



## University of South Carolina Upstate Campus Action Plan 2022-23

### Overview

Civic Engagement efforts at the University of South Carolina Upstate are supported by a wide range of faculty, staff, and student organizations under the leadership of the Civic Engagement Coordinator, Dr. Allison Ellis. The purpose of this campus action plan is to detail strategies for increasing civic participation and involvement among students at USC Upstate during the 2022-23 academic year.

There are three main goals which will be discussed in more detail in the proposal. The first goal is to ask every student if they are registered to vote. By making sure each student at USC Upstate is asked at least twice whether they are registered to vote, the goal is to have 100 percent registration by the end of the academic year. The second goal is increased participation. To achieve this goal, efforts will be made to reduce the costs associated with voting. This includes making the polls more accessible to students and informing them on ways they can vote early and absentee. The third goal is to better educate students on candidates and issues. Bringing speakers to campus and organizing panels to experts to address salient topics will help accomplish this goal.

### Leadership

USC Upstate's Campus Action Plan will be driven by the leadership of Dr. Ellis, who will work with a variety of students and student organizations, faculty and academic affairs, community partners, national organizations, and local election officials to implement the plan.

A key group that will be involved with implementing the action plan is students. The Andrew Goodman Foundation ambassador, Emily Martinez-Villalobos, is the predominant leader of students and will work with student affairs and many different organizations on campus. Some of the student groups involved are the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; Black Student Leaders; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; Latin American Student Organization; NAACP; Spartan Latinx Leaders + Allies; Spectrum; Student Government Association; and Upstate United Feminists. Working with student groups such as these helps reach a wide and diverse number of students on campus.

Faculty and academic affairs also have an integral role in executing this action plan. In her role as Civic Engagement Coordinator, Dr. Ellis works closely with the Office of Service

Learning, especially its director, Dr. David Marlow, and associate direction, Dr. Deb Kladviko. The Student Success Center and its director, Susannah Waldrop, also play a vital role. Each year, incoming freshman can take University 101, an elective course aimed at giving students the tools they need to succeed in college. A majority of freshmen take this course, providing a great opportunity to reach many new students. University 101 will be a main tool for registering students to vote and providing them with information to make political participation easier.

There are also community partners and national organizations that are part of the action plan. Within the Spartanburg community, some of the groups involved in Upstate's civic engagement efforts are the League of Women Voters, Spartanburg GOTV Coalition, and the Office of Voter Registration and Elections. Nationally, Upstate works with nonprofit partners such as the Andrew Goodman Foundation, Civic Nation, American Democracy Project, Alliance for Youth Organizing, Ask Every Student, and Campus Compact.

## COMMITMENT

USC Upstate is committed to encouraging student engagement. Part of Upstate's mission statement speaks to the promotion of "deeply-connected community engagement" and empowering "students to become lifelong leaders in their professions and communities." Civic engagement helps tie students to their communities by showing them why participation is important. Therefore, encouraging civic engagement on campus helps accomplish part of the university's mission.

## LANDSCAPE

USC Upstate is a public four-year institution with approximately 6000 students. In 2022, it was ranked as the #1 Top Public Regional University in the South. Upstate has a diverse study body, with 30% of students identifying as Black and 7% of students as Hispanic. The majority of students live off campus and are from the upstate region of South Carolina. A large percentage of the student body are first generation college students.

Upstate has authorized the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and has reports dating back to the 2012 election. The reports consistently show improvement in both voter registration and participation rates. In 2016, 81.4% of students at Upstate were registered to vote and the overall voting rate on campus was 60%. In the 2020 election, these numbers improved to a voting registration rate of 85.2% and a campus voting rate of 68.4%. In 2018, the rates were slightly lower, with a turnout rate of 35.7%, however, it is typical for fewer people to turnout in midterm elections. That is why this year is especially important in terms of registering students and getting them out to vote.

Our institution received a Voter Friendly Campus designation in 2021-22 and was recognized by ALL IN with Silver Seals in 2016, 2018, and 2020.

## GOALS

### A. Long-term Goals

1. Increase voter registration – Voter registration was 85.2% in 2020. A primary long-term goal is to increase student voter registration to at least 90% in 2022, and 95% in 2024, with the hope of it being almost 100% by 2026.
2. Increase the campus voting rate – The long-term goal is to increase the campus rate by at least 10% in each election going forward. In the last midterm election year, 2018, Upstate’s turnout rate was 35.7%. Therefore, in 2022, the goal is for it to increase to at least 39.3%. In the last presidential election in 2020, Upstate’s voter turnout rate was 68.4%. Therefore, in 2024, the goal is for turnout to increase to at least 75%.
3. Increase the number of civic education events on campus to better educate students on candidates and issues.

### B. Short-term Goals

1. Get more students to register to vote using their local address.
2. Increase the percentage of students who vote absentee (either in person or by mail).
3. Increase the participation of students in campus forums and other civic engagement related events.
4. Revamp the Civic Engagement website and be more active on social media.
5. Utilize the Engage Upstate student organization more and increase its membership.

## STRATEGY

### A. Voter Registration

#### New Student Orientation

Each student attending orientation is given the opportunity to register to vote. Per Upstate’s policy, students can only be prompted to register to vote using South Carolina’s scvotes.org website. The policy helps prevent mistakes from being made on paper registration forms. Additionally, students can use the scvotes.org website to check whether they are already registered to vote, and to make changes to their address if necessary.

#### Student Email sent by Academic Affairs

Starting in 2022, USC Upstate will email every student prior to the voter registration deadline with information on how to register to vote using the scvotes.org website.

#### National Voter Registration Day

September 20, 2022, is National Voter Registration Day. A campus-wide voter registration drive will be held involving numerous student organizations and multiple locations on campus. In 2022, over 10 student organizations are already on board to

participate, as well as two faculty groups. Refreshments and swag will be available at all the tables set up at high-traffic areas on campus to entice students to stop by and register or check their registration status.

#### University 101 Classes

University 101 is an elective course a majority of incoming freshmen take geared to help them succeed in college. This course will be utilized as a way to connect with a large number of freshmen and make sure they are registered to vote. As discussed further in the action plan, this class will also be used as a way to educate voters.

#### Ask Every Student

USC Upstate is participating in the Ask Every Student program, which is a project of the National Resource Consortium on Full Student Voter Participation. The goal is to get close to 100% student voter registration on campus by spending 3-5 minutes with each student. This effort will be systematized so that incoming students will continue to be registered each year. Both orientation and University 101 classes will be a strong component of this effort.

### B. Voter Mobilization

#### Campus-Wide Email

Two different campus-wide emails will be sent out during the fall semester. The first will be on October 7, 2022, reminding students of the October 9, 2022, deadline to register to vote. The second will be on November 4, 2022, to remind students to vote on Tuesday, November 8, 2022. The second email will also include a voters' guide, which will be further discussed in the next section on Voter Education.

#### Social Media

The Andrew Goodman Foundation's student ambassador recently started new social media accounts to promote civic engagement on campus. There are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts called USC Upstate Votes which are now being used regularly to post valuable information and reminders for students.

#### Voting Pledge

The week before the November 8, 2022, election, a voting banner will be available in the library for students to sign, pledging that they will vote in the upcoming election. Refreshments will be available and the event will be promoted through social media as well.

#### Student Poll Workers

As in the past, students will be encouraged to work as poll workers in Spartanburg County on Election Day.

#### Absentee and Early Voting

There will be several events leading up to Election Day encouraging students to request absentee ballots or vote early. Since many students are registered to vote somewhere other than Spartanburg County, getting them to vote absentee or in advance should help increase the campus turnout rate.

### C. Voter Education

#### Civic Engagement Website

The civic engagement website at Upstate is being updated to include relevant information to students. It will contain links to our civic engagement social media accounts, the scvotes.org website, and provide non-partisan information on the main candidates and issues in the upcoming November 2022 election. The NSLVE reports for Upstate from 2012 to 2020 can also be accessed through the website.

#### University 101 Classes

There is already a civic engagement component to University 101 classes, but part of this action plan will involve introducing new election engagement curriculum which will help students feel more empowered to vote. Often students do not feel informed enough to cast a ballot. By working closely with the Student Success Center, the hope is for students not to only know how to register to vote and physically go and vote, but also for them to feel informed enough to do so.

#### Campus Forums

As has been done in the past, campus forums will continue to be held regularly about various issues related to voting and elections. The goal is to have at least one forum a semester. In the fall, there will be a forum featuring the Director of Registration and Elections for Spartanburg County, Adam Hammons, who will speak about voting in the upcoming November 2022 election. He will tell students about recent changes in South Carolina law that affect voting, particularly regarding absentee and early voting. In the spring there are plans for two forums. The first will be in mid-January and will discuss the results of the November 2022 election and possible impact going forward. The forum will feature several professors and local experts. The second is being planned for later in the spring and will involve bringing a named speaker to campus. Details are still being worked out.

#### Voter Guide

The library faculty recently finished putting together a digital voters' guide for students. It provides valuable information on registering to vote, finding your polling place, where to get nonpartisan information on candidates and issues, etc. It will be emailed to all students, faculty, and staff the week prior to the November 2022 election. Library staff plans to continue updating this guide for future elections.

### D. Ballot Access

#### Promote the Right to Register Locally

Students will be encouraged during voter registration drives to register to vote in Spartanburg County with a local address – either on or off campus. Being registered locally will make it easier for students to vote since they will not have to return to their hometown on Election Day in order to cast a ballot. Additionally, members of Engage Upstate will go into residence halls to try to encourage students to update their addresses.

#### Assist with Requesting Absentee Ballots

South Carolina laws regarding absentee voting changed recently. We will help inform students of these changes and assist them in requesting absentee ballots. Events will be held in residence halls to encourage students to request absentee ballots in advance of the November election.

#### In-person Absentee Voting

Students will be informed through a variety of platforms that they can vote early at the Spartanburg County Administration Center, Boiling Springs Library, and Woodruff Library from October 24, 2022, up until 6 p.m. on November 5, 2022.

### REPORTING

Our campus action plan will be posted on our campus page on ALL IN's website <https://allinchallenge.org/campuses/university-of-south-carolina-upstate-the/>. Our institution has also given ALL IN permission to publish our NSLVE reports which are posted on our campus page on ALL IN's website.

Additionally, our campus action plan will be sent to the Andrew Goodman Foundation, and will be posted on Upstate's Civic Engagement website.

### EVALUATION

The outcomes of this action plan will be assessed in several ways. A major source of evaluation will come from the 2022 and 2024 NSLVE reports. The hope is that these reports will show improvements both in the percentage of registered students and the overall voting rate on campus. It is also hoped that the percentage of students voting absentee increases.

Additionally, we will ask for feedback on our program throughout the year. This will involve getting feedback from students who attend campus forums and other events sponsored by Engage Upstate, and also by their attendance levels. Growth in the membership of Engage Upstate would also be an indication that our plan is having a positive impact on the student body population. Traffic to the civic engagement website and social media sites will also be tracked. An increase in traffic will show that students are being exposed to the information.