

## West Chester University of Pennsylvania 2024 Nonpartisan Democratic Engagement Action Plan

Developed by: Shay Gillespie

### Executive Summary:

West Chester University (WCU) has a long history of campus involvement in various forms of civic engagement, including service-learning, community-based research and voter engagement. The university is deeply committed to developing graduates who contribute to the common good through participation in cultural and civic discourse, and through understanding the ethical implications of decisions and the world in which they live.

This action plan will provide WCU's various strategies to implement non-partisan campus voter education, engagement, and outreach. Guided by a task force comprised of students, faculty and staff, as well as input from community partners, voter engagement goals will be reached through various strategies, including programs, projects and initiatives taking place between July and November 2024 on WCU's primary campus in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

The Voter Education and Engagement Task Force is led by the Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact (CCESI) within the Division of University Advancement & External Affairs (UAEA) at West Chester University.

*This nonpartisan democratic engagement action plan was developed by West Chester University of Pennsylvania in Pennsylvania for the 2024 election. The purpose of this action plan is to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter registration, education, and turnout in the 2024 election. The goals for West Chester University of Pennsylvania for the 2024 election are:*

By the end of the 2024 General Election, West Chester University will have:

1. Recorded a 90% institutional voting rate
2. Provided 10-15 voter education events & 10-15 post-election processing events/spaces between August – December
3. Recorded a 90% voting rate from students of all demographics (race/ethnicity, class year, academic program)

## Leadership:

CCESI revisited the membership of the Voter Engagement Task Force formed in 2020 to coordinate voter education and engagement efforts. The Task Force held its first synchronous meeting in June 2024 with the following members:

### Staff

- Rita Patel Eng, Director, Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact
- Shay Gillespie, Associate Director, Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact
- Katie Clay, Associate Director, Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact
- Sabrina Rightmer, Director of Communications and Marketing for Student Affairs
- Julie Dietrich, Executive Director, University Advancement & External Affairs
- Kristin English, Interim Director, Center for Trans and Queer Advocacy
- Chancey Page, Assistant Director, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Kalyani Kannan, Assistant Director, The Center for Women & Gender Equity
- Stephen Hopson, Associate Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life
- Kellianne Milliner, Associate Director of Athletics
- Rachel Daltry, Director, Counseling and Psychological Services
- Lexie McCarthy, Director, Off-Campus and Commuter Services

### Faculty

- Ashlie Delshad, Associate Professor of Political Science & CSM Dean's Faculty Associate for Student Success
- Hannah Ashley, Professor; Coordinator of Youth Empowerment and Urban Studies (YES) Program; Founder of Writing Zones 12.5
- Erin Knight, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Health Sciences
- Chris Stangl, Associate Professor and Department Chair of Political Science
- Peter Loedel, Professor, Political Science
- Linda Stevenson, Professor, Political Science
- Shannon McQueen, Professor, Political Science
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### Students:

- Emily Chatburn, Graduate Assistant, CCESI
- Kyanna Randolph, CCESI Student Leader for Voter Engagement

- Justin Duffie, CCESI Student Leader for Voter Engagement

Beyond the members of the Task Force, we plan to engage other departments situated within the Division of Student Affairs, University Advancement & External Affairs, and student clubs and organizations. During the last general election, we were able to partner with university leadership for the president to send campus-wide communications on the importance of voting and voting resources leading up to the general election. We also hope to engage local political leaders and public servants to engage with students on the importance of civic engagement through campus events.

### **External Partners:**

- Chester County Voter Services
- ALL-IN Campus Democracy Challenge
- PA Youth Vote

### **Commitment:**

Enveloped in West Chester University's [mission statement and goals](#), the institution aims to graduate students who “collaborate with others to solve problems and address societal needs, communicate effectively and participate in civic discourse and engage inclusively in a diverse society”. Among the institution’s goals, WCU states “community and cultural engagement”, “critical thinking”, and “inclusion” among how it measures success it its graduates.

As part of an emerging [strategic plan](#) implemented in 2023, WCU aims to “foster and advance an equitable and welcoming environment that promotes belonging, well-being, and a shared commitment to the common good creating a sustainable community of educators.” A current initiative of this outcome is to “expand community engagement beyond the campus experience”, with a partnering initiative to further assess and collect data on university community engagement efforts. The Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact convenes the Voter Education and Engagement Task Force and coordinates with The Office of the President to promote those efforts to the wider campus community.

President Chris Fiorentino is a current signatory to the ALL IN Presidents’ Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation most recently signing the commitment in 2020. In 2020, President Fiorentino also sent three email communications to the campus community on voting resources: one ahead of the Presidential Primary registration deadline, one ahead of the General Election deadline, and one on Election Day. As President Fiorentino retired at the end of June, we are hopeful in engaging our incoming

president, Dr. Laurie Bernotsky, to support voter engagement efforts in the same capacity.

Previously, our institution has developed and submitted an action plan to ALL IN for 2018 and 2020, which can be found on our ALL IN campus page:

<https://allinchallenge.org/campuses/west-chester-university/>. In 2021, WCU was designated as a Voter Friendly Campus by NASPA.

## Landscape:

West Chester University of Pennsylvania is a public 4-year institution and joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2017. Our institution is designated as the following: Predominantly White Institution.

### **Our campus demographic and voting data:**

West Chester University of Pennsylvania has 17,719 students. As of Spring 2024, 89.9% of students were in-state students, 10.2% were out-of-state students, and about 5,900 are residential students. As of Spring 2024, 10.3% of students identified as black, 3.2% Asian, 7.7% Hispanic or Latino, 3.6% multi-racial, and 73.9% white.

West Chester University of Pennsylvania has authorized the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and will receive campus voting data through 2033.

Our 2022 campus voting rate was 42.8%

Our 2022 campus voter registration rate was 78.2%

Our 2020 campus voting rate was 77.8%.

Our 2020 campus voter registration rate was 86.9%.

Our 2018 campus voting rate was 42.3%.

Our 2018 campus voter registration rate was 77.2%.

West Chester University of Pennsylvania has been recognized by ALL IN with the following seals of recognition for past elections: 2016 Silver, 2018 Gold, 2020 Gold.

### **Important dates:**

- September 17th: National Voter Registration Day / Constitution Day
- September 20th: PA Student Voting Summit in Harrisburg (10am-4pm)
- October 7th-11th: National Voter Education Week
- October 21st: Voter Registration Deadline
- October 29th: Vote Early Day/Last Day to apply for a mail-in ballot
- November 4th: Election Hero Day
- November 5th: Election Day (mail-in ballots must be received by 8pm)

## Goals:

By the end of the 2024 General Election, West Chester University will have:

4. Recorded a 90% institutional voting rate
5. Provided 10-15 voter education events & 10-15 post-election processing events/spaces between August – December
6. Recorded a 90% voting rate from students of all demographics (race/ethnicity, class year, academic program)

## Strategy:

West Chester University of Pennsylvania will implement these strategies to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter participation.

### **Goal 1: Record a 90% institutional voting rate**

#### *Strategies:*

- Engage WCU's new President to continue our outgoing President's commitment to democratic engagement by sending campus-wide voting resource communications and signing the ALL-IN Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation
- Utilize undergraduate student leaders to have voter registration and voting resource presence through weekly tabling and at large campus events, including:
  - Welcome to the Borough
  - Fall Involvement Fair
  - Constitution Day / National Voter Registration Day
- Utilize our ALL IN Campus Portal, social media, the WCU Votes page, and WCU Marketing professionals to disseminate voter education and registration information

### **Goal 2: Provide 10-15 voter education events & 10-15 post-election processing events/spaces between August – December**

#### *Strategies:*

- Work with Voter Education & Engagement Task Force to develop programming that:
  - Educates students on the democratic process

- Introduces students to local civic leaders and the importance of civic engagement in their local communities
- Provides processing spaces for students experiencing anxiety due to the candidate campaigns, political discourse, and the results of the general election

**Goal 3: Record a 90% voting rate from students of all demographics (race/ethnicity, class year, academic program)**

*Strategies:*

- Work with students and staff from the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to implement The Power in Our Ballot Student of Color Initiative to engage students of color to vote
- Create and present a voting module to First-Year Experience sections across academic disciplines
- Coordinate with Off-Campus and Commuter services to disseminate voting information to upperclassmen students residing in the West Chester borough

**Evaluation:**

We will evaluate our action plan in the following ways:

West Chester University of Pennsylvania will use the National, Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement to evaluate the increase of student voting by comparing our campus voter turnout and voter registration rates to past elections to measure progress on increasing both. The university is currently undergoing its Carnegie Foundation Classification for Community Engagement reclassification process.

By using the ALL-IN Campus Voter Registration Portal, we will track our registration efforts via the data collected. We plan to track attendance and educational events and create an evaluation form for students to provide feedback on the event's helpfulness in understanding the election. We will collect attendance via anonymous headcount from post-election resources to determine the utilization of identity group-specific spaces by the campus population.

**Reporting:**

Our campus action plan will be posted on our campus page on ALL IN's website <https://allinchallenge.org/campuses/west-chester-university/>.

Our institution has given ALL IN permission to publish our past NSLVE reports, which can also be found on our campus page above. The action plan will be distributed by request to members of senior leadership and linked on CCESI's WCU Votes webpage.