

WINTHROP DECISION 2018

WINTHROP UNIVERSITY Voter Friendly Campus 2018 ACTION PLAN

Decision 2018 Campus Leadership:

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Section 1: Overview

Winthrop University is a master's-level, comprehensive, public university of 6,000 students located in Rock Hill, South Carolina. It has a long-standing commitment to civic engagement, including promoting voter turnout among its students. Winthrop earned the Voter Friendly Campus designation for 2017-18 and a Bronze Shield from the All In Campus Democracy Challenge in 2016. It seeks Voter Friendly Campus designation again in 2019-20 as an outward sign of its intentional, institutional commitment to civic engagement and personal and social responsibility.

Winthrop's National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) reports show that Winthrop has an engaged student body. Since 2012, Winthrop students have registered and voted at higher rates than their peers nationally. Moreover, Winthrop's voter registration, education, and turnout efforts in 2016 bore fruit with a 4.8 percent increase in student voter turnout over 2012.

In 2014, the last midterm election, South Carolina voter turnout was 19.5 percent for voters aged 18-24.¹ The latter is comparable to Winthrop's student voter turnout of 19.9 percent. Winthrop students are also more likely to be registered and to vote than their peers nationally and at public four-year institutions. The Table 1 summarizes Winthrop student voter registration and turnout rates from 2012-2016.

Table 1: Winthrop Student Voter Registration and Turnout Rates, 2012-2016

	Student Voter Registration Rates		Student Voter Turnout Rates		
	Winthrop	National	Winthrop	4yr Public	National
2012	81.9%	69.0%	53.4%	46.8%	46.9%
2014	70.5%	68.0%	19.9%	18.5%	18.5%
2016	83.5%	70.6%	58.1%	49.8%	50.4%

Source: National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, 2014 and 2016 reports

Decision 2018 Goals: The Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, led by Dr. Karen Kedrowski and Dean Bethany Marlowe, will coordinate Winthrop's efforts. The Task Force identified three goals for 2018 election season:

- 1) To increase Winthrop's student voter turnout to 25 percent, which represents a 5.1 percent increase over 2014;
- 2) To increase voter turnout among those majors with the lowest voter turnout rates in 2014 and 2016 to the Winthrop average (25%); and
- 3) To work with the York County Election Commission to reduce barriers to student voting.

Winthrop's primary voter turnout goals for 2018 is to increase student voter turnout from 19.9 percent (2014) to 25 percent in 2018 or 5.1 percent. Assuming that voter turnout for the 18-24 age group remains constant, Winthrop students will surpass the South Carolina voter turnout rate for voters aged

¹ US Census Bureau. "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2014." <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-577.html>.

18-24 by at least five percent. This increase is slightly more than the improvement the University saw from 2012-2016 (4.8%) and is a reasonable goal for the coming election year

These three goals also reflect two additional, important facts: 2018 is a midterm election, when turnout is typically 20 points lower than in a presidential election year, and there is no US Senate race in South Carolina to help generate additional voter excitement.

Our efforts will include continuing the successful strategies used in 2016 augmented by an institutional effort to bring a polling place to campus in 2018 and targeted outreach to student athletes and other low-turnout student populations. The latter are identified using the institution's 2016 NSLVE report. The efficacy of these efforts will be assessed with qualitative and quantitative measures and by the 2018 NSLVE report. The assessment results will be used to inform Winthrop's 2020 action plan.

Part 2: Coalition

Winthrop's Decision 2018 team will be led by Dr. Karen Kedrowski, Executive Director of the Center for Civic Learning and Dean Bethany Marlowe, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students.

This leadership team will work with a larger group, the Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE). This group is comprised of approximately two dozen faculty, staff, and students from across the University who are engaged in community and civic engagement. Initially convened in 2013 to catalog the University's civic and community engagement activities campus wide, the Task Force now is now implementing an action plan for further engagement and will comprise the core of the Decision 2018 team.

Members of the CLDE Task Force and their affiliations are:

- Dr. Karen M. Kedrowski, Executive Director of Center for Civic Learning, Co-Director of the John C. West Forum on Politics and Policy, and Professor of Political Science; Co-Chair
- Dean Bethany Marlowe, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Co-Chair
- Dr. Jeff Bellantoni, Dean, College of Visual and Performing Arts
- Ms. Kinyata Brown, Assistant Dean for Diversity, Engagement, and Inclusion
- Dr. Jennifer Leigh Disney, Chair, Department of Political Science, Coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies Program, and Professor of Political Science
- Ms. Valerie Dunlap, Compliance Coordinator, Department of Athletics
- Dr. Margaret Gillikin, Director of the Social Studies Education Program, Coordinator of Community-Based Learning minor, and Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education
- Ms. Whitney Hough, Director of Communications and Community Engagement, College of Visual and Performing Arts
- Ms. Amber Jolly, Assistant Director of Student Activities for Fraternities and Sororities
- Ms. Judy Longshaw, News & Media Services Manager, Office of Communications and Marketing
- Ms. Jessica Lynn, Executive Director, South Carolina Campus Compact
- Ms. Ellin McDonough, Director of Career and Civic Engagement
- Ms. Liz Moore, Residential Learning Coordinator
- Ms. Katarina Moyon, Co-Director of the John C. West Forum on Politics and Policy; Director of HMXP 201, the Human Experience; and Adjunct Faculty in Political Science

- Dr. Danielle Nunnery, Assistant Professor of Human Nutrition
- Ms. Summersby Okey-Hamrick, Operations Manager, Social & Behavioral Research Laboratory and Program Assistant, John C. West Forum on Politics and Policy
- Dr. Leigh Poole, Director of the International Center
- Ms. Patricia Riley, Assistant Director of Student Activities
- Dr. Bradley Tripp, Associate Professor of Sociology
- Dr. Laura Ullrich, Assistant Dean, College of Business Administration and Associate Professor of Economics
- Dr. David Vawter, Associate Professor of Education
- Dr. Virginia Williams, Director of Individualized Studies major, Coordinator of the Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies and Civic and Public Engagement minors; and Professor of History
- Dr. Jessica Yang, Assistant Professor of Social Work
- Additional student designees will be recruited for the fall
- A member of the York County Election Commission will be invited to join the group.

The Task Force will coordinate voter registration, education, and turnout as well as encouraging student voter advocacy efforts in 2018, collectively known as Decision 2018 activities, and beyond. Identified student organizations, including the Council of Student Leaders, the College Democrats, the College Republicans, and Greek organizations, will be invited to join the Decision 2018 team. 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 meet at least twice during Fall 2018 as it undertakes voter registration and education efforts prior to the South Carolina primary in June 2018. In Fall 2018, key members or subcommittees will meet regularly until Election Day. The full Task Force will meet in person at least twice during the fall semester and communicate regularly electronically.



Part 3: Description of the Work

The three goals listed all relate to the “four pillars” identified by the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative as necessary and essential for a successful plan. Since Winthrop University has proven methods from 2016 we will continue to implement those strategies. These efforts will also help the University achieves its three goals for 2018 and support the four pillars of voter registration, voter education, voter turnout, and creating student voter advocates. All election-related activities will be branded with the “Decision 2018” logo.

Pillar #1: Voter Registration. Winthrop University’s voter registration efforts will include the following:

- Tabling at Freshmen Orientation to encourage students to register for the first time or change their voter registration to their York County address. Student Life personnel will hand out stickers that read “I Registered. Eagles Vote” stickers to those who register.
- Tabling at election-related events prior to the state’s voter registration deadline.
- Tabling and other events on National Voter Registration Day.
- Conducting a campus-wide voter registration and voter turnout publicity campaign using traditional and social media.

- Sending targeted messages to low-turnout populations, including freshmen, students majoring in low-turnout majors, and African Americans.
- Distributing voter registration deadline reminders students via email, Wingspan, the student portal, and other means.

Pillar #2: Voter Education. Winthrop University will build on its strong record of promoting civic engagement through campus programming in the 2018 election cycle. These efforts began in Spring 2018, with campus appearances by nine gubernatorial candidates (of ten), including a debate co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters and a town hall with the Rock Hill mayor.

In fall 2018, voter education efforts will include:



- **News Literacy and the Future of Journalism Series:** The

John C. West Forum on Politics and Policy, the Departments of Political Science and Mass Communication, and South Carolina Humanities received a \$35,000 grant from the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the Mellon Foundation to

promote informed citizenship. These funds will support a series of lectures and forums collectively entitled “News Literacy and the Future of Journalism.” Five of these events will occur in September and October 2018.

- **Palmetto Focus Series:** The West Forum hosts the Palmetto Focus series each year with two local law firms. These forums address key issues before the state and bring in locally prominent speakers. At least one Palmetto Focus series event will be held prior to the election.
- **Syria Series:** The Department of Interdisciplinary Studies has hosted public lectures and forums on the Syrian conflict for about five years and intends to continue this effort through the 2018 election cycle.
- **Events Co-sponsored by the Athletic Department:** Winthrop will generate enthusiasm for voting by hosting two events targeted to student athletes in Fall 2018. The first will focus on professional athletes and social justice activism and the second will use international student athletes to talk about elections in their home countries.
- **Candidate Appearances and Forums:** Winthrop University will host forums and public speeches by candidates for public office. The President’s Office will issue formal invitations to all candidates for statewide office after the June 2018 primary. In addition, the local alumni chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and the West Forum are currently planning two candidate forums.
- **Constitution Requirement Courses:** The Task Force will request that faculty teaching courses that meet the Constitution Requirement provide information on the importance of voting and distribute information about voter registration and absentee voting.
- **Meetings with Selected Student Clubs and Organizations:** The Task Force has identified three majors with relatively low student voter turnout. Task Force representatives or student voter ambassadors (see below) will meet with students in these majors to highlight issues of importance to these students, based on their fields of study and/or intended careers.
- **Publicity Campaign:** The Task Force will conduct a campus-wide voter registration and voter turnout publicity campaign using traditional and social media.



Winthrop University undergraduates are required to attend a specific number of Cultural Events (18 for those who enter Winthrop as first semester freshmen) prior to

graduation. Whenever appropriate, these voter education events will be submitted to the Cultural Events Committee for approval, which will help attract student audiences.



Pillar #3: Voter Turnout. Winthrop University will continue its successful voter turnout efforts from the 2016 election cycle, plus add efforts targeted to selected student populations, and outreach to the York County Election Commission.

Campus-wide efforts:

- Printing and distributing “check your voter registration status” cards and flyers with instructions for ordering absentee ballots.
- Supporting students’ registration and absentee voting efforts by covering the cost of postage to mail forms and ballots.
- Printing, distributing, and mailing “make a plan to vote” reminder cards broadly on campus.
- Distributing voting information, including absentee voting in person, to faculty, staff, and students via email, the Wingspan student portal, and on the web site.
- Conducting a campus-wide voter registration and voter turnout publicity campaign using traditional and social media.
- Publicizing the precinct polling locations in York County.
- If necessary, providing transportation to polls on Election Day for students living in residence halls.

Promoting Turnout in Low-Turnout Student Populations: NSLVE data helps the Decision 2018 team identify and target low-turnout student demographic groups. They are:

- First semester Freshmen, the class with the lowest voter turnout in 2016;
- Students majoring in Biology, Exercise Science, and Environmental Science/Studies, which are the majors with the lowest voter turnout in 2016; and
- African-American students, the one racial/ethnic group whose voter turnout declined from 2012 to 2016.

The freshmen class (~1100 students), Biology students (~400 students), Exercise Science students (~300 students), and African American students (~1700 students) represent significant proportions of the Winthrop body. 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.

In addition, Winthrop University has approximately 300 student athletes who participate on 16 intercollegiate teams. The University’s NSLVE data do not provide separate voter turnout data for student athletes. However, the Task Force understands that student athletes face unique challenges to voting. First, this population has a high percentage of out-of-state students, who need advice and assistance on registering to vote and/or securing absentee ballots. Second, these students have busy schedules with travel to games and competitions, practice, mandatory study halls, and coursework. Voting absentee allows student athletes the best opportunity to exercise their rights to vote.

Specific strategies include:

- Incorporating voter registration, absentee voting, and “make a plan to vote” exercise into the ACAD 101 (freshmen seminar) planner. This includes distributing postcards for students to complete that will be mailed to their campus addresses about a week before Election Day.
- Guest appearances in required introductory and senior seminar courses in Exercise Science and Sport Management Programs.
- Guest appearances in Environmental Science/Studies introductory course and the Geographic Technology courses and outreach through listserv for majors.
- Guest appearances in the Introduction to the Biology Major course and departmental seminars required for juniors and seniors; outreach through the Beta Beta Beta Honor Society; and providing targeted messages to be posted on the department’s informational monitor.
- Working with African-American fraternities and sororities and other student organizations with predominantly African American membership (NAACP, Society of Ebonites, Plain Jane) to mobilize voter turnout.

Promoting Turnout Among Student Athletes: The Task Force will reach out to student athletes by:

- Providing student athletes with information about the absentee voting processes in their home states and in South Carolina so the students can make informed choices about where and how to vote; and
- Using athletes’ student halls or practice times to have the students complete absentee ballot request forms and ballots as a group.

Outreach to the York County Election Commission: Winthrop University is geographically located in York County, South Carolina. Historically, Winthrop University has had a difficult relationship with the Election Commission. While this relationship has improved in recent years, the University seeks to work more closely with the Election Commission.

Geography presents a challenge. Most of the campus, including all residence halls, is located in the Fairgrounds precinct. In 2018, the Election Commission moved the polling place for the Fairgrounds precinct from a building within walking distance of campus to a church that is over a mile from campus and not easy to find for those unfamiliar with the neighborhood.

The Task Force co-chairs, Bethany Marlowe and Karen Kedrowski, will arrange a meeting with the Director of the York County Election Commission to discuss ways to reduce barriers to student voting after the June primary. Specifically, the University will request that Winthrop be designated as a location for absentee voting in person prior to the 2018 general election. If that is not possible, the Task Force will ask that the polling place for the Fairgrounds precinct be moved to a location on or within walking distance of campus. Winthrop President Dan Mahony has also signed a letter to the Election Commission expressing interest in hosting a polling place on campus.

In addition, the Task Force conducted a survey of Winthrop students in March 2018 to determine students’ interest in voting in York County under various scenarios. The survey found that 83.5 percent of survey respondents (n=696) are registered to vote in the United States. Of these, one-third (33%) are registered in York County and 58 percent are registered elsewhere in South Carolina. Of the students who live in residence halls (53%), over half (59%) indicated that they would “definitely” or “probably” change their voter registration to York County if the University provided rides to the polling place. A slightly larger majority (61%) indicated that they would “definitely” or “probably” change their voter registration to York County if they could vote on campus prior to election day (i.e. if absentee voting in

person was available on campus). Given that approximately 2000 students live in on-campus residence halls, as many as 1,000 students might register to vote in York County, if the Task Force can reduce these barriers to voting. These data will be presented to the Election Commission as well.

If the University cannot secure an absentee voting location on campus, the Task Force will arrange transportation to the Fairgrounds precinct polling place on Election Day.

Pillar #4: Students as Voting Advocates: In 2016, Winthrop University worked with the York County Election Commission to train students as “Voting Ambassadors.” These students distributed voter information at relevant cultural events, during National Voter Registration Day, in classes, and through student clubs and organizations. Winthrop will again train students as Voting Ambassadors. These students will have Decision 2018 t-shirts to wear when working as Voting Ambassadors. It will also train members of the Task Force and other interested faculty so the University has faculty/staff Voting Ambassadors as well.

In addition, the Center for Civic Learning is recruiting a student Voting Outreach Intern for Fall Semester. This student will work closely with Dr. Kedrowski to develop messages for low-turnout populations and to promote voting within these populations.

The Task Force and the Voting Outreach Intern will also work with Winthrop student media to provide voter registration and absentee voting information to students.

Part 4: Timeline

October 2017: The Decision 2018 logo was designed and approved.

November 2017- May 2018: President Daniel Mahony issued invitations to appear on campus to all candidates for statewide and federal office who had declared by April 2018. He will reissue these invitations to those who survive the primary in fall 2018.

November 2017: Dr. Kedrowski secured permission to place voting reminders in the Announcements section of the Wingspan student portal in November 2017. Voter registration and absentee voting reminders were posted in April 2018 for the June 2018 primary and will be posted prior to the general election in Fall 2018.

December 2017: Winthrop University submitted its Action Plan to All In Campus Democracy Challenge by December 15, 2017.

December 2017: The University began hosting candidate appearances in December 2017. By April 2018, Winthrop University had hosted 9 of the 10 gubernatorial candidates.

January 2018: Winthrop University renewed its participation in the Voter Friendly Campus Initiative by submitting its letter of intent in January 2018.

January – November 2018: The University will continue to host public lectures, debates, and candidate forums as usual starting in January 2018.

March-April 2018: The Task Force conducted a survey of students to gauge student interest in registering to vote in Rock Hill if they could vote on campus in January 2018. This information will be used to inform conversations with the York County Election Commission.

April-May 2018: Students received voter registration and voting reminders for the June 2018 primary in April 2018. Voter registration deadline reminders were sent to faculty, staff, and all summer session students in May 2018.

June 2018: The Task Force will send out voting reminders to faculty, staff, and students enrolled in summer session prior to the June 12 primary, and if held, the June 26 run off.

June 2018: Voter Registration tabling begins at Freshmen Orientation. This is scheduled for all five freshmen orientation sessions.

June 2018: Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan finalized and submitted.

June-July 2018: Dr. Kedrowski and Dean Marlowe will meet with York County Election Commission officials.

June-July 2018: Student Voting Outreach Intern will be identified and hired.

August 2018: Outreach to targeted student populations for the Fall general election will begin.

August-September 2018: The Task Force will arrange student and faculty/staff Voting Ambassador training programs.

August-November 2018: Voter education, registration, and turnout efforts will continue through Election Day.

Part 5: Success

The Task Force will evaluate the effectiveness of the Decision 2018 strategies through a variety of quantitative and qualitative measures, to include:

Quantitative Measures:

- Number of “check your voter registration” cards and “how to vote absentee” flyers distributed;
- Number of students who register to vote or change their registration to Rock Hill;
- Number of and attendance at election-related events in Spring and Fall 2018;
- Number of courses visited by Voting Ambassadors and Task Force members;
- Number of students taken to the polls on Election Day (if appropriate);
- Number of Faculty/Staff Voting Ambassadors trained;
- Number of absentee ballot request forms and absentee ballots mailed by the University;
- Other measures as they come available.

Qualitative Measures:

- Feedback from Voting Ambassadors, faculty, and staff that identify successful strategies and areas for improvement;
- Success in implementing new strategies, such as securing reminders on the Wingspan portal or locating a polling place on campus;
- Feedback from individuals working with targeted groups on success of reaching these groups.

Progress toward the goal of 25 percent voter turnout in the 2018 midterm election will be determined by the University's 2018 NSLVE report. Subsequent reports will provide feedback on the progress toward the long-term goal of matching the statewide voter turnout average.

All feedback and evaluation data will be used to design the University's 2020 election year strategy and to refine its goals.

