

# University of North Carolina Asheville Action Plan—2022

## Executive Summary

The University of North Carolina Asheville (UNCA) sees civic engagement as a hallmark of our institution. As the public liberal arts college in the UNC system, we pride ourselves on curricular and extra-curricular programs that promote high-impact student experiences, encourage community engagement, and foster the development of leadership skills.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, our institution’s strategic plan emphasizes the importance of encouraging students to engage in civic leadership and to participate in democratic processes.<sup>2</sup> UNCA students are incredibly invested in social justice and are very involved in politics. Indeed, in 2021, the *Princeton Review* ranked UNCA in the top 20 for “Most Politically Active Students.”<sup>3</sup> We believe this to be one of our strongest assets, and we undertake efforts further promote and support such engagement among the students, faculty, and staff.

These efforts to promote democratic engagement on the UNCA campus are supported by a variety of different organizations and offices on campus including (though not limited to): the Student Affairs Division, the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning, the Student Organization Council, the Political Science Department, and many student organizations. Representatives from each of these organizations (faculty, staff, and student), as well as from other offices/organizations, have agreed to serve on a voter engagement committee to plan, oversee, and coordinate all registration, mobilization, turnout, and other election-oriented activities on UNCA’s campus for the 2022 elections and beyond. As noted, our efforts are a reflection of our university’s wider commitment to engagement and service to the community.

Our overarching goals, to be discussed in greater detail below, are to increase voter turnout in the 2022 election relative to past midterm elections (especially among the 18-25 year old demographic), to provide easy access to non-partisan candidate and ballot information, to provide information about and clarify confusion over election law, and to provide greater access to the polls for members of the campus community. We also hope to support other organizations in the Asheville/Western North Carolina region doing this work in the wider community. More generally, we hope to contribute to the culture of engagement on our campus. While we are aware that our goals may not all be accomplished in a single year or single election cycle, we believe the plan herein described lays the foundations for doing so over time. This document will cover both our short-term goals for this election cycle and longer-term goals as an institution in these areas. Our efforts, however, are always a work in progress, and we adapt to the landscape and circumstances as needed. We intend to update our action plan formally every two-years, though we constantly seek to improve upon it.

We strongly believe that our students are the best advocates for civic engagement among their peers. Thus, the faculty and staff involved in these efforts on campus like to follow the lead of and help implement the ideas of the students who are the heart of these efforts. Our goal is to provide the support and guidance they need to execute their innovations. Most of the engagement on campus relies on interpersonal and in-person connection between students, faculty, staff, and community members. This includes in-person registration drives, panel discussions, documentary viewings, candidate visits to campus, and information sessions. However, due to the pandemic, we have experimented with developing more online resources and engagement opportunities, with some success. This has included the launch of the UNCA Votes website.<sup>4</sup> We intend to continue these virtual efforts, even as in-person events take center stage again. We believe this can only help to increase participation and make our efforts more inclusive of a wider swath of the campus community.

We have participated in the All-In Challenge since the period prior to the 2016 election, and we have benefited from the resources and motivation it provides our institution. We also participate in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement.<sup>5</sup> to inform our strategies and reflect on the strengths and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unca.edu/about/mission-values/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://strategicplan.unca.edu/strategic-direction-3-community-engagement>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unca.edu/events-and-news/stories/princeton-review-the-best-386-colleges-2021-edition/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://vote.unca.edu/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://idhe.tufts.edu/ns1ve>

weaknesses of our current framework for engagement. Further, we have developed very rich partnerships with the community outside our campus and work with the Campus Vote Project, NC Campus Compact, the Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP), Democracy NC, the League of Women Voters, and other organizations to register and mobilize voters and educate the campus and wider community about elections and politics more generally. We are constantly working to build new partnerships both on and off campus to support these efforts and to better represent a diversity of perspectives, approaches, and ideas on these issues.

The planning for and implementation of the goals and strategies subsequently described are already underway; in particular, we have already begun to encourage engagement in the 2022 election cycle. During the 2021-2022 academic year, we hosted a variety of candidates on campus to help inform our community about the May 2022 primaries, particularly in terms of who was running for office and what they stand for. We conducted several voter registration drives, as well. Further, we provided free shuttles to the polls in April 2022 during the early voting period for the May primaries—our goal was to ensure that students had access to the polls before they dispersed for the summer. Our efforts will pick up again once students return to campus in August 2022; we are spending the summer formulating a more concrete game plan so that roll out in the Fall is as smooth as possible. Our efforts will extend beyond the November election, however. We are committed to continual efforts on campus in this regard, even if those efforts are most visible in the months immediately prior to an election.

This report was primarily completed by Ashley Moraguez, an Associate Professor of Political Science, in consultation with those listed in the next section. Please direct questions and comments to [amorague@unca.edu](mailto:amorague@unca.edu).

## Leadership

As mentioned above, engagement efforts on UNCA’s campus are supported by multiple offices, student organizations, academic departments, and individuals on campus. Our working group overseeing and planning the efforts most intimately includes a key group of faculty and staff on campus:

- Correne Anderson, Associate Director of Cultural Events & Engaged Citizenship, Key Center for Community Engaged Learning
- Kate Johnson, Director of the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning
- Ashley Moraguez, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Robert Straub, Director of Student Development & advisor to Student Government Association, Student Affairs

This core group of faculty and staff aim to coordinate and oversee the electoral and civic engagement efforts on campus to prevent redundancy and to promote collaboration instead of competition. Our biggest strength lies in providing institutional memory to these efforts. While some of our student leaders graduate each year, we are a constant. We help the next round of leaders with the associated learning curve and provide the context and information necessary for student efforts to succeed. We also help with some of the logistics of planning events, such as campus-wide communications, booking spaces, and budgeting. We also keep the Student and Academic Affairs divisions aware of the engagement efforts on campus. Cori and Kate represent the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning, which exists to connect students, faculty, and staff to community partners to address social issues.<sup>6</sup> Robert represents our Student Development offices within Student Affairs; his work touches all areas of student life, and he advises the Student Government Association. Ashley Moraguez, as a member of the faculty, represents Academic Affairs and serves as the adviser to several student organizations behind the engagement efforts. This committee also serves as the line of communication between the university administration and the students leading the efforts. We have also worked with the Communications team and other offices on campus to advertise our efforts and accomplishments. Such partnerships led to the creation of the UNCA Votes website, which is now largely maintained by students.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup><https://keycenter.unca.edu/>

<sup>7</sup><https://vote.unca.edu/>

In addition to the faculty and staff mentioned, student leaders are also a critical part of the efforts on campus. Our student leaders are passionate about democratic participation, have new and innovative ideas, and are the most effective leaders in these efforts. While they may not have the institutional knowledge and memory of the faculty and staff, they do know the student body. As such, they have invaluable knowledge about what kind of resources, support, and events our students need and want to see around civic, election, and democratic engagement.

Among the student body, the Political Science Club typically takes primary responsibility for planning and executing voter registration and mobilization events, in consultation with other groups. The Student Government Association also consistently helps with these efforts. New organizations are also being brought into the fold for the 2022 elections. In the 2021-2022 academic year, the College Democrat and College Republican student organizations, as well as the student chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, were re-established after going dormant during the pandemic. These newly reestablished organizations are interested in helping to organize and in innovating for the 2022 election cycle and beyond. Indeed, they have already been pivotal in terms of campus engagement around the 2022 primaries, helping to organize shuttles to the polls and inviting candidates to campus. Further, we have 3 Campus Election Engagement Project Civic Influencers<sup>8</sup> and a fellow with the Campus Vote Project<sup>9</sup> on campus, who work on these efforts regularly; these four students are compensated for their fellowships. The key identified student leaders involved in engagement efforts for the 2022-2023 academic year are:

- Allison Lyall, President of the Political Science Club
- Hope Sikes, Vice President of the Political Science Club and Campus Vote Fellow
- Ona Elkins, Treasurer of the Political Science Club
- Eleanor Sullivan, Secretary of the Political Science Club
- Abby Florek, Speaker of the House for the Political Science Club and CEEP Civic Influencer
- Hannah Goldfarb, President of the College Democrats and CEEP Civic Influencer
- Sophie Ross, President of the College Republicans
- Cale Belcher, President of the Student Chapter of the ACLU
- Joe Franco, CEEP Civic Influencer and officer in the Sunrise Movement student organization

Our working group is committed to being inclusive to all faculty, staff, and students interested in leading engagement efforts on campus, as our goal is to not only engage the student body but the entire campus community. Further, we are always looking to recruit new members who can bring fresh perspectives and new ideas with which we can work. While there is no official chair to our working group, as it is a very collaborative and equal partnership, the main organizing members are Ashley Moraguez and Kate Johnson. They work to recruit new faculty, staff, and students into these efforts. However, most of the recruitment of new members comes from our current student leaders who collaborate and work with other students and then bring them into these efforts. Our group is ever-evolving. Some members of the committee will start meeting regularly (1-2 times per month) over the summer to begin 2022 general election planning in earnest. Student leaders also have a shared Google folder for event planning over the summer. As the Fall semester approaches, we plan to start having full committee meetings to begin concrete planning for the Fall. Once the Fall semester begins, the plan is to meet regularly and more often—the frequency will be determined by the plans and events we lay out for ourselves.

It is important to note that there is turnover in membership of our working group from year to year, especially among the students who work on these efforts. However, there are succession plans and resources

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<sup>8</sup><https://civicinfluencers.org/about-us/civic-influencers-2/>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.campusvoteproject.org/>

in place to account for such turnover. The Political Science academic department is committed to consistently providing faculty (and some financial) support to voter registration efforts. A member of the Political Science faculty will regularly advise the Political Science Club on campus and thus will, by requirement of the role, help to lead voter registration and engagement efforts on campus. The Political Science Club Constitution lists as the main charge of the organization to promote civic engagement and voting in a non-partisan manner on campus, so they will continue to spearhead these efforts. The Key Center similarly has an ongoing commitment to these issues in its stated goals and mission. Further, the Key Center has recently committed to dedicating a student employee line to electoral engagement efforts moving forward.

In addition, to help facilitate smooth transition and turnover in these efforts, a former Political Science Club president (and recent UNCA alumna) Chase Loudermelt drafted a detailed document entitled “A Voter Registration Guide: UNC Asheville and Beyond.” This document is a how-to guide for planning engagement events on campus; it provides a detailed description of all the past civic engagement events that have been hosted on campus, an overview/evaluation of the challenges and successes the campus has had since 2016, and a proposal of ideas/recommendations for the future. Loudermelt created this guide as part of her fellowship with Campus Vote Project and her Community Engaged Scholar project with the Political Science Department and the Key Center for exactly these reasons. We hope current and future leaders will add to and amend this document.

Beyond our campus partners, members of the wider community are critical to our efforts, and we would not have the level of success we’ve had without them. They include:

- Buncombe County Election Services—particularly Jake Quinn, the chair of the Buncombe County Board of Elections
- Democracy NC
- NationalVoterRegistrationDay.org
- NC Campus Compact
- Campus Vote Project—especially Rachel Clay
- Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP)— especially Liam Hysjulien
- The League of Women Voters of Buncombe County
- Interfaith Initiative for Social Justice & Carolina Jews for Justice-West—especially Ron Katz

## Commitment

Our civic and voter engagement plans are consistent with and guided by the wider mission and goals of the university. UNC Asheville’s Strategic Plan emphasizes the importance of community engagement as a means to “encourage students to engage in civic leadership and democratic processes.”<sup>10</sup> Recently established plans for the future of UNCA prioritize amplifying the whole student experience on campus, with the goal of developing our students into active citizens locally and globally. Similarly, the university’s mission statement emphasizes the importance of “engaged service” and “practical experience” for students; it also commits us as an institution to “respond to the conditions and concerns of the contemporary world” and “public responsibility to address the needs of our community.”<sup>11</sup> In this spirit, in 2020, the university established three themes or priorities around which we’d be focusing many of our institutional efforts: racial justice, public health & COVID-19, and elections. The university’s commitment to these areas has continued over the past two years. We believe that by promoting and supporting civic engagement, voting, and civil discourse on campus that we are helping address the needs of the local community, opening dialogue on pressing issues, and positioning students to make a difference in the world around them. Due to efforts like those described, UNC Asheville has ranked in the top two nationally for “Best Schools for Making an Impact” in 2016 and

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<sup>10</sup><https://strategicplan.unca.edu/strategic-direction-3-community-engagement>

<sup>11</sup><http://catalog.unca.edu/content.php?catoid=16&navoid=953>

2018 in the Princeton Review’s guidebook for *College that Pay You Back*. As noted previously, in 2021, the *Princeton Review* ranked UNCA in the top 20 for “Most Politically Active Students.”<sup>12</sup>

The commitment to civic learning and engagement is present at every level of the institution—from the administration to the student body. The administration has supported these efforts in many ways. In particular, the administration has committed UNC Asheville to be an early voting location for the campus and wider community during presidential election years, should the local Board of Elections choose us as a location. In midterm election years, when demand for early voting is typically lower in the county, the university is committed to ensuring that our campus and the wider community have access and transportation to the polls. The university administration has also been and will continue to be a pivotal supporter of other forms engagement in the community, as well. For example, the administration supported decennial census efforts in 2020. They also planned programming around the Jan 6th, 2021 attack on the US Capitol last year.

Further, the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning on campus seeks to build partnerships between students, faculty, staff, and leaders in the community. The Center’s goals are to strengthen our community and to address social issues. As such, democratic participation and civic learning are at the core of their mission. This office also supports Service Learning on campus, which is an approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic knowledge and skills to address needs in the community. Many of these classes focus on democratic engagement, in particular; these include classes on voting theory and on US elections, which team up to lead voter registration efforts on campus and to have students work the polls on Election Day. Other service learning classes offered in the 2022-2023 academic year will involve students working with legal offices in Asheville to screen for potential clients and studying poverty’s interaction with the law. There will also be a course that focuses on cultivating global citizenship.

Our working group also plans to continue working with the Communications and Marketing team on campus and with Residential Education in planning civic engagement events for the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years. We would like to more fully integrate voter registration training into the training for Resident Assistants, as we know that students are more likely to respond to mobilization efforts from their peers. We also think incorporating engagement opportunities and voter registration more formally into new student orientation could make a big impact.

The faculty also work to embed civic engagement into the curriculum and the classroom experience. This is discussed in more detail in the next section. The faculty’s commitment to engagement also goes beyond the classroom and into the co-curricular. Many departments on campus help to organize events to bring awareness to pressing issues in domestic and global politics and that have direct effects on democratic engagement. For example, the Political Science Department helped to organize several events regarding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and what this means for democracy. The Women, Gender, and Sexualities Studies program similarly put on programming about recent challenges to *Roe v. Wade*. All of these co-curricular events help to inform our campus community and can be seen as calls to action. Further, the first-year seminar program also includes an element of civic engagement. All faculty who teach these courses are given the opportunity to invite trained student “experts” into their classroom to register their classes to vote and to discuss the importance of voting (this is described in more detail below).

The Student Affairs division is also a pivotal part of the campus commitment to civic learning and engagement. They have an extremely dedicated staff who provide assistance to students in planning events, provide a budget for student organizations to do outreach work, and provide engagement and volunteer opportunities. They also help train student leaders. There are many key offices within Student Affairs that support these efforts, but the Multicultural Affairs Office and Student Organization Council are prominent among them.

Our most important commitment to civic engagement and voter participation, however, comes not from the administration, faculty, or staff but from our students. We have a very active and passionate student

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<sup>12</sup><https://www.unca.edu/events-and-news/stories/princeton-review-the-best-386-colleges-2021-edition/>.

body and vibrant student organizations. As mentioned previously, several student organizations are key actors in voter and civic engagement efforts, and they often recruit volunteers and support with great success from across the student body. For example, our annual National Voter Registration Day efforts alone generally attract 50-60 student volunteers and engage hundreds. Student groups have also been pivotal in inviting candidates to campus in the past, hosting nonpartisan groups to discuss the ballot, hosting debate and election night parties, and arranging early voting locations on campus or shuttles to the polls.

## Institutional Landscape

Our goals as a committee and as representatives of various departments, organizations, and offices at UNCA are informed by the the landscape both on and off campus. In particular, our goals are a reflection of the institutional structures around, resources for, and the realities of democratic participation within our campus community and in the state of North Carolina as a whole (especially since we recognize that many of our students are not necessarily Buncombe County voters). We will discuss each aspect of our landscape in turn.

### Campus Overview—Campus Curriculum, Efforts, Resources, and Barriers

As mentioned previously, there is a commitment to civic engagement and civic learning at all levels of the institution, including at the curricular level. For example, the Political Science Department seeks to “cultivate students who ask questions and think critically and creatively about the political world, communicate effectively in diverse communities, and are actively engaged in local, national, and international life.”<sup>13</sup> As such, the department is offering a host of courses in Fall 2022 to accomplish these goals, including but not limited to a course on US Elections, one on ReStorying Community (which focuses on the theory & practice of civic engagement and community building), and a course entitled Politics and the Mind (which focuses on the development of political beliefs and behaviors). Similarly, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology emphasizes and promotes “discussion of a range of issues (e.g. gender and sexuality, queer theory, race and ethnicity, labor, globalization, disability studies, deviance and social control, poverty).”<sup>14</sup> The Environmental Studies program teaches students to solve “environmental issues with sustainable solutions,” emphasizing the intersection of biology, chemistry, politics, and public policy (among other disciplines).<sup>15</sup> Faculty members in various departments also offer an annual course called “Ideas to Action,” in which students learn how to turn their ideas into plans that can become reality; they are introduced to the theory and practice of social entrepreneurship, conduct a critical analysis of problems and needs, and work in interdisciplinary teams to design solutions to social problems. Further, many departments across the university have internship opportunities for students, in which they work with food banks, advocacy groups, political campaigns, and many other organizations. While these are anecdotal examples, they are representative of a systemic whole. Many courses and departments across the university encourage students to participate in the community, engage in applied learning, and promote social responsibility.

In addition, the Liberal Arts Core at UNC Asheville requires all students to enroll in at least once Diversity Intensive course. These courses share 5 primary learning outcomes:

1. Students will understand the socially constructed nature of identities.
2. Students will understand the significance of individuals’ differing relationships to power.
3. Students will understand how individuals, organizations, and institutions create, perpetuate, or challenge inequality.
4. Students will understand how multiple identities intersect.
5. Students will be better equipped to reevaluate their ideas about diversity and difference.

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<sup>13</sup><https://politicalscience.unca.edu/>

<sup>14</sup><https://socanth.unca.edu/>

<sup>15</sup>[uncahttps://envr.unca.edu/](https://uncahttps://envr.unca.edu/)

Beginning in Fall 2022, newly admitted students will also be required to enroll in at least one additional Diversity Intensive course which will focus particularly on race and ethnicity in the US. These courses' learning outcomes add to those in the wider Diversity Intensive program but specifically aim to help students understand the nature of race and racism, systemic and institutional racism, racial injustice, and what it means to be an anti-racist.<sup>16</sup> Together, these courses demonstrate a dedication to fostering an appreciation and understanding of diversity domestically and globally. In Fall 2022 alone, over 60 sections of DI courses are being offered at UNCA.

As mentioned, UNCA also has Service Learning Designated courses. In these courses, students are required to work for 20+ hours a semester with a community partner outside of class meeting time. These courses are organized through the Key Center, which also provides training for the faculty teaching these classes. These courses aim to:

1. Use student learning to address community needs and encourage community resilience
2. Encourage students to clarify, develop, and live their own values while respecting the views and beliefs of others
3. Deepen connections between the “real world” experiences and academic content
4. Foster feelings of civic responsibility
5. Allow students to develop life skills by working with people and places that are different from their own experiences

Seven service Learning classes will be offered in Fall 2022, covering topics including Cultivating Global Citizenship, US Elections and a Poverty Law Clinic. While these courses are not required of the student body, they are promoted to students and are popular among them. The Key Center also sponsors our Community Engaged Scholars Program, which provides the opportunity for students to become deeply involved in community based research and receive recognition for their efforts.<sup>17</sup> All these efforts are supported by co-curricular measures touched on above and subsequently.

In terms of campus resources to support civic learning and engagement, our biggest asset is our community—faculty, staff, students, and our Asheville-Buncombe community partners. Our institution has a good working relationship with many organizations and offices in the community, including the city and county government, the Mountain Area Health Education Center, the Collider, and many others. These organizations provide internships, work, and research opportunities for students on the campus. In terms of democratic participation, our campus has worked closely with local government, the county Board of Elections, the Asheville Field Office of the US Census Bureau, the League of Women Voters, NC Campus Compact, the Campus Vote Project, CEEP, Democracy NC, and so many other organizations and individuals who are committed to making sure our students know their democratic rights and have all that they need to exercise them. Without these partnerships, civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus would not be what it is today. We also have an incredibly active student body that cares deeply about social and political issues—their 90 percent voter registration rate and our volunteers for registration drives are examples of their commitment to democratic participation.

One of the biggest challenges to democratic engagement on campus is one of financial resources. Every year, our voter registration and mobilization efforts grow and become more ambitious; however, our modest budget for these activities remains limited and largely static. Our primary resources for our civic and voter engagement efforts come from the budgets of the Political Science Club, SGA, and the Key Center. Academic departments and other offices occasionally chip in, depending on need and the nature of our events. To supplement the on-campus funding we receive, we have come to rely on mini-grants from partner organizations, including the NC Campus Compact-CEEP, Democracy NC, and Campus Takeover. However, we know that if we are to continue to grow our efforts, securing a more stable funding structure will be an asset, and this

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<sup>16</sup><https://registrar.unca.edu/academics/liberal-arts-core/diversity-intensives/>

<sup>17</sup><https://keycenter.unca.edu/students/community-engaged-scholars/>

is something that we are actively working on. For the 2022 election cycle, we were awarded a \$1000 grant from the UNCA University Service Council to help with National Voter Registration Day efforts, to provide transportation to the polls, and to host a party to the polls to encourage voting in the general election. While this is a one-time funding opportunity, it will allow us to focus our energy on engagement efforts rather than on applying for external grants this election cycle. For that, we are very grateful! Another challenge to our voter engagement efforts is discussed in more detail in the following sections—the way state laws have created barriers to voting and registration that affect our campus.

Despite these challenges, our campus landscape is, we believe, conducive to fostering a culture of engagement, which is what we ultimately seek. The next subsection will show our progress toward this goal.

## Campus Overview—NSLVE Results and Campus Trends

UNCA participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), which provides institutions with data on student registration and voting rates.<sup>18</sup> Based on our access to data from the 2012-2020 election cycles,<sup>19</sup> we believe we have a good sense of the potential trends in participation on campus. While the 2012, 2016, and 2020 reports may be helpful to our efforts, we intend to build from our 2018 report most specifically, as it was the last midterm election cycle and thus is more directly comparable (in some ways) to the 2022 context. We are aware of the engagement differences across the country in presidential versus midterm election years.

Based on the accessible data, we believe we should focus on maintaining registration rates and increasing turnout rates on our campus. We generally have very high registration rates among eligible students. In 2016, our registration rate among this demographic was 84.9%, in 2018 it was 87.6%, and in 2020 it was 93.7%. As such, we have a bit of room to grow here, but most of our efforts should be spent on maintaining these high registration rates and ensuring student registrations are up-to-date. We have more work to do when it comes to turnout, however. In 2020, we had a very high rate of turnout among registered voters at 86.7%, which was a big increase from previous elections and one of which we are very proud. However, the voting rate is a bit lower among all eligible voters at 81.2%. While we are still proud of this metric and it earned us a Platinum Seal with the All-In Challenge, we would like to improve upon this rate even further.<sup>20</sup> Since voting is a two-step process and requires registration, we know that can be a major barrier to increasing turnout, which is why our efforts have focused so much on registrations in recent years.

While our turnout and registration numbers in 2020 were dramatic improvements over other recent elections, we know that continued high levels of engagement are not a given, especially since the 2022 election cycle is a midterm year. However, between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections, turnout among registered students on campus increased 24.5%. We are hoping to capitalize on this trend and the engagement of our students.<sup>21</sup> Given that we had less than 60% of registered voters turnout to vote in 2018, we have a lot of room for improvement. Much of this will, of course, depend on our ability to bring awareness to the student body about the elections, what's at stake, and what issues are prominent. In the following sections, we describe our goals and strategies to accomplish this.

There are some interesting institutional and demographic patterns on campus worth noting, as well. UNCA students seem to overwhelmingly take advantage of early voting opportunities: 66.4% of our students voted early in 2012, 69.6% in 2016, 56.8% in 2018, and 51% in 2020.<sup>22</sup> This is a pattern of which we intend to take note and upon which we will focus on in our goals for 2022. We will advertise the early voting period and ensure students have access to early voting locations. Further, we also note that a large percentage of our students voted absentee in the past few presidential election cycles, especially in 2020. We need to make

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<sup>18</sup>We will be participating again in 2022; we reauthorized our participation prior to the 2018 election cycle.

<sup>19</sup>We have little data on the 2014 results from our campus, due to turnover of staff on campus. All our information from 2014 was provided by comparisons in the 2018 NSLVE report.

<sup>20</sup><https://allinchallenge.org/seal-awardees/>

<sup>21</sup>Turnout in 2014 was 32.5%, compared to 57% in 2018

<sup>22</sup>We believe this drop in early voting is due to increased reliance on vote by mail, especially during the pandemic. Indeed, we saw our in-person election day voting rate decline by 10 percent between 2016 and 2020.



sure this method of voting is accessible.

In terms of demographics, race and ethnicity seem to be important factors in voter turnout on UNCA's campus. In general, students who identify as racial and ethnic minorities tend to have lower turnout rates than do those students who identify as white. White student turnout was in 52% in 2018 and 83% in 2020. For Hispanic students, it was 48% and 72%. Among Black students, turnout was 42% and 77%, while among multiracial students it was 49% and 75% in the last two elections. These trends are important to consider for the goals we are setting and likely are related to similar trends across the state, to be discussed in more detail.

Age also seems to play a major role in voting on our campus. Across the past few election cycles, turnout steadily increased with the age of our students. In the past, the age range of concern was students between 18-21, who had a turnout rate of 43.3% in 2012, 40.9% in 2016, and 37.3% in 2018. Turnout increased significantly for students 22-24 and older. However, in the 2020 election cycle, the 18-21 age group bucked the trends of previous cycles. Those aged 18-21 had turnout rates of 82%, compared to 74% for the 22-24 bracket. This may have been due, in part, to efforts to engage incoming students in the election. We hope to examine this further to hopefully maintain this growth. We plan to continue our outreach to first-year and transfer students on campus.

## North Carolina Overview—State Voting Data and Patterns

Trends in voting across the state of North Carolina are also relevant to the efforts we make on our campus to increase registration and turnout rates. North Carolina has a controversial history when it comes to voting rights. As recently as 2016, a federal appeals court struck down a state Voter ID law that targeted Black voters with “almost surgical precision.”<sup>23</sup> The same law made it more difficult for young voters to register, by barring pre-registration efforts. While the law has since been struck down and is no longer in effect, it has bred a lot of disenchantment with and confusion surrounding the registration and voting process. Then, in 2018, NC voters approved a constitutional amendment to require photo identification for voting purposes, despite the controversy over the original voter ID law passed in 2013. Recently (as of December 31, 2019), a federal court issued an injunction against the new ID requirement.<sup>24</sup> The injunction will remain in place until further order from the court. At the moment, there is state legislation proposed to reinstate the requirement. As it stands now, photo identification will not be required in 2022, but this may change. This back-and-forth on the issue has created a lot of uncertainty over the state of election law in the state. Efforts to increase registration and voting on UNCA's campus, then, must be made with this in mind. One of the largest barriers to registration and voting in the state, we believe, is one of information and access.

In addition, some of the voting trends we see on campus seem to be more systemic, as they are also apparent at the state level. While turnout was high in NC in 2020 at 75%, it is not consistent across all segments of society.<sup>25</sup> The age demographic with the lowest turnout rates state-wide were voters in the 18-25 range with a 60% turnout rate. In terms of ethnicity, 59% of Hispanic/Latino voters turned out, compared to 77% of non-Latinos. Black voters turnout out at a rate of 68%, compared to white voters at 79%. We believe it is critical to think about the barriers that may be affecting the turnout rates of these groups on campus and in the state writ large when creating our campus action plan.

Another contextual factor at the state level that may affect voting and engagement on our campus is the controversy around NC's gerrymandering. After the 2010 census, North Carolina's political maps became the subject of state and national controversy and litigation. The maps were struck down and had to be redrawn multiple times due to both racial and partisan gerrymandering. In 2019, North Carolina was one of the two states whose districts were being litigated in the Supreme Court case *Rucho v. Common Cause* (Maryland was the other state). In that case, the Supreme Court declared that issues of partisan gerrymandering are political questions and thus outside the purview of federal courts. This left the issue to state courts.

<sup>23</sup><http://electionlawblog.org/wp-content/uploads/nc-4th.pdf>

<sup>24</sup><https://www.wral.com/federal-judge-blocks-voter-id-in-north-carolina/18861700/>

<sup>25</sup>[https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Press/NC%20Voter%20Turnout%20Statistics/voter\\_turnout\\_stats\\_20201103.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Press/NC%20Voter%20Turnout%20Statistics/voter_turnout_stats_20201103.pdf)

For part of the post-2010 period, Asheville was split between the 10th and 11th congressional districts and those district lines cut through UNC Asheville’s dormitories (and even particular apartments and suites on campus). This made registering voters on campus difficult to navigate and also had a negative effect on student voters’ feelings of efficacy. However, in November 2019, state courts struck down our previous maps and approved new ones for the state.<sup>26</sup> Under the new maps, which were in place for the 2020 primary and general elections, Asheville (and thus UNCA’s campus) was contained entirely in the 11th congressional district, which was a benefit to our community.

Then, as a result of the 2020 census, NC gained an additional seat in the House of Representatives, again rendering new political maps necessary. And again, those maps bred controversy and litigation. The new state legislative and congressional maps after the 2020 census went to the state supreme court for review, where they were struck down and ordered to be redrawn. This process resulted in our 2022 primaries getting pushed back to May instead of March, which led to challenges for our campus engagement levels. We had to work to educate the campus community about the election timeline and encourage early voting so that students could participate in the process before they left town at the end of the academic year. The litigation process eventually led to the adoption of new legislative maps and temporary congressional maps for the 2022 election cycle. However, after this election cycle, NC will have to draw new congressional maps, which too may be litigated. This constant redrawing of maps breeds a lot of confusion among voters and is an obstacle to our campus efforts.

Another related challenge is that, while our campus and the city of Asheville remain in one congressional district for now, our campus is still split down voting precinct lines. For students who live on campus, this means that there are two different polling locations that serve campus on Election Day, and they need to know which to go to. Precinct lines actually cut through specific dormitories, meaning hallmates can have different voting locations. This can be very confusing for students and is part of why we emphasize early voting so much. In NC, you can vote early at any polling location in your county; you do not need to vote at a designated location. Further, the campus precinct split also makes it difficult for students who live on campus to register to vote properly, as they often do not think to put their dorm room number on their residential address. This requires a lot of training of volunteers and education to ensure registrations can be properly processed.

Another recent change worth noting is that, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, NC for the first time allows online voter registration; previously you could only register by paper form. This has made it easier (or at least faster) for many students to register to vote or to update their registration. However, it is only available to those who hold NC driver’s licenses. NC also now allows voters to request absentee ballots online, which also makes that process a lot easier and streamlined for our students who vote in different counties.

While some of these changes may encourage mobilization and engagement, we have had a lot of big electoral changes occur in a very short period of time. As such, one of the most important efforts we will have to make going into the 2022 election and beyond is one of information provision—we need to spread the word about the status of the voter ID law and the new districts and many other things.

## Goals

### Short-Term Goals (Fall 2022 through Spring 2024)

1. Maintain/increase the voter *registration* rates on campus—the registration rate of eligible students on UNCA’s campus was 93.7 percent in 2020, which is significantly higher than it has been on campus since at least 2012, when we started participating in NSLVE. We believe that if we can make registering easy enough and pervasive enough on campus, we can maintain our levels of registration and possibly increase them. Our eventual goal is to reach 100 percent registration of eligible students, but we

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<sup>26</sup><https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/03/north-carolinas-new-congressional-map-shifts-two-seats-toward-democrats/?arc404=true>

recognize that our rate is already very high and that there may be diminishing returns on our efforts at some point. Further, we know it can be a challenge to maintain momentum and excitement/engagement in midterm election years (despite their importance!). However, this will not temper our efforts. Focusing on registration rates is one of our major goals, given that among registered voters, turnout was over 86 percent in 2020.

2. Improve voter *turnout* rates on campus, which we believe requires a multi-tiered approach:
  - Maintain/increase aggregate voter turnout rates on campus, relative to 2018 in particular (the last midterm election year)—Our voter turnout rate in the 2018 election was 50.8% among eligible students and 58% among registered students. While these numbers were high relative to other campuses and relative to our 2014 election turnout rates, we see a lot of room for improvement here, and we would like to increase these rates in the 2022 election cycle. The 2018 election cycle was a particularly impressive year in terms of in college student voting nationally<sup>27</sup>. It is unclear whether the 2022 election will have the same widespread energy around it. However, it is our campus goal to educate the campus about the stakes and garner as much momentum as we can.
  - Increase turnout among groups of students with lower rates—We aim to increase turnout among the demographic groups with the lowest turnout rates on campus, as described above. Further, there are some trends from the NSLVE reports that indicate that students in certain fields of study are less likely to vote than are others, and we aim to take measures to combat these trends.
  - Pledge at least 400 students to vote—While pledges are not a true commitment device, we do think that they have a psychological effect on potential voters and can help encourage turnout in the election. Further, when we ask students to pledge to vote, we give them the option to sign up for an email listserve that provides important election-related updates and information, which can help increase mobilization.
3. Reduce barriers/obstacles to voting for our campus community—we perceive that there are some institutional and informational barriers to voting on our campus that should be addressed in any plans to increase civic engagement and voter participation among our students and the wider UNCA community. First, we believe there may be a lot of uncertainty, confusion, and misinformation about recent electoral changes. This may produce anxiety in students considering voting, so we will aim to spread accurate information and to provide resources for students to turn to in order to have their questions answered. Further, our campus will likely not be an early voting location in 2022, as it was in 2020, due to anticipated lower county turnout in the midterm election. This creates potential barriers for students being able to vote, as the closest early voting location is over 2 miles away (and most of our students utilize early voting options) and many of our students either do not or cannot have cars.<sup>28</sup> We plan to offer free shuttles to the polls during the early voting period and on election day in Fall 2022; we have already done so for the 2022 primary elections. While this is not as convenient as a voting location on campus, it will significantly reduce costs and obstacles for students.
4. Provide opportunities for students to get engaged in the wider community, model civil discourse, & promote a culture of engagement—For those students who are particularly interested in politics and democracy and want to get involved, we hope to provide greater information on and opportunities for students to get involved in the election both on and off campus. We hope to have at least 50 students volunteer for campus registration events and another 30-50 volunteer with the Buncombe County Board of Elections, primarily as poll workers. We also hope to sponsor a series of talks, parties, and events on campus to attract attention. We believe this is key to fostering well-rounded citizenship and we think that the involvement of students in the process can positively affect and influence other students to get involved, creating an atmosphere of engagement. We also hope to engage the student body to inform the kind of public education events we sponsor.
5. While much of our effort will focus on the 2022 general election, we also want to start preparing our campus community for the 2023 and 2024 elections. Asheville’s local elections are held in federal

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<sup>27</sup><https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/09/20/massive-surge-college-student-voting-2018>

<sup>28</sup>For example, first-year students cannot have vehicles on campus and are, for the most part, required to live on campus.

election years. However, some surrounding townships, where a decent number of students, faculty, and staff live (such as Woodfin, NC), do have local races in Fall 2023. As such, we want to bring awareness to these races and encourage turnout. Further, the primary elections for the 2024 election will likely be held in the Spring of the 2023-2024 academic year (NC primaries are *usually* held in March). As such, we need to keep our momentum going and focus on engaging students in these races, as well. Local elections and primaries tend to be particularly low information races, so we want to combat this and help inform our campus community.

## Longer Term Goals

Beyond the (relatively) short-term goals addressed above, we have some longer term goals that we hope to accomplish in the new few years:

1. Ensure campus as an early voting location from here on—we have a good track record of being an EV location in presidential election years; we would like to see this in midterm election years as well (though, this is not totally within our campus’ control—the local Board of Elections has the final say on all EV locations and they consider many factors in making their decisions)
2. Have election-related information included on the university calendar
3. Reach a voter registration rate of 100 percent (!! ) and a turnout rates consistently above 60 percent in midterm years and above 85 percent in presidential years
4. Develop and maintain relationships with local high schools to host voter registration and election-rated events to increase the 18-21 turnout rate in Asheville
5. Further embed community/civic engagement, democratic participation, and political inclusivity in future iterations of the university’s strategic plan
6. Secure greater university and outside funding for voter mobilization activities & work on the sustainability of our efforts
7. More formally embed civic engagement and voter registration into the orientation process for new students and/or in the first-year experience

## Action Plan

Below, we include our initiatives & strategies to accomplish each of the preceding goals.

### Strategies for Short Term Goals

1. Maintain/increase the voter registration rates on campus—We believe registering a greater number of students/members of the campus community to vote is a critical step in getting greater numbers to vote and otherwise participate in elections. For these reasons, we plan to do the following:
  - (a) Host multiple registration events around campus—we believe hosting multiple high-profile registration events on campus will be key to getting students registered in time to vote in the November election and beyond. These events will involve recruiting volunteers, training volunteers, and tabling at various places around campus. In particular, we would like to strategically host these events before the registration deadline for the general election. While it is possible for voters to register and vote at the same time during the early voting period, we think that pre-registering voters will make them more likely to turnout and to have the necessary resources to cast informed votes. We will, however, advertise, the same-day registration option during the early voting period, as well.
    - Possible events/registration drives:

- RendezBlue (August 2022)—first-year student orientation. Since many first-year students may be first-time voters, we want to particularly focus on getting them registered to vote. Embedding registration into the orientation schedule will be hugely helpful on this front. Previously, we have had student volunteers visiting first-year seminars (required courses for first-year students) but orientation may be a more efficient way to do so, if possible.
  - Rockypalooza (August 2022)—annual picnic and celebration to kick-off the new school year. Many members of the campus community attend this event, including first year students (it is part of their orientation process) and their families. This will be a prime opportunity to register a large group of voters
  - Student Organization Fair (August 2022)—We intend to have multiple student organizations table at the Student Organization Fair, an annual event that gives student organizations the opportunity to attract new members, with voter registration forms handy and information about upcoming election-related events
  - National Voter Registration Day (September 20, 2022)—This is typically our largest day of registration activity on campus, with over 50 volunteers and hundreds of students registering and pledging to vote. We typically table all over campus, host training sessions for volunteers, and offer incentives to get students, faculty, and staff to stop by to register. We provide free food at these events, information about candidates, and sample ballots. We are also in discussions about expanding our NVRD efforts. Some student organizations are thinking about turning the Tuesday “free hour”<sup>29</sup> into a “political party”—where there would be music and games, and we would also invite candidates from all parties to come to campus to talk with students and invite interest/advocacy groups to advertise and inform the study body
  - Tabling locations— Generally, high traffic areas would be the top priority for registration drives: outside Brown Dining Hall, both inside and outside Highsmith Student Union, outside Ramsey Library (on the university quad), outside residential dorms, outside Rhoades-Robinson academic building, and by the Rocky the Bull Dog statue (a campus landmark). Other academic buildings would be covered, if enough volunteers are recruited.
  - Advertising—To advertise these campus-wide registration events, we intend to co-host these events with as many student organizations as possible, use social media pages to post fliers and reminders, post fliers and banners around campus, post advertisements on the digital media screens in dormitory buildings, email student listserves, and hopefully post on a prominent page on the university website. We will also utilize the UNCA Votes website and Instagram page (@uncavotes)
- (b) Encourage online voter registration for those students who are eligible, at in-person drives and via email and social media. We can also designate “Voter Registration” areas around campus that operate all year long for students who cannot register online—ideally, we hope to designate a voter registration area in academic buildings, dorms, and in Highsmith Student Union so that students can stop in at any time to register to vote. A designated faculty/staff member will periodically check into to each location to collect and submit any registration forms submitted. This will be done in addition to the advertised events. We already have some of these locations, but we can and should add more.
- (c) Training as many volunteers as possible—while registering to vote is not necessarily a difficult task, in general, it can be tricky for students who live in campus dorms. Residential addresses cannot be designated as PO Boxes; however, students who live on campus are assigned a campus PO Box as their address and often use this as their residential address on voter registration forms. When this occurs, the Board of Elections cannot process the form. As such, we will train members of the campus community to instruct students on how to fill out the registration forms, to provide the addresses of the actual dorm buildings (which can serve as the residential address for students), and to explain that PO Boxes can only be used as mailing addresses. We especially intend to train any registration drive volunteers and RAs in the dorms of this. We also plan to

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<sup>29</sup>On Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12-1, there are no classes are scheduled on campus

post fliers with residential vs mailing addresses at any registration location. This information is also explained on the UNCA Votes website, to which we will direct students (we have stickers that advertise the website!).

- (d) We have already secured an internal grant for the 2022 midterms to allow us to focus on these efforts without applying for external funding! Our grant project is entitled “Midterms Matter.”
2. Improve turnout rates on campus—while we believe registering students is a major step in improving turnout rates on campus, we also recognize that registering a student to vote does not guarantee that they will, in fact, turn out to vote. As such, we plan to do the following:
- (a) Encourage Early Voting—We believe that informing students and members of the campus community about and encouraging them to vote during the 17-day early voting period can help turnout rates. As we have seen from our NSLVE reports, early voting is overwhelmingly the option our students choose. We want to further emphasize the benefits of doing: fewer/shorter lines, the ability to vote at any early voting location (rather than at a designated voting location), weekend voting, etc. We will have fliers with early voting dates and locations available at all registration drives and in Highsmith Student Union. We believe early voting is especially important on our small campus, since many of our students are commuters and many work off-campus jobs during the work week.
  - (b) Provide transportation to the polls—The UNCA Transportation Office has agreed to offer transportation to the polls for free on Election Day, so we intend to utilize that since campus is currently not designated as an early voting location for midterm elections. During the early voting period, we have secured a grant to cover the cost of campus shuttles to transport students to the polls (the shuttles will be free for them to use). We will advertise these shuttles via flyers and campus-wide email blasts to ensure students know about them.
  - (c) Focus on groups with lower turnout rates—Given past NSLVE reports, we believe it is important to focus on certain sections of the study body with lower turnout rates, hoping to help in any way we can to improve those rates in 2022 and future elections. We believe the key to success in this area is communication and outreach. The groups we would like to assist are as follows:
    - First-year/younger students: While the 18-21 year olds on campus bucked general turnout patterns in 2020, they are typically the lowest turnout group on campus and constitute a majority of our student body. As such, we intend to focus many of our efforts on this age group. In particular, we plan to focus some of our activities more particularly around the first-year experience; we believe that first year students are less likely to register and vote because of the difficulty in navigating the process, especially at a new address, and because many are new to voting. To help facilitate their participation, we intend to have voter registration tables at move-in and orientation events. Further, UNCA requires all first-year students to enroll in a First Year Seminar (FYS), generally during the Fall semester. We will extend an offer to all FYS instructors to have representatives of the Voter Engagement Committee come to each of their class periods for 20-30 minutes to register students to vote, answer any questions about voting/ballots/candidates, and provide voter information guides.
    - Racial and ethnic minorities: As noted above, voter turnout among UNCA students that identify as racial and ethnic minorities tend to be lower than that of the university as a whole and that of white students. To help increase those rates, we intend to work with the Multicultural Affairs office and Student Organization Council. We hope to cosponsor voter registration and election-related events with student organizations that represent these groups. For example, for the 2020 election, we spoke at a voter education event for the Black Student Association. This type of engagement can serve as a possible model for moving forward. Further, we intend to have open conversations with student groups on campus to identify the issues that students find the most pressing and to see how we can foster greater engagement and inclusivity. We believe this communication is critical.
    - Certain fields of study: According to our 2020 NSLVE report, turnout increased among all our majors/fields of study between 2016 and 2020. However, some disciplines, such as engineering

and management, had lower turnout rates than others. We hope to table for voter registration and voter education in the buildings that house classes in these fields. Some fields of study, such as languages and history, had particularly high turnout rates—we hope to speak to faculty and students in those departments to uncover what worked well for them in 2020.

- (d) Ask students to pledge to vote & send follow up emails: While many of our efforts will be focused on registering new voters, we are aware that we also must foster a sense of engagement in those who are already registered to vote. As such, we will offer voter pledges at all registration events and will offer incentives for students who agree to pledge to vote. When a student pledges to vote, we will also offer to sign them up for a listserv that will exclusively be used to send reminders about upcoming deadline and dates, political events on campus, and updates/changes to election law.
  - (e) Access to absentee ballots—At all voter registration events on campus, we intend to provide absentee ballots for our students, so that they have ample time to fill out their ballots and send them off to the appropriate county board of elections. We will also provide QR codes to the website that allows voters to submit a request online (this is new since the 2020 election). While a large proportion of our students are from the state of North Carolina, they do represent the entire state geographically. A decent number of our students choose to stay registered in their home districts and a decent percent have always voted absentee. For students who wish to do so, we aim to make this as easy as possible and to walk them through the process. We believe access to and use of absentee ballots will continue to be particularly important, especially amidst the pandemic.
  - (f) Election Day/Early Voting Period reminders— We believe one of the reasons young voters turn out to vote at lower rates is the fact that they have so many other things going on in their lives; college students, in particular, can be overwhelmed by the amount of information and number of events that are available to them. For this reason, we think that reminding students about the early voting period and about election day can be a huge step in increasing voter turnout on campus. We can easily accomplish this goal by emailing student listserves and posting fliers around campus. Further, we intend to offer students the possibility to sign up for an election reminder listserv when they register or pledge to vote at our registration drives. When a student pledges to vote, we inform them that this will automatically sign them up to receive 1-2 email reminders about the upcoming election, close to the voting period. We also offer this possibility to those who are newly registered as well.
  - (g) Advertise same day registration—Many of our efforts on campus will encourage students to pre-register to vote before the state’s October 14 registration deadline. However, we do not want members of the campus community who miss that deadline to think they will be unable or ineligible to vote. As such, after October 14, many of our efforts will switch gears to start advertising same day registration possibilities, which are available to them during the early voting period. We plan to use social media, email, and fliers to advertise this information.
  - (h) Host a Party To the Polls—In 2018, we received a small grant to host a Party to the Polls. This event provided food, music, activities, and voter resources to the campus community, while free shuttles transported students from the student union to the closest early voting location. This event was very well attended and brought a lot of attention and excitement to voting. We were not able to host such a party in 2020 due to the pandemic (though we hosted a safer, scaled back version), but we hope to bring it back in 2022. We have secured funding to do so.
3. Reduce barriers/obstacles to voting for our campus community—We believe that there are various potential barriers that may prevent, discourage, or depress turnout among the campus community that we can take measures to alleviate, if not resolve:
- Now that congressional districts have been redrawn in the state, Asheville, in its entirety, lies within one congressional district. Previously, when campus was split into two congressional districts, there was a lot of confusion about filling out voter registration forms, where students should vote, etc. However, this pressure is not fully alleviated, as our campus is still split along precinct

lines. For this reason, when filling out their registration, students are required to report not only their dorm address, but their specific room/suite numbers and letters. Many students thus do not fill out the form properly and have trouble getting their forms processed. This makes trained volunteers very important, despite the positive development in terms of redistricting. It also makes early voting easier because you do not have to vote at your assigned location during the EV period.

- As mentioned above in more detail, we want to make voting as convenient as possible for the students. We will provide free transportation to the closest early voting location during the EV period and to the voting locations that serve campus on Election Day.
  - Information also tends to be a significant barrier to voting. If voters feel that they cannot easily access information on candidates or the election to cast informed votes, they may not bother to vote at all. Given all the recent changes to electoral laws, we believe that spreading accurate information will be key to turnout in 2022:
    - Voter ID laws—as mentioned previously, in the past 6-7 years, NC has enacted two different voter ID laws, one of which was struck down by the federal courts and the other of which is temporarily blocked. As it stands currently, voters will not need a photo ID to vote in 2022, but that is subject to change. As such, the onus is on us to follow the litigation on this front and to keep the campus community informed as to the status of the law. While voter ID laws can generally have a depressing effect on turnout, we hope that if it is re-instated, it will not have such an effect on campus. Before the 2019 decision to block the ID law, our campus worked very hard to have our campus IDs approved as official forms of ID for voting purposes, and we were successful. As such, if the law is re-instated before November 2022 or beyond, we will make major efforts to ensure that the campus community knows that they can use their university IDs, which all students, faculty, and staff have.
    - Midterm election years tend to be low information elections. Potential voters may not realize that there are races beyond Senate and House races on the ballot, so we want to make sure they are aware of state and local down-ballot races as well. We will advertise how to access sample ballots, where to find non-partisan candidate information<sup>30</sup>, and will invite candidates on campus so students can have first-hand accounts of their stances.
4. Provide opportunities for students to get engaged in the wider community, model civil discourse, & promote a culture of engagement—The overarching goal behind all of our actions is to foster a sense of community and civic mindedness on our campus and to create a norm of engagement and participation. Towards that end, we seek to take action to imbed these actions into our curriculum, our extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, and our community outreach projects:
- Curricular Efforts/Engaged Learning: As described previously, there are many Service Learning classes being offered in Fall 2022 and more will be offered in future semesters.
  - Election Night Party: We will host an election night results-viewing party, as a culmination as many of the efforts that we will engage in the Fall. We will open this party to the whole campus (and outside) community, provide refreshments, and will invite faculty members to give context to and discuss the results. We believe that this activity will show students that politics can be fun and educational at the same time. Further, we think that having a group viewing of the results will foster a sense of political and democratic community and that having faculty participate can elevate the conversation to facilitate responsible discourse
  - Community Outreach: Beyond all the efforts we will be embarking upon on campus, we also strive to provide opportunities for students to volunteer and work with outside organizations to increase voter registration, turnout and mobilization in the wider Asheville and Western NC areas. We already have contacts with Democracy NC and other groups to participate in voter registration drives off-campus.
  - Continue having student fellows work with engagement organizations—We currently have one student serving as a fellow with the Campus Vote Project and three as Civic Influencers with

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<sup>30</sup>We often rely on resources from outside groups, such as the League of Women Voters' vote411 website, for this information



the Campus Election Engagement Project. These organizations have been providing resources and training to help these students lead voter engagement efforts on campus. We would like to continue to support students in pursuing these opportunities and get more students involved in such projects.

5. Prepare for the 2023 election and 2024 primary—We plan to emulate and learn from what works in 2022 for these efforts. Voter education will be particularly important as local elections are especially low information races.

## Strategy for Long Term Goals

1. Ensure campus as an early voting location from here on—Our campus administration has expressed interest to the county that we would like to be considered for early voting for presidential and midterm election years and are advocating for approval. We believe that we should be able to secure this during presidential election years, but in midterm years, there are fewer early voting locations and it may be a challenge. However, we are laying the groundwork. The challenge we currently face is county budget cuts threatening to reduce the number of early voting locations, at least this year.
2. Have election-related information included on the university calendar—We are working with the university’s Communications and Marketing Team on brainstorming events for the Fall and with the intent of having them placed on the university calendar in advance. This will require the approval of several university stakeholders but should be doable.
3. Reach a voter registration rate of 100 percent and higher turnout rates across campus and increase turnout among segments of campus with lower rates—We will continue all our efforts described above in the hopes on creating a more pervasive civic culture on campus. We also hope to continue our participation in the All-In Challenge and other programs to help support our efforts and provide us with a framework.
4. Develop and maintain relationships with local high schools to host voter registration and election-rated events to increase the 18-21 turnout rate in Asheville—This is a very nascent project on our part, delayed because of the pandemic, but we believe partnering with our Education department may be a great way to start this process.
5. Further embed community/civic engagement, democratic participation, and political inclusivity in future iterations of the university’s strategic plan—When the time comes to revisit our mission statement and strategic plan, we hope to be an active part of the process and advocate for this.
6. Secure greater university and outside funding for voter mobilization activities—This is one of our biggest challenges. We believe that working on partnerships both on and off-campus will be key here—pooling resources is our best bet. The key is finding these partners willing to pool said resources.

## Reporting

We intend to share our Action Plan internally and potentially externally, as well. Internally, the action plan will be made available to the senior administration, the Student Affairs staff, the Political Science Department, the staff of the Key Center, the students involved in these efforts and anyone interested. In addition, in Fall 2022, the Action Plan will be a guiding document for the Service Learning course on US Elections that will be offered. It will be made available to the students enrolled to guide their service both on and off campus and they will be invited to build off of and improve it.

In terms of external reporting, this is a work in progress. If we receive approval to do so, our plan is to share our All-In Challenge Action Plan on the fairly new UNCA Votes website (which is currently being updated). Our past NSLVE reports and other campus accomplishments related to civic and democratic engagement are already posted on the website, under the “Connect” tab.

## Evaluation

We will use a variety of metrics to evaluate the success of our civic engagement and democratic participation. Our main metric, due to the systematic nature of the data collection process, will be our NSLVE report. As described above, we use it to diagnose the weakness in our outreach efforts, identify areas for improvement, and adjust our strategies. However, we also think other data is very useful.

For example, at all our voter registration drives on campus, especially National Voter Registration Day, we keep meticulous track of our registration numbers and pledges to vote. Volunteers are asked to keep track of this information, and every voter registration station is provided a tally sheet that is updated hourly. These sheets are submitted to Ashley Moraguez at the end of NVRD or other registration events, and she and the board of the Political Science Club keep track of the numbers. These are also checked by counting the voter registration forms before submission to the Board of Elections. We use these numbers to internally gauge the success of our efforts and to provide a basic longitudinal analysis of how our efforts are playing out—we like to compare the data from year to year to see what strategies work and compare election year rates to non-election year rates. Interestingly, since 2016, we have seen an upward trajectory in registration rates each year, regardless of whether there is an election or not. We have also shared this data with organizations we work with and who provide fellowships to our students, including the Campus Vote Project and CEEP.

We do recognize, however, that recent changes pose a threat to this particular evaluation method. Until March 2020, voter registration in NC was exclusively done via paper form; this allowed us to keep track of registration progress, since most students chose to register to vote at campus registration drives. Due to the pandemic, however, NC now has online voter registration options for those with NC driver's licenses. While this is a great change and will, we think, encourage registration on campus, it will make it more difficult for us to gauge registration, since students can easily register without attending a campus registration drive. We are working on trying to set up a series of challenges and self-reporting on social media or the university website to keep track of registration (and turnout potentially). While self-reporting may not be the best metric, it is better than nothing. This is a long-term goal we are working toward.

At all our engagement events, we also provide an opportunity for students to join a listserv to receive information about political events on campus. This growing listserv allows us to track student interest and cater our advertising to those most likely to show up (though we still advertise widely as well). Finally, we also count the attendees at all events we host (watch parties, debate parties, candidate visits etc) to get a better idea of what types of events attract students, what days and times seem to work best, and how to use our admittedly limited funds.

## Wrapping Up

To wrap up our Action Plan, we would again like to emphasize that our plans are an ever-evolving work in progress. We believe we've made a lot of progress in promoting civic learning and engagement in recent years, and we hope to continue this positive trajectory. We strive for creative & innovative solutions to the problems we face both on campus and in society. Despite the challenges we may face, we have a lot of strengths. All of the university's priorities work in tandem with and reinforce a culture of civic engagement on campus, and our students are truly change-makers. Above all, we want to support their efforts, goals, and projects.