

efforts. Second, we need to collect demographic data about student participants in the Leadership Program and related activities. Third, we need to invite more instructional faculty to become involved so that more students can become involved. Fourth, we can compare our efforts with other colleges and universities throughout the state. Recent research by Chavez (2021) describes how community colleges conceptualized and operationalized the requirements of the Act. Fifth, the Work Group will discuss the inclusion of an assessment component to measure the impact of our Leadership Program on students' knowledge of civic engagement and leadership principles, internal and external political efficacy, and participation in community-based projects. ■

#### NOTE

1. The Work Group held meetings on the following dates: October 29, 2020; November 12, 2020; February 1, 2021; March 2, 2021; April 5, 2021; and May 3, 2021

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#### VOTER MOBILIZATION

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Wingate University is a private, nonprofit, comprehensive university located southeast of Charlotte, North Carolina. More than 3,600 students are enrolled, approximately 72% of which are undergraduate students. During the Fall 2020 semester, 1,778 students lived on campus. Most students are from North Carolina and most enroll at age 18. From 2016 to 2020, the university observed a 272% increase in in-person voting among residential students who voted on-campus.<sup>1</sup> This accomplishment was truly a campus-wide commitment, including the history and political science department, the athletics department, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the community engagement program (i.e., known as W'Engage), and student government.

This article discusses the various efforts undertaken to promote student voting on campus through voter education and direct mobilization. We anticipate that not all aspects of our specific approach will translate to every campus. However, it is our intention that from our examples, other departments will be able to adapt the approach to their own campus and further these efforts to promote voter mobilization.

#### Building a Campus Coalition

Both authors are faculty members in the history and political science department at Wingate University, and both previously

participated in activities such as Election Night watch parties and distributing voter-registration forms in class. However, in 2020, they began to coordinate with other faculty members to build a campus-wide coalition to mobilize student voting.

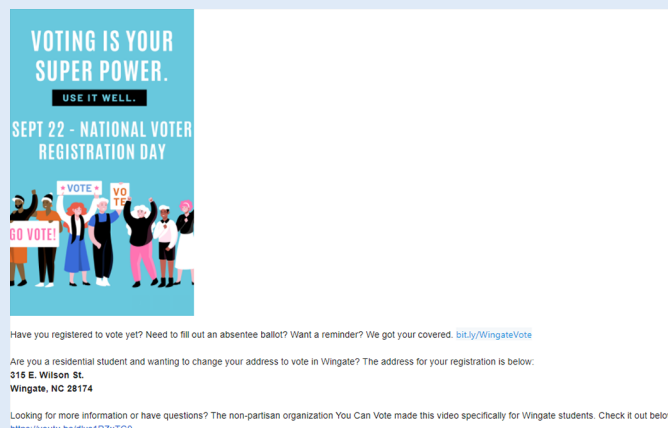
Our role in building this coalition stemmed, in part, from our involvement in the university's community engagement program known as W'Engage. This program began in 2016 and was created as part of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which is required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges accrediting body. Each semester, the QEP offers two-credit community engagement seminars with a domestic-travel component, using its resources to promote community and civic engagement. Typically, two or three seminars are offered with approximately 30 to 45 students enrolling each year. The travel component lasts for several days during the fall or spring breaks or during the week immediately following the end of the semester. During the Spring 2020 semester, one author offered a W'Engage seminar; the other author had recently become the program director.

The seminar, titled "Voting Rights Past and Present," taught students about the history of voting rights for various groups that have been disenfranchised throughout US history until the present day. The authors accompanied students on a trip through Alabama and Georgia to learn about voting rights in the context of the broader Civil Rights Movement. Students visited relevant museums and historic sites and also participated in the commemorative reenactment of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march. After returning from the trip, the students were expected to produce a nonpartisan voter guide for Wingate University students and to hold a voter-registration drive. Unfortunately, it was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The W'Engage program also sponsored voter-education-related events, with the director coordinating with other departments on voter-mobilization efforts. Particularly helpful participants in our campus coalition included the athletics department faculty. They worked directly with student athletes to encourage them to register and vote, and they created and promoted a website with voter-registration information tailored to Wingate University students. Another partner was the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which hosted and promoted related events (e.g., the Voting 101 session). Student government also used its social media channels to promote voting on campus. In their roles as political science faculty, the authors' involvement in W'Engage helped accomplish the following to promote voter mobilization on campus:

- invited representatives from nonpartisan organizations to give classroom guest lectures (via Zoom) to explain the voter-registration process
- hosted a Voting 101 Zoom meeting for almost 300 students to explain the process for registering and voting, including an open Q&A session
- provided course content for the first-year seminar on how to register and vote
- requested that visitors to the Wingate University registrar's website be directed to information about how to register to vote
- using signage, provided walking directions to the polls beginning at the university and ending at the voting precinct
- walked students to the polls
- provided students with access to voter-registration forms

**Figure 1**  
National Voter Registration Day Email



Note: The National Voter Registration Day email sent to students.

The W'Engage program also requested that the university join the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), which will provide additional data on students' voting habits so that better voter turnout can be promoted in the future. Because of connections established during the Spring 2020 seminar, a nonpartisan organization that is focused on voter mobilization volunteered to make a Wingate University–tailored video on how to register and vote. This video was sent to all Wingate students on National Voter Registration Day<sup>2</sup> along with other helpful information related to voter registration (figure 1). W'Engage provided funding and administrative support and also established connections that will allow voter-mobilization efforts to continue in the future.

### In-Person Voter Turnout on Wingate University Campus

To calculate the increase in voter turnout, data were requested from the Union County, North Carolina, Board of Elections. Unfortunately, we did not have data from the NSLVE for 2016 and 2020 because Wingate University only recently began participating in this study. Therefore, a manual review of the records was conducted to determine the number of registered voters with an address that indicated they were residential students at Wingate University and voted in person during the early-voting period or on Election Day. In both 2016 and 2020, the Wingate Community Center served as one of typically four early-voting sites in the county. The early-voting period in North Carolina usually is about 15 days. From 2016 to 2020, the in-person voter-turnout rate increased from 3.3% to 12.3%. According to the North Carolina State Board of Elections (2020b), statewide electoral participation increased by about 7 percentage points. Additional data concerning Wingate student voter turnout are in table 1.

There are limitations to these data. They do not include residential students who voted in other precincts (e.g., those living on campus but registered to vote at their permanent residence), students who voted by absentee ballot for precincts outside of Union County, and commuter students who voted in other precincts by any method. Therefore, this percentage represents an

**Table 1**  
In-Person Voter Turnout, 2016–2020

	2016 Turnout	2020 Turnout
<b>Turnout Rate</b>	3.3% (51 Students)	12.3% (219 Students)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	32%	34%
Female	68%	66%
<b>Race</b>		
White	41%	29%
Black or African American	16%	29%
Did Not Answer	43%	30%
<b>Party Affiliation</b>		
Republican	13%	15%
Democrat	7%	36%
Not Affiliated	80%	48%

underestimate of the total voter turnout by Wingate students, especially considering that 14.9% of all votes were cast by absentee ballot in Union County (North Carolina State Board of Elections 2020a). Additionally, North Carolina voters are not required to provide their race, ethnicity, or gender when registering to vote. Younger voters are less likely to volunteer this information, which means that some demographic data are missing (Cooper and Bitzer 2020).

### Conclusion

We encourage fellow political science faculty to become involved in building a coalition that can mobilize student voters on their own campus. Although our data had limitations, it was clear that the efforts to promote student voting on the Wingate University campus were extremely effective in 2020. Voter-turnout rates

increased dramatically during this election cycle, especially among voters who historically are underrepresented (e.g., African American students). Maintaining this momentum will require continued coalition work to sustain institution-wide efforts that were introduced in 2020 in future election cycles.

and right-wing challenges to academic freedom need an effective counterpunch from higher education (Association of American Colleges and Universities 2021a, 2021b; Brennan Center 2021).

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (2017) elevated civic engagement as a desired core learning outcome of

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On other campuses, the actors involved may be different: perhaps student government will be more active than student athletes; perhaps there is no office of community engagement (or equivalent) but faculty can connect with colleagues who incorporate community-engaged learning; or perhaps there is little support to integrate voter education into key components of the general-education curriculum. However, faculty can begin to incorporate civic engagement into their own courses when applicable. Whatever the case may be, we hope that our examples demonstrate the necessity of being involved on campus to promote voter-mobilization efforts and that these examples can be adapted to any campus context. ■

#### NOTES

1. Wingate University does not have a precinct that technically is “on campus.” However, the precinct in which residential Wingate students vote is a 15-minute walk or 5-minute bike ride from campus. References to on-campus voting refers to this precinct, which is located in the Wingate Community Center and is part of the town’s parks and recreation department.
2. See <https://youtu.be/dlus1PZuTC0>.

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#### LET’S GET POLITICAL: CO-CREATING AND ASSESSING CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

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The insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021; ongoing threats to democracy evidenced by the unproven and baseless claims made by a then-sitting president that an election was stolen; a relentless yet failed attempt to reverse results by badgering election officials in key battleground states; the passage of new laws across the country to make it more difficult for people to vote;

the undergraduate experience. Our institution created campus-wide Civic Engagement Learning Outcomes under the auspices of the James Madison Center for Civic Engagement (JMU Civic 2018) and the Center for Assessment and Research Studies (CARS) (Pastor, Schaefer, and Perkins 2021). Our approach acknowledges the need for a foundational grasp of democratic principles, awareness of pressing public issues, and an understanding of how to engage political decision making across levels of government while also recognizing that meaningful engagement requires critical analytical and communication skills. Given the divisive and abrasive state of our democracy, we also emphasize dispositions such as empathy and open-mindedness and developing confidence in the ability to address public issues. Finally, we embrace the notion that students learn by doing and therefore incorporate civic behaviors into our learning objectives.

There are several means by which students across all majors should encounter the opportunity to develop civic skills, knowledge, and dispositions both in and out of the classroom and to develop a deeper understanding of how to address public problems through political participation. To increase internal and external efficacy, JMU Civic co-creates and co-implements with students, faculty, staff, and community partners programming that meets our civic and political learning outcomes. Students learn about political participation opportunities and programming through a robust communications strategy, including campus-wide emails, global alerts on our campus course-instructional tool, and social media.

Elections are one point of entry for students to learn more and participate in the political process (Thomas et al. 2019). Traveling town halls in partnership with JMU’s Office of Residence Life is one of our most novel programs, in which political candidates physically travel to the common areas of three residence halls in one evening (Schwartz 2019). JMU Civic undergraduate democracy fellows facilitate the town halls and provide voter-registration opportunities for attendees. Students and community residents interact with candidates, ask unscripted questions, and learn about competing visions for addressing public issues. We also facilitated separate candidate town halls in 2020 with JMU Athletics and reached more than 250 student athletes, 100% of whom registered to vote. Trainings for resident advisors on how to facilitate difficult election conversations with hall residents is another partnership with our Office of Residence Life (Ong Whaley 2020).

Faculty, students, and community members also collaborate to create nonpartisan voter-education guides on candidates running