

University of North Carolina Asheville Action Plan—2024



Executive Summary

The University of North Carolina Asheville (UNCA) sees civic engagement as a hallmark of our institution. As the public liberal arts and sciences college in the UNC system, we pride ourselves on curricular and extra-curricular programs that promote high-impact student experiences, encourage community engagement, and foster the development of leadership skills.¹ This matches the interests of UNCA students, who are incredibly invested in social justice and are very involved in politics. Indeed, for its 2024 edition, the *Princeton Review* ranked UNCA sixth for colleges with the “Most Politically Active Students” and fourteenth for “Most Engaged in Community Service.”² We believe this to be one of our strongest assets, and we undertake efforts to further promote and support such engagement among the students, faculty, and staff.

The efforts to promote democratic engagement on the UNCA campus are supported by a variety of different organizations and offices on campus including (though not limited to): the Student Affairs division, the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Political Science Department, and many student organizations. Representatives from each of these organizations (faculty, staff, and student) 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 2024 election (and beyond). The committee has already worked with the university administration to designate the Fall 2024 term as the “Semester of Civics” to encourage programming relating to civic engagement, voter education/mobilization, and civil discourse at all levels of the university. As noted, our efforts are a direct reflection of our university’s wider commitment to engagement and service to the community.

Our overarching goals, to be discussed in greater detail below, are to increase voter turnout in the 2024 election relative to past presidential elections (especially among the 18-25 year old demographic), to provide easy access to non-partisan candidate and ballot information, to provide information about and clarify confusion over recent election law changes, and to provide greater access to the polls for members of the campus community. We also plan to support other organizations in the Asheville/Western North Carolina region doing this work in the wider community. More generally, we hope to contribute to the culture of engagement on our campus. While we are aware that our goals may not all be accomplished in a single year or single election cycle, we believe the plan herein described lays the foundations for doing so over time. This document will cover both our short-term goals for this election cycle and longer-term goals as an institution in these areas. Our efforts, however, are always a work in progress, and we adapt to the landscape and circumstances as needed. We intend to update our action plan formally every two-years, though we constantly seek to improve upon it.

We approach all our plans with the philosophy that our students are the best advocates for civic engagement among their peers. Thus, the faculty and staff involved in these efforts on campus like to follow the lead of and help implement the ideas of the students who are the heart of these efforts. Our goal is to provide the

¹ <https://www.unca.edu/about/mission-values/>

² See UNCA news story about this here.

support and guidance they need to execute their innovations. Most of the election engagement on campus relies on interpersonal and in-person connection between students, faculty, staff, and community members. This includes in-person events: registration drives, panel discussions, documentary viewings, candidate visits to campus, information sessions, etc. However, we also utilize online resources and engagement opportunities. For example, we launched the UNCA Votes website before the 2020 election and update it regularly with any and all election-related information our students and members of the wider community need.³ We also occasionally host online or hybrid events. We believe this combination can only help to increase participation and make our efforts more inclusive of a wider swath of the Asheville community.

We have participated in the All-In Challenge since the period prior to the 2016 election, and we have benefited from the resources and motivation it provides our institution. We also participate in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement⁴ to inform our strategies and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of our current framework for engagement. Further, we have developed very rich partnerships with the community outside our campus and work with the Campus Vote Project, NC Campus Engagement, Civic Influencers, You Can Vote, Common Cause NC, the League of Women Voters, and other organizations to register and mobilize voters and educate the campus and wider community about elections and politics more generally. We also work closely with our local Election Services office. We are constantly working to build new partnerships both on and off campus to support these efforts and to better represent a diversity of perspectives, approaches, and ideas on these issues.

The planning for and implementation of the goals and strategies subsequently described are already underway; in particular, we have already begun to encourage engagement in the 2024 election cycle. During the 2023-2024 academic year, we hosted the Executive Director of the NC State Board of Elections, Karen Brinson Bell, on campus to discuss recent election law changes in NC that will affect voters in 2024. We also provided programming and free shuttles to the polls around the 2024 primaries. In addition, our campus will be an Early Voting location in the Fall, which will complement the “Semester of Civics” theme. Our efforts will pick up again once students return to campus in August 2024; we are spending the summer formulating a more concrete game plan so that roll out in the Fall is as smooth as possible. Notably, however, our efforts will extend beyond the November election. We are committed to continual efforts on campus in this regard, even if those efforts are most visible in the months immediately prior to an election.

This report was primarily completed by Ashley Moraguez, an Associate Professor of Political Science, and student Voting Ambassadors, in consultation with those listed in the next section.⁵ Please direct questions and comments to Ashley Moraguez at amorague@unca.edu.

Leadership

As mentioned above, election engagement efforts on UNCA’s campus are supported by multiple offices, student organizations, academic departments, and individuals on campus. However, the committee overseeing and planning the efforts most directly includes a key group of faculty and staff on campus:

- Melanie Fox, Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs
- Kate Johnson, Director of the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning
- Ashley Moraguez, Associate Professor & Co-Chair of Political Science
- Carlton Smith, Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs & advisor to Student Government Association
- Robert Straub, Director of Highsmith Student Union

³<https://vote.unca.edu/>

⁴<https://idhe.tufts.edu/nslve>

⁵We owe a lot of appreciation to UNCA students Liv Barefoot, Amelia Floyd, Guillermo Hernandez, Michael Messele, Jack Paksoy, Hope Sikes, and Helen Williams for the efforts toward this Action Plan!

This core group of faculty and staff aim to coordinate and oversee the electoral and civic engagement efforts on campus to prevent redundancy and to promote collaboration instead of competition. Our biggest strength lies in providing institutional memory to these efforts. While some of our student leaders graduate each year, we are a constant. We help the next round of student leaders with the associated learning curve and provide the context and information necessary for student efforts to succeed. We also handle the logistics of planning events, such as campus-wide communications, booking spaces, and budgeting. Melanie represents the Student Affairs division and ensures that our events fulfill the university mission and have support from the administration. Kate represents the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning, which exists to connect students, faculty, and staff to community partners to address social issues.⁶ She has worked on voting and other civic engagement efforts since she began at UNC Asheville 8 years ago and helps facilitate relationships with community partners. Carlton Smith represents the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Student Government. While he is new to supporting voting efforts on campus, he has plenty of experience in planning university events and will ensure that our efforts are inclusive and reach all parts of the campus community. Robert represents our student union and more generally campus event planning; his work touches all areas of student life, and he has the most institutional knowledge of the group. He works with Election Services to ensure our campus is an Early Voting location each presidential cycle. Ashley Moraguez, as a member of the faculty, represents Academic Affairs and serves as the adviser to several student organizations behind the engagement efforts. She has helped lead campus voting efforts since 2015. This committee also serves as the line of communication between the university administration and the students leading the efforts. We are very lucky to have the support of our Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs in these efforts and a committed student body. We have also worked with Communications & Marketing and other offices on campus to advertise our efforts and accomplishments. Such partnerships led to the creation of the UNCA Votes website, which is now largely maintained by students.

In addition to the faculty and staff mentioned, student leaders are also a critical part of the efforts on campus. Our student leaders are passionate about democratic participation, have new and innovative ideas, and are the most effective leaders in these efforts. While they may not have the institutional knowledge and memory of the faculty and staff, they do know the student body. As such, they have invaluable knowledge about what kind of resources, support, and events our students need and want to see around civic, election, and democratic engagement.

Among the student body, the Political Science Club typically takes primary responsibility for planning and executing voter registration and mobilization events, in consultation with other groups (such as the College Democrats and College Republicans). The Student Government Association (SGA) has also been a consistent partner in these efforts. Further, in recent years, we have had several (paid) student Voting Ambassadors and (paid) student fellows with outside organizations who work together to lead the voter registration and mobilization efforts on campus. The currently identified student leaders that will be involved in engagement efforts for the 2024-2025 academic year are:

- Amelia Floyd, President of the Political Science Club and Voting Ambassador
- Helen Williams, Vice President of the Political Science Club and You Can Vote Fellow
- Liv Barefoot, Treasurer of the Political Science Club, President of SGA, and You Can Vote Fellow
- Guillermo Hernandez, Voting Ambassador
- Michael Messele, Voting Ambassador

On top of these students, we also plan to recruit additional student leaders to assist with the efforts. For example, our student fellow with Civic Influencers just graduated and we hope to find another student to fill that gap. In addition, we have applied for several external grants requesting funding to financially support additional Voting Ambassadors on campus for the 2024 election cycle. In fact, we recently received a grant with the Ask Every Student organization for this purpose, and we are greatly appreciative. We try to pay as many student leaders as possible to do this work to show how much we value it and to democratize the

⁶<https://keycenter.unca.edu/>

body of students who are able to engage in this work.

Building from that point, our committee is committed to being inclusive to all faculty, staff, and students interested in leading engagement efforts on campus, as our goal is to not only engage the student body but the entire campus community. We are always looking to recruit new members who can bring fresh perspectives and new ideas with which we can work. While there is no official chair to our working group, as it is a very collaborative and equal partnership, the main organizing members are Ashley Moraguez and Kate Johnson. They work to recruit new faculty, staff, and students into these efforts. However, most of the recruitment of new members comes from our current student leaders who collaborate and work with other students and then bring them into these efforts. Our group is ever-evolving. Faculty and staff members of the committee will start meeting regularly over the summer to begin 2024 general election planning in earnest. Some student leaders will also be contributing to the efforts during the summer. As the Fall semester approaches, we plan to start having full committee meetings to begin concrete planning for the Fall. Once the Fall semester begins, the plan is to meet regularly and more often—the frequency will be determined by the plans and events we lay out for ourselves.

It is important to note that there is turnover in membership of our working group from year to year, especially among the students who work on these efforts. However, there are succession plans and resources in place to account for such turnover. The Political Science academic department is committed to consistently providing faculty (and some financial) support to voter registration efforts. A member of the Political Science faculty will regularly advise the Political Science Club on campus and thus will, by requirement of the role, help to lead voter registration and engagement efforts on campus. The Political Science Club Constitution lists as the main charge of the organization to promote civic engagement and voting in a non-partisan manner on campus, so they will continue to spearhead these efforts. The Key Center similarly has an ongoing commitment to these issues in its stated goals and mission. Further, the Key Center has recently committed to dedicating a student employee line to electoral engagement efforts moving forward. Finally, student leaders generally write guides for those who take over their positions when they graduate to ensure the successful continuation of this work.

Beyond our campus partners, members of the wider community are critical to our efforts, and we would not have the level of success we've had without them. They include:

- Buncombe County Election Services—we work closely with this office in a variety of ways, including coordinating Early Voting on campus and/or shuttles to the polls, recruiting poll workers, navigating election law changes, helping students with voter ID requirements, etc
- All-In Challenge—we always participate in the Challenge and use the helpful feedback to improve our efforts. It also opens so many doors to partnerships and grant opportunities for us!
- Democracy NC—we have coordinated on events, and they provide useful nonpartisan voter guides and information
- Common Cause NC—we have co-hosted events with the organization and rely on them for useful nonpartisan information and occasional grant opportunities
- NationalVoterRegistrationDay.org—they provide useful resources and information for our annual National Voter Registration Day event
- NC Campus Engagement—this organization coordinates campuses across the state of NC and provides incredible conference, event, and grant opportunities
- Campus Vote Project—they provide fellowships for students and useful training and information
- Civic Influencers—similarly, they provide fellowships for students and useful training and information
- You Can Vote—this is a new partnership for our campus and we will have 2 student fellows with them. We are excited to learn from them

- Ask Every Student—this organization has provided a great foundation for improving and rendering our efforts more sustainable by providing advice on embedding them into existing campus processes; they also have provided helpful grant and funding opportunities to us
- The League of Women Voters of Buncombe & Henderson Counties—these chapters are reliable partners for events and always provide the additional volunteer help we need
- WNC Nonpartisan Voting Group, especially Ron Katz—this group consists of members from many nonpartisan organizations in the region, who work to support each other’s efforts. They provide us with information, volunteers, and a newsletter in which to advertise events

Commitment

Our civic and voter engagement plans are consistent with and guided by the wider mission and goals of the university. The university’s mission statement emphasizes the importance of “community engagement” and addressing “the most pressing needs of our time.” Further, we commit to “preparing the next generation of leaders and productive citizens to serve North Carolina and the nation.”⁷ In addition, one of the core values of our institution is diversity and inclusion, which is intimately associated with pillars of civic and community engagement.⁸ We believe that, in promoting civic engagement, voting, and civil discourse on campus, we are helping address the needs of the local community, opening dialogue on pressing issues, supporting diverse communities, and positioning students to make a difference in the world around them. As a result, as noted above, UNC Asheville has been ranked by the *Princeton Review* as a campus with the “Most Politically Active Students.” Our commitment to these goals is also reflected in the awards and grants we have received for the political engagement of our students.⁹

The commitment to civic learning and engagement is present at every level of the institution—from the administration to the student body. The administration has supported these efforts in many ways. For example, our leadership has committed UNC Asheville to be an early voting location for the campus and wider community during presidential election years, should the local Board of Elections choose us as a location. We are happy to report that we will be a site in 2024. In midterm election years, when demand for early voting is typically lower in the county, the university is committed to ensuring that our campus and the wider community have access and transportation to the polls. Our new Chancellor also signed the President’s Commitment for the All-In Democracy Challenge. In addition, she and senior staff worked to ensure that our student IDs were approved for voting purposes when NC instituted a new voter ID law in 2023. They have also worked with students who have advocated for more civic engagement opportunities on campus, which will be discussed later in this section.

Further, we have a designated office on campus, the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning, that specifically seeks to build partnerships between students, faculty, staff, and leaders in the community. The Center’s goals are to strengthen our community and to address social issues. As such, democratic participation and civic learning are at the core of their mission. This office dedicates many resources (time, staffing, funding, etc) to supporting election engagement efforts on campus and coordinates many events on campus to encourage student engagement in the community and in politics. This office also supports Community Engaged Learning (formerly Service Learning) on campus, which is an approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic knowledge and skills to address needs in the community. Many of these classes focus on civic and democratic engagement, such as a course on US elections, which encourages enrolled students to lead voter registration efforts on campus and to work at the polls on Election Day. These curricular efforts are discussed more in the next section.

The faculty work to embed civic engagement into the curriculum and the classroom experience in other ways as well, which is also discussed in more detail in the next section. The faculty’s commitment to engagement also goes beyond the classroom and into the co-curricular. Many departments on campus help to

⁷<https://www.unca.edu/about/mission-values/>

⁸<https://www.unca.edu/about/mission-values/diversity-and-inclusion/>

⁹See this page for more detail: <https://vote.unca.edu/connect/campus-accomplishments/>

organize events to bring awareness to pressing issues in domestic and global politics and that have direct effects on democratic engagement. For example, in the 2023-2024 academic year, the Political Science Department helped to organize several events that were pertinent to civic engagement. These included hosting state legislators on campus to speak with students about how to run for office and a keynote presentation on voting law changes by the NC State Board of Elections Director, Karen Brinson Bell. In addition, the Mass Communications Department hosted an event on the impact on AI in society, and the History Department hosted an event on the history of abortion policy. All of these co-curricular events help to inform our campus community and can be seen as calls to action. Further, the first-year seminar program also includes an element of civic engagement. All faculty who teach these courses are given the opportunity to invite trained student “experts” into their classroom to register their classes to vote and to discuss the importance of voting (this is described in more detail below).

In addition, the UNCA administration launched an initiative in the 2022-2023 academic year known as the Student High Impact-Focused Time (SHIFT) initiative; they invited faculty to apply for institutional grants that would encourage students to get involved in high-impact work and would foster student success. Dr. Ashley Moraguez in Political Science applied for and was awarded one of these grants for a project entitled “UNCA Votes” to support voter engagement efforts on campus from Spring 2023 through the November 2024 election. The administration agreed that further embedding civic and election engagement into our campus culture would drive greater levels of student success. The funding from the grant allowed Dr. Moraguez to hire a cohort of student Voting Research Assistants to help research and implement new engagement practices on campus. It also provides funding to support events.

Academic Affairs is not the only division supporting this work. Student Affairs is also a pivotal part of the campus commitment to civic learning and engagement. They have an extremely dedicated staff who provide assistance to students in planning events, provide a budget for student organizations to do outreach work, and provide engagement and volunteer opportunities. They also help train student leaders. There are many key offices within Student Affairs that support these efforts, but the Multicultural Affairs Office and Student Organization Council are prominent among them. Their roles are discussed in more detail in subsequent sections

Our most important commitment to civic engagement and voter participation, however, comes not from the administration, faculty, or staff but from our students. We have a very active and passionate student body and vibrant student organizations. As mentioned previously, several student organizations are key actors in voter and civic engagement efforts, and they often recruit volunteers and support with great success from across the student body. For example, our annual National Voter Registration Day efforts alone generally attract 50-60 student volunteers and engage hundreds. Student groups have also been pivotal in inviting candidates to campus in the past, hosting nonpartisan groups to discuss the ballot, hosting debate and election night parties, and arranging early voting locations on campus or shuttles to the polls.

The 2023-2024 school year is a great example of student commitment on campus. Members of both the Voting Research Assistants and SGA advocated for a day off from classes in the 2024-2025 academic calendar for a Voting/Democracy Day. The purpose of this day, they argued, would be to further civic engagement and voter mobilization efforts on campus during the Early Voting period; they wanted a day on which students would not have to choose between their classes and being engaged in the upcoming election. Students took full initiative on advocating for this day, pitching and defending it to both the Faculty Senate and the administration. Their proposal met some opposition over concerns for its feasibility and the political optics, but they managed to strike a substantial compromise with administrative support and backing. This compromise resulted a theme for the Fall 2024 semester entitled the “Semester of Civics,” which will highlight civic engagement, voter mobilization, voter education, and civil discourse, as mentioned previously. UNCA’s Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs have pledged \$5,000 in administrative funding for key semester events (i.e. National Voter Registration Day, Party to the Polls, hosting candidates on campus, et cetera), which will allow us to make these events even bigger and better than in past years. Within this semester, not only will we host all those central election events, but all 50+ student organizations will be encouraged to host their own events related to this theme, *and* faculty and staff will be encouraged to

partake in this theme both in and out of the classroom. The “Semester of Civics,” while perhaps not the original intention of the students, is the most substantial progress, in terms of explicit institutional support and funding, that UNCA has made in years; all credit is attributed to student advocacy and leadership.

Institutional Landscape

Our goals as a committee and as representatives of various departments, organizations, and offices at UNCA are informed by the landscape both on and 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 necessarily Buncombe County voters). We will discuss each aspect of our landscape in turn.

Campus Overview—Campus Curriculum, Efforts, Resources, and Barriers

As mentioned previously, there is a commitment to civic engagement and civic learning at all levels of the institution, including at the curricular level. For example, the Political Science Department seeks to “cultivate students who ask questions and think critically and creatively about the political world, communicate effectively in diverse communities, and are actively engaged in local, national, and international life.”¹⁰ As such, the department is offering a host of courses in Fall 2024 to accomplish these goals, including but not limited to a course on US Elections, one on Human Rights and International Law, and a course entitled Politics and the Mind (which focuses on the development of political beliefs and behaviors). Similarly, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology emphasizes and promotes “discussion of a range of issues (e.g. gender and sexuality, queer theory, race and ethnicity, labor, globalization, disability studies, deviance and social control, poverty).”¹¹ The Environmental Studies program teaches students to solve “environmental issues with sustainable solutions,” emphasizing the intersection of biology, chemistry, politics, and public policy (among other disciplines).¹² There are many other examples along these lines. Further, many departments across the university have internship opportunities for students, in which they work with food banks, advocacy groups, political campaigns, and many other organizations. While these are anecdotal examples, they are representative of a systemic whole. Many courses and departments across the university encourage students to participate in the community, engage in applied learning, and promote social responsibility.

In addition, the Liberal Arts Core (the general education program) at UNC Asheville requires all students to enroll in at least one Diversity Intensive course. These courses share 5 primary learning outcomes:

1. Students will understand the socially constructed nature of identities.
2. Students will understand the significance of individuals’ differing relationships to power.
3. Students will understand how individuals, organizations, and institutions create, perpetuate, or challenge inequality.
4. Students will understand how multiple identities intersect.
5. Students will be better equipped to reevaluate their ideas about diversity and difference.

Since Fall 2022, newly admitted students are also required to enroll in at least one additional Diversity Intensive course that focuses particularly on race and ethnicity in the US (these are designated as DI-R courses). These courses’ learning outcomes add to those in the wider Diversity Intensive program but specifically aim to help students understand the nature of race and racism, systemic and institutional racism, racial injustice, and what it means to be an anti-racist.¹³ Together, these courses demonstrate a dedication to fostering an appreciation and understanding of diversity domestically and globally. In Fall 2024 alone, well over 50 sections of DI and DI-R courses are being offered at UNCA.

¹⁰<https://politicalscience.unca.edu/whats-next/careers/>

¹¹<https://socanth.unca.edu/>

¹²<https://envr.unca.edu/>

¹³<https://registrar.unca.edu/academics/liberal-arts-core/diversity-intensives/>

As mentioned, UNCA also has Community Engaged Learning (formerly known as Service Learning) designated courses. In these courses, students are required to work for 15+ hours a semester with a community partner outside of class meeting time. These courses are organized through the Key Center, which also provides training for the faculty teaching these classes. These courses aim to:

1. Use student learning to address community needs and encourage community resilience
2. Encourage students to clarify, develop, and live their own values while respecting the views and beliefs of others
3. Deepen connections between the “real world” experiences and academic content
4. Foster feelings of civic responsibility
5. Allow students to develop life skills by working with people and places that are different from their own experiences

Eight service Learning classes will be offered in Fall 2024, covering topics including US elections, environmental justice, community health, and education. While these courses are not required of the student body, they are promoted to students and are popular among them. The Key Center also sponsors our Community Engaged Scholars Program, which provides the opportunity for students to become deeply involved in community based research and receive recognition for their efforts.¹⁴

All these efforts are supported by co-curricular measures touched on above and subsequently. One notable co-curricular initiative we will mention here, which we inaugurated during the 2023-2024 academic year, was a civic leadership training “course” for student Voting Research Assistants and student employees in the Key Center and the Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) office. Kate Johnson (Key Center), Alex Hollifield (LEAD), and Ashley Moraguez (Political Science) adapted the Citizen Redefined training program from Citizen University for our student body.¹⁵ Twelve students went through the program and they developed tangible leadership skills and felt much more comfortable speaking about difficult political and social issues and getting involved in their communities as a result. We hope to do a similar training session for future student leaders as well.

In addition, our “Semester of Civics” in Fall 2024 will have curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular elements. On the academic side, we plan to embed voter registration efforts into key courses to reach as many students as possible. We will arrange visits by student leaders to as many first-year seminars (required courses for new students in their first semester) as possible, as we know that these students are the least likely to be registered and that they face particular barriers to registration and voting. In addition, UNCA has a required Humanities sequence in which all students are required to enroll. All sections of these courses attend a joint lecture each week, and we plan to set up voter registration stations outside those lectures. We will also embed voter registration efforts into student life on campus. Election-related events, such as National Voter Registration Day drives and a Party at the Polls (described in more detail below) will be the centerpieces of the “Semester of Civics.” Beyond these efforts, part of the Semester of Civics involves inviting other offices, departments, and student organizations to develop their own non-partisan programming relating to the election and civic participation (guest lectures, election trivia, documentary screenings, etc) and inviting faculty to embed this material into their courses in any way that is appropriate. We already have some new exciting events being pitched, such as the University Writing Center hosting a session on how to write to your elected officials and an information session by the Career Center on how to apply for government jobs.

In terms of campus resources to support civic learning and engagement, our biggest asset is our community—faculty, staff, students, and our Asheville-Buncombe and national community partners. Our institution has a good working relationship with many organizations and offices in the community, including the city and county government, the Mountain Area Health Education Center, the Collider, and many others. These

¹⁴<https://keycenter.unca.edu/students/community-engaged-scholars/>

¹⁵<https://citizenuniversity.us/programs/citizen-redefined/>

organizations provide internships, work, and research opportunities for students on the campus. In terms of democratic participation, our campus has worked closely with local government, the county Board of Elections and Elections Services office, the League of Women Voters, NC Campus Engagement, the Campus Vote Project, Civic Influencers, Democracy NC, Common Cause NC, Ask Every Student, You Can Vote, and so many other organizations and individuals who are committed to making sure our students know their democratic rights and have all that they need to exercise them. Without these partnerships, civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus would not be what it is today. We also have an incredibly active student body—their 90 percent voter registration rate and our volunteers for registration drives are examples of their commitment to democratic participation.

One of the biggest challenges to democratic engagement on campus, on the other hand, is one of financial resources. Every year, our voter registration and mobilization efforts grow and become more ambitious; however, our modest budget for these activities remains limited and largely static. Generally, our primary resources for our civic and voter engagement efforts come from the budgets of the Political Science Club, SGA, and the Key Center. Academic departments and other offices occasionally chip in, depending on need and the nature of our events. To supplement the on-campus funding we receive, we have come to rely on mini-grants from partner organizations, including the NC Campus Engagement, Ask Every Student, and Campus Takeover. However, we know that if we are to continue to grow our efforts, securing a more stable funding structure will be an asset, and this is something that we are actively working on. For the 2024 election cycle, our financial status is a bit up in the air. Our institution is in the midst of a major (\$6 million) budget deficit. This has led to budget cuts in all areas of operation for the university, which will continue into next fiscal year. For this reason, there will likely be less funding for programming, student organizations, departments/offices, and student employment than we typically have going into Fall 2024. That being said, despite the deficit, the administration has promised funding, as described above, to support the “Semester of Civics.” The status of the aforementioned SHIFT grant, however, is uncertain, so we have applied for external funding in the hopes of providing some financial support for student leaders. We have secured a grant from Ask Every Student to support student work, and we are deeply, deeply appreciative. Another challenge to our voter engagement efforts is discussed in more detail in the following sections—the way state laws have created barriers to voting and registration that affect our campus.

Despite these challenges, our campus landscape is, we believe, conducive to fostering a culture of engagement, which is what we ultimately seek. The next subsection will show our progress toward this goal.

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.¹⁶ Based on our access to data from the 2012-2020 election cycles,¹⁷ we believe we have a good sense of the potential trends in participation on campus. While we participated in NSLVE for the 2022 election cycle, the report has not yet been made available to us. However, we did our own internal assessment of our efforts after the 2022 election cycle, so we have some data to build from. In addition, the 2020 NSLVE may be the most relevant for us for year, since it covered the last presidential election cycle and we know they differ significantly from midterm cycles.

Based on the NSLVE data to which we have access, we believe we should focus on maintaining registration rates and increasing turnout rates on our campus. We generally have very high registration rates among eligible students. In 2016, our registration rate among this demographic was 84.9%, in 2018 it was 87.6%, and in 2020 it was 93.7%. As such, we have a bit of room to grow here, but most of our efforts should be spent on maintaining these high registration rates and ensuring student registrations are up-to-date. We have more work to do when it comes to turnout. In 2020, we had a very high rate of turnout among registered voters at 86.7%, which was a big increase from previous elections and one of which we are very proud.

¹⁶We reauthorized our participation prior to the 2018 election cycle, so we will be continuing to participate for the foreseeable future.

¹⁷We have little data on the 2014 results from our campus, due to turnover of staff on campus. All our information from 2014 was provided by comparisons in the 2018 NSLVE report.

However, the voting rate is a bit lower among all eligible voters at 81.2%. While we are still proud of this metric and it earned us a Platinum Seal with the All-In Challenge, we would like to improve upon this rate even further.¹⁸ Since voting is a two-step process and requires registration, we know that can be a major barrier to increasing turnout, which is why our efforts have focused so much on registrations in recent years.

While our turnout and registration numbers in 2020 were dramatic improvements over other recent elections, we know that continued high levels of engagement are not a given. Every year, our student body changes, as some students graduate and others begin their academic journey; the same efforts may not always work on a changing student body. In addition, the electoral landscape changes often in NC, which poses challenges that will be covered in the next section. Further, given the political climate, the array of candidates, and the global and domestic political issues at stake going into 2024, we know that voters, especially young voters, may not feel as motivated to vote. These are all challenges that we will need to face head on.

There are some other interesting institutional and demographic patterns on campus worth noting from the NSLVE reports, as well. UNCA students seem to overwhelmingly take advantage of early voting (EV) opportunities: 66.4% of our students voted early in 2012, 69.6% in 2016, 56.8% in 2018, and 51% in 2020.¹⁹ This is a pattern of which we intend to take note and upon which we will focus on in our goals for 2024. Indeed, we are already working on this. We worked with our county Election Services office to designate a place in our student union for EV purposes. Further, we also note that a large percentage of our students voted absentee in the past few presidential election cycles, especially in 2020. We will make sure this method of voting continues to be accessible to students. For example, we plan to have QR codes to the NC absentee ballot portal at all our our events and tabling locations in the Fall. The link is also on the UNCA Votes website.

In addition to the NSLVE data, we also gathered some of our own internal data after the 2022 election cycle, which will be useful in planning for future elections. Political Science faculty worked with student Voting Research Assistants to draft and implement the first ever UNCA Civic Engagement Survey of the student body. While this survey did not ask students whether they voted or whether they were registered, it did ask questions that allow us to assess our campus efforts, such as what campus voting-related events students were aware of and what kinds of barriers to voting they experienced. The results were telling. For instance, over 90 percent of the respondents were aware of campus voting efforts, which is great. However, despite all our efforts and despite our high engagement levels on campus, $\frac{2}{3}$ of respondents experienced at least one barrier to voting (the modal response, however, was zero barriers). The most common barrier was lack of time to research the ballot, which is something we will work on in 2024.

In terms of the demographics, UNCA is a predominantly white institution (PWI). As of Spring 2024, 74.3 percent of the student body was white, 5.4 percent was Black, 9.2 percent was Hispanic/Latinx, 1.7 percent Asian, and 4.6 percent was multi-racial. In addition, 59.4 percent of the student body were female, and 24.6 percent of our student body are first-generation college students.²⁰ We believe it is critical to consider the demographics of our students in assessing our voter engagement efforts. For example, race and ethnicity seem to be important factors in voter turnout on our campus, according to our NSLVE reports. In general, students who identify as racial and ethnic minorities tend to have lower turnout rates than do those students who identify as white. White student turnout was in 52% in 2018 and 83% in 2020. For Hispanic students, it was 48% and 72%. Among Black students, turnout was 42% and 77%, while among multiracial students it was 49% and 75% in the last two elections. Our internal UNCA Civic Engagement Survey echoed some of this information. While there was not a racial gap in student barriers to voting based on the survey, there was a ethnicity gap. Hispanic/Latinx students were 12 percent more likely to report barriers to voting than other students. Our non-binary and trans students also reported higher rates of experiencing voting barriers. These trends are important to consider for the goals we are setting and likely are related to similar

¹⁸<https://allinchallenge.org/seal-awardees/>

¹⁹We believe this drop in early voting is due to increased reliance on vote by mail, especially during the pandemic. Indeed, we saw our in-person election day voting rate decline by 10 percent between 2016 and 2020.

²⁰Institutional data on these metrics can be found here: <https://irep.unca.edu/institutional-facts-enrollment-demographics/>. Please note that gender is only considered as a binary at the institutional level.

trends across the state, to be discussed in more detail.

Age also seems to play a major role in voting on our campus. Across the past few election cycles, according to NSLVE, turnout steadily increased with the age of our students. In the past, the age range of concern was students between 18-21, who had a turnout rate of 43.3% in 2012, 40.9% in 2016, and 37.3% in 2018. Turnout increased significantly for students 22-24 and older. However, in the 2020 election cycle, the 18-21 age group bucked the trends of previous cycles. Those aged 18-21 had turnout rates of 82%, compared to 74% for the 22-24 bracket. This may have been due, in part, to efforts to engage incoming students in the election. We hope to examine this further to hopefully maintain this growth. We plan to continue our outreach to first-year and transfer students on campus.

North Carolina Overview—State Voting Data, Patterns, and Challenges

Trends in voting across the state of North Carolina 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.”²¹ 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 has bred a lot of disenchantment with and confusion surrounding the registration and voting process. Then, in 2018, NC voters approved a constitutional amendment to require photo identification for voting purposes, despite the controversy over the original voter ID law passed. In December 2019, a federal court issued an injunction against the new ID requirement.²² The injunction remained in place until September 2023, when the NC state legislature passed yet another law that required photo IDs for voting purposes but was less restrictive in nature. The ID law took immediate effect and was in place for the 2023 municipal elections in NC and will be in place for the 2024 cycle. This back-and-forth on the issue has created a lot of uncertainty over the state of election law in the state. 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, we believe, is one of information and access. This may be especially tricky for students who have voted in the past without this requirement in place.

On top of the confusing informational aspect of the ID requirement, there are also other associated challenges. First, extant research has shown that ID laws can have a suppressant effect on voter participation, especially for certain groups of voters.²³ For example, young people are less likely to have photo IDs than other demographic groups, which can make ID requirements a real barrier to voting for them. However, we are fortunate that our administration worked to make sure our school IDs were approved for voting purposes. Even still, there will be challenges. For example, the ID law requires that a voter’s name on their ID match or be closely related to their legal name. On campus, we allow students to use the name of their choosing for their student IDs. This is especially important for our trans student population. The voter ID law thus may not allow the use of their student ID in these situations, forcing these members of our community to use their dead name, which may disincentivize voting. We will work with students in this situation to help them navigate this reality. Further, the ID requirement has put additional burdens on those who vote by mail. Voters in NC are now required to include a photocopy of their ID with their absentee ballot, so we will need to spread news of this new requirement to our students, many of which vote absentee.

In addition, some of the voting trends we see on campus seem to be more systemic, as they are also apparent at the state level. While turnout was high in NC in 2020, the last presidential election cycle, at 75%, it is not consistent across all segments of society.²⁴ The age demographic with the lowest turnout rates state-wide were voters in the 18-25 range with a 60% turnout rate. In terms of ethnicity, 59% of Hispanic/Latino voters turned out, compared to 77% of non-Latinos. Black voters turnout out at a rate of 68%,

²¹<http://electionlawblog.org/wp-content/uploads/nc-4th.pdf>

²²<https://www.wral.com/federal-judge-blocks-voter-id-in-north-carolina/18861700/>

²³See this article for an example: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0731121420966620?casa_token=71I9rXY_oLoAAAAA:Ngz0Wgc-ssWzV2tS50Nb37RK3mG9A6SRA1RCS-Dd6KphXIISoJnUyT2NeU9jFFNYizC7ToYxHJ4N

²⁴https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Press/NC%20Voter%20Turnout%20Statistics/voter_turnout_stats_20201103.pdf

compared to white voters at 79%. 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.

Another contextual factor at the state level that may affect voting and engagement on our campus is the controversy around NC's gerrymandering. After the 2010 census, North Carolina's political maps became the subject of state and national controversy and litigation. The maps were struck down and had to be redrawn multiple times due to both racial and partisan gerrymandering. In 2019, North Carolina was one of the two states whose districts were being litigated in the Supreme Court case *Rucho v. Common Cause* (Maryland was the other state). In that case, the Supreme Court declared that issues of partisan gerrymandering are political questions and thus outside the purview of federal courts. This left the issue to state courts. For part of the post-2010 period, Asheville was split between the 10th and 11th congressional districts and those district lines cut through UNC Asheville's dormitories (and even particular apartments and suites on campus). This made registering voters on campus difficult to navigate and also had a negative effect on student voters' feelings of efficacy. However, in November 2019, state courts struck down our previous maps and approved new ones for the state.²⁵ Under the new maps, which were put into place for the 2020 primary and general elections, Asheville (and thus UNCA's campus) was contained entirely in the 11th congressional district, which was a benefit to our community (and our efforts on campus!).

But, the story doesn't end there. As a result of the 2020 census, NC gained an additional seat in the House of Representatives, again rendering new political maps necessary. And again, those maps bred controversy and litigation. The new state legislative and congressional maps after the 2020 census went to the state supreme court for review, where they were struck down as a violation of our state constitutional because of the extremity of the partisan gerrymander. The litigation process eventually led to the adoption of new state legislative maps and temporary congressional maps for the 2022 election cycle. Then, the 2022 election itself resulted in a new partisan majority on the state supreme court, which chose to reverse the previous court's decision, rendering it necessary to adopt another round of congressional *and* state legislative maps for the 2024 cycle. Thankfully, Asheville's congressional district hasn't changed, but all of the state legislative lines in the city have, which is important for voters to realize. This constant redrawing of maps breeds a lot of confusion among voters and is an obstacle to our campus efforts. It is hard enough for experts to keep track of all of this, let alone busy student voters.

Another related challenge is that, while our campus and the city of Asheville remain in one congressional district for now, our campus is still split down voting precinct lines. For students who live on campus, this means that there are two different polling locations that serve campus on Election Day, and they need to know which to go to. They also might be voting on different candidates for certain positions. Precinct lines actually cut through specific dormitories, meaning hallmates can have different voting locations and candidate choices. This can be very confusing for students and is part of why we emphasize early voting so much. In NC, you can vote early at any polling location in your county; you do not need to vote at a designated location. Further, the campus precinct split also makes it difficult for students who live on campus to register to vote properly, as they often do not think to put their dorm room number on their residential address. This requires a lot of training of volunteers and education to ensure registrations can be properly processed.

Another aspect of NC electoral practices to note is that, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, NC developed an online voter registration portal; previously you could only register by paper form. This has made it easier (or at least faster) for many students to register to vote or to update their registration. However, it is only available to those who hold NC driver's licenses, and fewer students have them than previously. NC also now allows voters to request absentee ballots online, which thankfully also makes that process a lot easier and streamlined for our students who vote in different counties.

While some of these changes may encourage mobilization and engagement, we have had a lot of big electoral changes occur in a very short period of time. As such, one of the most important efforts we will have to

²⁵<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/03/north-carolinas-new-congressional-map-shifts-two-seats-toward-democrats/?arc404=true>

make going into the 2024 election and beyond is one of information provision—we need to spread the word about the status of the voter ID law and the new districts and many other things.

Goals

Short-Term Goals (Fall 2024 through Spring 2026)

1. Maintain/increase the voter *registration* rates on campus—the registration rate of eligible students on UNCA’s campus was 93.7 percent in 2020, which is significantly higher than it had been on campus since at least 2012, when we started participating in NSLVE. 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. Our eventual goal is to reach 100 percent registration of eligible students, but we recognize that our rate is already very high and that there may be diminishing returns on our efforts at some point. Further, we know 2024 might be a particularly challenging year to engage potential voters because of the political climate, which means we need to work harder. Focusing on registration rates is one of our major goals, given that among registered voters, turnout was over 86 percent in 2020.
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 2020 in particular (the last presidential election year)—Our voter turnout rate on campus in 2020 was 86.7 percent for registered students and 81.2 percent for eligible students. We are very proud of these metrics, but we, of course, still see room for improvement. We also recognize that 2020 had record high turnout for recent elections, so we will have to put concerted effort in maintaining and hopefully growing these rates.²⁶
 - 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. We also know that those same groups reported experiencing barriers in our UNCA Civic Engagement Survey, so we will put renewed energy into these efforts (as will be described later). Further, there are other trends in our NSLVE reports that indicate that students in certain fields of study are less likely to vote than others, so we will attempt to address that as well. We believe that these more targeted efforts are essential for us to live up to our institutional values of diversity and inclusion.
 - Pledge at least 400 students to vote—While pledges are not a true commitment device, we do think that they have a psychological effect on potential voters and can help encourage turnout in the election. We also plan to ask any students who register and pledge to vote to provide contact information so that we can send them reminders. However, we will also be conducting email blasts of the full student body.
3. Reduce barriers/obstacles to voting for our campus community—we know (from our formal and informal internal assessment efforts) 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 this election cycle, we believe there may be a lot of uncertainty, confusion, and misinformation about recent electoral changes. This may produce anxiety in students considering voting, so we will aim to spread accurate information and to provide resources for students to turn to in order to have their questions answered. Further, our UNCA survey after the 2022 election cycle indicated that, among students who experienced barriers to voting, the most common barrier was lack of time to research the ballot. So, we want to make sure that we help students with that particular barrier (and others they noted).
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

²⁶<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/04/record-high-turnout-in-2020-general-election.html>

students to get involved in the election both on and off campus. We hope to have at least 50 students volunteer for campus registration events and another 30 volunteer with the Buncombe County Board of Elections, primarily as poll workers. We also plan 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. We also hope to engage the student body to inform the kind of public education events we sponsor.

5. While Asheville's municipal elections happen in tandem with national election cycles, surrounding cities and towns (like Woodfin and Weaverville) have theirs in odd-years. So, we will be sure to help students registered in those areas navigate the local election cycles. We will also be sure that students are aware of and can participate in primary elections that affect Asheville.

Longer Term Goals

Beyond the (relatively) short-term goals addressed above, we have some longer term goals that we hope to accomplish in the next few years:

1. Ensure campus as an early voting location from here on—we have a good track record of being an EV location in presidential election years; we would like to see this in midterm election years as well. While we will advocate for this, we recognize that this is not totally within our campus' control—the local Board of Elections has the final say on all EV locations and they consider many factors in making their decisions. Further, there are fewer EV sites in midterm years, so that poses a challenge
2. Have election-related information more consistently included on the university calendar
3. Reach a voter registration rate of 100 percent (!) and a turnout rates consistently above 60 percent in midterm years and above 85 percent in presidential years
4. Further embed community/civic engagement, democratic participation, and political inclusivity in future iterations of the university's strategic plan/mission statement
5. Secure greater university and outside funding for voter mobilization activities & work on the sustainability of our efforts—sustainability is one of the values of our institution and we believe that, while we have a robust civic engagement program on campus, it is not set up in the most sustainable way

Action Plan & Strategy

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

Strategies for Short Term 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—we believe hosting high-profile registration events on campus will be key to getting students registered in time to vote in the November election and beyond. These events will involve recruiting volunteers, training volunteers, and tabling at various places around campus. In particular, we would like to strategically host these events before the registration deadline for the general election. While 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. We will, however, advertise, the same-day registration option during the early voting period, as well.
 - Planned and likely events/registration drives:

- Rockypalooza (August 2024)—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 (August 2024)—We intend to have multiple student organizations table at the Student Organization Fair, an annual event that gives student organizations the opportunity to attract new members, with voter registration forms handy and information about upcoming election-related events
 - National Voter Registration Day (September 17, 2024)—This is typically our largest day of registration activity on campus, with over 50 volunteers and hundreds of students registering and pledging to vote. We will table at 4 different central locations on campus and will host training sessions for volunteers and offer incentives to get students, faculty, and staff to stop by to register. We typically provide free food at these events, information about candidates, and sample ballots.
 - National Voter Education Week (NVEW)—we plan to participate in this week of programming. The NC deadline to register to vote is October 11th, so NVEW will be our last push to register voters. We will table at different locations around campus all week, especially during the Tuesday and Thursday free hour (an hour during which no classes are scheduled in the middle of the day). We also plan to host a big event that week, possibly a ballot information session, to draw attention to the voter registration deadline and the start of the early voting period.
 - Tabling locations— High traffic areas will be the top priority for registration drives: outside Brown Dining Hall, both inside and outside Highsmith Student Union, outside Ramsey Library (on the university quad), outside Governor’s Hall (a central dorm and shuttle stop), and outside Rhoades-Robinson academic building. We also will periodically table outside the Humanities lecture hall, since all students are required to take the Humanities course sequence. Other 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, and email student listserves. The Communications and Marketing office will also be putting together a “Semester of Civics” landing page on the university website so that we can advertise all the central election-related programming, as well as the programming organized by other offices and organizations on campus. We will also utilize the UNCA Votes website and Instagram page (@uncavotes)
- (b) Encourage online voter registration for those students who are eligible, at in-person drives (with QR codes) and via email and social media.
- (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. Further, since our campus is split along precinct lines, students are also required to put their dorm room number and letter along with their residential address, which many do not realize. 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. This information is also explained on the UNCA Votes website, to which we will direct students (we have stickers that advertise the website!).
- (d) Class visits—we will also be organizing voter registration visits to first year seminar courses to ensure that all first-year students receive instruction and support on how to register to vote

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 and advertise 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. This should be especially easy to advertise, since our campus will host an EV site in our 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) 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 help in any way we can to improve those rates in 2024 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: While the 18-21 year olds on campus bucked general turnout out patterns in 2020, they are typically the lowest turnout group on campus and constitute a majority of our student body. As such, we intend to focus many of our efforts on this cohort. 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, and because many are new to voting. 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 Seminar (FYS), generally during the Fall semester. We will extend an offer to all FYS 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 & ethnic minorities: As noted above, voter turnout among UNCA students that identify as racial and ethnic minorities tend to be lower than that of the university as a whole and that of white students; Latinx students also reported greater barriers to voting in our internal surveys. To help facilitate voting among these groups of students, we intend to work with the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and Student Organization Council. We hope to cosponsor voter registration and election-related events with student organizations and affinity groups that represent these groups, such as HOLA (Hermanes Orgullosos en las Americas) and the Black Student Association. We have already reached out to these groups about programming relating to the “Semester of Civics.” 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. Finally, we will continue to diversify the coalition that plans and leads these efforts on campus. In particular, we think that securing funding to pay students to lead voting efforts on campus can democratize the body of students who can work on these efforts and make this work more accessible to students who otherwise feel excluded. Involvement of the OMA will be critical in all these aspects, as it is the leading office to ensure that we live up to our core value of diversity and inclusion; the office has a strategic focus on campus culture and leadership development, critical parts of civic engagement.
 - Trans and nonbinary students: As noted previously, in our 2022 UNCA Civic Engagement survey, trans and nonbinary students reported higher barriers to voting than did cisgender students. This is also going to be an area of focus for us in 2024. As noted in the previous bullet point, we will be working with the OMA, student organizations, and affinity groups to do programming that helps reduce these barriers to this group of students. In particular, we already plan to host a session about the new voter ID requirement and what this means for students who do not use their legal names but have not formally changed them. We know from speaking to students that this is a huge barrier for our trans students, whose voices

deserve to be heard at the polls. We will do our best to support students through the legal landscape.

- Certain fields of study: According to our 2020 NSLVE report, turnout increased among all our majors/fields of study between 2016 and 2020. However, some disciplines, such as Engineering and Management, had lower turnout rates than others. We hope to table for voter registration and voter education in the buildings that house classes in these fields. Some fields of study, such as Languages and History, had particularly high turnout rates—we hope to speak to faculty and students in those departments to uncover what worked well for them in 2020.
- (c) Ask students to pledge to vote & send follow up emails: 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. 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 also offer to sign them up for a listserv that will exclusively be used to send reminders about upcoming deadline and dates, political events on campus, and updates/changes to election law.
 - (d) Access to absentee ballots—At all voter registration events on campus, we intend to provide absentee ballots request forms 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. We will also provide QR codes to the website that allows voters to submit a request online. 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 a decent percent have always 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. We especially want to highlight the changes to the absentee ballot process that are now in place, such as providing a photocopy of your ID.
 - (e) Election Day/Early Voting 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, posting fliers around campus, and sharing information on social media. Further, we intend to offer students the possibility to sign up for an election reminder listserv 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.
 - (f) Advertise same day registration—Many of our efforts on campus will encourage students to pre-register to vote before the state’s October 11 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 11, many of our efforts will switch gears to start advertising same day registration possibilities, which are available to them during the early voting period. We plan to use social media, email, and fliers to advertise this information.
 - (g) Host a Party At the Polls—Almost every election year, we host a Party to/at the Polls. This event provides food, music, activities, and voter resources to the campus community to encourage early voting. In the past, it was very well attended and brought a lot of attention and excitement to voting. We were not able to host such a party in 2020 due to the pandemic but we brought it back in 2022 with success. Events like these are also incredibly helpful in showing that civic engagement is part of the culture and identity of our campus.
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:

- Now that congressional districts have been redrawn in the state (again), Asheville, in its entirety, lies within one congressional district. Previously, when campus was split into two congressional districts, there was a lot of confusion about filling out voter registration forms, where students should vote, etc. However, this pressure is not fully alleviated, as our campus is still split along precinct lines. For this reason, when filling out their registration, students are required to report not only their dorm address, but their specific room/suite numbers and letters, as noted before. Many students thus do not fill out the form properly and have trouble getting their forms processed. This makes trained volunteers very important, despite the positive development in terms of redistricting. It also makes early voting easier because you do not have to vote at your assigned location during the EV period.
 - As mentioned above in more detail, we want to make voting as convenient as possible for the students, which is why having a EV location on campus is key. We will also provide free transportation to the voting locations that serve campus on Election Day.
 - Information also tends to be a significant barrier to voting. If voters feel that they cannot easily access information on candidates or the election to cast informed votes, they may not bother to vote at all. Indeed, in our UNCA survey after the 2022 election cycle, not having time to research the ballot and struggling to get reliable election information were along the most frequently cited barriers to voting for students. Given this we plan to:
 - Inform the student body about the new Voter ID law—as mentioned previously, in the past 10 years or so, NC has gone back and forth on requiring IDs for voting purposes. This has bred a lot of confusion and voter disenchantment, as voters get discouraged when they realize that they weren’t fully prepared for voting. Since a new ID law is now in place, we will be mentioning this at all our events, on social media, on the university website, and in email blasts. We will also be spreading the word that our campus IDs count as valid forms of ID at the polls
 - We plan to host at least one ballot information session, hosted by a non-partisan organization in town, so that students can learn about what races are on the ballot and what power those positions have. Many students focus too much on the top of the ballot and don’t realize how many state and local races are also on the ballot. We want to equip them to cast an informed vote all the way down. We will also provide QR codes to sample ballots at all-person events and links to access sample ballots in our email and social media outreach
 - We will also work with nonpartisan groups in NC that produce candidate and ballot guides, so that we can share hard copies of those guides at events and share online versions on the UNCA Votes website
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 embed these actions into our curriculum, our extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, and our community outreach projects:
- The “Semester of Civics” should be a huge help in this respect, as the administration has agreed to advertise it and support it as a priority in the Fall. In addition to the central election programming, every part of campus has been invited to create opportunities and programming around this theme, so this should really cement the culture of engagement on campus and make it explicit to all our community members.
 - Curricular Efforts/Engaged Learning: As described previously, there are many Community Engaged Learning classes being offered in Fall 2024 and more will be offered in future semesters.
 - Election Night Party: We will host an election night results-viewing party, as a culmination of the many 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.
 - **Continue having student fellows work with engagement organizations—**We usually have students working with Civic Influencers and the Campus Vote Project and we will have fellows with You Can Vote this Fall. These organizations provide resources and training to help these students lead voter engagement efforts on campus. We would like to continue to support students in pursuing these opportunities and get more students involved in such projects.
5. **Prepare for future local and national cycles—**We plan to emulate and learn from what works in 2024 for these efforts. In odd years, we will focus on municipal elections in surrounding areas, as discussed above. While these efforts will be scaled back since they only apply to a small subset of voters on campus, we still want them to be visible and accessible. Voter education will be particularly important as local elections are especially low information races. As we move on to the 2026 election cycle, we will again ramp up our efforts for the primary and general elections.

Strategy for Long Term Goals

1. **Ensure campus as an early voting location from here on—**Our campus administration has expressed interest to the county that we would like to be considered for early voting for presidential and midterm election years and are advocating for approval. We believe that we should be able to secure this during presidential election years, but in midterm years, there are fewer early voting locations and it may be a challenge. However, we are laying the groundwork. We have good relations with the local Elections Services office and they know we are willing. We will advertise our campus voting location widely in 2024 to demonstrate that it is a location that serves the wider (and not just the campus) community.
2. **Have election-related information included on the university calendar more regularly—**We are working with the university’s Communications and Marketing Team on the “Semester of Civics” for the Fall with the intent of having the associated events placed on the university calendar in advance. We also intend for them to create a landing page for the events. We hope this will lay the groundwork for doing so in the future as well, especially as we are currently going through a website refresh.
3. **Reach a voter registration rate of 100 percent and higher turnout rates across campus and increase turnout among segments of campus with lower rates—**We will continue all our efforts described above in the hopes on creating a more pervasive civic culture on campus. We also hope to continue our participation in the All-In Challenge and other programs to help support our efforts and provide us with a framework.
4. **Further embed community/civic engagement, democratic participation, and political inclusivity in future iterations of the university’s strategic plan/mission—**we are currently working on the “Asheville 2030” campaign to pinpoint areas of priority for the future. We are encouraging community members to fill out the institutional survey on the topic and emphasize civic and community engagement. We will continue to push for this emphasis as plans are made. We hope the “Semester of Civics” is successful so that we can continue it each election year and it can be a manifestation of this commitment.
5. **Secure greater university and outside funding for voter mobilization activities and increase the sustainability of our efforts—**This is one of our biggest challenges. To make our efforts more sustainable, we would like to see more funding for student employees to reliably lead these efforts, so we can have consistent and reliable student input. Relying on volunteerism is a precarious model, especially when students often have to work to support themselves. Paying them shows that we value these efforts. We also believe that additional support (stipends, course releases, etc) for faculty and staff leading these

efforts would help sustain this work. However, all of this costs money, and we are currently in a budget deficit. To address this, we believe that working on partnerships both on and off-campus will be key here—pooling resources is our best bet. We would like to do more targeted donor outreach and hope to work more closely with Advancement to start a campaign to support this work.

Reporting

We will share our Action Plan internally, making it available to the senior administration, the Student Affairs staff involved with student life and engagement, the Political Science Department, the staff of the Key Center and Office of Multicultural Affairs, the students involved in these efforts, and anyone interested. In addition, in Fall 2024, the Action Plan will be a guiding document for the Community Engaged Learning course on US Elections that will be offered. It will be made available to the students enrolled to guide their service both on and off campus and they will be invited to build off of and improve it. We intend for the action plan to guide all who work on these efforts and so sharing it widely is essential.

If we receive approval to do so, our plan is to share our All-In Challenge Action Plan on the UNCA Votes website (which will be updated this summer), so that it is shared externally as well. Our past NSLVE reports and other campus accomplishments related to civic and democratic engagement are already posted on the website, under the “Connect” tab.

Evaluation

We will use a variety of metrics to evaluate the success of our civic engagement and democratic participation efforts. Our main metric, due to the systematic nature of the data collection process, will be our NSLVE report. As described above, we use it to diagnose the weakness in our outreach efforts, identify areas for improvement, and adjust our strategies. However, we also think other data is very useful, so we’ve been expanding efforts in this area.

For example, at all our voter registration drives on campus, especially National Voter Registration Day, we keep meticulous track of our registration numbers and pledges to vote. Volunteers are asked to keep track of this information, and every voter registration station is provided a tally sheet that is updated hourly. These sheets are submitted to Ashley Moraguez at the end of NVRD or other registration events, and she and the board of the Political Science Club keep track of the numbers. These are also checked by counting the voter registration forms before submission to the Board of Elections. We use these numbers to internally gauge the success of our efforts and to provide a basic longitudinal analysis of how our efforts are playing out—we like to compare the data from year to year to see what strategies work and compare election year rates to non-election year rates. We have also shared this data with organizations we work with and who provide fellowships to our students. In recent years, we have seen the number of students who register to vote at our events decline, but this is to be expected, as we already have such higher registration rates on campus. Further, there are changes to the registration process that may be affecting those numbers.

That is, we recognize that there are challenges to this particular evaluation method in ways there weren’t in the past. Until March 2020, voter registration in NC was exclusively done via paper form; this allowed us to keep track of registration progress, since most students chose to register to vote at campus registration drives. Due to the pandemic, however, NC now has online voter registration options for those with NC driver’s licenses. While this is a great change and will, we think, encourage registration on campus, it makes it more difficult for us to gauge registration, since students can easily register without attending a campus registration drive. We plan to provide QR codes at our registration drives for those who prefer the online form, which will allow us to track clicks. This method will help, but it is still imperfect, as clicks don’t necessarily translate to registrations. Another challenge is that in recent election cycles, we have had a greater number of groups (both external and internal) hosting their own smaller drives on campus, separate from our larger institutionally-planned ones. While we, of course, welcome these efforts and love the increase in engagement, it does make it harder to gauge how many students are benefitting from organized drives.

In addition, as noted previously, after the 2022 election cycle we created and implemented the UNCA Civic Engagement Survey, an assessment tool crafted by Political Science faculty and students. The anonymous survey asks students a variety of questions relating to campus efforts around voting and about their demographics. In terms of the engagement questions, it asks students about what campus election engagement efforts they were aware of, which they participated in, how they learned about the events/efforts, and which were most helpful. We also ask about barriers students faced to voting and any suggestions they have for improving the efforts in future election cycles. The intention is to use this survey to assess our past efforts and address shortcomings in the future. We notably do not ask students whether they are registered to vote or whether they voted, as we get aggregated numbers from NSLVE and do not want to ask those potentially sensitive questions on the survey, even though it is anonymous. We made this decision in consultation with our Institutional Review Board (IRB) on campus. We do ask students for some of their demographic information on the survey (race, ethnicity, gender identity, age range, year in school, etc); though, all these questions are optional on the survey. We ask these questions so that we can conduct more nuanced analyses to gauge how far reaching and inclusive our efforts are. We think it is critical to ensure that our efforts reach and support a diversity of students and this survey (along with NSLVE data) allow us to assess this and improve where needed. We intend to continue this survey after future election cycles and we have IRB approval to do so.

We should note that the 2022 iteration of the survey was not perfect. For starters, because of the time it took to draft the survey and get it approved by IRB and the administration, we did not implement it on campus until Spring 2023. We think it would be much better to roll it out in closer proximity to the election. For the 2024 survey, we plan to roll it out a week after the election and to keep it live for two weeks (until Thanksgiving). Also, given that the survey is completely optional, our response rate was not as high as we would have liked (though, our sample was representative of the student body on demographic and academic lines). We advertised the survey as widely as possible in Spring 2023 and provided raffle prizes for participation, but we think we can do better in the future. The survey roll out in Fall 2024 will be advertised as part of the “Semester of Civics” programming and will have more support from administration, so we think this model will help us in the future.

Wrapping Up

To wrap up our Action Plan, we would again like to emphasize that our plans are an ever-evolving work in progress. We believe we’ve made a lot of progress in promoting civic learning and engagement in recent years, and we hope to continue this positive trajectory. We strive for creative & innovative solutions to the problems we face both on campus and in society. Despite the challenges we may face, we have a lot of strengths. All of the university’s priorities work in tandem with and reinforce a culture of civic engagement on campus, and our students are truly change-makers. Above all, we want to support their efforts, goals, and projects.