

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

VOTER FRIENDLY CAMPUS REPORT

Prepared by Dr. Carah Ong Whaley, JMU Civic Associate Director & Angelina Clapp, JMU Civic Democracy Program Fellow



INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 global health pandemic threatened not only the conduct of elections, as evidenced especially during presidential primaries, but also the ability of campuses to provide meaningful opportunities for informed participation in elections. As campuses and communities across the country struggled to adapt and cope with public health and accompanying safety measures, many traditional means for educating and mobilizing young voters in the 2020 Elections were rendered obsolete as a result of limitations of in-person contact and campuses relying on virtual instruction.

Students have the opportunity to vote either at their permanent address or in the locality where campus is situated. The pandemic created additional challenges to student voting because of displacement. JMU Civic and Dukes Vote had to design and distribute creative resources for students to refer to how/where/when to vote to ensure they were able to vote in the right place either early, by mail or on Election Day.

While there were several opportunities to broadcast messages with accurate voter registration and voting information, including through campus-wide emails, course registration system and our campus instructional tool, Canvas, such top-down methods are ineffective even under “normal” circumstances for developing the deeper connection of electoral participation to student civic skills, capacity and agency.

Although class time is an effective means for educating young voters (Bennion and Nickerson, 2016), volunteers had to be trained to conduct class “visits” in a virtual setting. Virtual presentations also had to be adapted to accommodate asynchronous meetings and redesigned to be more effective in a virtual environment, especially when live questions and answers specific to students weren’t possible.

Although social media has become increasingly important for disseminating political information (McAllister, 2015) and can be an effective tool for mobilizing student voters (Teresi and Michelson, 2015), it also poses threats to democracy by effectively distributing election misinformation, disinformation and propaganda as evidenced in the 2020 election. Furthermore, as a result of the pandemic and additional time spent in the virtual environment, it has become even more challenging to capture student attention online. Effective social media campaigns were designed to be microtargeted to student interests and majors. For example, we focused especially on low-propensity voters based on data from our National Study for Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) report. New forms of relational digital organizing emerged through the availability of such apps as OutVote in partnership with ALL IN Campus Vote Project and were used in combination with “couch parties” and campus text messaging competitions. Perhaps the most successful was our celebrity cameo campaign in partnership with the Campus Election Engagement Project, which was used to capture attention, share accurate election information on social media and engage in election conversations.

INTRODUCTION (CONT.)

To respond to the disconnect between addressing public problems through political participation and to increase internal and external efficacy, we co-create and co-implement with students programming and initiatives that meet civic and political learning outcomes. JMU students are consistently asked two questions through our programming and year-round voter education class visits: what do you care about? And, what can you do about it? Two things they can do are registering to vote and voting.

Our research and experience show that students care deeply about issues, but are not connecting political and civic participation as a means to address those issues. Student-led efforts lean into politics through learning-centered, action-oriented dialogues, dubbed “Tent Talks,” which bring major issues like racism and social justice, the economy, the public health crisis, the environment and immigration to public spaces on campus with opportunities for deliberation, discussion and action. In the pandemic, we’ve harnessed social media spaces for public deliberation and action. The program’s goal is to normalize and demystify discourse on public issues, especially important as discussion of politics has been deemed too divisive and therefore off-limits in other areas of students’ lives. Students had the opportunity to increase civic knowledge and skills by researching and developing background and issue primers for presidential and vice presidential debates, and joining online discussions with campuses across the country during the debates. Students also developed primers on pressing public issues - including racial justice, the environment, immigration, public health, education, among others - and creating public discourse on social media through Live discussions and carousels that combine videos, pictures and graphics to share in-depth, multi-media posts on key issues and why voting matters.

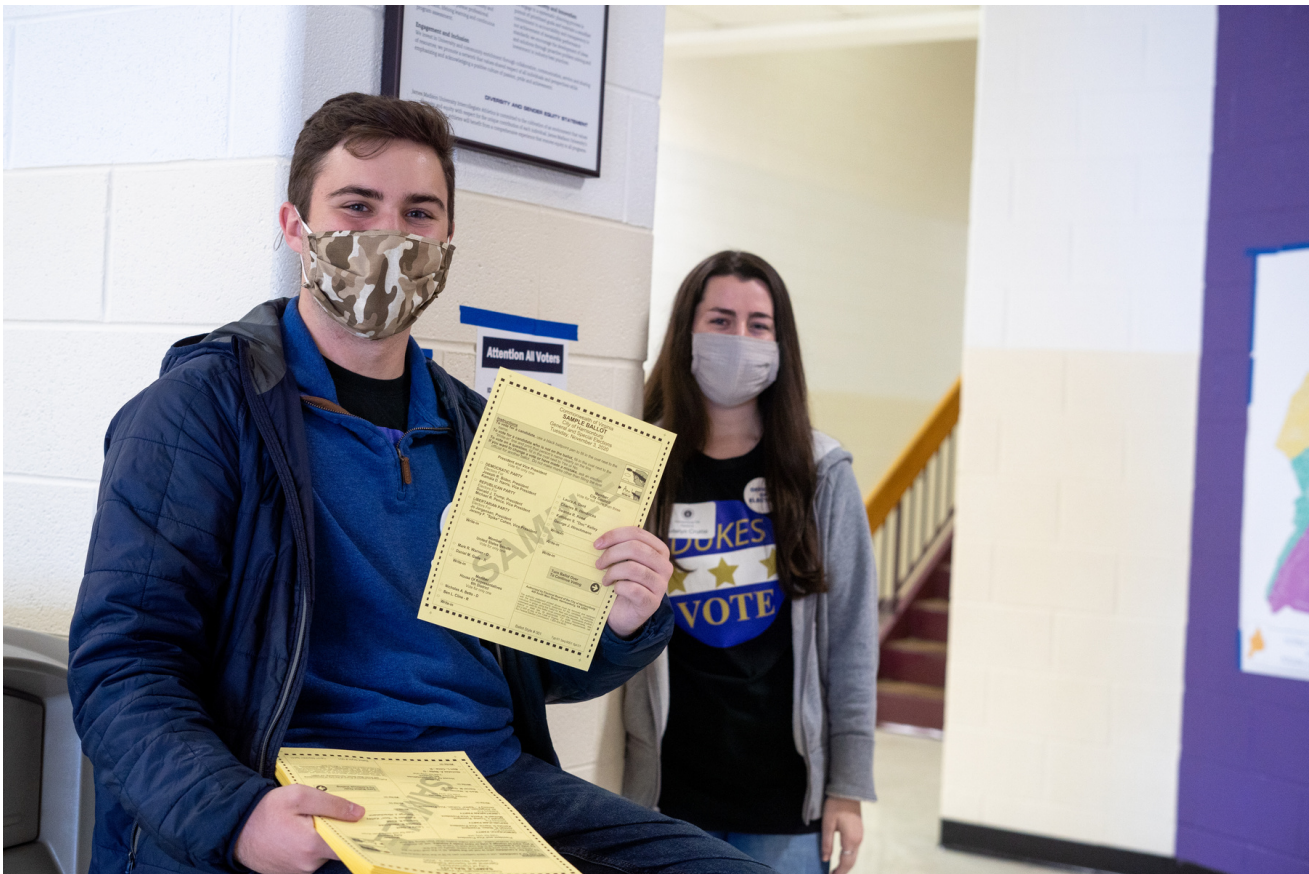
The pandemic-induced virtual-dominant environment created opportunities for political candidates to more readily accept invitations to town halls. JMU Civic and Dukes Vote hosted town halls with local, state, Congressional and presidential candidates, giving students the opportunity to research and develop questions on pressing public problems, and to facilitate social media Live town halls that were also more accessible to the broader public. As a result of the pandemic, we held 55 virtual programs reaching over 260,000 individuals.

Additionally in 2020, we partnered with the Office of Residence Life to hold virtual trainings for Resident Advisors on how to facilitate difficult election conversations with hall residents and offered a new tool to facilitate reflection and discussions exploring how experiences and identities shape our politics. We also partnered with JMU Athletics, hosting virtual town halls in 2020 with Congressional candidates for over 250 student athletes and registered 100 percent of our student athletes to vote.

INTRODUCTION (CONT.)

We are awaiting data from our NSLVE report to gain a better understanding of how our efforts impacted student turnout. From 2014 to 2018 (the first year of programming), JMU's voter turnout rate increased 300%. Students have also responded positively to programming, including the virtual format in 2020. As one student reflected, "I liked attending the virtual Town Halls because I got to hear from the candidates directly rather than their campaign, and it was neat to see different perspectives in the political process." Preliminary survey data from an instrument that was administered to the same students in Fall '18 as freshman and Spring 20 as second-semester sophomores indicates that there has been a statistically significant growth in four areas of civic skills. Additional data collection and analysis is planned for 2021.

Students are learning about myriad pressing public issues and new methods for understanding the nature of problems in the classroom. We have to also equip them with skills, capacity and agency to embrace politics and political participation as a means for solving those problems and building a more just and inclusive democracy. Voting rates in recent elections are promising, but we believe that colleges and universities can better prepare students for deeper engagement in democracy by leaning into politics.



GOALS

Our primary goal is and was to continue to embed civic learning and democratic engagement throughout the campus experience. We aim to give every individual an opportunity to contribute their knowledge, skills and expertise to meaningfully participate in democracy through elections and other forms of civic engagement.

Ask every student for full participation

We sought to expand efforts through virtual programming and experiential learning opportunities. We used both administrative means to ask every student to participate in elections, including campus-wide emails and global alerts on Canvas, our campus instructional tool. Using our NSLVE report, we also targeted low-propensity voters through social media campaigns. We developed a partnership with JMU Athletics and created collaborative virtual programming. Student athletes registered 100% of their peers to vote.

Increase registration and turnout

Our goal was to increase voter registration to 90% of the student population from 83% in 2016 and to increase turnout to 60% of the student population from 52% in 2016. We will have a better understanding of actual numbers when NSLVE reports are available in 2021.

Implement broad efforts to expand voting access to students via satellite voting centers

Our request for satellite voting centers could not be accommodated by the local Board of Elections due to limited capacity. As a result, we created informational campaigns showing where to vote early by walking from campus to City Hall, and how to vote early by mail or on Election Day. Students and faculty assisted with these efforts, including serving as Election Officers and stuffing thousands of absentee ballots to mail.



GOALS

Equity and Inclusion

Equity and inclusion are JMU Civic institutional values embedded throughout programming. We provided information and materials to student organizations to conduct their own voter registration campaigns. More than 57 languages are spoken in Harrisonburg, which is a refugee resettlement community and home to immigrants from around the world. Our Woodson Martin Democracy Fellows translated information about voting into four languages for distribution in the community and inclusion in our nonpartisan voter guide.

Meeting people where they are

As a result of the pandemic, we held 55 virtual programs reaching over 260,000 individuals. We continued efforts to build upon valued partnerships with Student Government Association, Fraternity and Sorority Life and other groups in order to create voting actions and messaging most appealing and relatable for students. We contacted all off-campus housing complexes, requesting that they share information with residents on voting. We provided Dukes Vote t-shirts and volunteers who helped residents register to vote at their apartment complex for National Voter Registration Day and National Voter Education Week. In partnership with the Campus Election Engagement Project, we developed a highly engaging celebrity social media campaign to Get-Out-The-Vote. We learned from Residence Life, that one of the greatest needs was to be prepared to facilitate difficult election conversations. In partnership with Jordan Todd, Director of Learning Programs, we prepared materials and co-facilitated trainings for Resident Advisors.

Expand community partnerships

We continued to build upon our relationships with local registrars and local Boards of Elections by regularly attending electoral board meetings, being in regular contact with the registrar's office, and by coordinating student volunteers to assist with preparations for the election. In addition, we provided space for training Election Officers and recruited more than 120 students to serve as Election Officers. We provided training on voter registration and voting to faculty and staff of the Institute for Innovation in Health and Human Services, which works directly with members of the community.

Expand student volunteer network

We began building a volunteer community to give more students an opportunity to contribute to efforts, especially in cooperation with leaders of the Student Government Association.

2021 TEAM

Dr. Abraham Goldberg, Executive Director

Dr. Carah Ong Whaley, Associate Director

Logan Zeigler, Administrative Assistant

Angelina Clapp, Democracy Program Fellow

Diego F. Salinas, Woodson Martin Democracy Fellow

Sarah Gully, Graduate Assistant

Anna Connole, JMU '21, Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow

Emily Baker, JMU '21, Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow

Charles Connor, JMU '23, Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellow

Kyle Ford, JMU '21, Ask Every Student Democracy Fellow

Nadiya Khaydari, JMU '22, Woodson Martin Democracy Fellow

Mary Tolentino, JMU '23, Woodson Martin Democracy Fellow

Nikki Oppenheimer, JMU '22, Ask Every Student Democracy Fellow

Drew Persinger, JMU '21, Campus Election Engagement Project Democracy Fellow

Ryan Ritter, JMU '23, Ask Every Student Democracy Fellow

Katrina Tilley, JMU '21, Campus Election Engagement Project Democracy Fellow

Kyel Towler, JMU '21, Racial Justice Democracy Fellow

Katelyn Waltemyer, JMU '21, Communications Fellow

Austin Luke, JMU '21, Civic Democracy Fellow

Isabella Lindblad, JMU '24, Democracy Fellow



COALITION AND ROLE OF PARTNERS

All internal and external partners played an essential role in our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. JMU Civic and Dukes Vote collaborated with various on-campus and off-campus departments and organizations in order to hold programs for students and create mutually-beneficial relationships across the campus experience and beyond. Partners helped organize and facilitate learning events, and created and distributed educational materials. Our goal is to strengthen and expand these partnerships through year-round programming that connects solving pressing public issues to meaningful engagement in civic life. While we serve all constituencies on campus and many constituencies beyond campus, we aim to especially focus on including traditionally underserved and underrepresented constituencies and ensuring they have a voice in decision-making. We continue to work to strengthen our coalition with the Student Government Association and plan to further reach out to STEM and low propensity fields of study at JMU in order to build our coalition.

On-campus offices/departments

- Office of the President
- Office of the Provost
- JMU Communications and Marketing
- School of Music School of Media Arts and Design
- Orientation
- Office of Residence Life
- UREC
- Athletics
- Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue
- Furious Flower Poetry Center
- Honors College
- Political Science Department
- JMU X-Labs
- College of Education
- College of Arts and Letters
- College of Business
- JMU ChemistryJ
- MU General Education Program
- College of Health and Behavioral Sciences
- College of Visual and Performing Arts
- JMU Libraries
- The Breeze and Breeze TV (Student Media)
- Community Service-Learning
- School of Communication Studies
- Institute for Innovation in Health and Human Services
- Facilities Management (on-campus precinct)
- Democracy in Peril Speaker Series

COALITION (CONT.)



Student Organizations

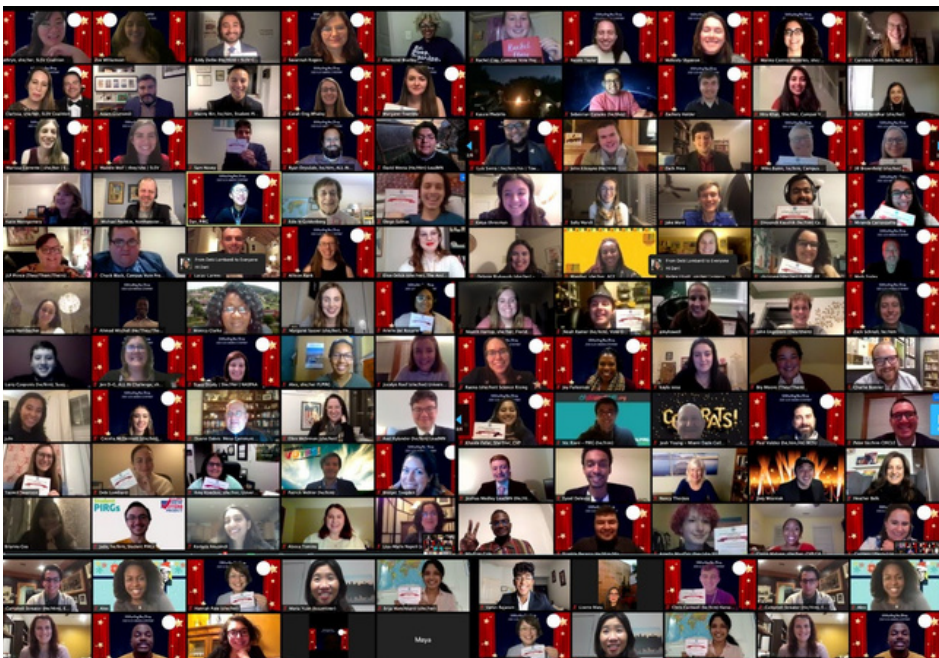
- Student Government Association (Dr. Ong Whaley is now a faculty advisor to SGA)
- Women of Color
- D.E.E.P Impact
- College Republicans
- College Democrats
- Virginia 21
- Fraternity and Sorority Life
- NAACP
- Student Coalition Against Racism

Local and State

- City of Harrisonburg Electoral Board
- The Hburg Citizen
- UVA's Center for Politics
- City Council
- WHSV
- Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth
- Daily News Record

National

- Students Learn Students Vote Coalition
- National Conference on Citizenship
- Ask Every Student
- Campus Vote Project
- Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP)
- American Democracy Project
- Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE)
- ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
- Vote for Astra
- Turbovote
- NASPA
- MTV +1 the Vote

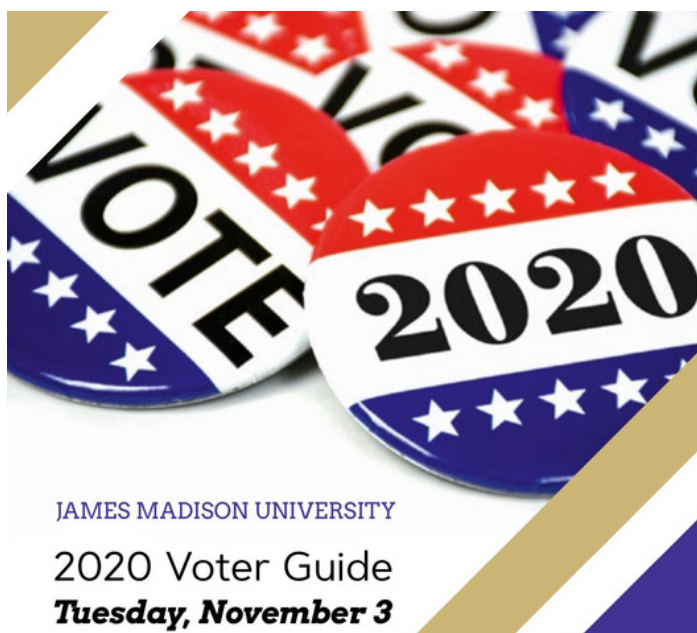


Town Halls

- Jo Jorgensen, Libertarian Party
- Presidential Candidate Howie Hawkins and Angela Walker, Green Party Presidential Candidates
- Former Virginia Governor Terry McAullife representing Joe Biden's presidential campaign
- Dr. Daniel Gade, Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Virginia (two town halls, including one in-person on campus with public safety measures)
- Congressman Ben Cline, incumbent for VA 6th District
- Nick Betts, Democratic Candidate for Congress (VA 6th District)
- City Council town hall with all city council candidates
- Harrisonburg City Public School Board candidates
- Town Hall with Congressman Ben Cline and Nick Betts for more than 250 JMU Student-Athletes
- Delegate Cia Price on Amendment One Redistricting Reform in Virginia

2020 Nonpartisan Voter Guides

- Comprehensive 2020 voter education guide with responses from presidential, Congressional, city council and school board candidates to pressing public issues, including the pandemic, the economy, immigration, health care and more
- Amendment One guide to redistricting reform in Virginia
- Political Identitree resource for faculty, staff, and Resident Advisors to facilitate conversations about how social identity impacts political identities and behavior
- Guide for facilitating election conversations



ELECTION EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT 2020



Tabling

At the start of the fall 2020 semester we held multiple voter registration drives outside in areas where social distancing was possible. We answered students questions about the upcoming election, registered students to vote, and directed them on how to request an absentee ballot. Students were sent home after the first few weeks of the semester so we had to be creative with how to continue to engage them and to be sure they were properly registered to vote if displaced by the pandemic. A few weeks before Election Day, students returned to campus, but classes were primarily virtual. With return to campus, we were able to do voter registration drives at prominent spaces on campus. JMU Civic and Dukes Vote Democracy Fellows, and members of Student Government Association spent dozens of hours registering students and ensuring they had correct voting information.

Class Visits

We created a powerpoint for use by faculty and JMU Civic and Dukes Vote democracy fellows to educate students about how to register and vote with dates and deadlines and direct links to complete registration and absentee requests. We conducted virtual class visits to provide students with this information, to walk them through the voter registration and absentee request process and to answer questions. Because of the pandemic, we had fewer requests for class visits, though every faculty member was offered the opportunity to have a trained volunteer visit and present.

Off-Campus Housing

As part of our goals to ask every student to vote, we had to find creative ways to engage students living off-campus and taking classes online. We canvassed all of the high-density off-campus housing complexes and gave information to residents on voting. In partnership with Community Service-Learning, we also held voter registration and absentee request hours at leasing offices.



Debate Watch Parties

JMU Civic and JMU XLabs interdisciplinary 2020 Elections course created presidential debate primers that included background information on the topics that would be discussed in each presidential debate. Faculty and students joined the American Democracy Project's debate watch parties on Discord, and facilitated discussions open to all JMU students, faculty and staff.



Curricular Activities

- Interdisciplinary 2020 Elections course in partnership with JMU XLabs
- Powerpoint for faculty to use in classrooms
- Sample syllabus statement
- Workshops for faculty and resident advisors on facilitating difficult election conversations
- Dr. Carah Ong Whaley developed political identiTree as a resource for faculty, staff, and Resident Advisors to facilitate conversations about how social identity impacts political identities and behavior.

The JMU Civic and JMU XLabs interdisciplinary 2020 Elections course, facilitated by Dr. Carah Ong Whaley, Professor Adrienne Hooker (School of Media Arts and Design) and Professor Cathy Copeland (Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication) combined scholarship and experiential learning to develop and implement nonpartisan voter education and engagement initiatives on campus and in surrounding communities. Scholarship addressed complex issues and challenges for the 2020 elections, including: how the pandemic affected elections, the presidential nominating process, how state laws and Electoral College structure the game; and the impact and role of political parties, superPACs, interest groups and the media, with a special focus on the role of social media. We also examined the role and impact of election administration and the importance of who turns out and why.

Among several course projects, students created presidential debate primers that included background information on the topics that would be discussed in each presidential and vice presidential debate. Faculty and students joined the American Democracy Project's debate watch parties on Discord, and facilitated discussions open to all JMU students, faculty and staff. Students also created the nonpartisan Voter Education Guide and used OutVote to conduct text messaging campaigns. They also worked with the local Director of Elections, preparing absentee ballots and serving as election officers.



Election-related Presentations

Election-related Presentations in National and State Forums: Association of American Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, Students Learn Student Vote, American Democracy Project, Bipartisan Policy Center, Virginia Campus Democracy Summit (4)

In the Media

JMU Civic was featured in: Inside Higher Ed, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Teen Vogue, Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, Forbes, Washington Monthly, The Breeze, Breeze TV, Daily News-Record, WHSV, The Citizen

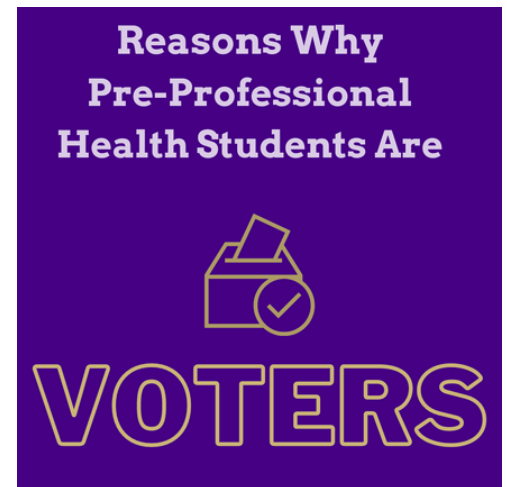
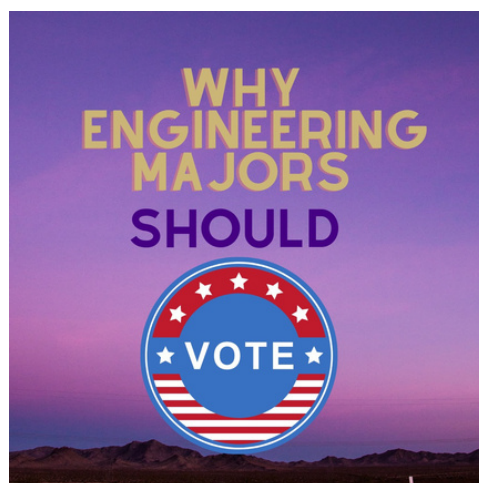
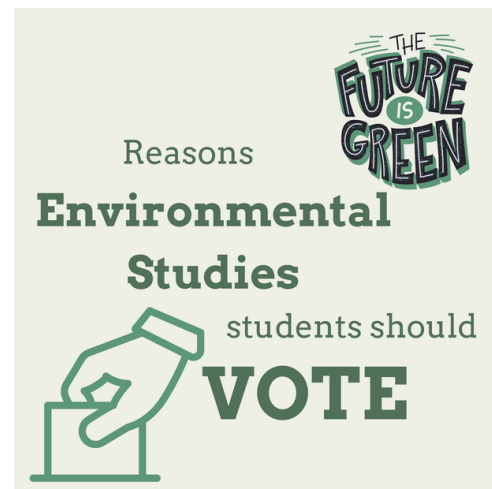


Campus-wide Post-Election Programming

- **Election Day Detox:** THRIVE, the Honors College, and the Center for Multicultural Student Success (CMSS) in collaboration with The ARROW Project, a non-profit mental health organization based in Staunton, provided students with a space to discuss and process the outcome of the election
- **Post-election Analysis Panel Discussion:** JMU Civic and JMU's College of Arts and Letters hosted a Town Hall with faculty experts from Political Science, School of Media Arts and Design, and the School of Communication Studies on the outcome of the election.
- **Processing election emotions:** Faculty members from the Department of Psychology facilitated discussions on how to cope with election emotions
- **Election processing with SOGIE Programming:** Provided a space for LGBTQ+ students to process election results, gather resources on self-care, and practice some mindfulness techniques to remain grounded and connected
- **Global Perspectives on the U.S. Elections:** JMU Civic and JMU's College of Arts and Letters hosted a Town Hall featuring Political Science and History faculty on global perspectives on the U.S. Elections and discussed the potential foreign policy implications of the elections.
- **Conversations in Self-Care:** Managing Stress and Burnout in 2020 SOGIE provided students with ways to navigate their mental health in 2020.
- JMU student facilitators, leaders in Community Service-Learning and the Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue facilitated discussions on moving forward as a "purple" campus focusing on the concerns and humanity behind others' political views.
- **Students and the Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue facilitated discussions on JMU and the first amendment:** making sense of campus free speech in an era of political divisiveness
- **Civil discourse:** post-election The Center for Multicultural Student Success (CMSS) featured guest speaker Chris Taylor who facilitated discussions to process election results and facilitate an open dialogue on how to navigate civil discourse conversations through the post-election climate on campus, online, and across America
- JMU Counseling created resources on Maintaining Mental Health During Election Season

Get-Out-The-Vote Digital Campaigns

- In partnerships with the Campus Election Engagement Project, we commissioned cameos from seven different actors, comedians, and performers encouraging JMU students to vote early, absentee, or in person on election day.
- We hosted multiple text messaging parties using the app OutVote. Participants could use our pre-made messaging to mass text their contacts with information on the election and how to register to vote. Text messaging campaigns were most successful if required as part of an assignment or community service project.
- Because students are in a unique position of choosing where to vote, there are still educational hurdles to understanding that students must register where they want to vote, and vote where they register. The pandemic exacerbated this because students were displaced during the semester. Our solution was to create concise and clear language about voter registration processes and delivered that language widely across campus and over social media platforms.
- Using previous years NSLVE data, we identified majors and fields of study with the lowest turnout rates. We created campaigns showing why they should vote with specific examples of topics and important public issues that their field of study cares about and how they are impacted by government policies.



Election Podcasts

- JMU Psychology expert Dr. Ben Blankenship discussed election emotions and how we can cope
- JMU Political Science faculty Dr. Marty Cohen and Dr. Kathleen Ferraiolo discussed the 2020 elections in the broader arc of American political history
- CBS News Correspondent John Dickerson discussed the American presidency in trouble
- Michael Pfeifer, voting rights and political law attorney, discussed vote-by-mail and other voting rights issues
- Chris Piper, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Elections, discussed election administration; historic levels of absentee and early voting and partnering with federal agencies and other states to combat foreign interference
- SCOTUSblog reporter and Supreme Court expert Amy L. Howe discussed the litigation arms race in 2020 and the role of the Supreme Court in voting rights and election law
- Dr. Michael Gilbert, the Martha Lubin Karsh and Bruce A. Karsh Bicentennial Professor of Law, and Director of the Center for Public Law and Political Economy at the University of Virginia discussed election-related legal challenges, voting rights and more
- JMU Professor of Political Science Dr. David Jones discussed the implications of the media for democratic participation, practice and governance
- JMU students Wyatt Blevins (Political Science and Public Policy and Administration, '22), Chairman of the College Republicans; Robert Gruberger (History and Political Science, '22), Young Democratic Socialists of America at JMU; and Emily Baker (Political Science and English, '21), Campus Vote Project, Democracy Fellow discussed what civic discourse during elections means to students



Campus Precinct

- JMU has a campus precinct, which is located at our Convocation Center. One of the first challenges we faced was the construction of a new convocation building on campus. JMU now has two convocation buildings, so students were confused about which one to vote at. We were able to mitigate this by posting on our social media which building to go to and also set up our tent outside of the old convocation center so students knew which one to go to.

Party at the Precinct

- To celebrate Election Day, we set up our tent outside of our on campus precinct and had a socially distanced party at the precinct with performances by Theatre and Dance students. We handed out free items (t shirts, masks, I voted stickers) to students entering and exiting the polling place.



Barriers

- The COVID-19 pandemic was the greatest barrier we faced, occurring in the middle of a consequential election year, threatening voter turnout and peoples' trust in the election process. JMU students were sent home a month before the election due to an increase in COVID-19 cases. Then, JMU students were welcomed back to campus before Election Day. This posed significant challenges to ensuring students were registered in the right locality, could receive their absentee ballots and were able to vote. There are many gaps in voter knowledge among JMU students, including confusion about how to register to vote, what the voting process entails, and how to request an absentee ballot. This confusion was exacerbated by the pandemic and required more widely available information for students how/when/where to vote.



Beyond 2020

Virginia has elections every year and 2021 is no exception. We have already begun voter education and engagement around the 2021 elections, including programming with candidates for governor and other state and local offices.

We are also emphasizing harnessing social media and other digital spaces to create innovative forms of engagement. Students continue to develop primers on key issues written as analyses with ideas for action and discussion questions that are posted on our blog, shared at Tent Talks, converted to social media primers as carousels and Live discussions, and used as the basis for new talk show called “Civic Cereal,” in partnership with WXJM, a local radio station.

NSLVE

Once we receive our NSLVE data, we will analyze and distribute widely across campuses. Results will inform how we can broaden our coalition and make it more inclusive. We will use the data to adjust our strategies and continue to reach out to majors and demographics that are least likely to participate in elections, while uplifting and celebrating progress and election participation. We will also use our NSLVE data to inform Deans, Academic Unit Heads, and campus Administration about how we are doing as a campus. We will invite them to contribute ideas for making progress in educating for democracy on our campus. All of our NSLVE reports and other assessment data are available on our website: jmu.edu/civic/assessment.shtml.

Campus Climate

Preparing students to be active and informed participants in civic and political life during their undergraduate experience is met with significant challenges. A 2018 campus climate study for political learning and engagement on our campus revealed that student interest in political learning and engagement is mixed. Many students struggled to understand how public issues affect them, how best to address civic problems and were not convinced that their actions would make a difference anyway. Students focused on the private good of a college degree, emphasizing getting a job and making money, and public engagement was primarily apolitical and limited to volunteerism and community service. Concerns were raised by students and faculty members about the proposition of introducing political discussion into the classroom, a promising practice for preparing young people to engage in our democracy. Many students perceived in-class discussions about political issues as uncomfortable and risky. Reasons included not wanting to be perceived as countering the instructor’s opinion, fear of being attacked for their views, and wanting to avoid offending classmates. Faculty voiced concerns about not having the skills necessary to facilitate in-class discussions about political issues and fear of reprisal by students and the university if the discussion gets out of hand.

We continue to work to address these barriers by institutionalizing civic learning and democratic engagement through student-led efforts that lean into politics.

