

# Norfolk State University – Action Plan 2022

Developed by Dr. Soji Akomolafe

## I. Executive Summary

Norfolk State University (NSU) is historically black institution that is deeply committed to civic learning and democratic engagement. As stated in our institution's strategic plan, we are grounded on our heritage, focused on the future, and deeply committed to student success. This year's action plan, which was jointly developed by the coalition listed below will be implemented starting from August 2022. The goal is to weave civic engagement into courses and campus life, familiarize students with the voting process, and develop strategies to engage them in the political process. Three years ago, the Department of Political Science in association with the Office of Student Affairs launched a campus-wide initiative to foster civic engagement on campus and promote a culture of activism designed to encourage increased participation of students, staff and faculty in the political process. Since then, as a result of some of the initiatives we put in place, we are glad to report that we have been able to move the needle forward significantly in this regard.

## II. Leadership and Team Members

As in the past, we rely on a collaborative effort that includes the participation of many entities on the campus. Essentially, the Department of Political Science has been working collaboratively with an array of faculty members, the Young Democrats Club, the campus chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Epsilon Pi Chapter, as well as the Student Affairs Office. This collaborative effort is headed by Dr. Soji Akomolafe, Executive Director of the Center for African American Public Policy and Chair of the Department of Political Science. Other members are as follows:

- Tarrye Venable, Director of Office of Student Activities
- Ciri May, Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow and NSU Young Democrats President
- Maleik Watkins, NSU Young Democrats Political Action Director
- Ivana M. Rich, Assistant Associate Athletic Director for Academic Services
- Dr. Michele Marable, Dean of Student Affairs
- Dr. Juan Alexander, Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management

## III. Commitment

As enumerated in our 2021 Action Plan, given that elections take place every year here in the Commonwealth of Virginia, we pride ourselves on making civic engagement and democratic participation programming a cornerstone at Norfolk State University. Last year, it was clearly stated that we will bring together faculty, staff, students, community members to organize around democratic, and voter engagement activities on campus. We also outlined two sets of goals: short-term and long-term. While our long-term goals still remain practically the same, we have changed direction a little bit regarding our short-term goals. Indeed, as part of our commitment to this cause, we have fulfilled some of the promises we made last year. Two of our long-term goals have already been met along with one short-term goal. For example, one of our short-term goals was to join NSLVE. Norfolk State is now a member of NSLVE. Also, as promised in our long-term goal, the university has agreed to suspend classes

on presidential election days to allow students more time to exercise their civic duty while we have already surpassed the 80 percentiles landmark we set for voter registration increase. We really appreciate and commend the efforts of the university administration for working with us on some of our initiatives and in particular for making these two achievements possible.

Finally, for the 2021 Virginia gubernatorial election, and acting in a non-partisan manner, Norfolk State hosted a number of candidates, including the current governor, Glen Youngkin. Working in concert with the department's Center for African American Public Policy (CAAmPP) and several news organizations including Wavy News 10, the university hosted gubernatorial debates this past electoral cycle. We have also gone on to host high-visibility individuals and celebrities such as Pharrell Williams, to help encourage and sensitize students as to the benefits of voting, but more broadly, consistent political participation.

#### **IV. Landscape**

Three years ago, the Department of Political Science in association with the Office of Student Affairs launched a campus-wide initiative to foster civic engagement on campus and foster a culture of activism designed to encourage increased participation of students, staff and faculty in the political process. To be clear, our greatest achievement and the one we are most proud of is in the realm of voter registration. We are glad to announce that the Office of Students Affairs now recognize us as partners in this endeavor as we have been working hand-in-glove on all matters concerning voter registration on campus. Our activities in this regard include training the trainers and registering student to vote. Students who register on campus must first be certified by the Department and Student Affairs Office. Also, in order to ensure the integrity of the process, no outside group can conduct any registration exercise on campus unless they are invited by either the Student Affairs Office or the Department of Political Science. For the second time in a row, during the Agoge Week (Freshmen Transition Week), once again, students were registered in large numbers. Our NSLVE numbers for registration and voting certainly confirm that Norfolk State has made a significant improvement.

#### **V. Goals**

##### **(a). Long-term Goals**

- Have at least eighty percent of Norfolk State students registered to vote (Achieved).
- Work with the Provost to suspend classes and activities until 1:30 PM each year during Election Day (Achieved).
- Get seventy-five percent of registered students at the polls on Election Day (Pending).
- Get National Voter Registration Day and Election Day on the official Academic Calendar (Pending).
- Establish an on-campus polling location (Pending).

##### **(b). Short-term Goals**

- Enroll Norfolk State University into National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement. (Achieved)
- Create and infuse POS 101 - Civic Engagement and the Political Process (Pending).
- Get at least twenty-five percent of the incoming freshmen class registered to vote (Pending).

- Work with other HBCUs in a collaborative inter-campus effort to promote civic engagement on our respective campuses (Pending).

## **VI. Strategy**

This year, our main strategy consists in creating a civic engagement course and introducing it into our General Education Curriculum. The goal is to expose the entire student population to the political process through civic engagement education and activities. That means, any student wishing to graduate from Norfolk State would have to complete at least three credit hours of civic engagement lectures/activities. The course will be a hands-on approach with a service-learning component as well as opportunities for internship with governmental entities and civic engagement organizations. To this end, the Department of Political Science has sought for, and got approval to hire at the assistant professor level a full-time faculty whose job would comprise mainly of designing the course. Next, the department would submit a request to the College of Liberal Arts Curriculum Committee for approval to offer the course and if approved, would submit the same to the college-wide Curriculum Committee. We are working very closely with the Dean's Office on this initiative, and we hope to have it done during the coming academic year. Should this strategy pan out as envisaged, it would drastically change the civic engagement landscape at Norfolk State University.

## **VII. Participation in NSLVE**

As stated earlier, the university currently participates in NSLVE. To be clear, we got our first campus report in 2021 and they were extremely encouraging. According to the data, NSU's 2020 voting rate increased by 7.7%, the highest increase ever recorded for the university over a period of one year. More importantly, registration rate surpassed the 80% goal we set for ourselves rising up to 86.1%, while voting rate of registered students increased from 47.8% in 2018 to a whopping 76.2% in 2020. We definitely hope to continue our association with NSLVE.

## **VIII. Reporting**

We have already accomplished one of our long-term goals. For the first time in the history of the university, last year, classes were suspended all day on Election Day. We are still negotiating with the Office of Student Affairs to place both the National Voter Registration Day and Election Day on the official Academic Calendar. Dr. Juan Alexander, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Admissions is assisting us in this endeavor. It is our fervent hope that before the next midterm elections (2023), our labors in this regard would bear fruit. We have also added a new goal to our short-term endeavor. As stated above, our top priority now is to develop a course in civic engagement and introduce it into the general education courses. Hopefully, by this time next year, this goal would have been met.

## **IX. Evaluation**

Up till now, our efforts have been self-evaluated although, we are confident that it has been fairly and in as much as possible accurately done. That said, in the future, we hope to put in place a more sophisticated form of evaluation that might include an people external to the department.