiracial, 2.2% is Unknown, .52% is American Indian or Alaskan Native, .05% is Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

In our voter registration drives we are hoping to continue to get our in-state and out-of-state students registered to vote in Mississippi if possible, and/or help them with the absentee voting process.

There doesn’t seem to be a strong desire to be involved with politics on our campus, as a whole. We have some pockets of students who are very passionate that represent different political parties, but as a whole our campus seems pretty neutral about voting. We are hoping our efforts to have more voter registration drives, events that drive excitement and interest around voting, as well as educating students on why their voices matter will help drive up the level of interest among students.

### **V. Goals**

Short-term:

- Increase voter registrations
- Rebuild our task force and gain more buy-in from other departments, student orgs, and local officials
- More social media presence leading up to elections
- Host multiple voter registration drives across campus in order to get a diverse group of students registered to vote

Long-term:

- Currently, the majority of the work being done with voter friendly has been on two people. The Task Force has not been as involved as it could be to help spread the work out among the group. Need to continue to gain buy-in from those selected to be part of the task force, as well as recruit more students, staff, faculty, administration, and local officials to be part of the group.
- Continue to educate throughout the academic year, even when there isn’t a major election. The task force could do more during state and local elections to educate our students on the important issues and reasons to vote.

## VI. NSLVE

In the 2024 National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement for Mississippi State University, MSU has seen a decrease (-8.7%) in the registration rate of our students since 2018 (NSLVE, 2024, p. 4). MSU has plenty of room for improvement in all areas of voter registration. As we look towards the challenges ahead this year, we want to not only educate students and register them to vote, but we want to continue to increase our voting rates. It is clear that as our enrollment continues to grow, we need to continue to educate our students on the importance of voting and how powerful their voices can be. We know that if we get them in the habit of voting now, they are more likely to continue to vote in the future. We are committed now, more than ever, to engage our students to become responsible citizens and let their voices ring true.

### Voting, Registration and Yield Rates

#### YOUR INSTITUTION

8.1%

2022 Voting Rate

-8.7

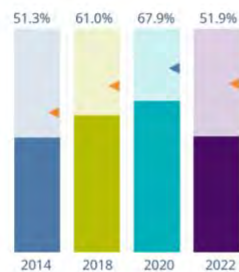
Change From 2018

#### ALL INSTITUTIONS

30.6%

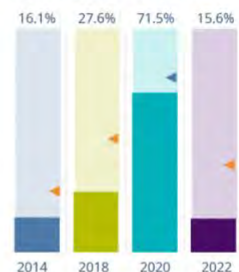
2022 Voting Rate

#### REGISTRATION RATE



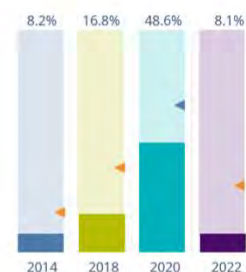
The **Registration Rate** is the percent of your voting-eligible students who registered to vote.

#### VOTING RATE OF REGISTERED STUDENTS



The **Voting Rate of Registered Students** is the percent of registered students who voted on Election Day. We often refer to this as the "yield" rate.

#### VOTING RATE



The **Voting Rate** is the percentage of eligible students who voted on Election Day. The voting rate is also the product of the registration and yield rates.

## **VII. Strategy**

### **Voter Registration for new and returning students:**

To reach the rest of the student population, we feel that several new initiatives are needed

- a. Voter registration drives during MSU's *Dawg Days* (August 16-25, 2024).
- b. Voter registration table during the first SEC home football game at the student entrance to the football stadium.
- c. Encourage mandatory voter registration drive training for those planning to host a drive by working with the County Circuit Clerk's office to lead training.
- d. Implementation of several large voter registration drives during the week of September 16-20 using the energy of National Voter Registration Day to generate awareness and interest in voter registration.
  - We also plan to host an event where students can view the "No time to fail" Documentary, with a panel discussion to follow. Food will be served to encourage student participation.
- e. Will host Mississippi Secretary of State Micheal Watson for an event in October called "Your Voice Matters: A Discussion with Michael Watson"
- f. Students enrolled in Campaign Politics and Political Behavior courses will create social media campaigns, create and distribute flyers and cards advertising events, speak at classes, visit with student orgs and residence halls to let them know about events/opportunities to register to vote.
- g. We would like to cover the postage to mail voter registration forms for students who wish to register in their home state or county in Mississippi
  - We will have a list of states that allow online registrations and will provide laptops and iPads at the drives for students to register in their state, if that state does online registrations.
  - We will print copies of voter registration forms from other states to have at the drives.

### **Tracking voter registrations:**

- a. We will track voter registrations through completed applications.
- b. We will designate 4 faculty members and 4 student fellows to be the designated collectors of the voter registration applications, who will then check off students from a master list of enrolled students provided by the University Registrar's Office.
  - i. Faculty members will attend a two-hour training with a representative from the Circuit Clerk's office to ensure proper completion of the voter registration forms and learn the tracking system.
- c. Centralized campus mailing address established by the MSU Student Association for students to be able to register to vote.

### **Promoting voter registrations and voter registration events:**

- a. Draft a mass email to send to students regarding the processes available to register to vote in Starkville, MS and promote voter registration events for the semester.
- b. Voter Registration information available at Annual Involvement Fairs.
- c. Availability of stamps for mail-in voter registration forms.
- d. Shortly after each of the voter registration drives, we will provide a follow-up email to all students with a slide deck that shows how to request an absentee ballot, with the request deadlines for all 50 states.
- e. Pending "Ask every student implementation grant", hire PSPA Voting Fellows to assist with programming, implementation, and marketing of events.

## **Social and Digital Voter Registration Campaign**

- a. Students enrolled in Campaign Politics and Political Behavior courses will create social media campaigns.
  - Members of the Student Association and other organizations related to offices on our task force will assist in sharing content
- b. We will work with the MSU Office of Public Affairs to help promote voter registration efforts utilizing social and digital media.
- c. The Student Association Marketing Team will advertise voter registration drives hosted by the Student Association, College Democrats, College Republicans, and other on-campus entities on their social media accounts and on the digital ad space across campus.

## **Nonpartisan Voter Education**

### **1. Print and Digital Media**

- a. Posters and digital advertising will be on display around campus noting significant dates for students to be aware of o registration and candidate information (i.e., registration deadlines, requesting an absentee ballot, information on notaries, etc.).

### **2. Social Media**

- a. Frequent information sharing by SA, College Republicans, College Democrats, and other related student organizations on social media.
- b. MSU Office of Public Affairs social media

### **3. Campus wide civic engagement events**

- a. Host Election Day watch parties for live results of the elections as local and national media reports them.

## **Promoting Voter Turnout**

1. Work with the SA to have a student takeover on social media to talk about the importance of voting. Coordinate with other on-campus political organizations (College Republicans, College Democrats) for a large-scale social media campaign.
2. Seek the aid of our campus partners to decorate their facilities during the day/week of the election.
  - a. Dining facilities
  - b. Mitchell Memorial Library
  - c. Parking and Transit Bus stops
3. Work with the Oktibbeha County Board of Supervisors and/or the Election Commissioner Office to solidify a polling place on campus, hopefully in the Newell-Grissom Volleyball Facility.
4. Host a “March to the Polls” where students all travel together to their polling place after meeting up on campus.
5. Utilize posters, digital advertisements, and social media accounts throughout campus to remind students to vote on Election Day. These will use a common graphic to further remind students about the upcoming election.
6. Run a section in The Reflector about the importance of voting.
7. Provide a comprehensive list of Notary Publics, both on campus and in Starkville, available to students that may be voting absentee to have their ballots notarized.
8. Host an absentee event to assist people in completing and sending off their ballots.
9. Add election dates to university calendars:
  - a. OPA (Office of Public Affairs)
  - b. Cowbell Connect
  - c. Registrar

## **VIII. Reporting**

### **Tracking voter registrations:**

- a. We will track voter registrations through completed applications.
- b. The Center for Student Activities will be the designated collection office for voter registration applications, who will count registrations and be responsible for turning in completed applications to the court house.
  - i. All voter registration drives will be hosted by someone who has attended the mandatory training we offered, hosted by our County Circuit Clerk, to ensure proper completion of the voter registration forms.

### **Sharing results:**

- a. The university will post any designations received from Voter Friendly on university social media (will ask any members from the task force, to share on their org social media outlets).
- b. The university will do a news story on our efforts and results.
- c. Will work with the university to find a place for voter registration information to live on the university website.

## **IX. Evaluation**

Mississippi State University will once again look to register for the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement. The results from the previous NSLVE survey and the pending NSLVE survey will be compared to provide measurement of the success of the above action plan. The action plan will also be modified as needed throughout the year depending on the priorities realized throughout the year.

We will also evaluate how many students attended the events held throughout the year to see which events and which types of events are more successful for future planning.