

ACTION PLAN

SECTION I: Executive Summary

Winthrop University is a regional, public, Master's level institution dedicated to improving the state of South Carolina. Promoting civic engagement is a key value of the institution shared by the Divisions of Student Life and Academic Affairs alike.

According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), in recent elections Winthrop University students cast ballots at a slightly higher rate than students at other public, Master's level institutions and the national average. Though Winthrop students vote at higher rates than the national average, these turnout rates still leave room for improvement. Our hope is that the coordinated efforts planned for the 2022 election season will generate interest in and enthusiasm for the midterm election on campus and result in higher student engagement and turnout.

This report details Winthrop University's Action Plan for the 2022 midterm election, collectively branded as *Decision 2022*.

SECTION II: Leadership

"This section describes the team that is responsible and accountable for the institution's efforts to increase civic learning and democratic engagement."

Winthrop's Decision 2022 team will be led by a Steering Committee of campus leaders on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE). Initially convened in 2013, the 2022 Steering Committee has been streamlined to include those on campus who take an active role in civic engagement. The CLDE Steering Committee will be implementing the action plan for democratic engagement and will comprise the core of the Decision 2022 team. Steering Committee members are:

Dr. Shelia Burkhalter, Vice President for Student Affairs

Ms. Nicole Chisari, Communications Coordinator, Communications and Marketing

Dr. Jennifer Leigh Disney, Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science and Director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program

Dr. John Holder, Faculty, Department of Political Science

Ms. Judy Longshaw, News & Media Services Manager, Office of Communications and Marketing

Ms. Liz Moore, Academic Advisor, Richard Riley College of Education

Ms. Katarina Moyon, Director of the John C. West Forum on Politics and Policy and Co-Director of HMXP 102, the Human Experience

This Steering Committee leadership team will work with two larger groups, the Network on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (NCLDE) and Winthrop Student Voting Ambassadors (WSVA). The NCLDE group is comprised of approximately twenty faculty, staff, and community members who are engaged in community and civic engagement. This group will work with the CLDE Steering Committee as needed on activities in the 2022 Action Plan. Updated 2020 network members are listed below. We will reach out to all members, and new hires, to ensure they continue their important collaboration.

Ms. Kinyata Brown, Assistant Dean for Diversity, Engagement and Inclusion, Office of Diversity and Student Engagement

Ms. Beth Covington, Public Relations & Training Coordinator, York County Board of Voter Registration and Elections

Ms. Karen Derksen, Director of Winthrop Galleries, College of Visual and Performing Arts

Ms. Elizabeth Dulemba, Associate Professor of Design, College of Visual and Performing Arts

Dr. Adrienne Edwards, Director of Human Development and Family Sciences, Assistant Professor of Counseling Leadership and Educational Studies, College of Education

Dr. Margaret Gillikin, Director of Social Studies Education Program and Coordinator of Community-Based Learning minor, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Crystal Glover, Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Pedagogy, College of Education

Dr. Jeannie Haubert, Department Chair, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Amanda Hiner, Critical Reading, Thinking, and Writing (CRTW) Director, Associate Professor of English, College of Arts and Sciences

Ms. Whitney Hough, Director of Communications and Community Engagement, College of Visual and Performing Arts

Dr. Nicholas Moellman, Assistant Professor of Accounting Finance and Economics, College of Business Administration

Ms. Claire Mooney-Melvin, Director of Academic and Student Services for Athletics

Dr. Leigh Poole, Director of the International Center

Dr. Don Rakestraw, Chair, Professor of History, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Kelly Richardson, WRIT101 Director, Professor of English, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Danko Tarabar, Assistant Professor of Accounting Finance and Economics, College of Business Administration

Ms. Celeste Tiller, Director of External Relations and Institute of Management, College of Business Administration

Dr. Bradley Tripp, Associate Professor of Sociology, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Virginia Williams, Director of Individualized Studies major and Coordinator, Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies and Civic and Public Engagement minors, College of Arts and Sciences

Vacant, Director of Academy of Learning (ACAD), University College

The second group, Winthrop Student Voting Ambassadors (WSVA), will be selected to work on aspects of the 2022 Action plan related to voter outreach and turnout through social media. WSVA will be trained to help students access our new TurboVote voter information and registration program. WSVA will also be asked to place information regularly on social media regarding registration, elections, and voter information events. All Voting Ambassadors will receive a Road to the White House T-Shirt to wear when working as Voting Ambassadors.

The Steering Committee will coordinate voter registration, education, and turnout efforts in 2022, collectively known as Decision 2022 activities, and beyond. In addition, student leaders, including the Council of Student Leaders, College Democrats, and College Republicans, will be invited to join the Decision 2022 team as appropriate. Task Force leadership will also collaborate with the University's Office of Public Events and local Democratic and Republican party leadership.

The Task Force will work with the York County Election Commission throughout this process. In the past, the University has hosted the York County Election Commission to train student voting ambassadors on the essentials of South Carolina voting law, and Ms. Beth Covington, from the local county election office is invited to once again join our NCLDE.

The Steering Committee will meet as needed in spring 2022 as it undertakes voter registration and education efforts prior to the South Carolina primary June 14, 2022 and the general election on November 8, 2022. The Steering Committee will communicate with NCLDE members and WSVA electronically and in-person, as appropriate.

SECTION III: Commitment

This section describes how the institution demonstrates its commitment to increasing civic learning and democratic

engagement.

Leadership Support: Winthrop University leadership has in the past committed to civic learning and democratic engagement from the highest levels. In 2021 the University purchased TurboVote software to help students, faculty, and alumni stay engaged in the voting process. We are in the midst of conducting a presidential search. Voting engagement faculty and staff plan to continue to work as closely with the new president on voter engagement initiatives and issues. Staff also work with the full support of the Provost on voter engagement initiatives.

Integration in the University's Mission and Supporting Documents: The opening sentence of Winthrop University Mission Statement reads, "Winthrop University provides personalized and challenging undergraduate, graduate, and continuing professional education programs of national caliber *within a context dedicated to public service to the nation and to the State of South Carolina.*" (Emphasis added). The University's strategic plan reinforces this statement by recognizing the importance of community engagement. In particular, Strategic Plan Goal 2.2 states, "increase opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to interact with organizations in the community, with an emphasis on enhancing our impact on the surrounding community."

Academic Goals: Winthrop University has four University-Level Competencies (ULCs), which are skills and habits of mind that transcend undergraduate programs. While all four are important to civic learning and democratic engagement, two are especially germane:

Competency 2: Winthrop graduates are personally and socially responsible.

Winthrop University graduates value integrity, perceive moral dimensions, and achieve excellence. They take seriously the perspectives of others, practice ethical reasoning, and reflect on experiences. *Winthrop graduates have a sense of responsibility to the broader community and contribute to the greater good* (Emphasis added).

Competency 3: Winthrop graduates understand the interconnected nature of the world and the time in which they live.

Winthrop University graduates comprehend the historical, social, and global contexts of their disciplines and their lives. They also recognize how their chosen area of study is inextricably linked to other fields. *Winthrop graduates collaborate with members of diverse academic, professional, and cultural communities as informed and engaged citizens* (Emphasis added).

To support these ULCs, the Winthrop University General Education program has a three credit-hour Constitution Requirement. These courses are expected to cover the United States Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and the "essentials" of the *Federalist Papers*, and The Emancipation Proclamation, and one or more documents foundational to the African-American freedom struggle. In addition, students in the required freshmen seminar, ACAD 101, conduct a food drive for a local charity each year, and one of the ACAD 101 lesson plans is dedicated to political and civic engagement. CLDE member Katarina Moyon helps update and revise that lesson yearly.

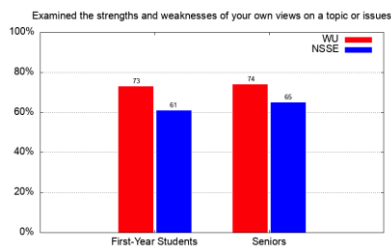
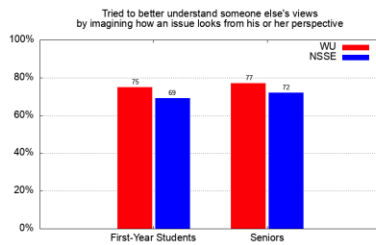
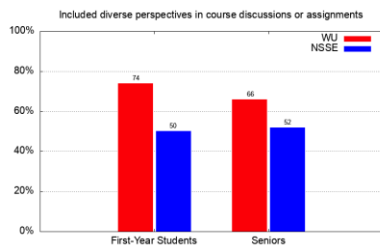
Co-curricular programming: Winthrop undergraduates are required to attend 18 cultural events prior to graduation. These include theatre, dance, and musical performances; gallery talks; film; and public lectures, forums, and discussions on issues of societal concern. Political and social themes pervade the cultural event offerings.

Civic engagement is infused throughout the co-curricular programs as well. The Office of Career Engagement facilitates volunteer opportunities for student organizations across campus. They also collaborate with faculty to incorporate service learning into their courses. Fraternities and sororities regularly raise funds for national causes. Student athletic teams also donate thousands of hours to community service projects. Approximately 400 students participate in the Martin Luther King Day of Service each year. Finally, Student Life professionals are engaged in voter registration and turnout efforts.

By state law, Winthrop is closed on Election Day during federal elections (presidential and midterm).

Assessment of Civic Learning: Civic learning is assessed in a variety of ways. The University Level Competencies are assessed regularly by personnel in University College. Offices in the Division of Student Life regularly assess their performance and use these results to improve their operations.

Second, Winthrop participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE annually collects information from hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about first-year and senior students' perspective on their learning. The results are presented to the University community and they will be published on the university's web site. The latest results indicate that Winthrop is especially strong in offering students a civic education and better understanding of the challenges of living in a democracy. In examples culled from the 2021 report, NSSE asked Winthrop students whether their university did the following things and compared them to national NSSE survey results.



Finally, student registration and voter turnout rates are assessed by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and these data are shared campus wide. Information regarding Winthrop's success with student voter registration is sent to local media via press releases. Several members of our steering committee also work in the University media relations office. In this way we are able to make our reports and information public.

SECTION IV: Landscape

Student Engagement: The NSSE and NSLVE assessment tools show that Winthrop students are more engaged in curricular and co-curricular activities than their peers nationally and at institutions of a similar type, as mentioned above.

Winthrop students are also more likely to be registered and to vote than their peers nationally and at public four-year institutions. Table 1 summarizes Winthrop student voter registration and turn out rates from 2012-2018.

Table 1: Winthrop Student Voter Registration and Turnout Rates, 2012-2018

	Student Voter Registration Rates		Student Voter Turnout Rates		
	Winthrop	National	Winthrop	4-year Public	National
2014	70.5%	65.6%	19.9%	29.9%	29.2%
2016	83.5%	70.4%	58.1%	49.8%	48.3%
2018	79.4%	73.4%	40.1%	53.0%	54.9%
2020	89%	83%	74.5%	65%	66%

Source: National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 Reports and [website](#)

While there is room for improvement, these data show that Winthrop University students are registered and vote at higher rates than their peers at public institutions, and college students nationally.

Gratifyingly, Winthrop University's efforts to encourage student voter turnout in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, led to an 16.4% increase over 2016. The University's *Decision 2020* efforts led to its designation as a Voter Friendly Campus and to earning a Gold Seal from the All In Campus Democracy Challenge, this is an improvement from our Bronze Seal in the 2016 presidential elections.

Curriculum and Co-Curricular Efforts: Commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is infused throughout the Winthrop student experience. See Section III.

Internal Barriers: Winthrop University identified the following internal barriers to increasing its student voter registration and turn out efforts:

Lack of financial resources: Winthrop University's operating budget is spartan and many of these resources are already committed. Consequently, securing additional resources for new initiatives is difficult and redirecting existing revenues from other worthy efforts is problematic.

Lack of human resources: Likewise, Winthrop University operates with minimal staffing for its size and level of activity. A drop in student enrollment over the past few years has made the financial situation at the university grim. Faculty have substantial teaching and advising responsibilities and Student Life staff have multiple and varied responsibilities. To save money, most positions where people leave have not been replaced. As a result, adding new duties to already full plates is difficult. Additionally, we have lost several key personnel with knowledge and experience with the 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections who have not been replaced, and where there are no plans for replacements.

Faculty and staff morale: More than a decade of lean operating budgets, staffing shortages, heavy workloads, and small-or-nonexistent raises have taken their toll on employee morale. Asking faculty and staff to engage in *Decision 2022* activities, especially when such activities seem far removed from their primary responsibilities, is likely to be met with resistance.

Internal bureaucratic processes: Seemingly simple tasks require multiple approvals and take time. Each hurdle is also a possible "veto point," where a request could be denied.

Student antipathy to "snail mail:" South Carolina allows electronic voter registration; however, requesting an absentee ballot requires downloading and mailing a form. (Only some county election commissions permit forms to be emailed or faxed.) Absentee ballots must be mailed or hand delivered by 7 p.m. on Election Day. Students procrastinate and may not send in their absentee ballot request forms or absentee ballots in a timely fashion. A TurboVote membership should help counteract some of this inertia.

Student antipathy to email: Students likewise prefer to communicate over social media, and say they generally check email only when necessary for class. This creates a challenge for voter registration and awareness efforts.

External Barriers: One of the greatest barriers to increasing student voter registration and turnout rates is South

Carolina election law. Among the challenges the law poses are:

An early registration deadline: The deadline to register or change registration is 30 days before an election.

Voter ID requirement: Voters must present a government-issued photo ID when voting. Even though Winthrop is a public institution, a student ID is not a valid form of ID for voting purposes.

No early voting: South Carolina does not allow early voting, although each county allows absentee voting in person prior to Election Day. However, voters must report to the election office in the county in which they are registered to take advantage of this opportunity.

In addition, other exogenous factors create barriers, namely:

Inaccessible Polling Place: In 2016, the York County Election Commission moved the polling place for the precinct that includes Winthrop's residence halls from a building adjacent to campus to one about five blocks away on a remote side street. The York County Election Commission mistakenly believed that the building historically used as a polling place was owned by the University and that the University did not want a polling place on campus. Unfortunately, there are no plans to change the voting location in the 2022 election cycle.

2022 Redistricting: Since the 2020 Census, districts around Winthrop University and across the state are being redrawn. Raising awareness among students and faculty of impacts on their districts will be a challenge in this first post-redistricting election.

An historically difficult relationship with the York County Election Commission: Previously, the York County Election Commission refused voter registration applications from Winthrop students living on campus and/or required them to provide proof of residency beyond what was required by state law. This practice has now ended. While the relationship between the Election Commission and the University is improving, memories of this unfortunate history remain.

North Carolina media market: Winthrop is located in the Charlotte, North Carolina media market. North Carolina's election laws permit early voting and have different deadlines and polling place hours. Despite our best efforts, this can be a source of confusion.

Resources Available: In spite of these challenges, Winthrop University has resources available to help achieve its voter participation goals. These include:

Experienced team members: Several members of the CLDE Task Force were engaged in the *Decision 2018* and *2020* efforts. The most successful activities will be replicated in 2022.

An engaged student body: As the NSSE data show, Winthrop's students show high levels of engagement inside and outside the classroom. Many of these students are further mobilized by current events. Some of this student energy can be translated into voter registration, education, and turnout efforts.

Effective branding: The *Decision 2018* and *2020* activities were unified by effective use of a common logo. This logo will be updated for 2022 and will provide a recognizable graphic for use publicly.

Additional Resources Required:

Financial and personnel resources added to appropriate operating budgets to cover miscellaneous costs during the 2022 election cycle. The West Forum is slated to lose its 10-hour per week administrative support beginning in the fall 2022 academic year due to lower enrollments and cost savings. This will make it well-nigh impossible to operate at full capacity for the election cycle. Other costs associated with running a voter registration campaign may include publicity, posting, and purchase or rental of minor equipment.

Ideas from faculty and staff who work with relatively low-turnout populations (Computer Information Systems, Business Management and Marketing, Physical Sciences) of how to engage with their students are needed. We will include faculty from those departments in our NCLDE and choose students from those majors as Voting Ambassadors as well.

SECTION V: Goals

Winthrop University has turnout and registration goals for the 2022 midterm election cycle.

Turnout Goals: According to the 2018 midterm National Study on Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) Report, the Winthrop University Student Voter Turnout Rate was 40.1%, this was a **20.2% increase** from our 2014 midterm voting rate. This was an enormous increase in our voting rate, but did not reach the state 2018 voting rate of 43% of South Carolina voting age population. Our result was in line with the 40% voting rate of all NSLVE Institutions in 2018. According to The United States Elections Project, the 2018 midterm election had the highest voter turnout rate for a midterm election since 1914, at 49.3%.

Since 2022 is another midterm election year, we will target our goals to the 2018 data. For 2022, Winthrop University seeks to increase student voter turnout to 42%; a 2% increase. This increase is a modest goal given our current personnel challenges discussed above.

Registration Goals: According to the 2018 NSLVE Report, 79.4% of Winthrop University were registered to vote. By 2020, that number had risen to 89.5%. Our 2022 goal is to raise registration by 2%, thereby getting closer to our presidential election year number.

SECTION VI: Strategy

Winthrop University will pursue a multifaceted strategy to encourage student voter registration and turnout. We will continue our successful initiatives in *Decision 2022*, including:

- Using *Decision 2022* logos to unify the disparate campus events and activities.
- Train students as Voting Ambassadors to encourage student voter registration and absentee voting and having the Voting Ambassadors conduct an online social media campaign for voting, with possible occasional visits to courses and attendance of cultural events with relevant content.
- Host candidate visits and forums, discussions, and public lectures on issues on the public agenda.
- Publicizing and participating in National Voter Registration Day 2022 (September 22, 2022).
- Distributing information about TurboVote and encouraging students to register.
- Distributing voting information via to faculty, staff, and students via email and on the website.
- If necessary, providing transportation to polls on Election Day.
- Include “mail your absentee ballot” reminders to the email blasts prior to elections.
- Secure permission to include voter registration deadline and “mail your absentee ballot” reminders on the Wingspan student portal “Announcements” section.
- Work with Athletic department leadership to help student athletes vote absentee. These students disproportionately represent out-of-state students. Practice and game schedules may complicate their efforts to vote on Election Day.

Targeted efforts: NSLVE data helps the *Decision 2022* team identify and target low-turnout student demographic groups. They include Freshmen and Sophomores, who are the least likely to vote. Students majoring in Computer Science, Business Management and Marketing, and Physical Sciences are the majors with the lowest voter turnout in 2020. Increasing the voter turnout of these populations even by a few percentage points would have a measurable impact on Winthrop's overall voter turnout rate.

Specific strategies to reach these populations include: Student Voting Ambassadors targeting relevant clubs, classes and honor societies, as well as rollout of voting registration and election information to the specific departments where the target students are located.

Timeline: The CLDE Steering Committee will meet with academic leadership in Spring 2022 to secure permission to place voting information reminders on the Wingspan and Blackboard student portals.

Most activities will take place between August 15 and November 8, 2022, including Voting Ambassador Activities, outreach to targeted groups, participation in National Voter Registration Day, and continued campus events.

The Steering Committee will meet after the election season to assess successes and challenges during the election season. We will work together to make 2024 even stronger than 2022. When the committee meets to debrief, we will devise a new plan moving forward.