



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**

**Voter Friendly Campus Report  
December 2018**

**SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The University of South Carolina (USC) is located in Columbia, S.C., the state's capital. The state legislature is in the university's backyard, just a block away from the center of the main campus. USC at large has seized many of the great opportunities that are afforded with this unique setup, through partnerships and educational initiatives. Despite previous attempts, this has not yielded as high of voter turnout as desired.

The Tufts University National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) campus report reveals information about USC's voter engagement that has shaped this action plan. When comparing the 2016 voting data with that of 2012, it is evident that USC is making progress in terms of increases among students registered to vote, as well as those actually voting in elections. In the 2016 presidential election, USC had a 53.5% voting rate which was 3.1% higher than the national institutional average. Additionally, the voting rate of USC students in 2016 was a 7.7% increase from the previous presidential election in 2012.

Like many other institutions, USC experienced a dramatic decrease in student voter turnout during the 2014 midterm election. Of the 32,156 enrolled students, only 17.8% of the eligible voters participated in the midterm election. Since 2018 brings another midterm election, USC will focus on voter engagement and civic education surrounding the midterm election.

Overall NSLVE data reveals the distressing reality that the majority of college students nationwide are not exercising their right to vote during presidential elections. Furthermore, data depicts that less than twenty percent of students participate in midterm elections. Although USC is relatively on par with its peer institutions, the university has attempted to seize the opportunity to address this national issue through its commitment to civic education this past fall.

Prior to fall 2018, USC had limited civic engagement programming that did not provide an intentional focus on voter engagement and civic literacy. The long-term goal is to create a culture of year-long civic engagement on campus. The short-term goal for the 18'-19' school year was to begin this work. This entails learning first-hand about our options, barriers and potential partners, and using what we learn to map out a plan for future efforts. In terms of civic engagement programming, our campus is a work in progress and is interested in the Voter Friendly Campus designation to help propel the desired culture and create a stronger emphasis on education and action.

**OVERVIEW**

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As outlined in our Friendly Voter Campus Plan, our goals for the 2018-19 school year are as follows:

## **Goal One: Voting Engagement**

- Increase number of students registered to vote
  - Assist students in understanding their options and what voting method is right based on their situation
  - Assist students in verifying they are registered to vote and that their information is correct
  - Disseminate absentee ballot voting information
- Provide education in voting logistics
  - Assist with logistics such as where students can cast their ballot or transportation to help them reach the polls

### **Strategies/Initiatives:**

- Held seven in-person voter registration events (including National Voter Registration Day) where students could check if they were registered, register to vote, request an absentee ballot, or look up their polling location
  - Trained a group of eight students on the functions of TurboVote and common voter registration questions/misconceptions
  - Held one additional absentee ballot party specifically aimed to attract, assist, and celebrate out of state voters
- Partnered with Student Government for a “Gamecocks Vote” campaign which included a social media takeover, a short video encouraging voter engagement, and tabling for peer-to-peer promotion of civic engagement
- Partnered with 17 student organizations for our Student Org Voter Registration Competition
- Added a civic engagement page to our website that featured helpful voter registration links/information, fact checking resources, and information about the election and the candidates

### **Fall 2018 Synopsis:**

Overall we met our voter engagement goal this past fall semester. The Leadership and Service Center uses TurboVote as our primary source of voter registration. According to our records, we registered 1203 unique voters through our initiatives. Our main goal, in addition to those listed above, was to create a culture of civic and voter engagement on our campus. Although this is harder to measure, the conversations focused on voting and the midterm elections on our campus this fall have propelled us in the right direction.

The Leadership and Service Center conducted an end of semester survey to all students who participated in a civic engagement program (voter registration included). Here are some poignant results related to goal one:

63.64% of participants indicated they learned more about the midterm elections

90.91% of participants indicated they learned more about the current political climate

36.36% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “If civic engagement programming did not exist, I would have participated in civic action independently”

## **Goal Two: Civic Literacy Education**

- Programming focused on helping students understand the political process including positions involved in elections, general purpose of midterm elections, and a deeper understanding of the effects the results could have for both the short and long term political climate

## Strategies/Initiatives

- Added a civic engagement page to our website that featured helpful voter registration links/information, fact checking resources, and information about the election and the candidates
  - [https://sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/leadership\\_and\\_service\\_center/civic\\_engagement/index.php](https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/leadership_and_service_center/civic_engagement/index.php)
- Programming focusing on different components of civic literacy
  - **Josh Dawsey; White House Reporter for Washington Post** – spoke about the role mass media plays in politics; specifically focused on elections
  - **Civility Series with Bakari Sellers (part one) and Micah Caskey (part two)**
    - Bakari Sellers previously served in SC House of Representatives for District 90 - Sellers facilitated a dialogue and panel discussion with politically affiliated organizations on bipartisanship and the current political climate. This event was open to the entire campus community.
    - Micah Caskey serves in the SC House of Representatives for District 89 – During his dialogue Caskey provided both historical and current perspectives on civility, and led a conversation connecting civility to the Carolinian Creed our students uphold. This event was open to the entire campus community.
  - **One Vote Documentary Viewing** – “bears hopeful witness to the humanity and rich diversity of American voters, and to the unsung stories that comprise our exercise of democracy. It is an inspiring film that follows five diverse Americans on Election Day 2016.” One of the stars of the documentary, Brenda Williams, led an inspiring discussion on the history of voting in our country and the voting rights of those who are incarcerated. This was followed by a student led Q&A session.

## Fall 2018 Synopsis

This goal was met, but is still a work in progress. As mentioned, this was the first semester of intentional civic engagement programming at University of South Carolina, and although great strides were taken this semester to integrate civic literacy, a lot of lessons were learned along the way that will shape programming in the future.

The Leadership and Service Center conducted an end of semester survey to all students who participated in a civic engagement program (voter registration included). Here are some poignant results related to goal two:

81.81% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that participation in civic engagement programming increased their understanding of civic engagement processes

81.82% of participants indicated they learned more about media’s role in politics

54.55% of participants indicated they learned more about voting processes

## Goal Three: Dialogue & Deliberation

- Provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue to cultivate civil deliberation and increase issue-based knowledge. Effective deliberation can help students gain development in civic literacy, active listening, humility, non-dualistic thinking, grit, among a variety of others. Additionally, this type of dialogue can increase student’s understanding of local and national social/political issues.

### Strategies/Initiatives

- As mentioned, the Bakari Sellers event touched on deliberation by having politically affiliated organizations discuss bipartisanship and the current political climate. Since this was a panel-style event, the deliberation occurred between a select few individuals, and the audience primarily watched.

### Fall 2018 Synopsis

- The Leadership and Service Center plans year-long engagement broken into semesters. Our primary focus this fall was goal one and two of this document centered on the midterm elections. Moving into spring 2019, our focus shifts to deliberation grounded in the National Issues Forum model.

As mentioned, the Leadership and Service Center conducted an end of semester survey to all students who participated in a civic engagement program (voter registration included). Here are some poignant results related to goal three:

One participant wrote “more conversation-based programming in smaller groups” when asked “What other civic engagement programming would you like to see”? This quote aligns with the need to implement this type of programming.

### **Goal Four: Civic Action**

Assist students in turning ideas into action and increase students’ capacity and commitment to participate constructively with others and to work collectively to address common problems

### Strategies/Initiatives

- Our Women’s Mentor Network hosted a speaker from Women’s Rights and Empowerment Network for an Advocacy 101 workshop
- Integrated conversations around United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals into our Emerging Leadership Course by discussing why leadership is critical for advancement of societal goals
- Brought four student leaders to the Southern Collegiate Leadership Conference that focused on “Leading Through Controversy” and integrated civility and deliberation throughout the conference

### Fall Synopsis 2018

Similar to goal three, integrating civic action conversations into existing programming is an ongoing process that we have started this fall and plan on developing further for the upcoming academic year.

As mentioned, the Leadership and Service Center conducted an end of semester survey to all students who participated in a civic engagement program (voter registration included). Here are some poignant results related to goal four:

81.82% of students agreed or strongly agreed that participation in civic engagement programming increased their commitment to civic action

### **Overall Synopsis**

Goals one and two were strongly met this fall semester, and are the goals that most closely relate to the Voter Friendly Campus designation. Goals three and four are our primary focus for

the upcoming spring semester. Overall our short-term goal of learning first-hand about our options, barriers and potential partners, and using what we learn to map out a plan for future efforts has been met. This will help guide our programming as we move forward.

## **SECTION II: COALITION**

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Students are crucial to developing and strengthening a culture around civic education and participation at USC and in Columbia. The Civic Leadership Education and Action Team (CLEAT) is an established group of committed students to assist in implementation of this action plan. Two student leadership positions have been identified; Chief Civic Education Strategist and Chief Civic Action Strategist. CLEAT began this fall 2018 semester and is currently composed of five students.

Our coalition is predominantly composed of the following:

- Leadership and Service Center staff members
- Civic Leadership Education and Action Team
- Momentum Series Advisory Board
- Student Government

These students and staff members coordinate all the programming listed above. Although student government is its own entity, partnership and collaboration was key this past semester due to the quantity of students they have, and their social capital on campus. This coalition functioned productively and did an effective job merging ideas to provide streamlined programming.

For democratic engagement work in the future, our coalition needs to grow. As mentioned, CLEAT is composed of five students, four of whom are seniors. A focus of this group in the spring is to increase awareness of their group and recruit new members for the following academic year.

Additional on-campus partners:

- Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Office
- Carolina Judicial Council
- School of Mass Communications & Journalism
- School of Social Work
- Department of Political Science
- Office of Multicultural Student Affairs
- Student Organizations (17 this past fall)

Additional off-campus partners:

- Richland County Elections Commissions
- Civic Nation
- #VoteTogether
- National Voter Registration Day
- TurboVote
- South Carolina Campus Compact
- NASPA Lead

The on-campus partners listed above partnered on specific one-time programs and general voter engagement. For example, School of Social Work expressed interest in pushing voter registration among their students so we provided them with TurboVote referral codes, voter registration education materials, and acted as a support during their registration efforts. Most of our off-campus partners provided helpful resources to guide the education and best practices of

our coalition's programming. For example, National Voter Registration Day webinars, NASPA Lead cohort calls, and campus compact civic action planning resources.

### **SECTION III: ANALYSIS OF WORK**

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#### **Voter Registration:**

- Held seven in person voter registration events (including National Voter Registration Day) where students could check if they were registered, register to vote, request an absentee ballot, or look up their polling location
  - Trained a group of eight students on the functions of TurboVote and common voter registration questions/misconceptions
  - Held one additional absentee ballot party specifically aimed to attract, assist, and celebrate out of state voters
- Distributed TurboVote link through a myriad of platforms (website, flyers, social media, events, etc.) for individuals to register on their own time
- Partnered with Student Government for a "Gamecocks Vote" campaign which included a social media takeover, a short video encouraging voter engagement, and tabling for peer-to-peer promotion of civic engagement
- Partnered with 17 student organizations for our Student Org Voter Registration Competition

Through TurboVote we registered 1203 students (note: this does not include those who registered using a student organization's TurboVote platform such as national fraternity and sorority platforms)

#### **Voter Education:**

- Added a civic engagement page to our website that featured helpful voter registration links/information, fact checking resources, and information about the election and the candidates
- Handed out hard copies of these resources during tabling events and promoted the online versions during programming events
- Spoke in four first-year classes about voter registration and education resources

#### **Ballot Access:**

- Utilized TurboVote for students to request absentee ballots and register to vote
- Promoted use of BallotReady through website, social media, in-person events, student orgs, so students could view their ballots prior to voting

TurboVote was a huge advantage for students because of how it walks through details of absentee ballot requesting state by state in a way that our volunteers would be unable to memorize on their own. Our network of off-campus partners was also a huge advantage since we had access to resources, best-practices, and individuals whom we could ask questions. One barrier that kept occurring during in-person registration events is that our students rarely carry their licenses with them, making it difficult to register in person.

#### **Voter Turnout:**

- During tabling events we had specific lines for people to look up their polling location and ballot in advance to eliminate any confusion for them on Election Day
- Uber/Lyft was providing free or discounted rides to the polls on Election Day and we promoted this information to students to eliminate any transportation barriers

- College Democrats, College Republicans, College Libertarians joined forces in what was called “Politicarolina” to promote early voting and day of voter turnout

#### **SECTION IV: SUCCESSES**

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- 1) **CLEAT** –The Leadership and Service Center functions off of a student led, staff supported model. Thanks to CLEAT, this was the first semester civic engagement was led from this perspective and it provided a lot of needed insight into student views and opinions about what works and what doesn’t for programming. It also gives us first-hand insight into some of the barriers students face.
- 2) **Ability to share our work** – The staff members coordinating civic engagement programming were featured on two webinars this semester. The first was ALL IN Democracy’s webinar “Celebrating National Voter Registration Day of your campus”. The second was a webinar with TurboVote and CampusLabs called “Ace the Midterms! Get the most out of your Voter Engagement Strategy”.
- 3) **Variety of partners** - Our programming brought together a variety of constituent groups including 3 academic departments, 17 student organizations, and 3 student affairs partnerships. Interacting with multiple groups helped extend our reach across campus and unites a culture around voting/civic engagement.

#### **SECTION V: BARRIERS**

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- 1) **Reauthorizing participation in NSLVE** – Despite our continuous efforts as an office to reauthorize, there has been a hold-up in our legal department due to some concerns about security and what is done with data once received by Institute for Democracy and Higher Education. The issue has moved up the chain of command at our institution and we are actively working with the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education to solve this problem. NSLVE data is a critical component to our assessment plan and we are doing everything in our power to mitigate this barrier.
- 2) **Student apathy** – Our campus struggles with student apathy in a variety of contexts. This paired with students’ confusion around voting procedures and general procrastination often limits our impact on campus. We tend to see the same students engaging in all of our programming and need to extend our reach to those not currently involved.
- 3) **Lack of financial resources** - Securing additional resources for new initiatives can be difficult and redirecting existing revenues from other worthy efforts can be problematic and challenging. We have been able to pull funding from other programs to make our civic engagement plan possible this semester, but need to secure a more reliable budget source in the future.

#### **SECTION VI: BEYOND 2018**

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In addition to engaging more in deliberation and civic action as mentioned above, we have partnered with Richland County Government Voter Registration and Elections on a plan for 2019-2020 elections.

The plan includes the following interactions:

- Richland County Government providing training for CLEAT members and student volunteers helping with voter registration to ensure everyone is aware of local/state

- policies
- Solidify a polling location on our campus to be staffed by USC students and Richland County Government professionals
- Streamlined communication message about voter registration/turnout information (3 times as election dates near) in the Sunday email which is sent to every USC student
- Partnering on voter registration events during New Student Orientation and Parents weekend

Richland County Government and the Leadership and Service Center also sat down to discuss barriers they had with student voters in the past and how we can collectively mitigate that. Partnership with Richland County Government will be critical in providing as streamlined a process as possible for voter engagement. These steps will help our campus prepare for local/state elections and the 2020 national election.

## **SECTION VII: NSLVE DATA**

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As mentioned above, we have had issues reauthorizing to have use of our NSLVE data again. Assuming this problem is solved shortly, our coalition plans on using our data to inform areas of success, and gaps on campus. Once we have the data we will meet to discuss the results and the implications this has for our work moving forward.

Since we have begun to partner with academic units this past election cycle, the fields of study voter rates is particularly of interest so we can identify more academic units with whom to partner. NSLVE also provides us the opportunity to compare where our efforts are compared to peer institutions as well.

## **SECTION VIII: PHOTOS AND STORIES**

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CLEAT coalition members with Bakari Sellers for Civility Series Part One



CLEAT coalition members with Micah Caskey for Civility Series Part Two





CLEAT coalition members with Josh Dawsey; White House Reporter for the Washington Post  
Mass Media in Politics & Elections



### National Voter Registration Day

Partners included: CLEAT members  
 Student Success Center  
 Politicarolina (College Democrats, College  
 Republicans, College Libertarians)  
 School of Social Work  
 Yalla Vote Campaign

Three locations across campus to register

CLEAT member prepping for a Parent's Weekend Voter Registration Drive



CLEAT member being interviewed about the importance of voting by School Mass Communication and Journalism student

CLEAT member at Absentee Ballot Party  
Celebrating out of state voters





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University of South Carolina Coalition Members  
contributing to this report

Jabari Bodrick  
Assistant Director  
Leadership and Service Center

Carly Zerr  
Leadership Coach  
Leadership and Service Center

Kylie Carney  
Civic Leadership Education Action Team  
Leadership and Service Center

Jordan Wayburn  
Civic Leadership Education Action Team  
Leadership and Service Center

Blaine Burris  
Civic Leadership Education Action Team  
Leadership and Service Center

Catherine Goodwin  
Civic Leadership Education Action Team  
Leadership and Service Center

Jordan Hammond  
Civic Leadership Education Action Team  
Leadership and Service Center