

Duke



2020 ALL-IN VOTER ENGAGEMENT PLAN

OVERVIEW

Students, faculty, staff, and administrators at Duke have been collaborating in 2019 and 2020 to encourage greater Duke student, faculty, and staff voter participation. While it is clear COVID-19 has presented challenges throughout the world, Duke remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that everyone who can vote and wants to vote, does vote.

BACKGROUND

From a North Carolina perspective, due to gerrymandering and the election calendar, it was hard to gauge the political climate around student voting at Duke heading into the 2018 elections. After all, this marked the first time in 12 years that a senator, governor, or president wouldn't be on any North Carolina ballots. There wasn't even a Durham mayoral election. And most local elections were headed toward lopsided results.

Moreover, reportedly only 12% of Duke students hailed from North Carolina before enrolling. This presented various challenges: Whereas locally raised students required only a one-step process for early voting, students hailing from elsewhere in North Carolina or elsewhere in the country would have to go through a multi-step process to vote: (1) register, (2) request an absentee ballot, (3) receive and fill out the ballot, and (4) mail in the absentee ballot. Additionally, a recent study in Virginia showed that many young people simply forget to put postage on their absentee envelope, meaning the voting deadline might pass before the undeliverable mail can be re-sent.

And so, numerous campus constituencies worked together in 2018 to facilitate the registration and voting process. These steps included:

- Establishing regular meetings among student leaders and other interested participants to brainstorm strategies for maximizing voter participation and to organize [events](#).

- One-to-one outreach to more than 1,000 students to gauge voter registration status, voting potential, and whether they had any questions about the process.
- Campus-wide e-mails from the President, Vice President of Student Affairs, Vice Provost of the Office of Undergraduate Education, Registrar, Polis: Center for Politics, and Student Government to encourage voting.
- Creating a comprehensive [Duke Votes](#) website to thoroughly explain how to register and vote anywhere in the country, how to verify registration, how to assess candidates on the ballot, important deadlines, and upcoming campus voting events. More than 5,000 unique visitors accessed the web tool in the two months leading up to Election Day.
- Securing an early-voting site in the highest-trafficked location on Duke's campus: the Brodhead Center.
- Ensuring that the Durham Board of Elections had every on-campus student's official street address, so that any such student would not have to jump through additional hoops of verifying her/his address if registering to vote locally.
- Erecting registration and voting reminder signs across campus.
- Engineering a massive social media push around registering and voting.
- Paid advertising on Facebook and on the campus shuttle buses that transport thousands of students and other community members each day.

As a result, a [record number of people](#) voted early on Duke's campus in the run-up to Election Day 2018, and overall student voting in the 2018 general election [more than doubled](#) the [2014](#) total.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXPANSION

In the aftermath of 2018, Polis and a handful of non-seniors started discussing strategies for creating a student-led Duke Votes Coordinating Committee to serve as a hub for student registration and voting efforts. To be clear, the DVCC would not replace the terrific work already being done by politically minded student organizations. Instead, it would augment such work by becoming the only student organization focused on student registration and voting year-round.

The 10-student DVCC was formed in September 2019, immediately organizing "train the trainer" events to learn voter registration best practices, and to train other members of the Duke community. Later that month they produced the first of 16 voter registration drives during the 2019-2020 academic year, through which they successfully registered hundreds of students, while educating hundreds more on how to register in their home state and request absentee ballots.

The DVCC collaborated with dozens of Duke organizations/dorms to implement these registration drives, including the Alexander Hamilton Society, Black Men's Union, Blackwell dorm, Blue Devils United, Center for Muslim Life, Duke Diya, Duke MLK Commemoration Week Committee, Duke Political Union, Duke Student Government, Duke University Union, Gilbert Addoms dorm, Jarvis Dorm, Mary Lou Williams Center, Mi Gente, Southgate Dorm, Undergraduate Environmental Union, and Women in Politics.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Just as it did in 2018, Polis continued to play a leadership role with Duke Votes, serving as the DVCC's advisor, funding events such as Party at the Polls and Voting Isn't Spooky, investing in advertising and campus signage, and working with Duke's Office of Information Technology (OIT) and other entities to implement the promotion and distribution of a North Carolina voter photo ID card—a recently legislated requirement for voting in the state. Before a federal court in late 2019 blocked the requirement from taking effect, the DVCC, Polis, and OIT had successfully registered more than 500 students to receive photo ID cards, and then orchestrated their distribution.

Additionally, Polis established two pilot programs to promote registering and voting:

Duke Votes Ambassadors

[21 Duke staff members](#) volunteered to serve as the school's first voting ambassadors, available to answer registration and voting questions, and to direct students to resources for more information. Each ambassador is equipped with a Duke Votes Ambassador sticker on their door or cubicle, as well as an unlimited supply of stamped envelopes, which any student can use to mail a registration form and/or absentee ballot. To maximize coverage across student populations, the ambassadors work in all corners of the campus, including Student Affairs, Housing and Residence Life, the Office of Undergraduate Education, the Divinity School, Pratt School of Engineering, the Sanford School of Public Policy, the Academic Advising Center, the Women's Center, the Center for Multicultural Affairs, the Center for Muslim Life, Jewish Life at Duke, International House, the Wellness Center, and the Office of New Student Programs.

Personalized E-mail Alerts

366 first-year students signed up to receive three e-mails throughout the academic year covering on how to register and vote in their home jurisdiction, representing 37 states and the District of Columbia. In September, November, and January, each of these students received a personalized e-mail addressed specifically to them: their registration deadline, absentee ballot request deadline, and absentee ballot return deadline, as well as other information to help prepare them.

Many students took the time to ask follow-up questions, all of which were answered. One student even expressed concern that he had registered to vote, but his name did not display online when he sought confirmation on an official website. In response, Polis offered to walk with him to vote: "And if there's a problem, we'll call the Board of Elections to resolve it."

An April 2020 survey to these students highlighted the program's success:

- On the question of how much these personalized e-mails impacted their decision to vote, the average student response was a 61 on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 meant "not at all impactful" and 100 meant "tremendously impactful."
- On the question of how much these e-mails impacted their decision to register to vote, the average student response was a 67 out of 100.
- On the question of how much these e-mails educated them on registration and absentee ballot deadlines, the average student response was a 75 out of 100.

Other campus entities also developed innovative solutions to the challenge of encouraging higher student voting participation. For example, Hart Leadership Program in the Sanford School initiated a ["Why Vote?" Video Challenge](#), in which they welcomed 30-second videos that would effectively motivate peers to vote

EARLY RETURNS

Despite limitations created by COVID-19, Duke and its students remain focused on the same goal: ensuring that everyone who can vote and wants to vote, does vote. On the eve of campus closures, Duke completed its [most successful](#) early-voting engagement in history. A [study](#) conducted by EQV Analytics of all North Carolina higher education institutions with dedicated "college precincts" showed that 34% of 18-22-year-olds in Duke's campus precincts voted early in the 2020 North Carolina Primary. It was by far the highest percentage turnout of any recorded college precinct, and it was triple North Carolina's statewide turnout.