



University of Mississippi 2022-2023 Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan

I. Executive Summary

The University of Mississippi looks forward to robust voter engagement programming for the 2022-2023 academic year. The following document showcases our campus democratic engagement action plan and explains how we will carry out our voting vision and goals.

This plan is the primary effort of William Teer, Assistant Director of Student Leadership Programs in UM's Center for Community Engagement. William oversees a number of voting and civic engagement programs through the Center, including managing UM's Voting Ambassadors and organizing the UM Voter Engagement Roundtable. While the plan represents work mostly addressed by William, input was provided from members of these teams which include Dean of Students Dr. Brent Marsh and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Community Engagement Dr. Cade Smith. Special note should also be given to student leaders Caroline Leonard and Alex Mobley, who serve as president of UM's Andrew Goodman Foundation chapter and UM's Voter Ambassadors, respectively.

The voting engagement team at the University of Mississippi seeks to increase voter registration and voter turnout for the 2022-2023 academic year. With this being a primary election year, many of our efforts will look to the Fall 2022 semester as the November election approaches. Thanks to our partnership with Mississippi Votes, our team will seek to register at least 200 voters and receive 400 pledge cards of voters pledging to vote by October 2022 through our partnership with the MS Votes Voter Empowerment Program. From there, our main goal focus on increasing voter turnout on our campus. Data from our campus's 2020 NSLV report show that two primary demographics are lacking for voter turnout on our campus: younger students (those in their first and sophomore years) and males. Our team will partner with the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Dean of Student's Office, Sorority and Fraternity Life, Ole Miss Athletics, The Declaration of Independence Center for the Study of American Freedom the Gertrude C. Ford Ole Miss Student Union, the Associated Student Body, and the Black Students for Political Studies (BIPS) student organization to address these goals.

The first phase of our action plan will commence on June 1, 2022 and run through October 2022 as these are the months we have to register voters before the November 2022 election. Phase 2 will occur during the spring semester and conclude in April 2023. A second annual UM Voting Summit is hoped to occur during the 2022-2023 academic year. Exact dates will be determined during Summer 2022 as our first ever voting summit was held in March 2022. We hope to turn this program into an annual event that will reach a wide campus audience as the years progress. Voter registration drives and a "Rebels to the Polls" voter turnout campus wide program will encapsulate the other key voting and civic engagement programs for the 2022-2023 school year.

The action plan will be led by William with efforts from UM's Voting Ambassadors, UM's Andrew Goodman Foundation, and the UM Voter Engagement Roundtable. These efforts will be housed in the Center for Community Engagement, one of two centers that represents UM's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement. Special attention was considered for this plan to be as equitable and inclusive as possible by considering the unique campus and community populations present here at the University of Mississippi.

II. Leadership

Our working group members include Dr. Brent Marsh, Dean of Students, Dr. Cade Smith, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Community Engagement, members of the Voting Engagement Roundtable, UM Voting Ambassadors, and UM's Andrew Goodman Foundation chapter. Notable faculty members include Dr. Eliot Parker, Writing and Rhetoric Instructor and Dr. Na-Youn Lee, Professor of Social Work. Notable student leaders include Alex Mobley, student president of UM Voting Ambassadors and Caroline Leonard, student present of UM's Andrew Goodman Foundation chapter.

Campus groups that we seek to partner with include the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Dean of Student's Office, Sorority and Fraternity Life, Ole Miss Athletics, The Declaration of Independence Center for the Study of American Freedom the Gertrude C. Ford Ole Miss Student Union, the Associated Student Body, and the Black Students for Political Studies (BIPS) student organization.

Community groups that we seek to partner with include Mississippi Votes, the North MS and Oxford League of Women Voters, Oxford to the Ballot Box, Yoknapatawpha Arts Council, and Oxford Community Market. Mississippi Votes represent our primary community partner, as our university was recently named as one of MS Votes' 2022 Voter Empowerment Project partners. We also plan on coordinating once again with our local county clerk's office. In Fall 2021, we partnered with this office to register over 40 high school students at nearby Lafayette County High School. We look forward to partnering with Mr. Jeff Busy, Lafayette Circuit County Clerk, and our board of Lafayette County Election Commissioners in the upcoming academic year.

Our working group will reconvene monthly meetings in the Fall 2022 semester through our Voting Engagement Roundtable. Since this is a group primarily composed of faculty and staff, William will update the student groups he manages (UM AGF Chapter and UM Voting Ambassadors) put forth by the Roundtable. Roundtable meetings will occur via Zoom as this has proven to be more convenient for our group of faculty and staff members. Student meetings will occur in person given their smaller group sizes, although some Zoom meetings will transpire with this group particularly when unplanned conversations need to occur.

One direction we would like to better pursue this year is including more folks from diverse backgrounds in our voting groups. Simply put, we need more BIPOC stakeholders in our group. We represent the public flagship institution for the state of Mississippi, and therefore have a unique mission of ensuring campus groups like ours look like our state.

As a staff member in the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, William will work closely with division leadership such as Dr. EJ Edney, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion and Dr. Cade Smith, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Community Engagement, to ensure we are including valuable campus and community members in our efforts. Specifically, William hopes to partner with more groups that represent and advocate for African American students on campus. He is confident that partnerships with those listed here will lead to this kind of deserved inclusion and partnership.

III. Commitment

This section of our plan perhaps represents the greatest area of growth for our team. Last year, we held our campus's first ever Voting Summit through partnerships with the Declaration of Independence Center for the Study of American Freedom and the Black Students for Political Studies student organization. Our efforts were recognized by Dr. Shawnboda, Associate Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Community Engagement. While Dr. Mead is a member of our campus senior administration team, our team still has work to do in order for our efforts to reach stakeholders like our Chancellor or Provost.

It is hoped that a continuation of the Voting Summit, registration drives to the Summer 2022 Orientation Sessions, and a campus-wide "Rebs to the Polls" program will increase our visibility to the campus senior administration team.

More communication to those on this team can push our efforts forward, efforts that absolutely align with our University's Pathways to Equity plan, a plan that is primarily led by leaders here in the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement. Dr. EJ Edney, a primary visionary for this campus effort, will be a key stakeholder here. Given that he reports to Dr. Shawnboda Mead, who in turn reports to Chancellor Glenn Boyce, it is quite possible that our collaboration can bring deserved attention to our campus senior administration team.

Our plan includes civic learning and democratic engagement as a foundation for everything we do. As members of the Center for Community Engagement, we have a mission to engage our campus and community on civic life and causes. Plans like this align strongly with our central work and add to existing programming and efforts in place. Regarding our institution's civic, democratic, and/or political learning outcomes, such outcomes would be most closely found in our University's Pathways to Equity plan which is available for public viewing on the Chancellor's website. While more focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion and how all departments on campus can be more inclusive in their work, Pathways does include aspects of civic learning as well. In all honesty, more can be done to improve these kind of learning outcomes for our institution. As mentioned above, I believe partnerships with key university leaders can lead us to this next step of establishing such learning outcomes for our campus.

Previous plans do exist for our campus. For example, the University of Mississippi was named as a Voter Friendly Campus for the 2021-2022 year. This distinction was primarily led by former Assistant Director for Community Engagement, Mrs. Erin Payseur Oeth. Erin relaunched our campus's voting engagement efforts in the Center for Community Engagement before transitioning to a new role outside of the University in Spring 2021. This plan, and the upcoming academic year's voting engagement efforts, represent the "torch" passed down by her.

IV. Landscape

As mentioned in the previous section, civic learning and democratic engagement learning outcomes are not as strong as they could be overall for our campus. The UM Creed calls for students to “believe in the respect and dignity of each person” and “fairness and civility.” While an admirable inclusion in our campus culture, it does not touch on democratic engaged learning and could be further used more broadly to reach these stated objectives.

We have assessment data from our Campus Climate Report and our 2020 NSLVE Data Report. Overall, our campus is extremely divided when it comes to political ideology. Conservatives will tell you we are too liberal and liberals will tell you we are too conservative. Additionally, the University of Mississippi has a notable and long-running history of painful race relations dating back to our campus founding in 1848, the Civil War, the integration of James Meredith in 1962, and one of three 2008 Presidential Debate Locations featuring then Sen. Barack Obama.

Campus Climate reports reveal that African American students feel less safe and supported on our students than white students. Those who are first generation or low income feel less supported as well. Meanwhile, more white students report positive feelings about their campus experience than Black students and other students of color. For a fuller analysis on these findings, I recommend reaching out to Dr. Brent Marsh, Dean of Students, or Dr. EJ Edney, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Equity.

Barriers that prevent our campus from being successful likely include the larger political climate that we face here in Mississippi. With recent “anti-CRT” laws coming into effect by our state legislatures, it makes efforts regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion education even more challenging. Additionally, our state continually faces cycles of generational poverty that disproportionately affect our Black and brown communities. Mississippi has the largest percentage of Black residents of any state in America (about 40%), yet the University of Mississippi, the public flagship institution of our state, only features about 10% of undergraduate students who identify as Black or African American. About 75% of UM undergraduate students identify as white, with remaining ethnicities being primarily comprised of AAPI and Hispanic students. Our Native American student population is sparse.

Most resources to ensure student success for BIPOC students are housed in the Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement, which represents the second half of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement along with the Center for Community Engagement. Our hope is that partnering with our colleagues here and elsewhere on campus (see sections II and III) will lead to the intentional inclusion of marginalized students in our voting engagement efforts. Interestingly enough, voter registration data from our 2020 NLSV report showed that our African American student population experienced the largest increase in voter registration turnout for the 2020 general election. Our hope is that we can capitalize on this growth through partnerships with the previously mentioned stakeholders as we approach November 2022.

V. Landscape

Our long-term vision includes the following goals for the next 5 academic years:

- For 2022, we hope to increase our campus voter registration efforts and election turnout efforts by 5%. Specifically, we hope to see this increase for our male voters and first year and sophomore campus voters as recommended by our 2020 NSLVE data
- By 2023, we hope to include voter registration for first year and transfer students into the official Office of Admissions Summer Orientation Schedule
- By 2024, we hope to establish polling location(s) on our campus
- By 2028, we hope to secure an asynchronous day of learning for Election Day

Our short-term goals for the upcoming 2022-2023 year include

- Consistent buy-in from university leadership. William will accomplish this by meeting monthly with Dr. Cade Smith and Dr. Brent Marsh to inform them of efforts and advocate for resources and support.
- Increase in representation on our Voting Engagement Roundtable. By 2023, at least 10% of our Roundtable will represent marginalized communities on our campus
- Increase campus voter registration efforts and election turnout by 5% across all campus demographics for Election Day 2022
- Register at least 200 voters and pledge 400 voters to commit to voting on Election Day (as part of our VEP partnership with MS Votes)

VI. Strategy

Our voting plan for 2022-2023 can be summarized by the following focus areas:

- Voter Registration during Summer 2022 Orientation Sessions
- Fall 2022 –
 - Three Voter Registration Drives as part of Voter Education, National Voter Registration Day, and our MEP partnership with MS Votes
 - “Rebels to the Polls” campus wide voter turnout program. Providing education and awareness about the November 2022 and transportation to voting polls
- Spring 2023
 - Second-annual University of Mississippi Voting Summit

The main teams that will carry out these initiatives will be our Voter Engagement Roundtable, UM Voting Ambassadors, and the UM Andrew Goodman Foundation. Given that our central voting team is small, we will rely on campus and community partnerships (please see sections II and III) to ensure our voting goals for the next academic year are met.

VII. NSLVE

VIII. Reporting

Key stakeholders in our university community have access to our 2022 NSLVE report. Dr. Brent March and Dr. Cade Smith are the primary distinguished receivers of this report given their roles on campus. William Teer is the staff person who currently has most utilized the report for this current plan.

Current and future NSLVE reports will be asked to be featured on the Dean of Students website. We recognize the recommendation for this data to be publicly available and will initiate the conversations with Dr. Marsh and others to feature the report on related websites.

The current 2022 NSLVE report has been the foundation of our plans for the 2022-2023 as shown in this document and for our five-year plan as specifically shown in Section V. We would like to give a special shout out to Dr. Nancy Thomas of Tufts University for guiding us through key findings of our report during her address as keynote speaker during the 2022 University of Mississippi Voting Summit. Given that her institute oversees the national NLSVE data collection and distribution, we were quite humbled with her presence, wisdom, and advice regarding our own campus report.

IX. Evaluation

Given that our 2022-2023 action plan is comprised of three main programs (Summer Orientation Voter Registration, Registration and Voter Drives in the Fall, Voting Summit in the Spring) it is likely we have to incorporate separate assessments for each of these three areas. Further consultation with Dr. Brent Marsh and Dr. Cade Smith will occur in Summer 2022 to determine the past route to capture this data. We recognize the value in measure program evaluation and how campus is making progress towards its goals.

An additional opportunity to measure our plan could be available through our next Campus Climate plan. Further consultation with Dr. Castel Sweet and Dr. EJ Edney will occur during Summer 2022 to ensure we are not missing out on other already established campus wide assessments to capture this data. If anything, including questions about our voting and civic engagement efforts in these already established, larger-scale assessments can help us plan for future years as we review what students need, know, and don't know about our efforts.

Going forward, William Teer will spearhead these initiatives as Fall 2022 approaches. It should be noted that these efforts do not fall under William's primary job duties. He serves as the Assistant Director of Student Programs in the Center for Community Engagement as the Director for the Bonner Leaders Program. While civic related programs like managing the UM Voting Engagement Roundtable and UM Voting Ambassadors are included in this listed job responsibilities, additional efforts like those represented in this report are purely voluntary. Given the scope of this work on a large campus like the University of Mississippi, William recognizes our current voting team should begin conversations on how this work can be shared by a smaller, centralized leadership team to ensure maximum campus success.