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**Mercer University Wins “Highest Student Voter Participation” and “Most Improved Student Voter Participation” in Southern Conference’s Voter Participation Championship**

*University of North Carolina at Greensboro and East Tennessee State University are runners-up as both universities set a high bar for SoCon Votes in student voter participation in 2018 elections; UNCG and ETSU will also receive awards from the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge*

**WASHINGTON, DC** – In an attempt to address one of American democracy’s biggest problems—low and unequal participation that leads to low levels of engagement beyond college—schools within the Southern Conference launched “[SoCon Votes](#),” the first NCAA Division 1 conference championship for voter participation. The initiative began in 2016 and continued the competition amongst the 10 colleges and universities leading into 2018. This program is supported by the non-partisan, non-profit program, the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#).

“SoCon Votes is the first of its kind and has spurred concerted efforts to register, educate, and turnout college students at the polls across the Southern Athletic Conference,” said Jen Domagal-Goldman, executive director of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. “While we congratulate Mercer University, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and East Tennessee State University on earning their awards, all 10 of the SoCon Votes institutions raised the bar on student voting for their campuses.”

Concluding the first Division 1 Conference Championship for Voter Participation, Mercer University claims the conference championship for Highest Student Voter Participation with a record-setting 49.8% of students participating in the 2018 general election. Mercer’s team tasked with overseeing this initiative was led by Lauren Shinholster, Coordinator of Community Engagement.

“The 2018 midterm election was further proof that the student vote is powerful,” said Lauren Shinholster, Coordinator of Community Engagement at Mercer University. “We are proud that Mercer students recognize the value in their right to vote, and that they choose to celebrate this right by actively participating in the democratic process no matter the year.”

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro claimed the second-place award for highest voter turnout, with efforts led by Kristina Gage, Associate Director for Civic Engagement. According to their National Study on Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report, student voter participation rates topped out at 39.7% in 2018 – rising 16.1 points from 2014.

Mercer University also claims the conference championship for Most Improved Student Voter Participation with a 22.2 percentage point increase in student voter participation, from 27.6% in 2014 to 49.8% in 2018.

East Tennessee State University claimed the second-place award, with efforts led by Joy Fulkerson, Director of Leadership and Civic Engagement. According to their NSLVE report, student voter participation rates increases from 16.2% in 2014 to 35.2% in 2018 – which represents a 19 point improvement.

The conventional wisdom has long been that millennials demonstrate a general apathy when it comes to voting. However, a recent landmark study—and the first major one released on 2018 youth voting trends—from Tufts University and the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) entitled “[Democracy Counts: Increased Student and Institutional Engagement](#)” tells a very different story. In fact, student turnout doubled from 2014 to 2018. The improvements by students at Mercer University, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and East Tennessee State University show what is possible when leaders on college campuses stand up to support student civic engagement.

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About ALL IN Challenge:

The [All IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#) a national, nonpartisan program of Civic Nation, a 501c3 based in Washington, DC. By recognizing colleges and universities for their commitment to increasing student voting rates, the Challenge encourages higher education institutions to help students form the habits of active and informed citizenship, make democratic participation a core value on their campus, and cultivate generations of engaged citizens who are essential to a healthy democracy.