BEST PRACTICES

Encouraging College Student Democratic Engagement Through a Collaborative Voter Mobilization Project

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Abstract: Drawing on challenges I experienced when teaching a political communication course, I designed an upper-level undergraduate course with the objective of developing students' civic competence and democratic engagement. The major class assignment, which is the focal point of this best practices essay, was a four-step collaborative voter mobilization project designed and executed by undergraduate students. I use research, classroom conversations, and student observations to discuss four best practices for encouraging students to participate in electoral politics: (a) fostering political efficacy, (b) peer-to-peer learning, (c) experiential learning, and (d) learning through reflection. This essay breaks a four-step collaborative voting mobilization project down into easily implementable steps for those seeking to inculcate attitudes and behaviors that foster democratic engagement whether that be in schools, universities, or within the broader community.

Although Millennials—people born between 1981 and 1996—will soon comprise the greatest share of the electorate, they are far from being the largest generational bloc of actual voters (Fry, 2018). Having previously taught an upper-level undergraduate political communication course, I knew that fully engaging students in the democratic process would be challenging. Students in prior iterations of a political communication course had shared with me that they did not vote because they saw their vote as "wasted" or perceived that it "didn't matter." Consequently, students confessed that they were disinterested in political engagement. Their admissions aligned with a 2017 report produced by the

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Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE) that found that, in 2012, students attending The State University of New York at Fredonia (SUNY Fredonia) lagged 17% behind the national average with 29.9% of students and 43.7% of registered students voting in the presidential election.

As I reflected on conversations with students and the IDHE report, I wondered if SUNY Fredonia students' lack of democratic engagement was an anomaly. I discovered that despite being eligible to vote, college-age citizens are notorious for failing to engage in political participation (Hays, 1998; Ulbig & Waggener, 2011). Scholars argue that, since electoral engagement and a strong democratic system are connected, disengagement in the electoral process harms the nation as a whole (Barber, 1984; Lijphart, 1997; Pateman, 1970). In sum, students' lack of democratic participation could have detrimental effects. For instance, those running for office are less likely to take the concerns of young adults into consideration when building their political platforms, because that cohort is less likely to vote (Delli Carpini, 2000).

A report released by the Commission on the Future of Undergraduate Education (2016) found that almost 90% of Millennials who graduate from high school will spend some time in college. Despite being distinctly positioned to educate young people in nonpartisan ways, institutions of higher learning fail to provide students with information they need to partake in electoral politics (Brandon, 2014). Since there is a connection between education and political engagement, undergraduate courses offer an opportunity to instill in students an incentive for active political participation (Hill & Lachelier, 2014). This is an important endeavor because, as Condon and Holleque (2013) contend, people who participate in politics early in life are more likely to be politically engaged throughout their lives.

With the goal of providing students with an academic experience that would inspire them to become more politically engaged, I designed a semester-long assignment that sought to develop students' civic competence and participation in democracy. The major assignment in the class, which is the focal point of this best practices essay, is a four-step collaborative voter mobilization project designed and executed by undergraduate students. I subsequently discuss best practices for encouraging participation in electoral politics: (a) fostering political efficacy, (b) peer-to-peer learning, (c) experiential learning, and (d) learning through reflection. By outlining a voter mobilization project, I offer best practices that others seeking to politically engage citizens, whether in schools, at universities, or within the broader community, can implement to inculcate in the populace attitudes and behaviors that foster democratic engagement.

Political Efficacy

Of the 4,386 students who attended SUNY Fredonia in the fall of 2016, 16 were enrolled in my upper-level undergraduate political communication course. All of these students were communication majors with the exception of one communication minor (Business Administration major) and two non-majors (English and Political Science majors). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of course participants alongside demographic characteristics of the Communication Department and SUNY Fredonia. There were two course participants for whom demographics were not collected.

TABLE 1
Demographics

Demographic	SUNY Fredonia Population (*n* = 4,386)	Communication Department Population (*n* = 386)	Course Population (*n* = 14)
Race			
White	76.7%	76.2%	85.7%
Black, Non-Hispanic	6.9%	9.3%	14.3%
Hispanic	7.5%	8.3%	0%
Asian	1.9%	1.6%	0%
Multiple Races	2.6%	2.1%	0%
American Indian	0.6%	0.5%	0%
Unknown	2.1%	2.1%	0%
Gender			
Male	43.1%	41.2%	42.9%
Female	56.9%	58.8%	57.1%

Note. Academic semester (Fall 2016) data retrieved from Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment. Communication Department population and course data collected by Argos.

Scott Warren, a fellow at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University, observed that "young people want to make the world a better place" yet "they don't necessarily see politics as the way to do it" (Alexander, 2020, para. 4). To gain perspective on students' lack of political engagement, class participants and I discussed why they opt not to vote. Similar to those enrolled in previous classes, many expressed a belief that their vote did not influence governmental decision-making. Students' statements indicated that they lacked political efficacy. Political efficacy is defined as an impression that "individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process . . . the feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (Campbell et al., 1954, p. 187). Established early in life, a person's sense of political efficacy is an important predictor of likely future democratic engagement (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2002). The fact that students felt they did not have political efficacy struck me as a critical hurdle to overcome in order to begin improving their overall political motivation. To foster political efficacy, the voter mobilization assignment adopted an experiential approach in which students learned about participating in politics by grappling with conditions and problems in the real world and proposing voting as the solution. Table 2 lists the responsibilities that comprised the voter mobilization project next to the percentage of the assignment each task was worth.

TABLE 2
Voter Mobilization Project Assignment Breakdown and Points Allocation

Assignment	Percent of Total Points
Research essay on past mobilization efforts	15%
Voter mobilization plan	40%
Campaign updates (2)	10%
Reflection essay	25%
Peer evaluation forms (5)	10%

Note. The voter mobilization project assignment had a total point value of 400 out of 1,000 total course points.

Students also shared that they did not participate in the political process because staying knowledgeable about politics was burdensome. Their assertions supported Delli Carpini's (2000) claim that young people's civic disengagement has created an epidemic of apathy toward the political process. Apathy is an unwillingness to exert some degree of effort to involve oneself in the political process (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991) and associates negatively with efficacy and involvement, each of which contributes to political disengagement (Pinkleton & Weintraub Austin, 2004). When citizens vote, they confer a degree of legitimacy on democratic institutions; therefore, I wanted to find a way to spark student awareness of the 2016 election.

Research indicates that people are more likely to participate in politics when they have self-interest in a political program or issue (Chong et al., 2001). With this research in mind, I required that for the first step in the voter mobilization project, students identify five issues that they believed affected college students. The class list included college affordability, healthcare, job creation, the environment, and humanitarian issues. After the topics were written on the board, students ranked the subjects based on their interest in the issues and were placed into teams of three to four. To start the teams off with a sense of common purpose, these student-generated assigned topics became the focal points of their voter mobilization plans.

During the second part of the assignment, students began researching their assigned topics in order to better understand the personal relevance of and candidates' stances on the political issue. The teams also used library databases to research past voter mobilization efforts in order to identify

- ▸ communication strategies implemented by voter mobilization campaign designers,
- ▸ tools used by voter mobilization campaign creators while interacting with a campus community, and
- ▸ election-related information that voter mobilization campaign designers provided to students.

Once the research stage was complete, the teams synthesized findings while writing an essay that

- ▸ described the political issue and candidates' viewpoints on the topic,
- ▸ summarized communication strategies that mobilization plan designers used to spur voter participation,
- ▸ compared and contrasted past mobilization efforts' strengths and weaknesses, and
- ▸ explained how the team would use the aforementioned information to design and execute its voter mobilization project.

Throughout class discussions, students shared that they became more interested in political participation as they researched their topics and admitted that investigating a political issue was not as difficult as they had originally anticipated. As students gained familiarity with aspects of political communication and skills acquisition, they became engaged citizens who established perceptions of their own political efficacy. An engaged citizen is one who follows democratic norms and principles, maintains empirically-based understandings about the social and political spheres, has knowledgeable opinions on public matters, and engages in actions intended to affect the welfare of oneself and others (Delli Carpini, 2004). The knowledge gleaned while researching past mobilization efforts informed the team's voter mobilization plan and positioned students to become leaders on campus who were familiar with democracy and voting.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

Participants in previous political communication classes reported feeling poorly informed about political issues and candidates, and were unsure how to fill out an absentee ballot. University students are inexperienced voters whose social network is primarily composed of peers who also have never voted (Bogard et al., 2008; Niemi & Hanmer, 2010). Consequently, they lack access to peers who are positioned to answer questions about voting. To offset this problem, the crux of the assignment incorporated peer-to-peer learning. This method of learning occurs when "students learn with and from each other without immediate intervention of a teacher" (Boud et al., 1999, pp. 413–414). As young people interact with their peers, they provide valuable information to a demographic that may be unsure how to register and cast a vote, uncertain about where to find information on candidates, and/or feel disillusioned with the electoral system. While speaking with peers, course participants encouraged fellow Millennials to recognize that their voices could contribute meaningfully to political discourse and that, in various ways, their political contributions could shape public policy.

Students' voter mobilization projects centered around providing their peers in the wider campus community with information on voting. For instance, while executing their voter mobilization campaign, face-to-face mobilization efforts helped students establish personal connections with their peers and with the electoral process. To achieve this objective, students used information they learned while writing the past voter mobilization efforts essay to create print materials that they handed out as they spoke with SUNY Fredonia students. Like Sam Houston State University's Political Engagement Project tabling endeavors (Ulbig & Waggener, 2011), students from one team sat at tables in high traffic areas on campus while distributing their colorful brochures. Another team read that students at the University of Southern California and at a college in Florida went door-to-door in campus dormitories to speak with students about voting (Hill & Lachelier, 2014). This team chose to disperse their brochures while implementing their own "dorm storming" strategy.

While researching others' voter mobilization efforts, one team read Ulbig and Waggener's (2011) study that found that providing students with basic information prior to voting increased their likelihood of casting a ballot. Accordingly, the students designed table tents that discussed candidates Clinton's and Trump's positions on healthcare-related subjects and shared the information with students. To inform students about the political issues, the team placed its election-themed centerpieces on tables in campus cafeterias and took turns speaking with their peers about the 2016 election. In these instances, students taught potential voters about political issues, how to vote, and the importance of participating in the democratic process.

As teams executed their voter mobilization plans, peer-to-peer learning held students accountable while also fostering ownership of learning and building a deeper understanding of course concepts. One way they did so was through campus media outlets, including the school's newspaper and its radio and television stations. The media the students chose coincided with their programs of study, such as video production, journalism, radio/audio, or public relations. Consequently, students incorporated their disciplinary knowledge into this project. For instance, one team appeared on a campus radio show to discuss the connection between healthcare and voting while a second team generated a radio advertisement using the school's production studio. Additionally, the editor of the school newspaper wrote an op-ed, and a video production major directed a commercial that aired on campus television. Through campus media, students facilitated peer-to-peer learning while helping to dispel the idea that a college student's vote did not matter.

In sharing their political knowledge, these undergraduates became engaged citizens who contributed to the political process. One student stated, "Learning so much on the topic and being able to talk about it in depth has made me passionate about what was happening and has made me want to share that with my peers." Another student noted that seeing his peers "out campaigning for causes normalized the idea of politics for college students' political engagement." One student sought to positively affect his peers' quality of life: "As a group, we hoped to inform Fredonia's students on the importance of voting and picking the right candidate who would better represent them when it came to their health care." Students' statements indicated that while speaking with peers, they gained practice in articulating their understanding of a politically consequential topic. In turn, SUNY Fredonia students joined those executing the voter mobilization projects in understanding where they stood on important issues in the 2016 election and becoming a more engaged citizenry.

Course participants also discovered that their new experiences conflicted with their prior understandings and beliefs. For instance, one student told the class, "This experience has changed my interest and opinion of political communication," and another wrote, "This experience altered my definition of political communication in that it heightened my interest in persuading the public." A course participant also admitted to seeing politics as "more than just old men arguing in stuffy rooms, it's about trying to get people to believe in something and try and change their future." Someone else shared that her team's voter mobilization efforts enabled her to "better understand what political campaigns were doing." Students' statements suggested that, as they spoke with the SUNY Fredonia student body, they expanded their understanding of the role communication played in the political process and shifted their beliefs about the nature of our political world.

Experiential Learning Theory

Making up 27% of the eligible voting population in 2016 (Fry, 2018), Millennials constituted a voting bloc that was large enough to shape election outcomes and the future of our participatory democracy (Tufts Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2020). Instructors, therefore, should create assessments that foster political efficacy so as to prepare students for effective participation in democracy. Using Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory as a guide, I designed the voter mobilization project such that learning occurred through active, hands-on methods (e.g., activities and projects) rather than through passive learning strategies (e.g., listening to a lecture). This distinction is important, because as Boud et al. (1993) contend, "learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged, at least at some level" (p. 8). Kolb (2014) similarly argues that adult learners, like those in a university classroom, want to know the relevance and application of what they are learning. One way to enhance student learning is by the integration of teaching and practice.

The voter mobilization project was an experiential learning exercise in which students took initiative, made decisions, and became intellectually engaged with political communication material. For instance, one team's slogan, "it's your health, care," was placed next to a picture of the American flag while another team generated its own mascot, named "Plant of Action," and positioned their slogan "Vote for the Earth! It's rooting for you!" next to its campaign logo. In these examples, teams used theories and concepts discussed in class, including the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Rhetorical Situation, ideographs, and Narrative Paradigm Theory, along with research on past mobilization efforts, to design its main messages and publicity materials. In these ways, students demonstrated an ability to integrate more conventional classroom learning with the pragmatic, hands-on aspects of the project, learning to juxtapose scholarship and praxis.

Course participants further demonstrated their understanding of the political process while using online social networking sites to generate political participation. Social networking platforms, such as Twitter, enabled students to engage in a two-way, reciprocal learning process as they communicated with their peers virtually. For example, students majoring in public relations and communication studies used knowledge gleaned from a social media course to create and disseminate surveys on political issues via Twitter and posted self-produced informational videos on Facebook. Students also generated status updates to increase voter turnout. Similarly, a student majoring in visual arts created a comic that featured a mascot she designed. Her team then posted the comic to their Instagram Story. With their creative approaches, students sought to expand their peers' understanding of political issues and tapped into their own abilities to use social media to energize a population characterized by disinterest in political participation.

Kolb's (1984) four-stage learning cycle served as a basis for students' weekly 10-minute oral updates. During the presentations, teams explained the activities they completed that week, challenges, and successes. Students subsequently reflected on whether what they found in the research corresponded with their experiences. Students also shared what they learned from their mistakes and achievements. Then, keeping in mind these experiences, teams offered a new idea or alteration of an existing one followed by a description of how they planned to apply the new idea over the next week. When each presentation finished, the class offered oral feedback. On the day following the presentation, teams began active experimentation while applying new knowledge as they proceeded.

Participation in experiential opportunities have been linked to students' development of a range of transferable skills (Griffin et al., 2010). For example, the voter mobilization project appears to have helped students hone their abilities to establish their credibility with their peers and, as one student put it, "provide people with all the facts and letting them make an informed decision." Another course participant shared that he now knows how to "successfully present unbiased information even when I very strongly favor one side over the other." Reflecting on how best to build credibility with peers, one student wrote, "We hoped that we would establish a sort of ethos with other college students: if we cared about voting, then so should they." Other students refined their social media skills. For instance, one student attributed the "likes" her group received online to their use of "personal statements combined with humor and modern slang." Each of these skills is transferable to other settings, where students may recall how to present information in a balanced manner while using language and examples that appeal to an intended audience.

Teamwork is an integral part of workplace success, yet 36% of managers found that new college graduates lacked interpersonal and teamwork skills (PayScale, 2016). With the goal of developing this particular soft skill, I designed the assignment such that a team's success was dependent upon team members exerting similar levels of effort. Research indicates that when people merge their contributions into group work, they may accomplish less than may be expected based on the sum of their individual capabilities (Karau & Williams, 1993). Since individual outputs were evaluated collectively, I suspected that some students might perceive the occurrence of social loafing within their team. Social loafing, which occurs when people make less effort when they work collectively than when they work alone or coactively (Karau & Williams, 1993; Latané et al., 1979; K. D. Williams & Karau, 1991), has negative consequences that can hinder a team from achieving its goals (Latané et al., 1979). A person's perception of social loafing can negatively affect a group member's motivation (K. Williams et al., 1981). Knowing that teams could experience a reduction in potential productivity, I incorporated individual peer assessment measures of teammates' efforts.

Every time students completed one of the assignments, I distributed a Google Form that prompted teams to reflect on each person's additions to the project. This form requested feedback that accounted for other team members' contributions and asked how effectively the team was working. I aggregated the individual feedback and presented it to the whole team when I returned the graded assignment. I then held brief conversations with groups to discuss the individual feedback, my feedback on the team's assignment, and any dysfunctional interaction patterns, such as perceived social loafing. These team meetings aimed to provide information to students for the purpose of increasing performance and decreasing ineffective behaviors. Our conversations indicated that peer feedback exercises helped students gain a richer understanding of their tasks and monitor and regulate their work. After we discussed the feedback, teams gathered to reflect upon the information and design a plan for correcting their future approaches. By providing opportunities for practicing their collaboration skills, teams learned how to accept others' perspectives, listen to feedback, and respect diverse approaches to completing work.

In sum, as they made connections between research and real-life involvements, students' experiences became focal points of learning. A student maintained, "By examining past political data and research conducted on student voting patterns, we created a plan that had both success and failures in which we learned from." Thus, the voter mobilization project emphasized experience as a means for testing the ideas students learned about in the research. For example, a few course participants observed that successful mobilization techniques discussed in the research, such as distribution of flyers, did not seem to work. On the other hand, another student discovered that "it is easier to reach young adults online than through traditional media," just as the research suggested. Some students felt that the research made mobilizing college students seem easy. Course participants, however, found it challenging. One student admitted, "I didn't think it would be this hard to mobilize students," and another stated, "I now understand how hard it is to mobilize the college student body to do something." A third student revealed, "It was quickly learned how difficult it really is to motivate politically uninterested people. However, I now know the better methods to mobilizing and persuading people to get involved." Responses indicated that involvement in politics played an important role in the learning process: ideas concerning civic engagement resulted from and were modified by experience. As they developed into engaged citizens, students constructed meaning from real-life experience and shared that meaning with their peers.

Learning Through Reflection

Once the polls closed on November 8, 2016, teams concluded their voter mobilization plans. Reflection based on prior knowledge is a key component of experiential learning (Estes, 2004), so I gave students a week to contemplate their experience before writing a reflection essay. I decided to have students write an essay because writing is an effective tool for measuring a student's ability to express knowledge and cognitive development (Bennion et al., 2020) and creates deeper understanding (Kellogg, 2008). In experiential learning, reflection transpires within the person (Joplin, 1995) so students wrote their reflection essays individually. To guide their written reflection, I asked students to:

- ▶ assess the team's decisions and use of peer-to-peer learning,
- ▶ consider whether their level of political self-efficacy and, if relevant, apathy, were affected as a result of completing the project, and
- ▶ reflect on the relationship between experience and learning by considering whether the disciplinary knowledge and information garnered while reading research transferred to a real-world situation.

By pondering what happened during the project and evaluating their experiences, students constructed knowledge from real-life events. Their responses revealed a new sense of civic competence and willingness to be involved in the political process.

For instance, some students expressed a belief that they gained a sense of political self-efficacy in that they felt like they helped American democracy by executing a voter mobilization plan. To this point, one student wrote, "I would like to think that voter mobilization plans like the ones we worked on in class had a huge hand in the increase of youth voter turnout." A second student expressed her belief that "even though no statistics are out yet on the percentage of Fredonia students that voted in this presidential election, I am confident that our campaign increased the awareness and acceptance of the importance of voting among college students." The possibility exists that as these young people make voting a habit, they may be more apt to participate in elections (Gerber et al., 2003) and, in turn, have their voices heard.

Implications

Those seeking to engage citizens in the democratic process can use the four best practices outlined in this essay, including fostering political efficacy, peer-to-peer learning, experiential learning, and learning through reflection, as a guide for designing their own voter mobilization campaigns. In what follows, I suggest ways in which organizations and instructors can implement voter mobilization projects altered to fit their needs.

First, voter mobilization projects can be adapted to demographics that have lower voting rates, such as Hispanic or Latinx populations, along with communities that are historically underrepresented in the polls (Krogstad, 2016). Facing language barriers and lacking connections to the political system, there exists a strong belief within the Hispanic community that their votes do not matter (Parlapiano & Pearce, 2016). A voter mobilization campaign could help dispel this belief by fostering political efficacy. For example, in Dunkirk, New York, the town adjacent to Fredonia, 30% of residents are Hispanic (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Local organizations, such as Hispanic Organization for Progress and Education (HOPE), could implement a voter mobilization plan grounded in a matter affecting the Hispanic population and propose voting as the way to create change. The issues could include those self-reported as important to the community, including "crime, crumbling housing, [and] empty storefronts" (Rosas, 2016, para. 9). HOPE could have a prominent member of the Hispanic community, such as Dunkirk's mayor, who holds the distinction of being the first Hispanic mayor in New York State, to establish personal connections with eligible voters as a way to generate political participation. Similar to students who spoke the language of Millennials, HOPE could train citizen leaders who communicate with the public in Spanish via the Dunkirk radio station WDOE, flyers posted at local restaurants and grocery stores, and HOPE's social media. By establishing that the benefits of being politically active outweigh the costs, as my students sought to do for their peers, the voter mobilization project could strengthen the Hispanic population's capacity to engage in civic and political endeavors.

Second, Warren shared a belief that young people's political disengagement stems from a failure of civics education (Alexander, 2020). Civics education presents students with opportunities to engage in classroom activities that model democratic processes through hands-on learning (Levesque, 2018). A similar voter mobilization project in primary and secondary schools could contribute to a civics education curriculum by using peer-to-peer learning to engage middle and high school students in politics. This assignment would be particularly useful in school districts with an educational goal of

promoting high civic qualities among their pupils. To develop students' civic skills and dispositions, students enrolled in government participation courses could select a topic relevant to people their age and design a voter mobilization campaign that encourages peers to take action. Examples might include voting in a mock election or participating in a letter writing campaign. Peer-to-peer learning, thus, would be a useful method of knowledge transfer by drawing on students' insights into their own demographics. Being involved in activism and simulations would help students learn how to be civically engaged and potentially deepen young people's knowledge of public affairs.

Third, this experiential learning activity could serve as a foundation for a political campaign's internship program. Student interns could apply academic knowledge while using a candidate's stance on a policy as a focal point for a voter mobilization plan. The intern could learn from industry professionals by presenting weekly briefings to campaign staff. Additionally, local organizations seeking campus-community partnerships, such as the League of Women Voters or the U.S. Census Bureau, might use a modified version of the assignment as part of an internship program that integrates knowledge of theories learned in the classroom with practical application in a student-run grassroots campaign. For instance, interns may produce online content, such as websites or blogs, which voting blocs could access to learn about steps in the voting process. Online tools, such as Canva, could assist interns in designing demographically distinct infographics and newsletters that inform different segments of the population about democracy. In these instances, students would acquire a range of hard and soft skills as part of their employment experience and gain valuable proficiencies. Then, while writing reflection essays, interns would describe tasks they completed, identify opportunities employers presented them, highlight challenges they experienced, and ascertain lessons learned. By contributing to or overseeing a voter mobilization campaign, the interns would gain an understanding of how democratic processes work and also garner a heightened political awareness.

Fourth, the voter mobilization project outlined in this paper can be applied and adapted in other instructors' pursuits, beyond a course in political communication, to reduce students' aversions to investing themselves in the democratic process and to teach students how theories can inform their creation of communication materials and interactions with peers. Based on my experience, I recommend teams of at least four so that more students are working toward shared goals. Group size may be an antecedent of social loafing; therefore, when a larger number of students are assigned to a group, the instructor should hold regular check-ins with teams to assess, motivate, and support positive team behavior. To reduce students' proclivities for social loafing, I recommend following Karau and Williams's (1993) suggestions including monitoring individual performance and having group members assign meaningful tasks to one another. Since students will likely use campus printing services to reproduce flyers and brochures, I encourage instructors to help teams secure funding to cover the cost of printing. I also found that teams' voter mobilization plans lacked depth and foresight. Consequently, I labeled teams' initial plans as drafts, provided detailed feedback, and gave the teams 48 hours to use the feedback to revise their proposals. Instructors may see more comprehensive voter mobilization plans if they require that teams submit a draft of the document prior to turning it in for a grade.

Conclusion

The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) maintains that institutions of higher education have begun to emphasize the importance of encouraging students' civic involvement. For this reason, instructors need assignments, such as a voter mobilization project, that they

can use to foster behaviors that lead to democratic engagement in young citizens. The voter mobilization project described in this essay was an experiential learning exercise in which students became actively engaged with their surroundings and applied knowledge in an impactful way that enabled them to feel like they were influencing their community and the democratic process. Student responses indicate that the project had positive real-world implications, and I propose that this assignment could be successfully adapted and applied in various contexts within other populations, as well. In doing so, we could contribute to a healthy democracy that includes an informed and active electorate.

In the end-of-term course evaluations, students identified the voter mobilization project as their favorite part of the class. One student wrote, "What I enjoyed best about this classroom experience was the GOTV campaign. That helped me learn a lot about campaigning." Another student appreciated the "interesting class discussion arising from the voter mobilization campaigns and creative freedom for the mobilization campaign." I would add that since students knew they were responsible for educating their peers on a political issue, the candidates, and the voting process, they worked harder and were more strategic about how best to reach SUNY Fredonia students.

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