



Shenandoah University Voter Engagement Action Plan 2024

Executive Summary

Shenandoah University's Action Plan was developed by the staff and work-study students of the Center for Civic Engagement, especially by Director Rebecca Gibson and Work Study Students Liberty Tennyson and Emma Ogden, with the purpose of increasing democratic engagement across campus. This initiative was originally developed in 2020 as a partnership between the Center for Civic Engagement and the Political Science department. In the revised plan for 2024, the inclusion of several additional partners will enable us to implement goals that will reach not only a broader student base but also include outreach to faculty and staff. This action plan will be implemented on Shenandoah University's main Winchester campus initially, with the hope of broadening its reach to the satellite campus in Loudoun as the Center for Civic Engagement grows and becomes better established. The goals of the Action Plan fall into four categories: increasing voter registration and turnout, providing opportunities for voter education and civic dialogue, improving awareness of inequities in voter access and working to increase inclusion, and expanding collaboration with faculty, student organizations and community resources. The plan is intended for use in the 2024-2025 academic year, and will be revised after the 2024 elections in order to begin preparing for the next election cycle. The Center for Civic Engagement will facilitate the implementation of the Voter Action Plan by supporting the students, faculty, staff and community partners involved.

Leadership

Below is the list of leaders who are currently planning to participate in voter engagement efforts:

- Rebecca Gibson, Director of Civic Engagement
 - The Center for Civic Engagement will be the primary leader in planning events and coordinating an overall structure for voter engagement on campus.
 - The Director, with the help of the Voter Engagement Team, is the author of this plan.
 - Rebecca Gibson is also a First Year Seminar Professor, teaching a class on voter engagement. During the 2023 session, two students from the class were recruited for the CCE's work study team. Hopefully that pattern will continue.
- Michael Romano, Associate Professor of Political Science
 - Michael Romano will be providing assistance in programming, as well as expertise in the area of political engagement.
- Leann Curley, Academic Affairs staff member who coordinates the First Year Seminar Mentorship program

- The First-Year Seminar program has agreed to partner in registering first year students. The first year seminar mentors in each class will invite our voter engagement team into their classes to help first year students register to vote online.
- Dahlia Ashford, Assistant Dean of Inclusion, Diversity and Equity
 - Dahlia Ashford will provide coordination, collaboration, and programming for students who participate in the Mosaic Center, including students of color and those who identify within the LGBTQ+ spectrum.
- Mannie Brown, Associate Director for Gender and Sexuality Resources
 - Mannie Brown, through their work in the Not Just Women's Center, will support and encourage participation in the CCE's voter education programs
- Isaac Blue, Assistant Men's Basketball Coach and Advisor for the RED Team (Racial Equity and Diversity), and student-athlete organization.
 - Isaac Blue will help the CCE foster a relationship with student athletes. Two of the more popular areas of study among our athletes are Business and Fitness Studies, which, according to our last NSLVE report, are some of our lowest areas of voter turnout. This partnership will help us better connect with these students.
- Dr. Teresa Masiello, Associate Director of Assessment, Institutional Research
 - Dr. Masiello will assist the CCE with assessment strategies regarding the plan, its implementation and results.
- Dr. Rosemary Green, Program Vice President, American Association of University Women Winchester, Va Branch
 - Dr. Green will assist us in programming with regards to community-wide voter education outreach
 - This September, for the second year in a row, we will host the AAUW's Candidate Forum, in which all candidates running for office in our local area will be invited to share their views on election issues with the community
- Ashley Smeltzer-Kraft, Head Field Hockey Coach
 - Coach Smeltzer-Kraft will collaborate with the CCE to provide voter registration education and materials to the athletic department in order to increase participation among the athletes (15 teams consisting of more than 500 athletes)
- Liberty Tennyson, Voter Engagement Coordinator- Advanced Work-study student
 - Within the Center for Civic Engagement, at least one work-study student will be tasked with planning voter engagement programs. Liberty is returning for her fourth year as a work-study student. She is also an officer in our Student Government Association. Before leaving for the summer break, Liberty and the voter engagement team began planning for the fall. They have already scheduled a voter registration training session for our entire work study team, 4 tabling dates on campus for voter registration and education, and 4 deliberative dialogue events on campus relating to election topics.
- Emma Ogden, Voter Engagement Team Work-study student

- Emma is returning for her second year on the voter engagement team. She will spend the fall semester coordinating our voter engagement events. She has created a “Find Your Voice” advocacy campaign to help students identify issues that affect them personally. Liberty has worked closely with Emma during her first year with us, and she plans to continue as the Voter Engagement Coordinator after Liberty graduates. As new students join our team, Liberty and Emma will identify potential coordinators for future years.
- Fabiola Vazquez Becerra, Deliberative Dialogue Coordinator Work-study student
 - Fabiola is returning for her fourth year on the CCE’s work study team. This year she has decided to dedicate the program’s fall programming to election issues and voter engagement.
- Additional CCE staff and student employees
 - All professional staff and current and future student employees (those hired for the 2024-25 school year) will complete ELECT certified training through the Virginia Department of Elections. This training will provide valuable information regarding our responsibilities while conducting voter registration drives in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Dr. Yolanda Gibson, Vice President of Student Affairs
- Dr. Karen Abraham, Provost
 - Dr. Abraham will facilitate the CCE’s work with SU faculty to determine the best ways to incorporate voter engagement into curricular and co-curricular programs. For example, Dr. Abraham is working with our work study staff to encourage faculty members to cancel their classes on election day to help eliminate voting barriers for students.
- Dr. Tracy Fitzsimmons, President, Shenandoah University
 - These administrators fully support and encourage the Center for Civic Engagement’s voter engagement programs and activities.

Commitment

The Mission Statement of Shenandoah University is as follows:

Shenandoah University educates and inspires individuals to be critical, reflective thinkers; lifelong learners; and ethical, compassionate citizens who are committed to making responsible contributions within a community, a nation and the world. Exercising one's rights as a voting member of the community is a perfect example of being an ethical, compassionate citizen committed to contributing responsibly to one’s community. Included in the University’s vision statement is the following: *Shenandoah University will be highly valued for a campus culture of compassion, responsibility, advocacy, and justice which graduates are inspired to replicate in communities beyond Shenandoah.* The Center for Civic Engagement is fully supported in its voter engagement efforts by the University’s administration and community as a whole. Our president, Dr. Fitzsimmons, is committed to this Action Plan and has signed the Higher Education Presidents’ Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation

For example, our Voter Engagement Coordinator (Liberty Tennyson) has met with the Provost, the Academic Cabinet and the Faculty Senate to present and promote the Day On Democracy

initiative, which encourages faculty to cancel classes on Election Day to help eliminate voting barriers for students. While a final decision has not been made as of the submission of this Action Plan, we are hopeful that the Provost will make an official statement in the fall asking faculty to cancel classes on November 5.

Landscape

Shenandoah University is fortunate to be led by a President and Board of Trustees who demonstrate care and concern for the community outside of campus. Campus voter engagement efforts have been a priority over the years, traditionally centered in the Center for Public Service and Scholarship. This office initiated participation in NSLVE and held voter registration drives at student orientations. These registration efforts focused exclusively to register students within Winchester, Virginia. Since voter engagement was just one small component of the Center's programs, much of the success of registration and actual voting was due to the energy and initiative of student leaders.

As of 2018, our voter registration rate was 79.8%, a rate that has been generally consistent since 2012. The actual voting rate in 2018 was 38%, only slightly lower than other institutions (39.1%). In the presidential election of 2016, the voting rate was 54.2%, slightly higher than the 50.4% average of other institutions. We are unable to report on NSLVE data from 2022, as we have not yet received the report.

At the end of 2019, the Director for the Center for Public Service and Scholarship retired. The office was transitioned from Academic Affairs into Student Affairs and was renamed the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). Voter engagement is still only one part of the civic engagement efforts in this Center, but has remained a priority, and each year several of the work-study students have held positions as voter engagement coordinators in addition to participating in Campus Vote Project as Shenandoah Fellows. The CCE's efforts appear to have resulted in higher rates: in the 2020 NSLVE report, our registration rate was 86.7%, and our voting rate was 71.3%, again higher than the 66% average of other institutions.

In 2015 Shenandoah University published its Strategic Plan: Shenandoah 2025, which was based on the results of its Strategic Planning Survey, which included input from students, faculty and staff. The first theme identified in this plan is: *Shenandoah University will focus on rigorous, innovative programs and engaged student learning.* In the 2018 Progress Update to the Shenandoah 2025 Strategic Plan, it was determined that progress is being made towards the goal of engaging students in learning and service activities in partnership with communities and organizations external to the university.

In line with its mission statement to educate and inspire individuals to become critical, reflective thinkers, Shenandoah University is committed to ensuring the creation of an inclusive environment characterized by respect for diverse cultures, experiences and perspectives, and equitable access for all students, faculty and staff. Several initiatives have proceeded from this commitment, including the PRIDE Task Force (President's Representatives on Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity), which initiated the university's first Campus Climate Survey. This survey

was designed to evaluate the experience of faculty, students and staff, and assist the institution in determining the necessary steps to create an environment of compassion, responsibility, advocacy and justice. In addition, a team of faculty and staff, student organizations and student support services has been identified to collaborate to ensure that diversity, equity and inclusion are valued across the institution. These initiatives all contribute to a university-wide climate which promotes community service and civic engagement. The CCE benefits greatly from these initiatives and the general support of the faculty, staff and administration towards our voter engagement programs.

Goals

Short term goals for 2022 election:

1. Increase voter registration on campus to 90% in 2024.
2. Get 100% of all eligible first-year students registered. We especially aim to target first year students through Welcome Week tabling and visiting each class in the First Year Seminar program to offer registration.
3. Increase the presidential year voting rate on campus to 80% from 71% in 2020. With the hope of having classes canceled on November 5, we plan to share information as widely as possible on how and when to vote, both in person and by mail, so that students can take advantage of the opportunity to vote on or before election day.
4. Provide opportunities for the SU community to learn information about candidates, political process, and political values through voter education events. Through tabling, class visits, the AAUW Candidate Forum and other voter education events, we plan to offer a wide variety of election resources and knowledge to students.

Long term goals:

5. Provide opportunities for the SU community to engage in civic dialogue to discuss current issues and practice listening to and appreciating political perspectives different from one's own. As of the end of the spring 2024 semester, we already have four dialogues scheduled for the fall. They are designed to help students talk through and share their thoughts about their political identity and how they will vote, and then how to move forward after the election. We aim to foster a spirit of listening to others' perspectives without judgment or persuasion.
6. Address issues of voter disenfranchisement by focusing on voter education and engagement programs specifically designed for marginalized populations. We hope to address this by collaborating on voter engagement programming with the Mosaic Center for Diversity and our athletic department's RED team (Racial Equity and Diversity).
7. Increase off-campus community engagement by partnering with community organizations to promote voter registration in the greater community. We have partnered with the AAUW for 2 years to host their annual Candidate Forum. We also hope to work with other organizations, such as our local NAACP branch, to provide more voter registration opportunities. For example, at this year's NAACP community-wide Juneteenth celebration, our CCE will represent SU with a table at the event, and we plan to offer voter registration then.
8. Develop partnerships with faculty to collaborate on the continued embedding of voter engagement and civic education into the curricular and co-curricular programs. We have

offered voter education programs to our FYS professors for the last 2 years, but we also hope to be invited to a variety of classes to educate students about voter registration and voting. This is a work in progress.

NSLVE (This section of the Action Plan is copied from our 2022 Action Plan, since we do not yet have our NSLVE report for 2022)

Our 2020 NSLVE report was used to inform our short term goals for this election cycle. Noting that in 2014 and 2018, both midterm election years, the registration rates remained constant but the actual voting rates were lower than in presidential election years, so we plan to focus our voter education programming for this cycle on the importance of participating in the midterm election process. One way we will do this is to schedule one of our civic dialogue events around this topic, including items that may be important issues specifically to the 2022 election.

Below is a summary of Shenandoah University’s 2020 NSLVE data on voter registration and participation rates for the past 3 cycles:

Voter Registration and Voting Rates for past 3 election cycles: 2020 NSLVE report Shenandoah University		
2016 Number of students who registered: 2,773 Number of students who voted: 1,869 Registration Rate: 81.1% Voting Rate: 54.7%	2018 Number of students who registered: 2,742 Number of students who voted: 1,242 Registration Rate: 81.2% Voting Rate: 36.8%	2020 Number of students who registered: 3,216 Number of students who voted: 2,646 Registration Rate: 86.7% Voting Rate: 71.3%
Voting rates by race/ethnicity: 2020 NSLVE report Shenandoah University		

2016 Registration/Voting rate	2018 Registration/Voting rate	2020 Registration/Voting rate
Asian: 35%	Asian: 22%	Asian: 58%
American Indian/ Alaska Native: 52%	American Indian/ Alaska Native: -	American Indian/ Alaska Native: 63%
Black: 43%	Black: 33%	Black: 61%
Hispanic: 51%	Hispanic: 38%	Hispanic: 64%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander: -	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander: -	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander: -
2 or More Races: 64%	2 or More Races: 34%	2 or More Races: 69%
White: 57%	White: 38%	White: 75%
Race Unknown: 43%	Race Unknown: 32%	Race Unknown: 68%

Strategy

Below are the strategies to accomplish the goals of Shenandoah University.

Increase voter registration/First year registration:

We are partnering with the All In Campus Democracy Challenge to use the allintovote.org tool on our university site. We will be directing students to this page during summer orientations, August on-campus orientation and move-in, and various on-campus activities during Welcome Week in August. Having online registration available provides a wider range of options for students because they can choose to register either in Winchester or in their hometowns.

We have also partnered with both the First Year Seminar program and Residence Life to reach eligible first-time voters. We (the CCE Voter Engagement Team work-study students) plan to visit the First Year Seminar classes and the First Year Residence Hall meetings early in the fall to share voter registration information. We will also be using the allintovote.org tool for this initiative.

Using data from NSLVE, the leadership team will also work to develop specific promotion of registration to demographic groups that have lower registration rates. We will partner with student organizations and identified DEI leaders (listed in the Leadership section) on campus to develop ways to reach out to these groups.

Increase voting rate:

One of the goals of our voter education efforts this fall is to inform students of all of their voting options. We plan to include information on mail-in and early voting along with our voter

registration promotional materials, using various social media platforms as well as our own Office of Marketing and Communications. We want to make sure that students are aware of all of their options, and they have ample time to plan so that they do not face last-minute obstacles on Election Day. In addition, as mentioned before, we are hoping to have all or at least most classes canceled on Election Day, and we will offer transportation to our local polling place that afternoon for students who need it.

Programs:

We will also be working to create events on campus that are student centered around the political process, political values, and why democracy matters, typically scheduling these events on days that are already significant to the voter engagement process, such as Constitution Day, National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, Vote Early Day and Election Day. Some examples of events are voter registration tables, debate watch parties and opportunities for deliberative dialogue that focus on issues of democracy and representation. These events will be advertised through campus-wide communication channels as well as within classes and student clubs and organizations. Four dialogues and four tabling events have already been scheduled on the University calendar for next semester.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:

Through collaboration with campus organizations that focus on DEI, we hope to identify and address any barriers that members of our community may face in the democratic process. As we plan our fall events, we will invite organizations such as the Black Student Union, Estudiantes Unidos, the Mosaic Center for Diversity, the RED team and the Not Just Women's Center to partner with us and provide input. We recognize that without these partnerships, our efforts to address any barriers faced by marginalized students will fall short.

Outreach Beyond the SU Campus:

Through partnerships with organizations like the NAACP and AAUW, we plan to reach out to the surrounding community to offer opportunities for voter education and engagement. We plan to hold voter registration drives at community events (an example, Winchester's Juneteenth celebration). We also hope to recruit SU students to apply to work as poll workers on election day.

Curricular and Co-Curricular Collaboration:

The CCE will work to create a strategy to generate interest and communicate with faculty members about ways to incorporate voter education and engagement into the curriculum. This is a long term goal, as time will be needed to assess the level of voter engagement already present and determine next steps, which may be unique to each department.

Reporting

The action plan, NSLVE data and end of year report will be shared with all leadership team members, the university administration, and publicly on our website and CCE social media.

Evaluation

Throughout the course of the election year, the CCE will implement assessment strategies to determine the achievement of the listed goals and to improve programs and inform future planning. We recognize that simply receiving the NSLVE data will not be useful unless we review, discuss and share it with our leadership team members, and take actions based on it. After the data is received, we will gather the leadership team to review and analyze the data. Dr. Teresa Massiello, one of the University's directors of assessment, will be instrumental in helping us identify issues within the data and implement any needed strategies. A long term goal will be to assess the effectiveness of these actions, thus continuing the cycle of assessment and improvement. Some examples of ongoing ways that we will assess our plan's implementation are tracking student participation in planned events, collecting and studying data from surveys taken by participating students, and keeping activity logs of our events and programs. We do these things by compiling reports after each event. The work study students responsible for each event report on attendance, survey results, and other factors noted at the events; the students then meet with staff to discuss their findings and assess our progress in the Action Plan.