

Shenandoah University Voter Engagement Action Plan 2022-2023

Executive Summary

Shenandoah University's Action Plan was developed by the staff and work-study students of the Center for Civic Engagement, with the purpose of increasing voter and 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 2022, the inclusion of the Provost and the administration of the Division of Student Affairs as 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 two satellite campuses in Leesburg and Fairfax 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 2022-2023 academic year, and will be revised after the 2022 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.
- 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.
- Dr. Cameron McCoy, Provost
 - Dr. McCoy will facilitate the CCE's work with SU faculty to determine the best ways to incorporate voter engagement into curricular and co-curricular programs
- First-Year Seminar Head Mentor, student
 - The First-Year Seminar program has agreed to partner in registering first year students. The head mentor of this program and will work to train mentors in each class to register students online.
- Dahlia Ashford, Assistant Dean of Students for Diversity, Inclusion, and Residential Services

- 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, Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator for Residence Life
 - Mannie Brown will assist us in reaching out to first year students in the residence halls
- 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
- 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)
- Nathan Tabourn, Assistant Director of Student Success, Men United for Excellence Program Coordinator
 - Nathan Tabourn will collaborate with the CCE to plan voter education in conjunction with programming for First Generation students and members of MUE, a mentoring program for African-American males.
- Libby Tennyson, Voter Engagement Coordinator- work-study student
 - Within the Center for Civic Engagement, at least one work-study student will be tasked with planning voter engagement programs. Libby is returning for her second year as a work-study student, and she will also be participating as a Shenandoah Fellow with Campus Vote Project. In addition, during the summer of 2022, Libby will work as an intern for the League of Women Voters.
- Meredith Blady, Graduate Assistant for the Center for Civic Engagement
 - Meredith, as Graduate Assistant, will coordinate with the director and the work-study students to plan and implement our voter engagement programs.
- Dr. Fritz Polite, Associate Vice President of Student Leadership and Development
- Dr. Yolanda Gibson, Vice President of Student Affairs
- Dr. Tracy Fitsimmons, 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.

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.

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% from 86.7% in 2020.
2. Get 100% of all eligible first-year students registered.
3. Increase the midterm voting rate on campus to 60% from 38% in 2018. Future goal: increase the presidential year voting rate to 80% from 71% in 2020.
4. Provide opportunities for the SU community to learn information about candidates, political process, and political values through voter education events.

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.
6. Address issues of voter disenfranchisement by focusing on voter education and engagement programs specifically designed for marginalized populations
7. Increase off-campus community engagement by partnering with community organizations to promote voter registration in the greater community
8. Develop partnerships with faculty to collaborate on the continued imbedding of voter engagement and civic education into the curricular and co-curricular programs

NSLVE

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

Strategy

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

Increase voter registration/First year registration:

We have partnered with Rock the Vote to create a webpage on our university site that is dedicated to voter registration. 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 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 Rock the Vote 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 on campus to develop ways to reach out to these groups.

Increase voting rate:

Recognizing that many students will either vote absentee or early in-person (From SU's 2020 NSLVE report, 27% of our campus voters voted early, 44% voted "not in person," and only 6% voted in person on election day), we will promote both of these options weekly, constantly educating the campus community about these processes. We plan to include information on absentee 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.

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 civic 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.

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, and the Not Just Women's Center to partner with us and provide input.

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. 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.