

**Rutgers-Camden Campaign Plan
2024-2025**

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Campaign Overview

Executive Summary

Rutgers University-Camden (RUC) action plan was developed by the RUC Votes Coalition. The coalition is a non-partisan organization that exists out of the Division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement (DICE). This plan was developed by Dr. Simanti Lahiri, Program Coordinator of Student of Civic Engagement, founder of the RUC Votes Coalition and Matthew Brodsky, President of the Rutgers University-Camden Student Governing Association and Student Lead for the RUC Votes Coalition, Bonner Civic Scholar Leader Team, Civics committee. This action plan aims to lay out a clear strategy for campus stakeholders on how to expand voter education, mobilization, turnout, and institutionalization of democratic and participatory goals on our Campus. This plan provides a guiding document for the 2024 election cycle as well as insight in attaining long-term goals for election participation. The plan aligns with the Chancellor's Strategic plan to provide a transformative academic experience for Rutgers Camden Students as it will "prepare the next generations of leaders by delivering rigorous academic programs that are bolstered by excelled in teaching in scholarship, experiential learning, and community engagement. (2023 Chancellor's Strategic Plan)

We believe that the action plan is an iterative process and will present it for review to members of the university community in order to ensure that our election goals and methods are equitable and inclusive of the diverse population of students, staff, and faculty that make up the RUC community.

Leadership

Rutgers University–Camden has taken a comprehensive and integrated approach to voting since our last Action Plan submission. Leadership on voting and voter engagement comes from the top, including Chancellor Antonio Tillis who recently signed onto the All-In for Campus Democracy Presidential commitment to full student voter participation. With the help of the Student-Staff-Faculty RUC Votes Coalition (RUCVC), we have not only increased the percentage of registered voters on campus but have also been able to raise the profile of elections and voting on our campus. Our efforts have been rewarded through recognition on the state level and we continue to focus on engaging voters not only on Campus, but also in our community of Camden city.

As noted in our previous action plan, the RUC votes coalition was founded in the Summer of 2021 as a Student-Staff-Faculty coalition, under the auspices of the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE). Since that time, the OCE has become the Division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement (DICE). The coalition is led by students with support from staff within DICE and other units across campus. In addition, we have support from the Pro Bono Law clinic and law students who work on elections.

Students continue to take the lead in RUC Votes, leadership is embedded within the Bonner Civic Scholars Program, representatives from NJPIRG and SGA. The Coalition is active throughout the academic year including off-year state elections. The RUCVC team connects the school with different national and local partners throughout the United States to provide them with the resources needed to vote in upcoming locations. Throughout the year, RUCVC will encourage students to vote, promote education in civic engagement, and promote involvement in civic engagement through poll working, registering voters, and providing educational materials. We have established connections with the Camden County Board of Elections and the NJ Department of State to facilitate our efforts both to receive our paper registrations and also to assess the needs of Rutgers–Camden students in particular. The coalition will also push for long-term institutional changes to promote civic engagement far into the future.

The leadership team for the RUC Votes coalition is as follows:

- Matthew Brodsky (CCAS 22') - Chair
- Melissa Rebovich (Law '23) - Law School Election Lead
- Dr. Simanti Lahiri: Staff Lead/Advisor/Faculty-Staff Liaison
- Dr. Nyeema Watson, Senior Vice Chancellor for Strategy, Diversity, and Community Engagement

As a student-led coalition, we are aware of the need to create pathways to leadership in the coalition for students who are passionate about voting. Currently Bonner Civic Scholar Alex Simone, has agreed to train with the current Chair to take on a leadership position in 2024. Finally, while staff and faculty are active in the coalition, we are currently trying to find ways to create more permanent and consistent involvement from across the university. One option would be to create a faculty and staff advisory board for the coalition, that would have specific goals to raise the importance of voting on a continuing basis.

Division of Diversity Inclusion and Community Engagement

Leadership for Community Engagement at Dice is as follows:

- Nyeema Watson, Ph.D. – Senior Vice Chancellor for Strategy, Diversity and Community Engagement
- Simanti Lahiri, Ph.D. - Program Coordinator, Student Civic Engagement
- Daniel Fidalgo Tome, Ed D - Program Coordinator, Engaged Civic Learning
- Laura Eppinger, Program Coordinator for Community Partnerships

In addition to the listed partners, RUCVC works with different organizations on campus to help promote Civic Engagement, like the Student Government Association, Political Science Society, and New Jersey Public Interest Group (NJPIRG). RUCVC works with outside organizations like the League of Women Voters and participates in ALL-IN Democracy Challenge. RUCVC also joins

the New Jersey Department of State's Division of Elections (DOE) in their annual Ballot Bowl competition, where schools across New Jersey compete to register as many voters as possible and get students to pledge to vote. We are very proud to have won the NJ State Ballot Bowl consecutively in 2022 and 2023. In addition, we were able to host the Ballot Bowl Kick Off Event in 2023, which helped to raise the profile of our voting efforts in the state and Campus.

Commitment

Since our last Action plan submission Rutgers University Camden has deepened its commitment to student voter participation and education in different ways. First, Chancellor Antonio Tillis recently signed onto the ALL-IN for Democracy President's Pledge for full student voter participation, which will infer "most engaged campus" status to RUC. Second, as previously mentioned, The Office of Civic Engagement was expanded into the Division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement. This change has led to the availability for more resources in our voting efforts. The RUC Votes Coalition is embedded within DICE and our Bonner Civic Scholar program under the leadership of Simanti Lahiri, PhD who is a political scientist by training and who has extensively researched the quality of democracy across different contexts. In addition to DICE's commitment to student voting in Rutgers, we also work to increase voting in the Camden community. In 2023 RUC came in second in the first Annual Community Centered NJ Ballot Bowl.

In 2023 we were asked to host the NJ State Ballot Bowl Kickoff event. During this event we worked with community partners such as the 76er's organization and Philabundance to kick off the State voting competition, but also to raise the profile of the importance of voting among RUC students and high school students in Camden. We invited high school students from all four Public Schools, as well as Leap Academy and Camden Academy Charter School. After the success of that event, DICE has decided to hold a similar annual event on National voter Registration Day, which will be an opportunity to celebrate voting and register College and High School Students in Camden.

Our voter registration efforts are led by the RUC votes coalition, but also, all new Bonner Civic Scholars are obligated to volunteer at least 5 times during the registration period, which guarantees student involvement in our voting efforts.

We have also decided to create a curricular component to our voting efforts which will begin in the Fall of 2024. Currently the class "Making Social Change" is the foundational course for our Bonner Civic Scholars program as well as our Certificate in Civic Engagement and Social Change and is taught by Dr. Simanti Lahiri. This class has been taught every Spring and focuses on giving students tools to empower themselves to make positive change in their communities. Starting in the 2024-2025 academic year this class will be taught in the Fall and Dr. Lahiri has decided to incorporate voter registration efforts into the class syllabus. Students in the class will volunteer to register voters in the community and on campus, bringing new students into the coalition, but also this will give students a deep look into youth voter participation.

Finally, in 2020 DICE and the political science department collaborated on a number of election events, such as debate parties and an information session about voting in New Jersey. We will replicate this in the 2024 election cycle.

As you can see, we have both broadened and deepened our commitment to voting and student participation since our last action plan on a number of different strata across the university.

Landscape

Rutgers University Camden is a Minority Serving Institution with an enrollment of 5,894^[SL1]. We also recently were designated as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution as well. Thus, our student body consists of a number of communities that have historically been marginalized from the voting process in different ways. That said, RUC has made a commitment to prioritize access to voting for all eligible students, staff and faculty.

NSLVE¹ data shows that 85% of students are registered to vote and had a voting rate of 72.4% during the 2020 election. This data beats the averages of other institutions in the same year. The 2020 election saw an increase in student voting that may be in part to the increase in personal methods of voting like mail in voting. Over 4,000 students choose to vote using not in person methods compared to 2,570 who voted in person during 2018. The high registration rate is thanks to New Jersey allowing people to pre-register to vote at 17 and can also register when getting their license at the DMV. These accessible existing methods of registration give Rutgers-Camden an already high registration rate and the focus needs to be on getting them out to vote and educated in the political process.

There are many institutional efforts that aim to increase civic participation on the campus. The university is a part of the New Jersey Ballot Bowl, a competition between different colleges and universities throughout the state to get the most voter registration and pledges to vote. In the past two years, Rutgers-Camden has won the NJ Ballot Bowl in its group. The University offers a variety of internship and placement-based opportunities for students to get involved in government, non-profit, and advocacy groups. The Mayor Internship Program, Rutgers Scarlet Service Initiative and Rutgers Scarlet Service in Washington DC all provide students funding to complete internships in New Jersey, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington DC. Additionally, there is the Rutgers Civic Scholar program which provides students a stipend to complete 300 service hours in a placement in the City of Camden. Rutgers also offers Engaged Civic Learning classes (ECL) which are courses that include in their curriculum that has students working with organizations in Camden to foster an idea of civic engagement. These programs while not directly related to voting are programs that can hopefully increase political efficacy and engagement that can lead to increased levels of turnout.

Rutgers University also uses an application called TurboVote. This is an online voter registration platform that allows students to register online. This program is provided by the University and is

¹ We currently only have access to our 2020 NSLVE Data, we will revise the action plan once we receive the 2022 data.

promoted to students. During critical election years, the TurboVote application is on students Canvas webpage when they login in to convince students to vote. There is no data to show the impact TurboVote may have on student registration rates at Rutgers Camden. While the TurboVote application is available, the RUC Votes Coalition focuses on using paper registration applications so that we can have a longer point of contact with students. Additionally, using paper registrations, allows us to collect information data of our students, who we contact before the election to spur turnout. Because of this we now have a large database of students who have registered to vote that we can reach out to through phone or text-banking. The RUC Votes Coalition also is permitted to help register students at the Raptor Welcome Fair, different orientation events, the graduate fair, and resource fairs.

When it comes to access to voting the barriers for Rutgers Camden students are small. Students have a variety of ways to vote in New Jersey. They can vote by mail, participate in early voting, and vote on Election Day. Students who are residents of New Jersey are also able to pre-register to vote at 17. There is a polling place on the campus during Election Day and a location near the campus for early voting. Access to voting is not the issue, however, the fact that a large portion of students commute from their homes creates a complicated situation for our student volunteers, who must understand and explain the different voting options for students. In addition, students who commute may not have the time to vote in their districts. Finally, students who dorm and live in NJ must decide which county they want to vote in, since the NJ State primary elections usually take place after the end of the Spring Semester, which can present difficulty for students as they decide on their voting plan. The coalition must emphasize the multiple different paths to voting that exist in New Jersey, and get students to anticipate how they may want to access the vote months in advance. Additionally, the coalition has struggled to reach students associated with STEM and Nursing fields. NSLVE data shows these fields typically have lower levels of voter turnout and the coalition must have a focus on outreach there. The University currently does not have the school closed for Election Day. The large commuter population creates challenges in getting additional volunteers. Many students only come to campus for classes and leave, making it hard to convince commuters to stay to help register voters. It also results in trouble finding new leadership for the coalition because of the time commitment that it requires. There is also a lack of public transportation options for students who may need to use it to get to polling locations or drop off their ballot in a drop box location. There is also a portion of the university that could be Spanish speaking and that could create barriers if voting materials in Spanish aren't provided to students.

An organizational barrier is that Rutgers University-Camden has students from multiple New Jersey counties and neighboring states like Pennsylvania and New York. This creates complications for the coalition as it has to be aware of different registration requirements for the two states, as well as the location of different county clerk offices to ensure delivery of voter registrations.

Goals

The following goals are meant to align with larger institutional goals we have developed to foster student civic engagement in multiple forms. Voting and elections are a necessary, but not sufficient, aspect of strengthening democracy, thus all of these goals, while finite in nature, will also help to foster a larger sense of community engagement and empowerment among our student population. In addition, we have a significant percentage of international, dacomented, and undocumented students, thus, overall goals for student civic engagement should include these populations.

Short Term Goals

- Register 70 students
- Get 800 students to pledge to vote
- Get 5 student organizations to join the coalition
- Increase social media account followers to 150
- Hold 1 event per semester
- Create a backwards plan before the end of Spring 24 semester
- Create a consistent volunteer base
- Develop multilingual support for voter registrations
 - recruit students proficient in Spanish, Vietnamese, and other languages.
- Implement a text banking system to GOTV for registered students
- We currently have a relationship with the PA student voter coalition, but we would like to develop more of these relationships as we increase our out of state student population (currently we are predominantly an instate institution).
- Provide quick links to out of state students about voting in NJ vs. their Home States.

Long Term Goals

- Increase the voting rate to 80%
- Increase registration rate to 90%
- Advocate for Same Day Voter Registration
- Develop a Volunteer Recruitment strategy
- Expand voter registration efforts during orientation
- Have University wide notifications every election, including primary elections
- Create and implement a pledge for student organizations and professor to not have events or assignments during Election Day
- Ask the Athletics Department to pledge to not hold practice on election day
- have 2500-4000 student pledges to vote in a 3-5 year period.

Strategy

Short-Mid term strategies (1-2 years)

Voter registration/pledges

- Campus Tabling: Currently, the coalition utilizes tabling efforts to help push voter registrations and obtain pledges to vote. We consistently table in the Campus Center, which serves as the main hub for students. We table every Tuesday-Thursday during the Campus Free Period from the first week of the Fall semester through the election. We register voters until the registration deadline and then transition to prioritizing collecting pledges to vote and providing voter and election information to students. We have set a goal to have at least three volunteers staff the tables each day. Based on previous tabling work each table should average 3 registrations and 25 pledges a day.

The students who register and pledge can then be put onto a contact list to help with GOTV efforts in the future

- Class Presentations: The university has a large commuter population. This means a large portion of students go to class and leave making them unreachable in the Campus Center. In order to reach more students the coalition will organize volunteers to speak in classes. The focus will be on intro level courses that typically have the largest amount of students in these classes. The coalition will design a script and presentation for a 5 minute talk to each class and conclude by providing registration forms and have them pledge to vote via an online form. The goal would be to get around 20-30 pledges and 2-5 registrations depending on class size.

Voter education

- Kickoff Event: After the success of hosting the New Jersey Ballot Bowl kickoff event the University wants to make a kickoff event to election season an annual event. The kickoff event in Fall 2023 included the Lt. Governor of New Jersey, high level administration members, elected officials, students from Rutgers-Camden, and schools in the city of Camden. This event provides students an opportunity to hear from students and leaders about voting, receive educational resources, and be able to register and pledge to vote. The intention would be to have this event on National Voter Registration Day and have a turnout out of 200. Planning for the event will take place in the Spring 24 semester.

- Education based events: The coalition will collaborate with different university partners to host events that promote voter education. The focus of these events would take place in the spring semester to keep democratic engagement in the minds of students. The coalition could consider partnering with groups like New Jersey League of Women Voters to coordinate these events.

- Social Media: The aim of the coalition is to create a social media toolkit that can be used by the coalition and its supporters. A part of that toolkit will include posts that provide important educational information. Over the spring semester, the coalition will create the Social Media Coordinator role. Their goal during the semester is to work to create different graphics that include information about registering to vote, the different methods of voting, how to learn more about a candidate, what is a county line in New Jersey and more. The goal would be to start unveiling this toolkit before the end of the semester to use before the primary election

- Website: We are currently working with the Marketing and Communications team to create an RUC Votes Coalition webpage, which will provide Camden specific voter information for students. The university is also in the process of adopting the Give Pulse Platform, so we will be able to recruit volunteers and advertise events through this platform once we roll this out on our campus. We are currently looking at Spring of 2024 for this rollout.

GOTV

- Phone/Text banking: The coalition intends to use the information gathered from pledges and registrations to create a strong GOTV strategy leading up to elections. Partnering with NJPIRG the coalition will do phone banking leading up to the election asking if students plan to vote, how they intend on voting, and answer any concerns they may have directly. The day of the election the

coalition will conduct a text bank that will send a text to all students that reminds them to vote if they haven't and any resources if issues arise. Over the spring semester a GOTV training Manual and script will be developed in order to have materials prepared ahead of the election

- Emails: The coalition will send out an email on Election Day to students on the mailing list reminding them to vote as well any important resources. The coalition will also work with our administration allies to keep a campus wide message sent out to students about the important of democratic engagement

Institutional

-We want to create a campus commitment to voting for faculty and staff, who will pledge to focus on voting during election day. Including, but not limited to not having assignments due on election day, providing extra credit for students who volunteer on election day, and athletics and other campus organizations not scheduling meetings or events on election day.

NSLVE

Rutgers University-Camden is participating in the National Study for Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). At the moment, Rutgers Camden is waiting to receive the data regarding the 2022 midterm elections and used 2020 election data to determine goals and strategies for this year's action plan. Once we have 2022 results we will link to those in this report. As we wait for our 2022 results I have linked our 2020 report below. Based on the available 2020 data we have generally been on an upswing in terms of registration but need to focus on urging registered students to vote. Our goals reflect this need, in our desire to create a text banking process to remind students to vote. [2020 NSLVE data](#)

Reporting

Upon completion of the final draft of this plan it will begin circulating among key stakeholders. Internally copies will be shared to the Chancellor and members of his cabinet including the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusions, Vice Chancellor for Students Affairs, the deans of the different colleges, and more. The plan will be shared to other members of the coalition including the Honors College, Office of Student Involvement, the Student Government Association, and New Jersey Public Interest Research Group. Feedback will be collected from the different stakeholders within the university infrastructure. In March, the plan will be made public to the entire university. It will be made public through an in-person event on campus that will reveal the plan and allow opportunities for feedback. Upon completion of the event the plan will be made available on the RUC Votes Coalition website for anyone to view and see. This website will also include the NSLVE data that was used to create this action plan.

Finally, this plan will be used by the leaders of the RUC Votes Coalition to implement in the year. At the end of the 2024 election cycle along with creating the 2025-2026 action plan an evaluation

will be drafted to determine the progress of the coalition goals and what needs to be reevaluated or changed

Evaluation

Since the last action plan, both the student and staff leads have implemented consistent evaluation of the effectiveness of our events and the weaknesses of our program. As with many campuses, RUC struggles to maintain a high level of student engagement. However, our numbers continue to improve. Short-term evaluation of the impact of events remains difficult, however, RUC is expecting to roll out the use of the Give Pulse Platform in 2024, once this platform is in place we can use Give Pulse and our current student engagement platform, Engage, to set up pre and post evaluation to measure the impact of specific events. We are hoping to have this in place by the end of Spring of 2024 in anticipation of the 2024 election cycle. In addition, maintaining a coalition is often one of the most difficult aspects of mobilization. We will implement more consistent Student/Faculty/Staff meetings in order to create more pathways for input and evaluation of events. Finally, leadership of the RUC Votes Coalition remains embedded within DICE and the Bonner Civic Scholars Civics committee, we will set up short, mid, and long-term goals for this committee with regard to recruitment to the coalition and student engagement. In October of 2024 we will deploy a Qualtrics survey to the campus community to measure registration rates, intention to vote and issues that are currently impacting students the most when it comes to voting. Currently the Staff and Student lead for RUC Votes meets on a weekly basis, but we hope to expand these meetings and make them a regular point of evaluation throughout the 2024 election cycle.