



ALL IN DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE

MERCER UNIVERSITY

2018 ACTION PLAN

MAY 31, 2018



I. Executive Summary

Mercer University's mission is to teach, to learn, to create, to discover, to inspire, to empower, and to serve. In fulfilling this mission, Mercer commits to promoting the development of students who understand that their gifts and talents can be used to change the world. Mercer takes great pride in supporting civic engagement, including the promotion of voter registration, education, and turnout amongst our students. According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), Mercer students register and turnout to vote at higher rates than their peers, but despite this level of engagement much improvement can still be made.

In 2016, Mercer students had a voter registration rate of 80% and a turnout rate of 56.4%. These rates were a slight dip from the rates seen in 2012 (83.8% and 58.7% respectively). As the midterm election nears and Georgia gears up for an exciting gubernatorial race, Mercer's Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) team, along with the students of Mobilize Mercer, are ready to take on the task of increasing democratic engagement.

Under the leadership of Dr. Douglas Pearson and Ms. Lauren Shinholster, the CLDE team will seek to accomplish the following goals:

- Raise the midterm voter registration rate (68.9%) to Mercer's 2016 voter registration level (80%).
- Increase the midterm voter turnout rate from 28% to 36% in 2018.
- Increase TurboVote signups by 30% in 2018.

The progress made by the CLDE team will work to achieve the long-term goal of raising voter turnout rates to 70% by 2028.

II. Leadership

The Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) team was formed to promote voter registration, education, and turnout amongst students at Mercer University. To improve civic learning and democratic engagement it was understood that a coordinated effort, featuring students, faculty, staff, and administrators, had to be undertaken. Under the leadership of Dr. Douglas Pearson, Vice President and Dean of Students, and Lauren Shinholster, Coordinator of Community Engagement, the 2018 Mercer University CLDE team was formed.

Members of the Mercer University CLDE team include:

- **Dr. Douglas Pearson**, Vice President and Dean of Students
- **Ms. Lauren Shinholster**, Coordinator of Community Engagement and Advisor to Mobilize Mercer
- **Ms. Alexandra Kirschbaum**, Undergraduate Student, Co-Chair of Mobilize Mercer
- **Mr. Christian Hartley**, Undergraduate Student, President of Young Democrats, and Co-Chair of Mobilize Mercer
- **Mr. William Carter**, Undergraduate Student, Treasurer for Mobilize Mercer

- **Ms. Carrie Ingoldsby**, Director of Campus Life and Student Involvement
- **Ms. Meredith Keating**, Assistant Director of Campus Life and Student Involvement
- **Dr. Mary Alice Morgan**, Senior Vice Provost for Service Learning and English Professor
- **Dr. Christopher Grant**, Chair of Political Science Department, Professor, and Advisor to Young Democrats
- **Dr. Lori Johnson**, Associate Professor and Director of the Law and Public Policy Program
- **Mr. Matthew Brownback**, Director of Student-Athlete Support Services
- **Mr. Frantz Salomon**, Area Coordinator in Residence Life
- **Ms. Beka Hott**, Area Coordinator in Residence Life
- **Ms. Taylor Jessamy**, Counselor, Student Support Services

Participation in Mercer’s CLDE team will grow as other key faculty and staff representatives are identified.

Mobilize Mercer

The CLDE team honors Mercer’s dedication to fostering a student-centered environment that empowers students to take an active role in the development of programs and services. At the forefront of Mercer’s student-led work to increase voter turnout is Mobilize Mercer, a nonpartisan voting initiative focused on raising voter awareness and participation. The CLDE team functions in a supporting and consulting capacity to Mobilize Mercer to assist in their planning of various voter engagement activities, including voter registration tabling and debate watch parties. In 2016, the efforts of Mobilize Mercer were recognized in Mercer’s win of the “SoCon Votes” competition, the first Division 1 athletic conference championship for democratic engagement. Mobilize Mercer will look to defend Mercer’s title in 2018.

Community Partners

The efforts of the CLDE team and Mobilize Mercer are enhanced through the support of community partners, which include the leaders of SoCon Votes, Middle Ga Votes, the All in Democracy Challenge, and the Campus Election Engagement Project. Additional support has been provided by the Macon-Bibb County Board of Elections and TurboVote.

CLDE and Mobilize Mercer Meetings

To accomplish the goals set forth in this action plan, the full CLDE team will meet at least once per semester, with key members meeting more frequently. The leaders of Mobilize Mercer will meet biweekly during Summer 2018 and weekly in Fall 2018. The full Mobilize Mercer team plans to meet biweekly in the Fall 2018 semester.

III. Commitment

The commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement transcends the work of Mobilize Mercer and Mercer’s CLDE team. Mercer University’s commitment to civic learning and

democratic engagement is reflected in the university's mission and vision statements, as well as the university's 2018 strategic plan.

Mission Statement

Mercer University's mission is to teach, to learn, to create, to discover, to inspire, to empower, and to serve.

In fulfilling this mission, Mercer cultivates an environment that encourages its students to develop their talents to serve the needs of humankind. Mercer's commitment to creating a culture of service can be seen just by taking a walk on the campus. Throughout the campus you will find signs that read, "At Mercer, everyone majors in changing the world."



Vision Statement

To change the world, one student at a time.

2018 Strategic Plan Imperatives

Mercer University's 2018 Strategic Plan outlines the university's vision for the decade ahead. The plan includes two imperatives that underscore the commitment to civic learning-- Imperative 5: Achieving Meaningful Outcomes and Imperative 7: Being True to our Heritage.

Imperative 5: Achieving Meaningful Outcomes

To achieve meaningful outcomes, Mercer will create an Engaged Learning Council to facilitate the coordination of engaged learning experiences including study abroad, service-learning, internships, and research. Mercer understands that by enriching the academic experience through engaged learning, students will be better prepared for success post-graduation.

Imperative 7: Being True to our Heritage

Mercer's heritage reflects a commitment to dignity, freedom, and compassionate service. In staying true to these values, Mercer guarantees an environment that supports openness and inclusion, as well as freedom of inquiry and expression. Mercer will continue to inspire students to lives of service by increasing annual participation in Mercer on Mission, a blended study abroad, service-learning, and research experience.

Core Curriculum

Preparing Mercer students to change the world is a shared responsibility. The commitment to developing change-makers is witnessed just as easily in Mercer's co-curricular experience as it is in the curricular.

Mercer's core curriculum for General Education builds on the assertion of commitment to civic learning by offering two tracks— the Great Books Curriculum or the Integrative Curriculum.

The course sequence in the Great Books Curriculum allows students to explore complex issues on race, class, and gender. A description of the Great Books Curriculum reads, "Through this survey of political, religious, philosophical, and scientific thought, students can increase their skills in disciplined thinking and effective writing, can heighten their moral and ethical reflectiveness, and can understand how the seminal ideas of the past have formed our twentieth and twenty-first century selves."

In the Integrative Curriculum Program, students complete three multidisciplinary courses— Understanding Self and Others, Building Community, and Engaging the World. A description on the 'Building Community' course reads, "The broad topic for this sophomore level course is community – how communities are formed, cultivated or threatened, and the role citizens play in preserving public good in communities and nations." The 'Building Community' course is enhanced through service-learning and has provided opportunities for Mercer students to tutor in Bibb County elementary and high schools, volunteer at a local day shelter, and work with animal rescue organizations.

Co-curricular

Beyond the curriculum, Mercer enhances the academic experience through cultural, social, and educational programming; community engagement and volunteerism; leadership development; and Greek Life and student organization participation.

With 20 active Greek chapters and nearly 150 student organizations on campus, Mercer students understand and embrace the importance of involvement and civic engagement. Students dedicate their time to rebuild homes with Habitat for Humanity, host food drives with MerServe, and raise funds for pediatric hospitals with MU Miracle. Finally, Mercer students demonstrate their commitment to democratic engagement through involvement with organizations such as College Republicans, Young Democrats, Young Americans for Liberty, and Mobilize Mercer.

Although Mercer students have long been active in the community on their own, the Center for Community Engagement functions as the clearinghouse for volunteer opportunities. The Center for Community Engagement matches individual students and student organizations to community agencies for volunteer placement. Additionally, the Center for Community

Engagement works with faculty to facilitate the planning and coordination of service-learning opportunities.

IV. Landscape

In 2016, Mercer University participated in the inaugural “SoCon Votes” competition. “SoCon Votes”, an athletic conference championship for democratic engagement was created by Joey Wozniak, a senior at Mercer University at that time. In recognizing the important role that colleges and universities play in strengthening civic engagement, Mercer



Pictured from l-r: Joseph Wozniak, creator of SoCon Votes; 2016 Mobilize Mercer leaders, Hannah Vann (advisor), Austin Paul, and Emily Thompson; Lyne Murphy, SoCon Votes sponsor; Douglas Pearson, Mercer Vice President and Dean of Students; and Mercer President, Bill Underwood.

administrators quickly bought into the “SoCon Votes” competition. In addition to winning “SoCon Votes”, Mercer took two steps that continue to impact the political climate and commitment to democratic engagement on campus—NSLVE participation and the formation of Mobilize Mercer.

NSLVE

The NSLVE assessment has been a useful tool for examining voter registration and turnout rates at Mercer University. By organizing voter engagement data based on age, gender, and fields of study, for example, NSLVE has enabled Mercer to draw inferences on the areas in which we can improve from the previous election. The tables listed below provide a snapshot of democratic engagement at Mercer.

Table 1. Student Voter Registration Rates

	Mercer	All Institutions
2012	83.8%	69.0%
2014	68.9%	68.0%
2016	80.0%	70.6%

Table 2. Student Voter Turnout Rates

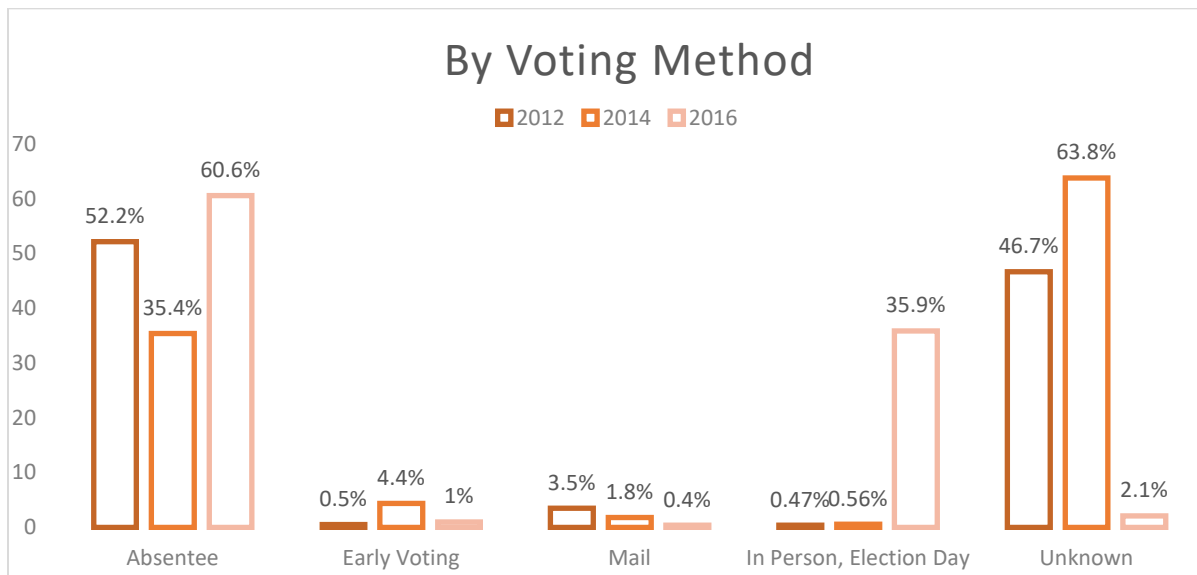
	Mercer	All Institutions
2012	58.7%	46.9%
2014	27.7%	18.5%
2016	56.4%	50.4%

While Mercer University students register and turnout to vote at higher rates than their peers, there is significant room for improvement. Most notably, there is concern regarding the disparity in voter registration when comparing the 2014 midterm election to the presidential elections of 2012 and 2016. With a nearly 15% decline in voter registration from 2012 to 2014, it will be paramount to stress the importance of midterm elections. The university’s commitment to promoting democratic engagement must be sustained. Other notable democratic engagement trends can be seen below.

Democratic Engagement at Mercer

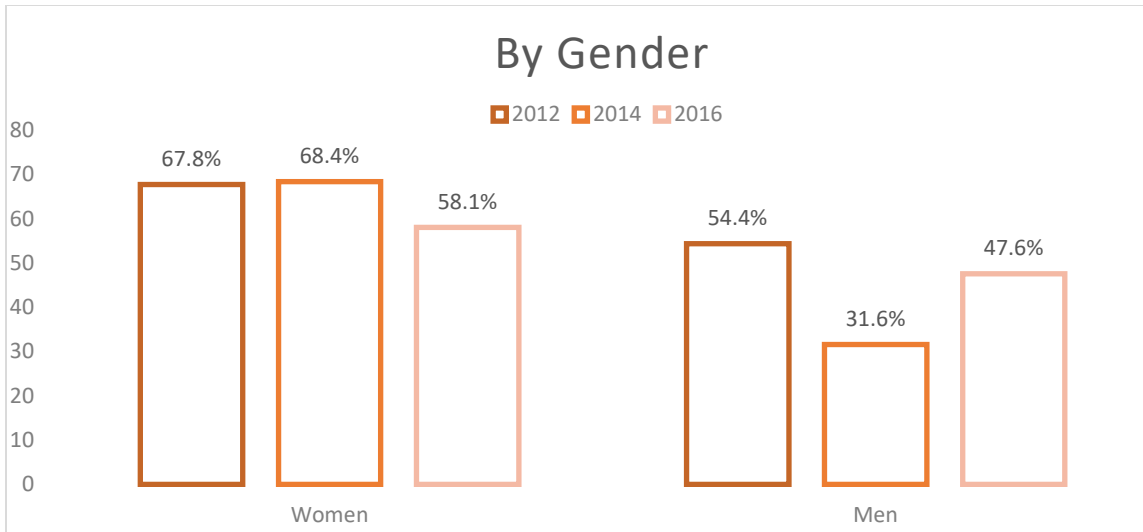
Absentee Ballot vs In Person, Election Day

Based on Fall 2017 enrollment data, 86% of Mercer students are from Georgia. Despite the high rate of Georgia residents, the majority of Mercer students are still opting to vote via absentee ballot (60.6%). Mobilize Mercer and Mercer’s CLDE team will work to inform students that they have the right to vote using their university address if they so choose. If students prefer to vote via absentee ballot, Mobilize Mercer can facilitate this process by signing those students up with TurboVote. TurboVote will allow students to request a state-specific absentee ballot.



Voting, By Gender

According to Mercer’s NSLVE data, women are voting at higher rates than men. Mobilize Mercer will combat this disparity through targeted programming, which may include partnerships with fraternities to host voter registration drives amongst their members.



Voting, By Field of Study

Mercer’s NSLVE breakdown based on field of study follows the national trend of lower voter turnout amongst STEM majors—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. To address the lower voting rates, the CLDE team will work to identify faculty members that can function as liaisons between their students and Mobilize Mercer.

Field of Study, Highest Voting Rates	Rate	Field of Study, Lowest Voting Rates	Rate
Public Administration & Social Service Professions	72.9%	Physical Sciences	37.7%
Education	72.4%	Philosophy and Religious Studies	43.5%
Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	72.2%	Engineering	44.4%
Law Enforcement, Firefighting, and Protective Services	71.0%	Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Humanities	45.0%

Internal Barriers

Mercer is very fortunate to have supportive faculty, staff, administrators, and students who are willing to lead the charge to increase democratic engagement. However, as with most initiatives, additional staffing and funding can lend itself to increasing the number of events that can be conducted, as well as the potential quality and reach of those events.

External Barriers

While Georgia has taken strides to reduce barriers to voting, there are still significant challenges.

- Voter ID requirements- Georgia does not accept school IDs from private institutions
- Polling Location- While the nearest polling location is less than 2 miles from campus, it may prove difficult for some students to vote if they do not have access to reliable transportation.

- Voter registration deadlines- Georgia does not offer same day voter registration. All Georgia voters must be registered to vote by October 9th for the general election on November 6th.

Resources

Despite some challenges, Mercer is confident that our institution is primed for a successful election season. There are several available resources that are key to Mercer's success—dedicated personnel and community partners, adequate funding, and civic-minded students.

V. Goals

To build upon the accomplishments of 2016, Mercer University has set the following goals:

Long-term goal: **Raise voter turnout rates to 70% by 2028.**

Short-term goals:

- I. **Raise the midterm voter registration rate to Mercer's 2016 voter registration level.**
Historically, voter engagement declines in midterm elections; however, the effort behind encouraging students to register to vote should not wane. In 2014, 68.9% of Mercer students registered to vote, but in 2016 this rate surged to 80%. It is the expectation that through intentional and well-coordinated efforts this goal can be met.
- II. **Increase the midterm voter turnout rate from 28% to 36% in 2018.**
In 2014, the voter turnout rate in the United States was 35.9%, while Georgia's turnout rate was 38.5%. Mercer will work to raise its voter turnout to the level of engagement seen nationwide in 2014.
- III. **Increase TurboVote signups by 30% in 2018.**
Mercer recorded 205 TurboVote signups in 2016. To justify the expense of TurboVote and the continuation of this partnership, utilization must be increased. In 2018, considerable effort will be placed behind the promotion of TurboVote. Mobilize Mercer will take care to promote that TurboVote can do more than facilitate voter registration. Mass emails, voter registration tabling, and campus-wide competitions are a few of the strategies that will be used to increase signups.

VI. Strategy

Various strategies will be undertaken to increase voter registration, education, and turnout at Mercer.

Voter Registration

- TurboVote
 - The partnership with TurboVote has been renewed for 2018-2019. Paper voter registration forms will continue to be available in the Center for Community Engagement and Office of Campus Life and Student Involvement, but TurboVote will be the primary platform for Mercer's voter registration efforts.
 - Mercer's TurboVote link will continue to be featured on MyMercer, the university's online student portal. When students need to access the portal to check their grades or review their financial aid, they will also be able to register to vote, change their address, setup text reminders about election deadlines, or request absentee ballots.
- Summer Orientation Sessions, **June 15-25**
 - Information on voter registration will be provided during the summer orientation resource fairs. Promotional items including cups and stickers will be available.
- Move-in Day, **August 18**
 - Mobilize Mercer will be partnering with Residence Life to host voter registration tables in the first-year dorms during Move-in Day.
- Bear Fair, **August 20**
 - For those students who are unable to register during Move-in Day, they will have another chance at Bear Fair on Monday, August 20th. Bear Fair is the annual event that introduces first-year students to student organizations on Mercer's Macon campus.
- Mass Emails
 - Email reminders about voter registration deadlines and voter engagement events will be sent via "Bear Blurbs", a weekly email blast sent out every Monday.
 - Mobilize Mercer will petition President Bill Underwood to send out an email to all students about the importance of democratic engagement. This email will include a reminder about the registration deadline and upcoming election date, as well a link to TurboVote.
- UNV and INT Presentations, **September 17-28**
 - University 101 (UNV) is an integral part of the first-year experience where students can discuss topics such as study skills, health, safety, and hopefully, democratic engagement. Mobilize Mercer will work with UNV professors to arrange brief presentations that will conclude with voter registration.

- Similar to UNV, presentations and voter registration will also be offered to INT 201, 'Building Community'. Presentations during INT 201 will serve as an opportunity to engage sophomore students.
- Student Organization Presentations/ Event Co-sponsorships, **September and October**
 - Mobilize Mercer will work closely with student organizations and programming boards to identify opportunities for collaboration.
- Campus Competitions, **September- October 9**
 - Mobilize Mercer will promote voter registration through campus competitions.
 - Teams can be formed based on Greek Life affiliation, athletics, residence halls, student organizations, etc.
 - Each team will be assigned a unique referral code via TurboVote.
- Service-Learning
 - Keeping in line with Mercer's commitment to engaged learning, Dr. Christopher Grant, Chair of the Political Science Department, will offer a service-learning option in his Campaigns & Elections class.
 - Students taking Campaigns & Elections will work with Mobilize Mercer to coordinate and implement their voter registration efforts.
- Constitution Day, **September 17**
 - Each year, Mercer's Center for America's Founding Principles hosts a speaker series. In 2016, in observance of Constitution Day, Dr. Jeffrey Tulis from the University of Texas conducted a speech titled, "The Anti-Federal Appropriation."
 - Mobilize Mercer will look to align its voter registration efforts with the 2018 Constitution Day event by hosting voter registration booths throughout the duration of the event. Pocket constitutions and other promotional and educational items will be provided.
- National Voter Registration Day, **September 25**
 - Mobilize Mercer will be conducting voter register tabling throughout the day.
 - Tabling will be conducted in high traffic areas such as the Connell Student Center and the University Center.
- Be a Good NeighBear, **October 6**
 - Be a Good NeighBear is Mercer's largest annual day of service. With more than 400 students, faculty, and staff participating, this event will serve as a great opportunity to offer voter registration.
 - Be a Good NeighBear will serve as one of the final pushes for voter registration before the deadline on October 9th.

Voter Education

Voter education will be infused throughout Mobilize Mercer's voter registration events; however, additional voter education strategies are listed below.

- Comprehensive Voter Education Website
 - Mercer's CLDE team will work to establish a website that will provide information on voter registration, polling locations, democratic engagement trends, sample ballots, and upcoming events. The All in Democracy Challenge Action Plan and Mercer's NSLVE reports will be featured on this website.
- Debates, Local Candidate Forums, and Debate Watch Parties
 - Mobilize Mercer will provide opportunities to increase voter education by hosting debate watch parties; however, a major priority for the summer and early fall will be casting Mercer's bid to host a gubernatorial debate. The President's Office will lead this campaign.
 - The potential for hosting local candidate forums and seminars on voting rights will also be explored.
- Voter Education Marketing/ Social Media Campaigns
 - Mobilize Mercer has established an Instagram account to increase voter awareness. Facebook will continue to be used, but Instagram may assist in reaching a broader audience.
 - Flyers, posters, and banners will be displayed throughout campus and regularly updated.
 - Op-ed pieces from faculty, staff, or administrators may also be featured in The Cluster, the student news site at Mercer.

Voter Turnout

- Social Media Campaigns
 - In the days leading up to Election Day, Mobilize Mercer will launch their "I vote because..." campaign. The campaign will feature prominent student leaders who represent a diverse cross-section of Mercer's study body.
- Election Day Shuttling, **November 6**
 - A potential barrier to voting may be transportation. To address this barrier, Mobilize Mercer will coordinate shuttles on Election Day.
- Election Night Celebration, **November 6**
 - Mobilize Mercer will host an Election Day Watch Party that will include election themed food and "I Voted" swag.

VII. Reporting

The All in Democracy Challenge Action Plan will be shared with all members of the CLDE team and Mobilize Mercer. Additionally, the action plan and Mercer’s NSLVE report will be posted online.

VIII. Evaluation

NSLVE will be the primary evaluation tool to determine voter registration and turnout rates. Additional measures that will be recorded include:

- TurboVote signups
- Number of events and event participation
- Event/presentation feedback



Questions related to this action plan should be addressed to:

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