# Virginia Wesleyan University ALL-IN Voting Report

## **Executive Summary**

Virginia Wesleyan University's Action Plan was developed with the assistance of the VWU Political Science Department, Wesleyan Engaged: Center for Civic Leadership and Service Learning, Hofheimer Library, Marlins Vote, and the Student Government Association. The plan was developed in the summer of 2021 prior to the start of the fall semester and revised upon receipt of the 2020 NSLVE report. The plan is one that is on-going as the Commonwealth of Virginia votes every year. The focus of the plan shifts between federal and state elections depending on the year.

Building upon the NSLVE reports from 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020, the action plan was developed for the campus overall (faculty, staff, and students) in order to increase the number of students, faculty, and staff who vote in all elections and to increase knowledge and engagement of students on issues that affect the localities where they live. By increasing a student's knowledge of issues that affect them on a local level, VWU is hoping to have a more engaged alumni base that will aid in the solution of issues facing localities.

The plan was developed for the VWU campus in Virginia Beach, VA. VWU has no satellite campuses; however, the campus has a robust online educational program. The plan was developed with primarily the main campus in mind; however, many of the action items also will incorporate the online students. Though the campus is in Virginia Beach, the plan also incorporates other areas of Hampton Roads including Norfolk, Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Portsmouth.

The action plan was developed to provide a guide for the campus (faculty, staff, and students) to become more aware of the importance of voting. It was also developed to showcase the engagement being done on the campus to aid students in becoming more community focused. Finally, it also serves as a way for faculty to adjust course curriculum so that educational topics can be presented in the course and can incorporate voter engagement through asking questions of candidates to research presentations on important local topics. In 2020, VWU adopted an amended strategic plan entitled "Forging Our Future: Building On Strength 2020-2030." Goal Six of the Strategic Plan states that the institution will help graduates to "contribute to their communities through engagement and leadership." Within that goal, the institution has developed action items that include strengthening engagement program grounded in evidence-based outcomes that enhances learning, attitudes, behaviors, and skills. Voter engagement is a key component for Wesleyan Engaged: Center for Civic Leadership and Service Learning. The Center is the lead on engaging students in and out-of-class in becoming more engaged civically.

The Commonwealth of Virginia is one of four states that vote each year. In the Commonwealth, residents have the ability to vote every six months. Because of this, the action plan was divided into six month increments and by the 2022 elections and then 2023 elections. The action plan is focused on both short-term and long-term goals. The action plan was updated after the release of the 2020 NSLVE report.

The action plan is coordinated through Wesleyan Engaged and all evaluations will be done by Wesleyan Engaged in conjunction with Institutional Assessment. The action plan will be implemented through the different participating groups and lead on the various action items. It will also be implemented in a roll-out fashion as different parts of the action plan will start and end at various parts of the year.

## **Leadership**

The main working group is comprised of the following individuals:

- Dr. Leslie Caughell, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Kelly Jackson, Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Religious Freedom
- Bethany Tsiaras, Wesleyan Engaged: Civic Engagement and Service Learning Director
- Sarah Guzzo, Director of Student Activities
- David Stuebing, Director of Residence Life

Each of the people on the main working group constitute the different populations on and off the-campus. Each person on the main working group allows VWU to make sure the idea of engagement is sent out to the different constituencies. It also allows for broader programming and support of initiatives.

There are additional members who

- Dr. Scott Miller, President of Virginia Wesleyan University
- Dr. Keith Moore, Senior Vice President of Virginia Wesleyan University
- Dr. Sue Larkin, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of English
- Andrea Hoover-Erbig, Executive Director for Intercollegiate Athletics
- Dr. Craig Wansink, Director of the Center for Religious Freedom and Professor of Religious Studies

Outside of Housing, Wesleyan Engaged works closely with Student Activities in the promotion of events by utilizing the events calendar that is overseen by that department. Again, VWU is not a large campus so daily all departments work across divisions for the betterment of our students.

Wesleyan Engaged works with the City of Virginia Beach Office of Voter Registration and Elections to obtain materials regarding candidates running in Virginia Beach. Wesleyan Engaged also works with all localities within Hampton Roads to obtain PDFs of the ballot forms for those cities to be posted on the Wesleyan Engaged website in the Voting area. All student workers in the Wesleyan Engaged office, along with the Director of Wesleyan Engaged, are required to complete the online training offered through the Commonwealth of Virginia to do voter registration.

Kelly Jackson is the Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Religious Freedom. In her position, she develops programs for the Center that are presented for both on and off-campus populations. Because of this, she will be helping develop the educational programs for faculty, staff, and off-campus populations. David Stuebing is the Director of Residence Life. In his position, he oversees all on-campus residents. Through residence life, David will aid in passive programming (allowing pre-developed bulletin boards) and active programming (through RAs) for all residents.

The main working group reflects both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and includes faculty, staff, and students. The Director of Wesleyan Engaged is also a member of the Western Bayside Community Partnership, which represents the civic leagues and churches surrounding the campus. The community stakeholders are represented by the Western Bayside Community Partnership and the New Virginia Majority.

The other offices that are involved include Alumni Relations, the Marketing and Communications Department, the Learning Center, Wesleyan Ministries, Athletics, Residence Life, Dining Services, Volunteer Hampton Roads, and the Batten Honors College. Due to the size of the institution, all departments work closely together on a daily basis.

## **Commitment**

The VWU administration is very supportive of civic learning and democratic engagement. In the fall of 2017, VWU created Wesleyan Engaged: Center for Civic Leadership and Service Learning. The Center was formerly the Office of Community Service; however, the President and the Board of Trustees concluded that the mission of the Center should focus on engagement of students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community.

Each week President Miller compiles a weekly newsletter entitled Nota Bene for the campus and other populations. Each federal election year, the President devotes the first part of his September Nota Bene to voter registration and the last Nota Bene in October to the importance of voting.

Virginia Wesleyan University has a culture of education in the area of civic learning and democratic engagement. In the spring semester prior to national elections, political science faculty weave in voter engagement into their courses with papers focusing policy positions of candidates in both local and national candidates.

Virginia Wesleyan University's mission statement states: "An inclusive community dedicated to scholarship and service grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, Virginia Wesleyan University inspires students to build meaningful lives through engagement in Coastal Virginia's dynamic metropolitan region, the nation, and the world." Engagement is explicitly mentioned in the mission statement of the institution. With the establishment of the amended strategic plan "Forging Our Future: Building On Strength 2020-2030," the University adopted a new strategic plan and updated the Core Values of the institution. The sixth core value established in the plan states: "Social Responsibility, rooted in Methodist heritage, which inspires our community members to be engaged citizens, servants, and leaders who have a positive impact on their local and global communities." The Institution adopted six Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILO's). The sixth ILO established states "Graduates contribute to their communities through engagement and leadership." Finally, the third area of focus in the newly adopted strategic plan states that the

institution will "Elevate the importance of civic leadership and community engagement in both the curriculum and student life."

Outside of the classroom, civic learning and democratic engagement are built both actively and passively throughout the campus. Working with the Marlin Chronicle, Wesleyan Engaged helps spread the word about the importance of civic engagement and the issues/policies that voters will be deciding at the polls. Wesleyan Engaged has created bulletin boards in a bag for resident advisors to put up on their floors. Candidate meet and greets are promoted throughout the classes and instructors build assignments around the meet and greets. Outside of Wesleyan Engaged, the Nusbaum Center also hosts educational programs to help educate on and off campus individuals about civic learning and democratic engagement.

## Landscape

Within the amended strategic plan entitled "Forging Our Future: Building On Strength 2020-2030," engagement is woven throughout the outcomes both explicitly and implicitly. In the sixth Institutional Learning Outcomes, engagement is explicitly stated: "Graduates contribute to their communities through engagement and leadership." Outside that Institutional Learning Outcome, engagement is implicitly woven into the learning outcomes. The second Institutional Learning Outcome states "Graduates demonstrate independence, responsibility, and self-discipline" and the fourth Institutional Learning Outcome states "Graduates understand and engage the ideas of others." In both of these, engagement is implicitly stated for graduates with the focus on responsibility and engagement with the ideas of others.

Virginia Wesleyan University utilizes three campus data assessments for the students. Institutionally, the students take the National Survey of Student Engagement in their first and fourth years. The institution is an active participant in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement. The institution has done the NSLVE program since 2012 and has received the reports in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020. The reports are shared with the campus on the Wesleyan Engaged Voting Website, which is available for anyone.

In the 2019 NSSE report, VWU first-year students:

- Had a mean average below their peers in our Carnegie Classification and among Private Institutions in the Southeast on the question that examined attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues (VWU 2.4, Carnegie Peers 2.7, Private Institutions in the Southeast region 2.5). The mean average was a decrease among VWU first-year respondents between 2018 (2.5) and 2019 (2.4).
- Had a mean average below their peers in our Carnegie Classification and among Private Institutions in the Southeast on the question that focused on being an informed and active citizen (VWU 2.5, Carnegie Peers 2.7, Private Institutions in the Southeast region 2.7). The mean average was a decrease among VWU first-year respondents between 2018 (2.7) and 2019 (2.5).

## In the 2019 NSSE report, VWU senior students:

• Had a mean average above their peers among Private Institutions in the Southeast on the question that focused on attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues, while equaling their peers in our Carnegie Classification (VWU 2.7, Carnegie

Classification 2.3, Private Institutions in the Southeast region 2.3). The mean average was an increase among VWU seniors between 2018 (2.3) and 2019 (2.7).

• Had a mean average above their peers among Private Institutions in the Southeast on the question that focused on being an informed and active citizen, while equaling the mean average among our Carnegie Classification peers (VWU 2.9, Carnegie Classification 2.9, Private Institutions in the Southeast region 2.8). The mean average was an increase among VWU seniors between 2018(2.7) and 2019 (2.9).

Since 2012, VWU has participated every other year in the NSLVE. In an examination between the 2014 and 2018 off-year elections, VWU had a 22% increase (12.1% to 34.1%) in their voting rate; however, the total for the VWU rate was below the stated 2018 voting rate for all institutions, which was 39.1%. The number of students who registered to vote was 968, which was an increase of 14 individuals. The overall registration rate at VWU was 74.6%, an increase of 8.3%. The overall voting rate of registered students was 45.7%, which was an increase of 27.4%. When examining the overall voting rate by Carnegie Classification, the difference between VWU's voting rate (34.1%) and private Bachelor's Institutions (38.1%) was only 4%, while back in 2014 the different was 4.6%. When comparing the difference between the voting rate of all institutions (39.1%) and VWU's institution voting rate (34.1%) was only a 5% difference.

In 2016, VWU participated in the NSLVE report for the presidential election year. VWU's 2016 voting rate was at 49.5%, which was a 4.2% increase over the 2012 percent of 45.3%. The overall rate of voting for all institutions was 50.4%, which VWU was 0.9% below. Between 2012 and 2016, VWU increased the number of students who registered by 7 students; however, the number of students who voted was down by 6. The overall registration rate was 79.9%, which was an increase of 8% from 2012. In 2012, the difference between VWU's voting rate (45.3%) and the all institution voting rate (46.9%) was 1.6%. In 2016, the difference between VWU's voting rate (45.3%) and the all institution rate (50.4%) was only 0.9%. Among Private Institutions, the different between VWU and Private Institution Voting Rates as 2% (51.5% for Private Institutions versus 49.5% for VWU) in 2016. In the 2020 NSLVE report, the institutional voting rate was 65.5%, which was an increase of 16% from the 2016 election. VWU was 0.5% below the all institutional average of 66%.

Within the curriculum, civic learning and democratic engagement is presented in the curriculum in different ways. For some courses, the students are required to interview an elected officer regarding their political career, while in another course the students are required to attend a meet and greet to talk with candidates about their policy positions. The following courses have civic learning and democratic engagement presented in the curriculum:

Course	Course Title	Learning Outcome
CJ 348	Delinquency and Juvenile Justice - paper regarding local policies and laws on juvenile justice with interview of political official in this area	Understand the basic theories that describe and policies that entail juvenile delinquency from psychology, sociology, and criminal justice perspectives

ENVS 326/POLS 326	Environmental Policy Analysis - students required to research position of candidates on environmental issues and interview them at meet and greets	The policy process for the development of environmental policy
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POLS 111	Introduction to Political Science - attend Candidate Meet and Greets	Understanding of the American Political Process
POLS 308	American Political Thought - students write response papers regarding the candidate meet and greets. Students interview local campaign officials about how to run a political campaign.	To increase student understanding of how American electoral campaigns affect voters' knowledge, attitudes, evaluations, and voting behavior.
REC 206/REC 305	Management of Recreation and Leisure Services - students must attend candidate meet and greets to ask the candidates a minimum of one question that pertains to the area of recreation and leisure services and document it in a paper	Understand, as they relate to recreation, park resources, and leisure services: Legal foundations and the legislative process, contracts and tort law, regulatory agents and methods of compliance
SPED 371	Foundations of Legal Issues in Special Education - attend candidate meet and greet to ask candidate about education policy position for the candidate	An understanding and application of the legal aspects and regulatory requirements of students with disabilities including current regulations governing special education and policies and procedures regarding special education.
WGS 219	Women in Culture and Society - students host a panel discussion on candidate positions on women's issues	Students will be able to recognize how gender works as an ideological constraint and how policy affects the construct of gender

Within the co-curriculum, civic learning and democratic engagement are presented in different ways. The Nusbaum Center sponsors outside speakers focused around a select theme. During even years, the first few speakers in the fall semester focus on some aspect of civic engagement (2018 speakers in the fall included a speaker discussing the history of women in politics). Wesleyan Engaged serves as the lead for all engagement programs and throughout the fall sponsors individuals who help register students, as well as going into the community to register off-campus individuals. Marlins Go Green sponsors a forum to discuss the environmental policies of all candidates each fall (even years on the federal level and odd years on the state level). Marlins Vote sponsors candidates for local, state, and federal offices to come to campus and do a campus meet and greet. The forums are open to the campus community and the Virginia Beach community to hear from the candidates about their position on issues ranging from the environment to women's reproductive rights to minority rights. Finally, Hofheimer Library sponsors panels of faculty to discuss issues that affect the campus for faculty, staff, and students. The library also hosts displays focusing on civic learning and democratic engagement. The departments represented are across Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.

#### <u>Goals</u>

#### Long-Term Goals

As laid out earlier, the University adopted a new strategic plan. In the third goal, the institution desires to "Elevate the importance of civic leadership and community engagement in both the curriculum and student life." Within that goal, the institution has developed action items that include strengthening engagement with area schools and the City of Virginia Beach and to develop and sustain a student engagement program grounded in evidence-based outcomes that enhances learning, attitudes, behaviors, and skills.

As stated earlier, engagement is explicitly stated in the sixth Institutional Learning Outcome: "Graduates contribute to their communities through engagement and leadership." Outside that Institutional Learning Outcome, engagement is implicitly woven into the learning outcomes. The second Institutional Learning Outcome states "Graduates demonstrate independence, responsibility, and self-discipline" and the fourth Institutional Learning Outcome states "Graduates understand and engage the ideas of others." In both of these, engagement is implicitly stated for graduates with the focus on responsibility and engagement with the ideas of others. The institution is working at weaving engagement through all aspects of the curriculum so that students fully can see how in-class work is engaged in out-of-class life. By doing so, the institution is aiding students in understanding that engagement with the local and state elections process is necessary to solve local issues.

In order to reach the long term vision, the institution needs to involve students, staff, faculty, Board, and donors more than we currently are. Students need to be involved in order to help spread the word. As research has consistently shown, students listen to their fellow students more than faculty and staff. By having students help spread the regarding engagement and to complete assessments, the non-engaged students will be more likely to participate in programs and engagement initiatives. Faculty need to be involved so that they can incorporate more democratic engagement activities in their courses all-year round. Staff will need to be involved to remind students as they advise them about various upcoming events and completion of assessments like the NSSE and the CGMS in order to have a higher number of students complete the assessments. For seniors, staff can also remind them to complete the NSSE prior to graduation. For the Board and donors, they need to be involved to show support for such programs by promoting and attending events. With additional support from the donor that funds Wesleyan Engaged, additional donors may be willing to donate funds to help support democratic engagement efforts.

Event, Audience, Methods, Goal	<u>Who Heading</u>	<u>Туре</u>	<u>Date(s</u> )
Add Election Deadlines to the campus calendar. The calendar is for on campus populations. The goal is to have the event present on the calendar for all on-campus constituents. Determining all election deadlines for 2022, including primary deadlines and main election deadlines.	Hofheimer Library, Student Activities	Voting	Summer 2022

## **Strategy**

During Black History Month, Wesleyan Engaged and the NPHC will do a program reflecting on the history of the right to vote for African-Americans. The purpose of this is to educate participants regarding the historical events and the suffering individuals went through so that African Americans could vote.	Wesleyan Engaged, National Pan-Hellenic Council	Education	February 2022
Registering students who vote in SGA upper class elections. The process is for students whether they live on or off-campus. The goal is to provide students a way to register to vote in an easy way. Preparation for the event would include the obtaining of Commonwealth Voter Registration forms and publication of the event across campus.	Marlins Vote	Registration	March 2022

Working with the Gender and Sexual Equity Office, Wesleyan Engaged will be hosting a speaker who is involved with voting rights. The speaker is a Dominican Nun who was arrested in October advocating for more access to voting in the United States. She will be talking about her civic engagement activism and how it ties into her calling. The speech is time with Women's History month and will also have a passive display regarding the history of the rights of women to vote.	Gender and Sexual Equity, Wesleyan Engaged	Education, Advocacy	March 2022
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At the end of July, Wesleyan Engaged works with the Office of Institutional Assessment to get a list of all students, their emails, and the state of their permanent residence. All students are broken down by their state and each group receives an email regarding how to vote absentee in their state and a link to their state's voting office. Information regarding how to register to vote in the Commonwealth of Virginia is included for out of state individuals. For those from VA, links to their city's office of elections, the Commonwealth's Office of Elections, and how to register to vote on the VWU campus are included. For those students who are scheduled to do study away, an email is sent to them with information about voting abroad and all deadlines. They are encouraged to request an absentee ballot ASAP so that their vote counts.	Wesleyan Engaged, Office of Institutional Assessment	Education, Registration, Voting	Last Week of July
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All RAs will receive a bulletin board in a bag about voter education and registration to put up in the residence hall. The goal is to provide passive programming to educate residents about the democratic process. The population being served is the on-campus population. The bulletin board in a bag will be pre-made in the spring semester by the staff in the Wesleyan Engaged office and handed to RAs during student staff training. The preparation would be the creation of the bulletin boards in a bag	Wesleyan Engaged	Education	August 2022
boards in a bag.			

Wesleyan Engaged staff will be trained on being a delegate in Virginia to help register people to vote. The strategies for this will be to do the training during the first staff meeting so that the training is done in one setting and is truly completed. The training will be done on-campus. The only preparation needed prior would be having all staff bring their computers in order to complete the training or schedule the first staff meeting in a computer lab. The goal is to better aid individuals who register to vote by being able to help any student, faculty, and staff who wish to register to vote.	Wesleyan Engaged Staff (7 student workers), Bethany Tsiaras	Registration	August 2022
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Partnering with Western Bayside Community	Alpha Phi Alpha	Registration	August
Partnership and	Fraternity, Int., Zeta		2022
surrounding Civic	Phi Beta Sorority,		
League Associations to register voters. The	Inc.,		
audience for this	Alpha Kappa Alpha		
initiative is off-campus individuals. The	Sorority, Inc., and		
event will be held off-campus at the	Marlins Vote		
Community Day that is held at Good			
Samaritan Episcopal Church. Prior to the			
event, a list of student workers who can			
work the event and the			
materials needed for the event will need to be			
done. The goal of the initiative is to educate			
community members about voting deadlines			
and register individuals who are not			
6			
registered.			

Social Media Campaign "I Will Vote Because" with pictures and statements from VWU students, faculty, and staff. The audience for this strategy are on and off-campus individuals, including donors, community members, and alumni. Pictures will be done in the Batten Center throughout the week and posted to the Wesleyan Engaged and Virginia Wesleyan social media. Prior to the event, materials will be gathered by the Wesleyan Engaged Office, including dry erase boards and a camera. The goal for this initiative is to increase awareness both on and off-campus of the importance to vote. The other goal is to bring awareness to the importance of voting.	Wesleyan Engaged	Educa tion	August through Election Day 2022
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During Homecoming and Parents Weekend, Marlins Vote will host a table about voter engagement, registering people to vote, and reminding folks about voting. The audience for this event is anyone who attends Homecoming (both on and off-campus individuals). Face-to face communications will be had with individuals about voting and registering to vote. Prior to the event, Marlins Vote will reserve a table during Homecoming week and have the materials prepared that are needed. The goal is to raise awareness and to get people registered to vote (or reminding them to vote) from individuals on and off-campus.	Marlins Vote, Student Activities	Education, Registration	October 2022
on campus.			

them there.
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## **NSLVE as a Resource for Colleges and Universities**

The NSLVE reports showing the difference between 2012 and 2016 as well as the report showing the differences between 2014 and 2018 have been shared with the campus through the Wesleyan Engaged website in an area entitled "Voting" and then in a section entitled "NSLVE VWU Reports." The report is shared with organizations off-campus and is available through the Wesleyan Engaged website.

## **Reporting**

The Plan will be shared in different ways. The primary way is that it will be shared with the campus community via the VWU Wesleyan website on a section dealing with voting. The plan will also be shared with all academic departments in Faculty Assembly by the Executive Director of Wesleyan Engaged in order to make sure faculty know what the plan is and how they can aid in its success. Marlins Vote and the Feminist Majority will also be sharing the report with students by working with the Student Government Association and the Division of Campus Life to disseminate the report to them. The report will be presented to students through Student Government meetings and events. Marlins Vote and the Feminist Majority will also present it to the resident advisors during RA Training in August so that the information can be shared with residents when they move in during the first-floor meeting. New bulletin boards will be created for all residence halls documenting plan. Finally, the plan will be reviewed each week in the weekly email update to the campus community from Wesleyan Engaged with any updates or any upcoming events.

The plan will be made public through communications sent to the public by the Office of Marketing and Communications, which is sent to alumni, constituents, and other populations off campus.

## **Evaluating**

The purpose of the evaluation is to determine what changes are necessary to make events more successful. It also serves as a way to document the engagement activities on the campus when reporting engagement activities for various accreditations. Finally, the evaluation will serve as a way to examine any attitudinal changes in participants after the event is over.

The NSSE is used to determine how VWU students are doing among peers in a variety of areas. Information from both assessments allows VWU to adjust curriculum and programming so that VWU students are more informed and active with engagement. Outside of these assessments, information provided through programmatic assessments allows the institution to make changes to various campus programs in order to have a more engaged community. Finally, the information provided can be used to recruit donors and grants that focus on engagement both on and off-campus by showcasing the engagement of the campus.

The audience for the evaluation is the institution itself, donors, and off-campus individuals. On the campus, the assessment can be utilized by student organizations regarding what can be done to make the programs stronger, as well as what programs could be sun-setted or introduced that would get students to participate. Faculty can utilize the assessment to make changes to their courses in order to strengthen engagement in the course. The administration will utilize the data to be presented to current and potential donors, who would be willing to donate to support such programs for the campus. Finally, the assessment data could be utilized in applying for grants on the local, state, and national level that focuses on engagement.

The evaluation is spread throughout different departments on the campus. The NSSE is oversee by Institutional Assessment. Outside of course assessments, the assessments will be run by Wesleyan Engaged. For programs done through Housing, Housing will take the lead on the program assessments as they have standardized program assessments for their programs. Finally, Information Technology oversees the assessment of all academic courses. Through this online assessment, engagement within the courses will be assessed.