

An uncast vote is a dream discarded. Make  
your voice heard. Engage by voting

# Spartans Action Plan 2024

## Norfolk State University



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## **I. Executive Summary**

At Norfolk State University (NSU), we are deeply committed to civic learning and democratic engagement. As an HBCU, the importance of civic engagement to our students cannot be overestimated. This plan aims to ensure that every Norfolk State student understands their responsibility as a citizen and construes this responsibility as a crucial part of the learning process. We know that accomplishing this task will require an institutional commitment at the curricular and extracurricular levels. This realization came to a head about six years ago. Since then, we have made a lot of progress and introduced a lot of factors and mechanisms that have allowed us to improve our campus voter registration dramatically.

This action plan results from active collaboration between the Department of Political Science, the Provost's Office, the Office of Student Affairs, the Center for African American Public Policy, the Political Science Association, the Student Government Association, and the Office of Campus Life and Diversity. It will begin in August 2024 and continue until May 2025.

## **II. Leadership and the Team**

The collaborative effort is headed by Dr. Soji Akomolafe, who will also be the point person for the action plan. He will be assisted by a team of senior administrators, faculty, staff, and students listed below.

- Dr. Soji Akomolafe, Executive Director, the Center for African American Public Policy (CAAmPP); Chair, Department of Political Science
- Dr. Leonard Brown, Vice President for Student Affairs
- Dr. Andrea Neal, Associate Vice Provost, Office of Academic Engagement
- Tarrye Venable, Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs
- Dr. Faith Fitzgerald, Assistant Vice President for Campus Life and Diversity
- Dr. Stephen Magu, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
- Brianna Steele, Director for Student Activities and Leadership
- Mr. Narenzo Fleors, CVP Democracy Fellow (2022-23)
- Ms. Isabella Malave, Vice President, Student Government Association
- Ms. Kamoni Ricks, President, Political Science Association

The Center for African American Public Policy (CAAmPP) has played a leading role since its inception in 2019. It continues to do so in our efforts to promote and enhance civic engagement on campus. CAAmPP is affiliated with the Department of Political Science and plays a vital advocacy role in promoting the well-being of communities of color. Also, we have partnered

with two of the most efficient civic engagement, social justice, and advocacy groups in Hampton Roads: the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Urban League of Hampton Roads (ULHR). To show our commitment, we recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with both organizations. Over the years, we have organized events to empower our students and the community to raise awareness of their civic responsibilities. In addition, Norfolk State has working relationships with notable civic engagement organizations such as Students Learn Students Vote Coalition (SLSV), Campus Vote Project (CVP), ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, FacNet, and Student Voting Network. In the commitment section below, we have highlighted some examples of our partnership events with some of these groups.

#### *Succession Plan*

Senior administrators assign staff members to the team. Participation is also on a volunteer basis and sometimes by invitation. Succession is ensured by replacing revolving participants, e.g., when an SGA officer's term ends or when a faculty/staff member resigns or retires. Maintaining continuity has not been an issue for us, at least until now, since many students and staff are willing to work with us to advance the cause of civic engagement on campus.

### **III. Commitment**

To be sure, our commitment to civic engagement is clearly rooted in our institution's strategic plan. This has been consistently demonstrated by our deliberate efforts to create and grow a culture of civic engagement on our campus. Evidence of this is visible in every facet of our academic life.

#### *Mission Statement*

Norfolk State University, a comprehensive urban public institution, is committed to transforming students' lives through exemplary teaching, research, and service. Offering a supportive academic and culturally diverse environment for all, the University empowers its students to turn their aspirations into reality and achieve their full potential as well-rounded, resourceful citizens and leaders for the 21st century.

#### *Vision Statement*

Norfolk State University will be recognized nationally as a premier public institution with outstanding signature academic programs, innovative research, and community engagement opportunities.

*Core Values #5*

Engagement – We continually enhance the university’s role and influence in the affairs of local and global communities by promoting educational attainment, cultural enrichment, and economic development.

*Institutional Goal #4*

The University shall continue to maintain an environment that encourages its graduates to assume leadership roles in the community, state, nation, and world.

For further information on how civic engagement is interwoven in our work, please visit the university’s website: <https://www.nsu.edu/office-of-the-president/mission>

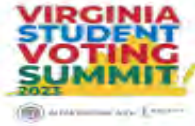
Our commitment to this cause has increased in the last few years. This plan brings together administrators, faculty, staff, and students to improve our efforts to make political participation one of Norfolk State's learning cornerstones. To illustrate this commitment, here are some of the events successfully organized and executed during the year.

*CVP - Voter Registration*

While we have not gotten our voter registration and turnout numbers where they need to be, we are nevertheless excited about some of the activities that have been executed so far. One of the highlights of those activities is our collaboration with CVP to host the Annual VA Student Voting Summit last year. There were approximately 150 participants from eight colleges and universities and one high school. Participating institutions included Norfolk State University, University of Virginia, Old Dominion University, Virginia State University, Virginia Wesleyan University, Piedmont VA Community College, Southwest VA Community College, Virginia Union University, and Booker T. Washington High School. In addition, there was robust participation from other partner organizations. These include the League of Women Voters, UpVote VA, Veterans for Political Innovation, REV UP Virginia, NSU’s college chapter of the NAACP, NextGen, UVA’s Serv, myBalbo, League of Conservation Voters, Lynnhaven River NOW, YWCA South Hampton Roads, VA College Advising Corps, Generation Ratify VA, and Vote Equality.



In recognition of our contribution to organizing the summit, Norfolk State was selected by CVP as the first recipient of the **Virginia Student Voting Summit Civic Spirit Award**. In awarding the prize, CVP noted that students, faculty, and administration attended the Student Voting Summit in record numbers while noting that Norfolk State University had the highest attendance ever since the event began.



Dear Norfolk State University,

Congratulations! You have been selected as the first campus to be the recipient of our Virginia Student Voting Summit Civic Spirit Award. On Friday, October 6th, 2023 students, faculty, and administration turned out to the Student Voting Summit at record numbers with Norfolk State University having the highest attendance! We value your commitment to civic engagement and that is why you are being awarded \$1000 in grant funding.

Please fill out the following information to accept your award which can be used to further your education and efforts in nonpartisan civic engagement.

**Institution Name:** Norfolk State University

*Main Contact Information:*

**Name:** Dr. Soji Akomolafe  
**Title:** Executive Director, CAAMP  
**Email:** oakomolafe@nsu.edu  
**Phone Number:** (757) 823-8999

*Secondary Contact Information:*

**Name:** Ms. Jocely Boyer  
**Title:** Administrative Assistant, CAAMP  
**Email:** jboyer@nsu.edu  
**Phone Number:** (757) 823-2288

*Payment Information:*

**Check Payable to:** NSUF  
**Billing Email Address:** 700 Park Ave., Norfolk, VA 23504

By signing this award letter, your institution agrees to the following:

- All programming that results from this award money will be nonpartisan.
- A representative from your institution will complete a post-grant form to report on your activities on campus, how the funds were used, and any reflections you may have.

**Return Information:** Please complete and return this form no later than Friday, November 3rd, 2023. Please email the completed form to Amber Wilt at [awilt@campusvoteproject.org](mailto:awilt@campusvoteproject.org) and CC Jaylin Drewry at [jdrewry@campusvoteproject.org](mailto:jdrewry@campusvoteproject.org).

**Recipient Signature:** *Olusoji Akomolafe* **Date:** 11/1/2023

### ***YWCA - We the People***

CAAMP has successfully organized and conducted two major conferences on Racial Equity and Social Transformation (R.E.S.T.) in collaboration with YWCA for two years. We have already identified the theme for next year's annual conference: Get Out the Vote (GOVT).







#### **IV. Landscape**

Founded in 1935 as the Norfolk Unit of Virginian University, Norfolk State University (NSU) is a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) located in Norfolk, Virginia. In 1979, it was granted independent university status as Norfolk State University. NSU, a comprehensive urban public institution, is committed to transforming students' lives through exemplary teaching, research, and service. Offering a supportive academic and culturally diverse environment, NSU empowers its students to realize their aspirations and achieve their full potential as well-rounded and resourceful citizens and leaders for the 21st century. NSU is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to offer baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees. Currently, NSU offers 36 undergraduate degrees, 15 master's degrees, and three doctoral degree programs. For the 2022-2023 academic year, total enrollment was 5,786 students. NSU is a Minority Serving Institution.

#### ***Institutional Support***

Regarding our voter education/registration efforts, the president and her administration have been highly supportive to the extent that some of the long-term goals listed only three years ago have been accomplished.

#### ***(a) Voter Registration Drives – Office of Student Affairs***

Our Office of Student Affairs has been exceptionally efficient in ramping up our voter drive activities in preparation for the upcoming general election.

Date	Time	Location	Event
8/25/24	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Student Center, Lobby	Spartan Voter Registration Drive
9/24/24	11:00 am – 2:00 pm	Student Center, Lobby	Spartan Voter Registration Drive
10/3/24	4:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Student Center, Lobby	The Hip Hop Caucus Presents: Respect My Vote Campaign!
10/3/24	6:00 pm – 7:30	Student Center, Dorthy B. Brothers Auditorium	The Hip Hop Caucus Presents: Underwater Projects
10/15/24	11:00 am – 2:00 pm	Student Center, Lobby	Spartan Voter Registration Drive
11/1/24	6:00 pm – 7:30 pm	Student Center, Dorthy B. Brothers Auditorium	Spartans Rock the Vote!
11/5/24	8:00 am – 9:00 pm	Student Center	Spartans Ride to the Polls!

**Voter Registration Drive Calendar – 2024**

**Norfolk State University – Office of Student Affairs**

As you can see above, students have several chances to register to vote before the November 5th election. We are optimistic that such efforts will boost our turnout rate and enhance our efforts to create and sustain a culture of civic engagement on campus. To be sure, beginning next year, we will utilize the Ask Every Student Toolkit for voter registration efforts. This will also help to mitigate our data problem.

*(b) Polling Day Activities – Political Science Association*

The Political Science Association, in conjunction with the Student Affairs Office, organized an election watch party. The Association presented gift cards to selected students to recognize their efforts during the voter registration exercises. Under the auspices of the Department of Political

Science, the Center for African American Public Policy provided the menu, which included pizza and soft drinks. There were 42 students, faculty, and staff in attendance. They will be holding a November 5<sup>th</sup> watch again. The plan is to increase attendance by at least 25%.

*(c) Spartans Ride to the Polls - Office of Student Affairs*

Under the auspices of the Student Affairs Office, students will be bussed to the polling station to cast their votes. This is incredibly important because, in the past, students have cited lack of transportation as the main reason for not casting their votes in previous elections. We hope this is another factor to improve our voter turnout rate in anticipation of the 2025 report.

*(d) Black Voters Matter Voter Education – The Center for African American Public Policy (CAAmPP)*

CAAmPP organized a campus voter education program in conjunction with the Black Voters Matter group. Over 250 students stopped by the bus for voter information and free souvenirs.





### ***Challenges***

As expected, the majority of our students are African Americans. Given our nation's troubled voting rights history and current efforts to suppress votes across the country, we are fortunate that our efforts to increase the student voter turnout rate at Norfolk State have not been negatively impacted in any meaningful way. This is because the Commonwealth of Virginia is one of the few remaining states, especially in the South, that has refused to yield to the temptation of voter suppression and other gimmicks designed to prevent citizens and, in some cases, particularly students, from exercising their voting rights. Despite that, we could not increase our turnout rate for the 2022 elections. About one-third of our students are between the ages of 18-29. Incidentally, that is where we did most poorly. On the other hand, the only category that was not in red was voters aged 50+. That means we need to do a much better job finding ways to reach out more to the former age group. To combat this problem, in the future, we will resort to making better use of available data, most of which is readily available. In addition to NSLVE, we will explore other data sources such as the National Survey of Student Engagement, Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, and the Higher Education Research Institute and Cooperative Institutional Research Program, to mention a few.

The second challenge is equally disturbing. Like many other institutions nationwide, we are not immune to the wave of misinformation and disinformation that seem to have become a permanent landscape of our political universe. The danger is that we risk sending low-information voters to the polls unless we find a way to combat this. Should that happen, that will be counterproductive to the kind of democracy we deserve.

### **V. Goals**

Once again, Norfolk State University accomplished many of its goals. It was a team effort between different campus entities, notably the Provost's Office, the Department of Political Science, the Office of Student Affairs, the Political Science Association, and the Student Government

Association. As a reminder, below are the short-term and long-term goals we enumerated in the last action plans.

#### Long-term Goals

- Make NSU a hub for civic engagement learning activities for HBCUs
- Have at least eighty percent of Norfolk State students registered to vote.
- Get seventy-five percent of registered students to the polls on Election Day.
- Establish an on-campus polling location.

#### Short-term Goals

- Get National Voter Registration Day and Election Day on the official Academic Calendar
- Get at least twenty-five percent of the incoming freshmen class registered to vote.
- Increased accessibility to the off-campus polling location by providing a specific pick-up spot for the shuttle service (the shuttle should only go back and forth to the polling location).

#### *1. NSU Declares Election Days Class-free*

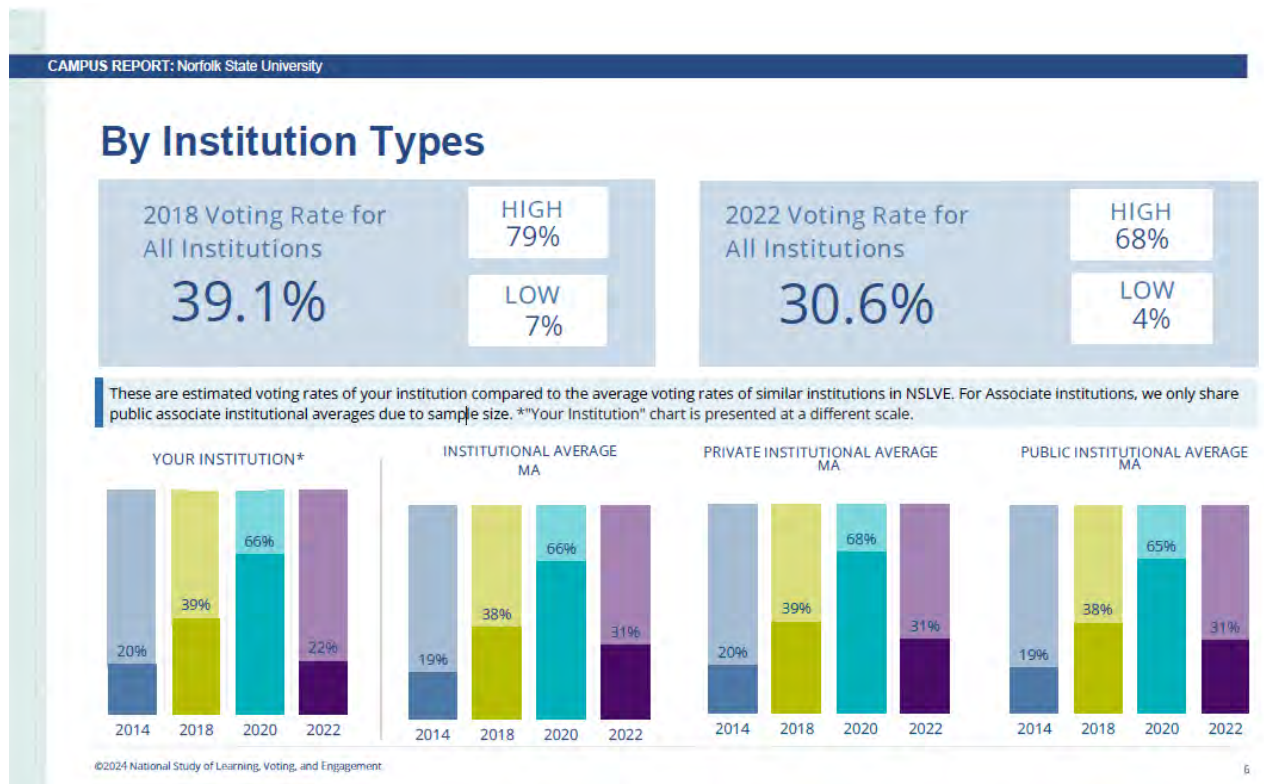
We are excited to report that what was initially presented as one of our long-term goals has become a reality three short years after we first proposed it. In our 2021 Action Plan, one of our long-term goals was to get the Provost's Office to suspend classes and all other campus activities on election days until 1:30 p.m. The outcome of that goal was even better than we had hoped. For the first time in the university's history, election days have been declared class-free so that NSU students, staff, faculty, and other stakeholders can perform their civic responsibilities to cast their votes.

#### *2. Civic Engagement Learning*

As part of our efforts to cultivate a culture of civic engagement on campus, we will implement civic engagement learning as a curricular offering. This has never been done in the history of the university. This is one of our most outstanding achievements since we started campaigning for administrative involvement in making the campus a civically engaged community. We greatly appreciate the cooperation we have received so far from the university administration and the various campus entities that worked with us to approve the proposed civic engagement course. POS 100 – Introduction to Civic Engagement will debut as a General Education course in Fall 2026. The 3-credit course will be housed in the Department of Political Science. We expect 500-1000 students to take the course each year. In designing the syllabus, we borrowed from institutions nationwide noted for their best practices in the subject matter.

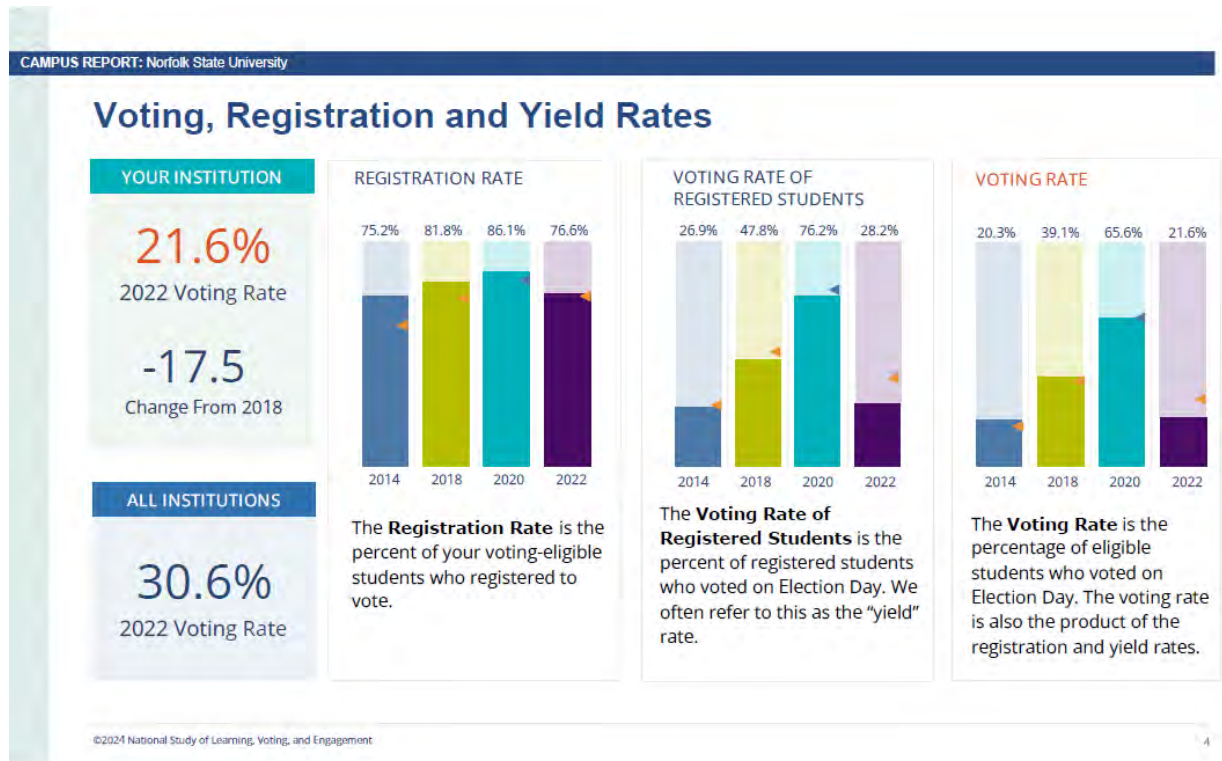
## **VI. NSLVE**

Our participation in the National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) program has enabled us to realize how much work we have ahead. While we are proud of our achievements since joining NSLVE, it is obvious that we must aggressively increase our efforts to galvanize not just students but the whole campus community in our efforts to improve our voting education and registration records. One good thing about joining NSLVE is that our team can use the report to enhance our voter registration efforts. For example, according to NSLVE, NSU's 2020 voting rate increased by 7.7%, the highest increase ever recorded for the university for one year. More importantly, the registration rate increased from 81.8% (2018) to 86.1% (2020), while the voting rate of registered students increased from 47.8% in 2018 to 76.2% in 2020. Therefore, it is not by luck that we have been designated a Voter Friendly Campus three years in a row. Also, as the graphic below indicates, NSU performed relatively well in 2014, 2018, and 2020 in terms of our estimated voting rates compared to the average voting rates of similar institutions.



Regrettably, the numbers for the 2022 report were not as flattering. To regain our momentum, this year's action plan will include another significant undertaking to further enhance our civic learning efforts. Essentially, we are doubling our efforts to ensure that students understand why political participation, albeit a choice, must be exercised at all costs if

the aim is to improve their well-being.



## VII. Strategy

Given our performance in the 2022 election cycle, we have decided to recalibrate our efforts to ensure we regain the momentum we have been having since the three election cycles indicated above. In 2016, the Department of Political Science and the Office of Student Affairs launched a campus-wide initiative to foster civic engagement. The initiative involved classroom instruction complemented by hands-on civic engagement activities. While we have made some significant improvements in the extracurricular domain, our efforts in the classroom have not kept up with those gains. This year's action plan will focus on our efforts to infuse civic engagement into the curriculum. As noted above, we are happy to report that this endeavor has come to fruition. Earlier this year, the Department of Political Science proposed introducing the civic engagement course into the curriculum. That proposal passed all three stages of approval (departmental, school, and college-wide). It will debut in the fall of 2026 once we finish handling the necessary logistics.

**VIII. Reporting**

In the short term, we will share yearly trends and observations regarding the civic engagement course outcomes and what they inform us about student political participation with the administration, particularly the Provost's Office and the Office of Student Affairs. In the long term, following the 2028 presidential elections, we will analyze the NSLVE report for Norfolk State and, based on our findings, share our conclusions with the administration and the whole campus community.

**IX. Evaluation**

We will use enrollment numbers in POS 100—Introduction to Civic Engagement to see if our goals are being met. We will use qualitative and quantitative methods to gauge students' progress in the course. A standard pre-test will be administered at the beginning of each semester, followed by a post-test at the end. We will then assess the results to implement necessary program structure changes. Also, a post-course survey will be administered to students who have completed the course to gauge their interest level in political discourse and participation.

More importantly, we will be guided by our NSLVE report, particularly the Registration and Yield Rates, to make necessary changes and ensure a better understanding of our voter education system. Where necessary, we will also encourage the administration to work with NSLVE to provide data they can afford to release without harming our privacy laws and procedures.