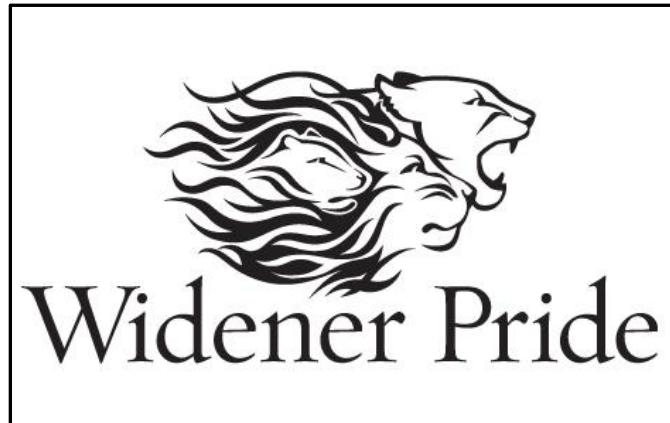




2020 Political Engagement Plan

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Leadership	2
Commitment	3
Landscape & NSLVE Data	5
Goals & Strategies	7
Reporting	8
Evaluation	9



Executive Summary

Widener University’s 2020 Political Engagement Plan was developed for the PA Campus Voting Challenge and All In Democracy Challenge in partnership with the Center for Civic and Global Engagement, the Political Science department, and the Political Engagement Committee. These key partners will oversee implementation with encouragement, support and feedback from senior leadership and key stakeholders, including faculty, staff, community partners and students.

The political action plan seeks to leverage existing civic and political engagement initiatives, raising intentionality in improving student voting rates, expanding our two-phased political education model and encouraging civic preparedness, lifelong, active citizenship and critical engagement with complex societal issues.

This plan was developed in response to our institution’s historic mission and strategic commitment to civic and political engagement and occurs concurrently with Widener University joining several key national initiatives including: the Wesleyan Engage 2020 initiative and the PA Campus Voting Challenge co-created by the All-In Democracy Challenge. Launched in spring 2020 with a short-term focus on the upcoming 2020 general primaries and presidential election cycles, the overarching goal for the plan is to incorporate a four-year educational approach to be re-evaluated in 2024.

Leadership

Widener's 2020 Political Engagement Plan will be coordinated by an Executive Team of three people: Dr. James Vike of the Political Science Department and Campus Program Director of Project Pericles, Dr. J. Wesley Leckrone, Chair of the Political Science Department and Chair of the campus-wide Political Engagement Committee, and Gretchen Mielke, Assistant Dean for Civic Engagement. The Executive Team will reach out to participating faculty and community groups to coordinate campus and local events.

The Executive Team will work with two groups. First, a Political Engagement Planning Committee will be composed of members of Widener Administration that promote engagement through their roles at the University, faculty members who have shown a sustained commitment to engagement, student groups whose mission includes political engagement, and community partners. The Planning Committee will serve three primary purposes. First, it will help identify curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities related to political engagement that are taking place on campus. Second, in conjunction with the Executive Committee, it will create a forward-looking engagement plan for each academic year. Finally, it will help publicize political engagement activities on campus.

The second group that will assist the Executive Team is a loosely organized Political Engagement Communications Network. Each semester the Executive Team will recruit and communicate with various faculty members who have indicated an intent to incorporate a political engagement component to one or more of their classes. The Executive Team will then stay in contact throughout the semester with this group to keep them apprised of political engagement activities and explore options to enhance participation and content programming through stronger linkages to the curriculum.

Members of the Political Engagement Planning Committee:

Administration

- Tim Cairry, Director, Student Success and Retention
- Uva Coles, Associate Vice President for Civic and Global Engagement
- Catherine Feminella, Associate Dean of Students, and Commissioner, Chester Housing Authority
- Kim O'Halloran, Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies and Extended Learning
- Office of Student Engagement representative

Faculty

- Brett Alvaré, Associate Professor, Anthropology
- Marina Barnett, Associate Professor, Social Work and Co-Director of Academic Service Learning Faculty Development Program
- Angie Corbo, Associate Professor and Department Chair, Communications Studies
- Brenda Kucirka, Associate Professor, Nursing

Student Groups

- Center for Civic and Global Engagement's Service Scholars Programs
- Pi Sigma Alpha: The Political Science Honors Society
- Student Government Association
- WUPAC: The Widener University Political Awareness Club

Community Partners

- Delaware County League of Women Voters (tentative)
- Christina Delva, Department of Public Affairs, City of Chester(tentative)
- Malcom Yates, Director of District Engagement and Constituent Outreach, U.S. Representative Mary Gay Scanlon - PA District #5 (tentative)
- State Representative Brian Kirkland's Office (tentative)
- State Senator Thomas Killion's Office (tentative)

Commitment

Widener University demonstrates its enduring commitment to increasing civic learning and democratic engagement through both words and deeds. The university has expressed this allegiance through communication of core values, programmatic and resource commitments, influential affiliations, innovative initiatives, and the receipt of numerous honors in the area.

It is safe to say that the commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is demonstrably weaved into the fabric of campus life. Of note is the fact that ten years ago, Widener faculty, senior leadership and the Board of Trustees approved an institution-wide learning objective closely related to enhancing characteristics of democratic engagement across the student body. Institutional Learning Objective #4 specifically says that students will demonstrate attributes of responsible citizenship. Components of the responsible citizenship learning objective include ethics, cultural competence, understanding of the purposes and techniques of engaged citizenship, and active participation in the social, economic, and political life of communities and larger world. The university established an initial assessment protocol and approved an institution-wide measurement rubric in 2015. A campus-wide examination of the depth and breadth of adherence to the ILO is on tap for the 2020-2021 academic year.

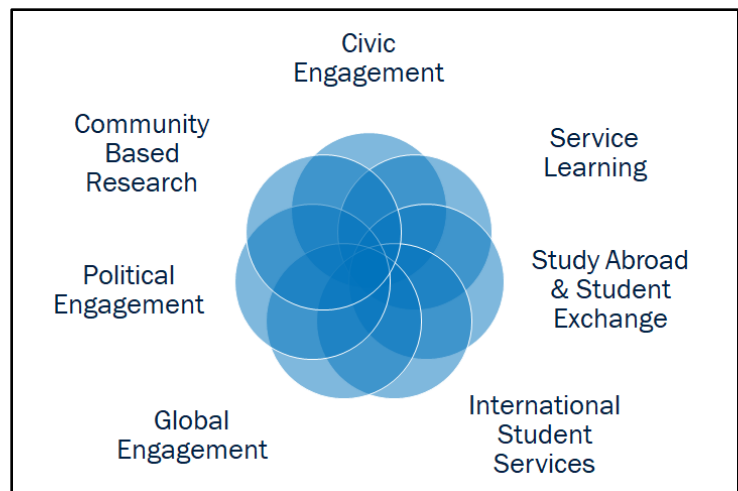
Widener University joined the Project Pericles consortium in 2006 and became a Bonner Partner in 2007 as a further expression of its commitment to civic and democratic values. Project Pericles is a consortium of 31 colleges and universities that promotes civic engagement and social responsibility within higher education. Periclean colleges and universities support curricular and co-curricular initiatives that prepare and encourage students to become active, responsible citizens. These initiatives span an array of efforts in the classroom, on campus and in the community. As a Bonner Partner, Widener is among 75 colleges and universities working to improve the lives of individuals and communities as part of the effort by The Bonner Foundation. Widener's Presidential Service Corps is a key facet of the Bonner Leaders program.

In order to promote political learning, civic discourse and political participation the university established the campus-wide Political Engagement Committee in 2007. The committee's charge

since then has been to coordinate efforts across academic and administrative units while championing the development of active democratic citizenship. In 2017, the Political Engagement Committee adopted a new model to guide programming decisions and to support greater intentionality in student development. The new model features two phases. Phase one focuses on empathy and understanding, while phase two focuses on expression and advocacy. The dual phase approach offers students exposure to knowledge building, information sharing and civil discourse exercises in a context that is more conducive to productive exchanges, while also offering experiential learning opportunities to enhance their ability to convincingly express preferences and effectively advocate for desired change.

Widener's Common Ground Initiative is an innovative aspirational model for colleges and universities to engage students, faculty, and staff in civil dialogue that teaches them to listen and bring together people with different perspectives. The initiative began with a kickoff event at the National Constitution Center in 2017 featuring an expert panel and student-led discussion on the topic of free speech on campus. The initiative has continued to thrive as an ongoing effort to activate participation in a thriving democracy by engaging the Widener community in challenging conversations that explore differences in open and respectful ways.

Widener recently extended its commitment to growth and prosperity in this area with the creation of the Center for Civic and Global Engagement (CCGE). The CCGE will act as an umbrella entity, seeking to aid coordination and champion excellence across seven previously dispersed campus programs and initiatives. The graphic to the right highlights the component parts of the new center, which cross academic, student services and community engagement aspects of university activities.



Lastly, it is important to note that Widener has received many honors recognizing its commitment and fulfillment toward institutional values centered on civic and democratic engagement. The various honors include:

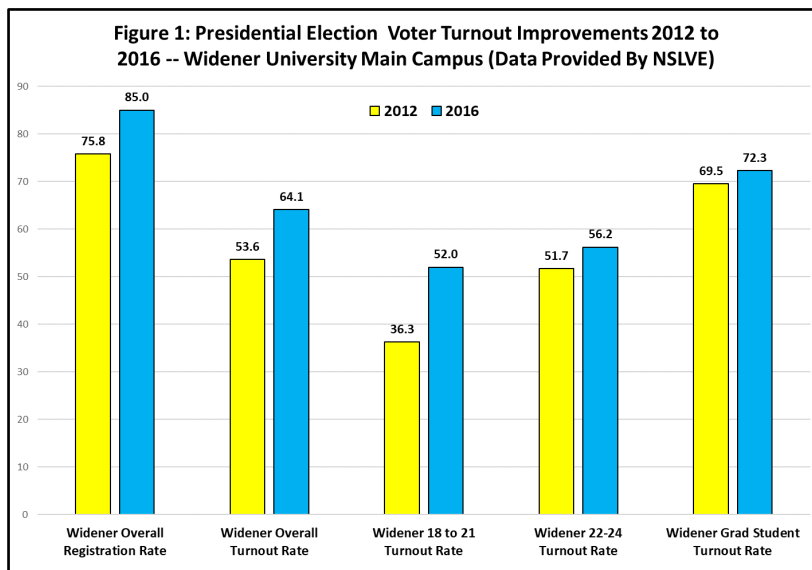
- Washington Monthly magazine ranked Widener 34th nationally in the category of promoting public service (2019)
- Pillars of Academia ranked Widener as #1 in PA (#16 in the country) for producing the most altruistic and civically-minded students (2017)
- Widener was one of only 14 institutions named as finalist for the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll award (2015)

- ❑ The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching chose Widener University as one of only 76 institutions in the nation to qualify for the “community engagement” classification (2015)
- ❑ Newsweek magazine ranked Widener University the No. 19 service-minded college in the nation (2010)
- ❑ NASCE data indicates that 79% of Widener undergraduate students participate in service or civic engagement; 27% higher than the national average (2017)

Current Landscape & NSLVE Results

The current campus landscape for civic and democratic engagement on the Widener University main campus is strong. The campus culture features a strong commitment to civic and democratic engagement among the students and ample programming and curricular/co-curricular partnerships to further the agenda. The campus has committed substantial attention to achieving notable improvements across numerous measures over the last decade and is proud to maintain a prominent position among peer institutions. Since we previously discussed the campus-wide institutional learning objective centered on responsible citizenship, we will focus the current landscape section on NSLVE data and items focused more narrowly on voter participation.

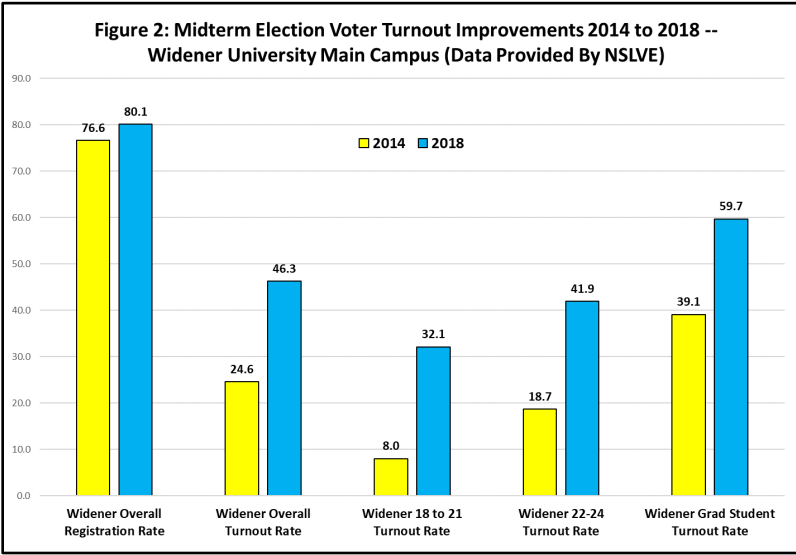
Widener University has participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement since the 2012 election. Focused and intentional efforts (by the Political Engagement Committee, the Office of Civic Engagement and numerous academic programs) to improve



student political engagement and voter participation during the 2016 presidential election cycle and the 2018 midterm election cycle have been informed by these survey results. We were pleased to report that main campus student participation improved dramatically in both 2016 and 2018. Figure 1 displays improvements from 2012 to 2016 in registration rates, campus-wide turnout, and

voter turnout rates across all age bands. Of particular note are the improvements in overall registration rates and turnout among younger undergraduate students. From a comparative perspective, the campus-wide turnout rate for the 2016 election exceeded the national turnout rate and the turnout rate in both Pennsylvania and Delaware County. Our 64% turnout rate also exceeded the mean rate among Carnegie private research institutions by nearly 14%.

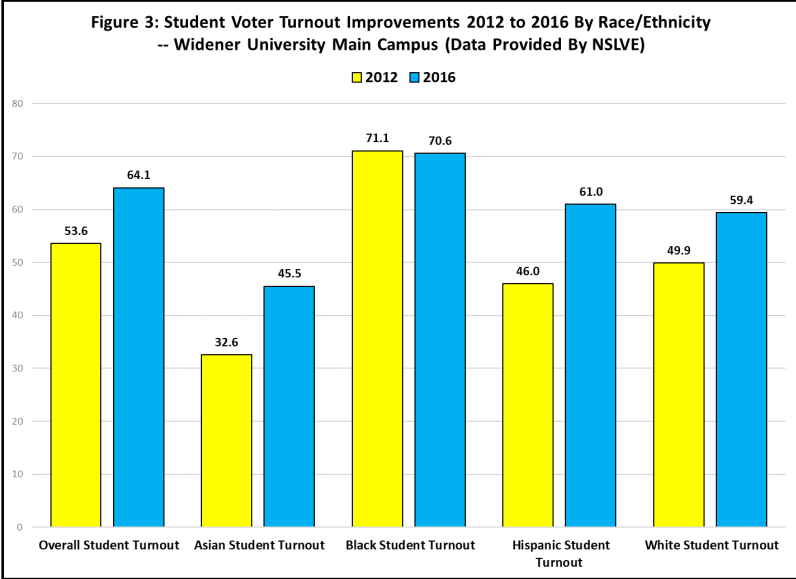
Figure 2 displays similarly positive results from the 2018 midterm election. Although improvement rates are somewhat skewed due to particularly low participation rates among



younger students in 2014, the improvements highlight an intentional area of focus for our political engagement efforts leading into the 2016 and 2018 election cycles. Main campus turnout in the 2018 election cycle again exceeded national youth voting rates and mean rates for institutions in our Carnegie classification. The sustained high level of voter registration among students from the 2016 rate is a positive

indicator of the continued commitment to mobilizing young voters as they matriculate into school.

Widener senior leadership and the Political Engagement Committee members remain attentive to



the potential for participatory inequities or institutional barriers to voting that have historically negatively impacted some student populations. We are mindful of this concern and are pleased that our turnout comparisons, when viewed across race / ethnicity categories, do not indicate disparities among traditionally underrepresented and/or disenfranchised groups. Data displayed in Figure 3 highlights

a sustained high participation rate among black students and positive gains in 2016 across each other category.

An analysis of our two most recent NSLVE reports has informed our plans for the 2020 election cycle. We intend to sustain and enhance our voter registration efforts heading into the fall semester. We have experience prior voter registration challenges due to the fact that our both our residential and commuter students come from numerous states with different policies and deadlines. This requires training and outreach commitments to help students make informed choices about their registration location. Given the potential for a diminished on-campus

presence in the fall, we intend to enhance our voter registration efforts through enhanced digital communications and by targeting new students through affiliations with our First Year Experience (FYE), Living Learning Community (LLC) programs, and individual faculty members.

We intend to pursue a comprehensive array of efforts to improve voter education and participation rates across the board in 2020. Areas we have identified that may be particularly strengthened include younger cohort students, graduate students, and students in programs and disciplines that have had lower participation rates in prior cycles. As mentioned previously, our outreach efforts will undoubtedly focus on enhancing engagement among new and returning undergraduate students. We also intend to work with the Graduate Studies Office to enhance outreach and programming offerings to the broad range of full-time, part-time graduate students. Academic programs that have had underwhelming participation rates identified in prior reports include students in Engineering, Business and some of the sciences.

Goals & Strategies

Institutionally, Widener University will join the national Wesleyan Engage 2020 Initiative and commit to furthering its three guiding principles:

- Developing civic preparedness is a core element of the mission of American higher education.
- Participating in American political life helps students learn from a diversity of ideas and people while developing skills for lifelong, active citizenship.
- Empowering students and teachers to engage with the complex issues facing the country are crucial facets of higher education's contributions to the common good.

Leverage existing voter education and registration efforts to continue to enhance voting rates, particularly targeting the 18-21-year-old age group.

- Focus on mail-in ballot education during the coronavirus environment. This will help with remote voter participation. (Spring 2020 and Fall 2020)
- Continue development and dissemination of digital content
- Partner with other university departments and faculty to execute voter education presentations with freshman seminars, living learning communities and other relevant courses (Fall 2020)
- Partner with faculty to add voter registration and GOTV information directly into the course syllabi. (Spring 2020 and Fall 2020)

Participate in the PA Campus Voting Challenge, partnered with the All In Democracy Challenge:

- Increase student voting rates, help students form the habits of active and informed citizenship, and make democratic participation a core value on our campus.
- Convene a campus-wide working group (political engagement committee) that includes members from academic affairs, student affairs, the student body, and any other relevant stakeholders.

- Continue ongoing participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) in order to measure our student voting rates.
- Develop and implement a data-driven action plan to improve civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation.
- Share our campus' action plan and NSLVE results with the Challenge in order to be eligible for a recognition seal and / or awards.

Continue to expand the usage of our two-phase political education model in events and activities: (Phase 1) Empathy and Understanding and (Phase 2) Expression and Advocacy

- Federal/State Legislative information forum
- Fall Constitution Days
- Census 2020 briefing and spring 2020 track outreach
- Debate Watch
- Issue Awareness events (centrally organized and course-based)
- Exit polling

Partner with other university departments and faculty to execute political education and voting presentations with relevant courses (Fall 2020)

- POL Advocacy Challenge: Student loan debt
- SSCI 120: Engaged Citizenship and SSCI 202: Current Issues in Political Engagement
- Numerous collaborating faculty currently being recruited for fall
- Target graduate programs and relevant courses

Partner with Human Resources to encourage staff to utilize a new election day policy in order to encourage access to voting on election day.

- Spring 2020/Fall 2020 outreach. The Volunteer Time Off policy can also be utilized for administrators and staff who want to volunteer during election day. Policy Approved May 2020)

Reporting

The plan will be shared via a portal and email with our key partners (including departments, student organizations and community partners), and senior leaders for feedback in spring 2020. The plan will be implemented and assessed annually by the Political Engagement Committee and the executive team members. Widener will continue to participate in the NSLVE study and obtain results to gauge our institution's voting participation rates. The NSLVE data will be shared with the All In Democracy Challenge as a way to inform the public. Other proxy variables such as attendance at campus and class events, and tracking voter registration data from voter registration drives will be utilized.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be an important part of our work confirming that we are being successful in attaining our political educational goals, confirming areas of strength and indicating future areas of focus. The political action plans will be evaluated by a series of evaluation tools. The NSLVE study will remain a center piece for learning more about our institutional voter participation rates. However, Widener will utilize additional tools such as pre-and post-tests in our partner courses, institutional research related to citizenship (institutional learning outcome # 4), and ongoing evaluation efforts of the Center for Civic and Global Engagement through partners like the National Assessment of Service and Civic Engagement (NASCE). The Center for Civic and Global Engagement will continue to implement event and program level evaluations (such as event attendance records, voter registration numbers, and community impact metrics). Widener will continue to provide evaluation efforts and reporting related to pursuing renewal of the Carnegie Foundation's Classification for Community Engagement and national partnerships with the Bonner Foundation, the Maguire Foundation, Project Pericles, Wesleyan Engage 2020 and more.