

University of North Carolina Asheville Action Plan—2018

Overview¹

Efforts to register and mobilize voters and to promote democratic engagement on the University of North Carolina Asheville’s campus are spearheaded by a variety of different organizations and offices on campus including (though not limited to): the Student Affairs Division, the Student Government Association (SGA), the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning, the Student Organization Council, and the Political Science Club. As part of the All-In Challenge, representatives from each of these organizations (faculty, staff, and student), as well as from multiple academic departments, have agreed to serve on a Voter Engagement Committee to plan, oversee, and coordinate all registration, mobilization, turnout, and other election-oriented activities on UNCA’s campus for the 2018 midterm elections and any elections thereafter.

Our overarching goals, to be discussed in greater detail below, are to combat low voter registration and turnout in midterm elections, especially among the 18-25 year old demographic, to provide easy access to non-partisan candidate and ballot information, and to provide greater access to the polls for members of the campus community. We hope to create/foster a culture of engagement on our campus, and, while we are aware this may not be accomplished in a single year or single election cycle, we believe the plan herein described lays out the first steps toward these larger goals. The plan outlined here is also consistent with UNCA’s Strategic Plan, which emphasizes the importance of community engagement as a means to “encourage students to engage in civic leadership and democratic processes.”²

Institutional Context

Our goals as a committee and as representatives of various departments, organizations, and offices at UNCA are informed by the the landscape both on an off campus. In particular, our goals are a reflection of the institutional structures around, resources for, and the realities of democratic participation within our campus community and in the state of North Carolina as a whole (especially since we recognize that many of our students are not Buncombe County voters).

Campus Overview—NSLVE Results and Campus Trends

UNCA participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), which provides institutions with data on student registration and voting rates.³ Based on our access to data from the 2012 and 2016 election cycles⁴, we believe we have a good sense of the potential trends in participation on campus. While 2012 and 2016 were presidential election years and thus are not directly comparable to a midterm election, such as 2018, we believe the data can still be useful for setting 2018 goals. Midterm election turnout in the US tends to be much lower than in presidential election years, so we contend that any problematic areas in our NSLVE reports may be more severe when it comes to midterms.

Based on the accessible data from 2012 and 2016, we believe we should focus on increasing both registration and turnout rates on our campus. In terms of registration, 72% of students were registered in 2012 and 68.7% in 2016. While these are high numbers, we believe/hope they can be improved upon. Of those students who are registered, turnout rates were 67.5% in 2012 and 75.3% in 2016. We find this upward trajectory promising but would like all of our registered students to exercise their right to vote. The overall voting rate of students on campus was 48.7% in 2012 and 51.8% in 2016. We are encouraged that over half of our students turned out to vote in 2016 but want to increase those percentages for the election cycles to come and we are aware that 2018 turnout rates may be much lower without concerted attempts to combat obstacles to voting in midterm elections (both institutional and informational).

¹Report completed by Ashley Moraguez, Political Science. Contact: amorague@unca.edu

²<https://strategicplan.unca.edu/strategic-direction-3-community-engagement>

³We have renewed our participation for 2018

⁴At the moment, we do not have access to the 2014 results from our campus, due to turnover of staff on campus

There are some interesting institutional and demographic patterns on campus worth noting, as well. UNCA students seem to overwhelmingly take advantage of early voting opportunities: in 2012, 66.4% of our students who voted did so in the early voting period and 69.6% in 2016. This is in comparison to the 22.7% and 17.9% that voted on election day in 2012 and 2016 respectively. This is a pattern that we intend to take note of and focus on in our goals for 2018. Further, we also note that a non-negligible percent of our students voted absentee in the past 2 presidential election cycles. Approximately 10% of our voting students voted absentee in 2012 and 2016.

In terms of demographics, race and ethnicity seem to be important factors in voter turnout on UNCA's campus. In general, students who identify as racial and ethnic minorities tend to have lower turnout rates than do those students who identify as white. The major exception to this trend was among Native American/American Indian students, who turned out at the highest rates of any demographic in 2016, at 64.7%. White student turnout was 52.6%, compared to 44% for Hispanic students, 36.1% for Asian students, 43.7% for black students, and 47% for multiracial students. These trends are important to consider for the goals we are setting.

Age also seems to play a major role in voting on our campus. Turnout steadily increases with the age of our students. In particular, the age range of concern is students that are 18-21, with a turnout rate of 43.3 in 2012 and 40.9 in 2016. Turnout increased significantly for students 22-24, with rates of 46 and 59.6 in 2012 and 2016. In particular, we plan to focus on first-year students to combat some of these trends.

North Carolina Overview—State Voting Data and Patterns

Trends in voting across the state of North Carolina, we believe, are also relevant to the efforts we make on our campus to increase registration and turnout rates. North Carolina has a controversial history when it comes to voting rights. As recently as 2016, a federal appeals court struck down a state Voter ID law that targeted black voters with “almost surgical precision.”⁵ The same law made it more difficult for young voters to register, by barring pre-registration efforts. While the law has since been struck down and is no longer in effect, it bred a lot of disenchantment with and confusion surrounding the registration and voting process. Efforts to increase registration and voting on UNCA's campus, then, must be made with this in mind. One of the largest barriers to registration and voting in the state is one of information and access.

Some of the voting trends on campus seem to be more systemic, as they are also apparent at the state level. While turnout rates in NC are the 11th highest in the country (69 percent in 2016), it is not consistent across all segments of society. The demographic with the lowest turnout rates state-wide was voters in the 18-25 age bracket with a 2016 turnout rate of 53% (compared to 60% in 2008 and 55% in 2012). Further, according to Democracy NC, a non-partisan nonprofit in North Carolina that focuses on voter engagement, there was a 7 point gap between white and black voter turnout in 2016 (71% vs 64%); the rate for Hispanic voters was even lower at 58 percent.⁶ We believe it is critical to think about the barriers that may be affecting the turnout rates of these groups on campus and in the state writ large when creating our campus action plan.

⁵<http://electionlawblog.org/wp-content/uploads/nc-4th.pdf>

⁶<https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/WhoVoted2016.pdf>

Initiatives for the 2018 Election Cycle

In the following section, we lay out and explain the goals we hope to accomplish during the 2018 election cycle. Then, we provide a tentative plan for how to accomplish each.

Goals

Our goals for the 2018 election are to:

1. Maintain/increase the voter *registration* rates on campus, relative to 2016—the registration rate on UNCA’s campus was 68.7% in 2016 (which is almost 2 points down from 2012). While the 2016 and 2018 elections are not directly comparable, given that 2016 was a presidential election year, we believe that if we can make registering easy enough and pervasive enough on campus, we can maintain our levels of registration and possibly increase them. This is one of our major goals, given that among registered voters, turnout was over 75 percent in 2016, which is a very high rate.
2. Improve voter *turnout* rates on campus, which we believe requires a multi-tiered approach:
 - Maintain/increase aggregate voter turnout rates on campus, relative to 2014 & 2016—in 2016, the voter turnout rate on campus was 51.8%, which was significantly lower than the aggregate state average and lower than the state average for voters between 18 and 25. While presidential election years are known to generate higher voter turnout rates than are midterm election years, such as 2018, we believe that the low turnout rates for 2016 may allow us to use it as a benchmark for measuring 2018 success. As such, our goal is to have campus turnout rates be over 50% for 2018. While we do not currently have campus NSLVE reports for 2014, we know that Buncombe County, the county in which UNCA lies, had 2014 turnout rates at about 50%, so again we think this is a reasonable goal to set, especially if we can register a greater percentage of students to vote
 - Increase turnout among groups of students with lower rates—We aim to increase turnout among the demographic groups with the lowest turnout rates on campus, as described above (18-21 year olds, racial and ethnic minorities, etc). Further, there are some trends that indicate that students in certain fields of study are less likely to vote than are others, and we aim to take measures to combat these trends.
 - Pledging at least 500 students to vote—given that midterm elections tend to be low information events relative to presidential election years, we want to make sure that students are in the loop about the upcoming election. As such, for those students that are already registered to vote, we hope to pledge as many to vote as possible. In 2017, an local election year, we were able to pledge about 150-200 students to vote, and we think we can increase that number significantly during a national election year, even on a small campus
3. Reduce barriers/obstacles to voting for our campus community—we perceive that there are some institutional and informational barriers to voting on our campus that should be addressed in any plans to increase civic engagement and voter participation among our students and the wider UNCA community. For example, for the 2018 election cycle, campus will not be an early voting site, like it was during the 2016 election, due to construction and a decrease in available parking on campus. This is going to make it significantly more difficult to maintain high rates of turnout. Further, midterm elections tend to be lower information affairs—there is less media coverage of these races, and detailed information on candidates tends to be harder to come by. We aim to address these potential barriers to voting and participating for UNCA students
4. Provide opportunities for students to get engaged in the wider community, model civil discourse, & promote a culture of engagement—For those students who are particularly interested in politics and democracy and want to get involved, we hope to provide greater information on and opportunities for students to get involved in the election both on and off campus. We hope to have at least 40 students volunteer for campus registration events and another 40-50 volunteer with the Buncombe County Board of Elections. We also hope to sponsor a series of talks, parties, and events on campus

to attract attention. We believe this is key to fostering well-rounded citizenship and we think that the involvement of students in the process can positively affect and influence other students to get involved, creating an atmosphere of engagement.

Action Plan

Below, we include our initiatives to accomplish each of the preceding goals.

1. Maintain/increase the voter registration rates on campus—We believe registering a greater number of students/members of the campus community to vote is a critical step in getting greater numbers to vote and otherwise participate in elections. For these reasons, we plan to do the following:
 - (a) Host multiple registration events around campus before the October 12 deadline for registration⁷—we believe hosting multiple high-profile registration events on campus will be key to getting students registered in time to vote in the November election. These events will involve recruiting volunteers, training volunteers, and tabling at various places around campus.
 - Dates for tabling:
 - Rockypalooza (August 17, 2018)—annual picnic and celebration to kick-off the new school year. Many members of the campus community attend this event, including first year students (it is part of their orientation process) and their families. This will be a prime opportunity to register a large group of voters
 - Student Organization Fair (date TBD, usually mid-to-late August)—We intend to table at the Student Organization Fair, an annual event that gives student organizations the opportunity to attract new members, in order to register students to vote at a location they will likely visit anyway and as a way to recruit volunteers for our registration drives and election day activities
 - Constitution Day (September 17, 2018)—The office of Student Affairs, often with the help of the Political Science Department, hosts an annual Constitution Day speaker, as well as Constitution week events (movie viewings, trivia, etc). As part of these festivities, we plan to have registration tables at the locations of each of the events and around high traffic areas on campus
 - National Voter Registration Day (September 25, 2018)—This is typically our largest day of registration activity on campus, with over 40 volunteers and hundreds of students registering and pledging to vote. We typically table all over campus, host training sessions for volunteers, and offer incentives to get students, faculty, and staff to stop by to register. We provide free food at these events, information about candidates, sample ballots, and NOW points for those who attend. NOW points are points that students collect for attending events on campus that can be redeemed for various prizes at the end of the semester.
 - Tabling locations— High traffic areas will be the top priority for tabling: outside Brown Dining Hall, both inside and outside Highsmith Student Union, outside Ramsey Library, outside residential dorms, and by the Rocky the Bull Dog statue. Academic buildings will be covered, if enough volunteers are recruited
 - Advertising—To advertise these campus-wide registration events, we intend to co-host these events with as many student organizations as possible, use social media pages to post fliers and reminders, post fliers and banners around campus, post advertisements on the digital media screens in dormitory buildings, email student listserves, and hopefully post on a prominent page on the university website.
 - (b) Designate “Voter Registration” areas around campus that operate all year long—ideally, we hope to designate a voter registration area in each academic building, each dorm, and in Highsmith Student Union so that students can stop in at any time to register to vote. A designated faculty/staff

⁷While it is possible for voters to register and vote at the same time during the early voting period, we think that pre-registering voters will make them more likely to turnout and to have the necessary resources to cast informed votes

member will periodically check into to each location to collect and submit any registration forms submitted. This will be done in addition to the advertised events.

- (c) Training as many volunteers as possible—while registering to vote is not necessarily a difficult task, in general, it can be tricky for students who live in campus dorms. Residential addresses cannot be designated as PO Boxes; however, students who live on campus are assigned a campus PO Box as their address and often use this as their residential address on voter registration forms. When this occurs, the Board of Elections cannot process the form. As such, we will train members of the campus community to instruct students on how to fill out the registration forms, to provide the addresses of the actual dorm buildings (which can serve as the residential address for students), and to explain that PO Boxes can only be used as mailing addresses. We especially intend to train any registration drive volunteers and RAs in the dorms of this. We also plan to post fliers with residential vs mailing addresses at any registration location.
2. Improve turnout rates on campus—while we believe registering students is a major step in improving turnout rates on campus, we also recognize that registering a student to vote does not guarantee that they will, in fact, turn out to vote. As such, we plan to do the following:
 - (a) Encourage Early Voting—We believe that informing students and members of the campus community about and encouraging them to vote during the 17-day early voting period can help turnout rates. As we have seen from our NSLVE reports, early voting is overwhelmingly the option our students choose. We want to further emphasize the benefits of doing: fewer/shorter lines, the ability to vote at any early voting location (rather than at a designated voting location), weekend voting, etc. We will have fliers with early voting dates and locations available at all registration drives and in Highsmith Student Union. We believe early voting is especially important on our small campus, since many of our students are commuters and many work off-campus jobs during the work week.
 - (b) Provide transportation to the polls—UNCA’s campus served as an early voting location for the 2016 election due to efforts of our student body president and SGA. However, due to widespread construction on campus during the Fall 2018 semester, it will not be an early voting location for the midterm elections. Given that turnout tends to be significantly lower in midterm elections already, this is a very concerning development for campus turnout rates. To maintain/ improve upon 2016 turnout rates, it will take a lot more effort than it would have if campus was an early voting location. To try to combat potential depressing turnout effects, various groups on campus (all mentioned in this document) are looking into pooling resources to rent campus shuttles during the early voting period to transport students to the nearest early voting location to campus (a public library 2 miles away). While the rental fees can be prohibitive, we are working with the administration and as many groups as possible to lower the costs and to fund the project. We hope to run shuttles on multiple days and multiple different time frames to cater to students’ varied class and work schedules and to serve as many students as possible. We think this will especially help first year students to be able to vote, since they are not allowed to have cars on campus. We have also applied for a mini-grant from NC Campus Compact to help fund this project; if granted, we intend to use a bulk of the funds on transportation. To supplement the shuttle service and to alleviate the costs, we will also be recruiting volunteers to transport members of the campus community to voting locations.
 - (c) Focus on groups with lower turnout rates—Given past NSLVE reports, we believe it is important to focus on certain sections of the study body with lower turnout rates, hoping to improve those rates in 2018 and future elections. We believe the key to success in this area is communication and outreach. The groups we would like to assist are as follows:
 - First-year/younger students: Given the voting rates of 18-21 year olds on campus, we intend to focus many of our efforts on this age group. In particular, we plan to focus some of our activities more particularly around the first-year experience; we believe that first year students are less likely to register and vote because of the difficulty in navigating the process, especially at a new address. Further, the Fall 2016 incoming freshman class will be the largest on record, making this an important group to focus upon. To help facilitate their participation, we intend

to have voter registration tables at move-in and orientation events. Further, UNCA requires all first-year students to enroll in a First Year Colloquium (FYC), generally during their Fall semester. We will extend an offer to all FYC instructors to have representatives of the Voter Engagement Committee come to each of their class periods for 20-30 minutes to register students to vote, answer any questions about voting/ballots/candidates, and provide voter information guides.

- Racial and ethnic minorities: As noted above, voter turnout among UNCA students that identify as racial and ethnic minorities tend to be lower than the university average and the average for white students. To help increase those rates, we intend to work with the Multicultural Affairs office and Student Organization Council on campus to reach out to these groups. We hope to cosponsor voter registration and election-related events with student organizations that represent these groups. Further, we intend to have open conversations with student groups on campus to identify the issues that students find the most pressing and to see how we can foster greater engagement and inclusivity. We believe this communication is critical.
 - Certain fields of study: According to NSLVE reports, we have some fields of study with low turnout rates (some natural sciences, for instance) and others with decreasing turnout rates (such as history). We intend to reach out to these departments (faculty, department chairs, etc) and extend the offer to visit classes to register students. We also plan to have voter registration tabling events in these academic buildings
- (d) Ask students to pledge to vote: While many of our efforts will be focused on registering new voters, we are aware that we also must foster a sense of engagement in those who are already registered to vote, especially in a midterm election where apathy tends to be higher. As such, we will offer voter pledges at all registration events and will offer incentives for students who agree to pledge to vote. When a student pledges to vote, we will give them a card of voting information and sign them up for a reminder email listserve. We believe the tangibility of these efforts will help to commit students to vote.
- (e) Access to absentee ballots—At all voter registration events on campus, we intend to provide absentee ballots for our students, so that they have ample time to fill out their ballots and send them off to the appropriate county board of elections. While a large proportion of our students are from the state of North Carolina, they do represent the entire state geographically. A decent number of our students choose to stay registered in their home districts and about 10 percent of those who voted in 2012 and 2016 voted absentee. For students who wish to do so, we aim to make this as easy as possible and to walk them through the process
- (f) Election Day/Early Voting Period reminders— We believe one of the reasons young voters turn out to vote at lower rates is the fact that they have so many other things going on in their lives; college students, in particular, can be overwhelmed by the amount of information and number of events that are available to them. For this reason, we think that reminding students about the early voting period and about election day can be a huge step in increasing voter turnout on campus. We can easily accomplish this goal by emailing student listserves and posting fliers around campus. Further, we intend to offer students the possibility to sign up for a reminder listserve when they register or pledge to vote at our registration drives. When a student pledges to vote, we inform them that this will automatically sign them up to receive 1-2 email reminders about the upcoming election, close to the voting period. We also offer this possibility to those who are newly registered as well.
- (g) Advertise same day registration—Many of our efforts on campus will encourage students to pre-register to vote before the state's October 12 registration deadline. However, we do not want members of the campus community who miss that deadline to think they will be unable or ineligible to vote. As such, after October 12, many of our efforts will switch gears to start advertising same day registration possibilities, which are available to them during the 17 day early voting period. We plan to use social media, email, and fliers to advertise this information.
3. Reduce barriers/obstacles to voting for our campus community—We believe that there are various

potential barriers that may prevent, discourage, or depress turnout among the campus community that we can take measures to alleviate, if not resolve:

- We perceive the largest and most obvious obstacle to be the fact that UNCA will not be an early voting location in 2018. As previously discussed, we hope to be able to sponsor multiple campus shuttle trips to the polls during the early voting period, to give interested students an easy, efficient, and costless (for them) way to get to the polls. We also hope to recruit volunteers to provide transportation to the polls. Finally, we hope to make guides to explain how students can use the public transit system in Asheville, which is free to students and faculty, to get to voting locations
 - Another obstacle, already discussed, lies in the navigating the actual voter registration form, for those students who live on campus. Since students typically view their campus address as their specifically assigned PO Box, many student voter registration forms do not get processed by the Board of Elections, since box numbers cannot serve as valid residential addresses. As such, we will go to the lengths described above to communicate to students that their residential address is the address of their actual dormitory building, and we will make sure to make sure those addresses are easily accessible with fliers, hand-outs, and online posts.
 - Information also tends to be a significant barrier to voting, especially in midterm elections. If voters feel that they cannot easily access information on candidates to cast informed votes, they may not bother to vote at all. Information on congressional candidates tends to be much lower than that on presidential candidates and the effect is even more stark down ballot. To combat this tendency (which is well-documented in the political science research), we hope to provide non-partisan candidate information to all students who register/pledge to vote or attend any election-related events. Our campus has a history of working with Democracy NC, a non-profit voter mobilization organization, which often provides sample ballots and ballot information. Further, the political science department will be offering a service-learning designated course on US Elections in Fall 2018, and one of the class projects will be to craft non-partisan voter guides to circulate to the campus and wider Asheville community
4. Provide opportunities for students to get engaged in the wider community, model civil discourse, & promote a culture of engagement—The overarching goal behind all of our actions is to foster a sense of community and civic mindedness on our campus and to create a norm of engagement and participation. Towards that end, we seek to take action to imbed these actions into our curriculum, our extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, and our community outreach projects:
- Curricular Efforts/Engaged Learning: In the Fall of 2018, multiple classes will be offered to specifically encourage democratic participation. The political science department will be offering two service learning courses, courses which are designated to involve a large component of community outreach and require students to work with a community partner. The two courses, Civic Engagement Community (POLS 357) and US Elections (POLS 374) will have students working with a variety of community partners, such as the Buncombe County Board of Election and Democracy NC. Another course, offered in the math department and Honors program, will focus on voting theory and will similarly be working with the Board of Elections to get students involved in voter registration and poll working. While this is not an exhaustive list of such courses, by any means, it is a snapshot of how civic engagement is increasingly intertwined into the curriculum.
 - Hosting candidates on campus: We intend to follow our trajectory of inviting candidates of all political parties to our campus to share their views and policy stances. During the Spring 2018 semester, campus hosted Democratic and Republican primary candidates for congressional seats, as well as a debate between candidates for sheriff. For the Fall, we hope to invite the general election candidates for the area's congressional seats, as well as for more local positions. We think this is an important way to increase information and foster civil discourse. We also hope to invite sitting politicians and political experts to campus well after the election, to keep such conversations going. We believe this will be a critical step in helping younger voters to be heard and to realize that their votes matter.

- **Election Night Party:** We will host an election night results-viewing party, as a culmination as many of the efforts that we will engage in the Fall. We will open this party to the whole campus (and outside) community, provide refreshments, and will invite faculty members to give context to and discuss the results. We believe that this activity will show students that politics can be fun and educational at the same time. Further, we think that having a group viewing of the results will foster a sense of political and democratic community and that having faculty participate can elevate the conversation to facilitate responsible discourse
- **Community Outreach:** Beyond all the efforts we will be embarking upon on campus, we also strive to provide opportunities for students to volunteer and work with outside organizations to increase voter registration, turnout and mobilization in the wider Asheville and Western NC areas. We already have contacts with Democracy NC and other groups to participate in voter registration drives off-campus. Further, we hope to do outreach to local high schools to host voter registration drives. We are currently are in conversations with the Asheville School and hope to organize with a greater number of local schools.

Longer Term Goals

Beyond the (relatively) short-term goals addressed above, we have some longer term goals that we hope to accomplish by 2020:

1. Ensure campus as an early voting location from here on
2. Have election-related information included on the university calendar
3. Reach a voter turnout rate of 60 percent across campus and increase turnout among segments of campus with lower rates
4. Develop and maintain relationships with local high schools to host voter registration and election-rated events, especially political candidates/politician visits, to increase the 18-21 turnout rate in Asheville
5. Further embed community/civic engagement, democratic participation, and political inclusivity in future iterations of the university's strategic plan
6. Secure greater university and outside funding for voter mobilization activities

Key Partnerships for Success

Faculty and Staff Members of the Voter Engagement Committee (as of May 2018):

- Ashley Moraguez, Political Science
- Patrick Bahls, Mathematics and Honors Program
- Kenneth Betsalel, Political Science
- Heidi Kelley, Sociology and Anthropology
- Robert Straub, Student Affairs
- Fred Tugas, Student Affairs

On-Campus Partnerships:

- Student Affairs and the departments therein:
 - Housing and Residential Life
 - Key Center for Community Engaged Learning

- Multicultural Affairs
- Student Involvement, Activities, and Leadership
- Student Government Association
- Political Science Club
- College Democrats and College Republicans (to sponsor non-partisan events)
- Political Science Department
- Honors Program

Off-Campus Partners:

- Buncombe County Election Services
- Democracy NC
- NationalVoterRegistrationDay.org
- NC Campus Compact

Potential Off-Campus Partners:

- Buncombe/WNC Voter Engagement Coalition
- League of Women Voters