



2018 ALL-IN VOTER ENGAGEMENT PLAN

OVERVIEW

Students, faculty, staff, and administrators at Duke worked in concert throughout 2018 to encourage greater Duke student, faculty, and staff voter participation. Taking point in this endeavor was POLIS: Duke's Center for Political Leadership, Innovation, and Service.

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 forgot to put postage on their absentee envelope, meaning the voting deadline might pass before the undeliverable mail can be re-sent.

Finally, Duke students' voting efforts have never been centralized. Some groups typically are engaged in registering and educating students. But they've operated largely in silos. Best practices are rarely, if ever, shared. Collaboration is unusual.

VOTER REGISTRATION, EDUCATION, AND MOBILIZATION

In only its third year of existence as Duke's hub for political engagement, POLIS sought to help transform Duke's campus into a more centralized voter registration and education operation, while also promoting autonomy among students to plan activities and promote messaging as they see fit. POLIS and others took the following steps to promote greater voter participation in 2018.

Project Citizen

In August Duke rolled out a new campaign called "Project Citizen." Led by the Kenan Institute for Ethics, Student Affairs, the Office of Civic Engagement, and POLIS, Project Citizen is a campus-wide effort to elevate students' understanding of their political identities and to challenge them to act on their beliefs. One element of Project Citizen is the education and mobilization of student voters, many of whom would be casting ballots for the first time.

Website

Inspired by Elon University's fantastic voter education website, in the spring of 2018 POLIS developed a "Duke Votes" website (<https://sites.duke.edu/dukevotes/>) to thoroughly walk through how to vote in North Carolina, how to vote elsewhere, important registration and voting dates, registration verification, sample ballots, and upcoming campus voting events. Before going live, the site was vetted by Duke senior officials, students, and even the Durham Board of Elections. The goal was to craft a site that would answer nearly every voter question succinctly, clearly, and accurately.

The site also includes a link to a Duke-specific TurboVote site to facilitate voter registration and absentee ballot requests.

As soon as students returned to campus in August, this website was promoted through campus-wide e-mails by Duke's president, vice president of Student Affairs, vice provost of the Office of Undergraduate Education, and registrar, as well as by POLIS, Student Government, and countless other Duke community members (faculty, staff, and students). It quickly became the virtual hub for all questions surrounding the 2018 elections.

From August 25 to October 8 (45 days), the site received 2,258 unique visitors and 5,145 page views. As voter engagement efforts increased in the final four weeks of the campaign, so did the site's popularity. From October 9 to November 1 (only 24 days), the site received an astounding 3,032 unique visitors and 6,997 page views.

Student Leadership Outreach

POLIS contacted more than a dozen Duke student leaders in May and June to brainstorm strategies for maximizing voter participation in the fall. Follow-up meetings in August led to the creation of a Student Coordinating Committee comprised of a dozen student leaders, which went on to meet regularly with POLIS to discuss campus-wide registration and education strategies. Simultaneously, POLIS started holding regular

public meetings with the Coordinating Committee and other interested students to entertain more innovative ideas and more areas for action. These public meetings included as many as 50 students, fostering meaningful voting-centric dialogue across ages, ideologies, genders, races, religions, etc.

Additionally over the summer, POLIS hired a Duke student to contact more than 1,000 Duke students to gauge voter registration status, voting potential, and whether they had any questions about the process. This type of one-to-one communication remained an important facet of the campus's voter outreach efforts.

Early Voting

In collaboration with the Durham Board of Elections, Duke senior officials were able to secure an early-voting site in the highest-trafficked location on Duke's campus: the Brodhead Center. Duke's registrar ensured 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 an additional hurdle of verifying her/his address when registering to vote locally.

Beginning in August, this early-voting site was heavily promoted visually and virtually. Signs were erected in front of the Brodhead Center. The Duke Votes website listed the days and times when people could vote. A Duke student leader created a widely distributed flow chart outlining how to register/vote based on one's residence, where to register/vote, and what forms of identification to bring when registering/voting early. And the Duke *Chronicle* newspaper, POLIS, and other entities kept this information front-and-center throughout the fall.

Events

To celebrate National Voter Registration Day on September 25, POLIS and students and other Duke community members peppered social media and internal messaging around prepping for upcoming voter registration deadlines around the country, early voting on Duke's campus, and other voter-related information. All that week, dozens of students collaborated on all-day voter registration "tabling" on the BC Plaza—the highest-trafficked outdoor area on Duke's campus, situated between the Brodhead Center and the Bryan Center. By week's end, they had registered more than 500 students.

Additionally, POLIS helped lead two major campus events to promote registration and early voting. The first was a "Party at the Polls" on the BC Plaza on October 17 to promote the start of early voting at the Brodhead Center. Live student entertainment and professional musicians entertained hundreds of students during the three-hour celebration, which was cosponsored by more than a dozen of the most prominent student organizations on campus. By day's end, more than 700 people had voted early in Brodhead. And a two-minute video of the event—with a "Go vote, Duke students!" mantra—has been featured broadly throughout campus and beyond: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hDbyPkmiOg>

POLIS also spearheaded a "Voting Isn't Spooky" campaign to coincide with Halloween, featuring all-day tabling on the BC Plaza to answer remaining voting questions and to urge students and others to vote before early voting was to shut down on November 3.

Social Media

Using hashtags like #DukeVotes and #BeAVoter and #EarlyVoting, POLIS and administrators and students continually pushed out social media posts to promote registering and voting. A Duke Votes Facebook page was created, enabling students and others to collaborate and educate each other more easily.

Paid Advertising

POLIS invested in daily ads on the Duke campus shuttle buses that transport thousands of students and other community members each day. Additionally, POLIS utilized Facebook advertising to broaden its registration/voting messaging.

Results

10,003 people voted early at the Brodhead Center, breaking the previous Duke campus voting record set in 2008 (9,361 votes):

<https://today.duke.edu/2018/10/early-voting-totals-underscore-interest-mid-term-election>.