

# Saving Democracy One Screen at a Time

**Megan Paluzzi**

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## Important Digital Organizing Links

- <https://sites.google.com/sage.edu/rscelection/home>
  - For post-election resources, tailored to your mood
  - Created by Megan Paluzzi, presenter
- [www.Canva.com](http://www.Canva.com)
  - For flyers, image editing, etc.
- [www.sage.edu/vote](http://www.sage.edu/vote)
  - For information on the Sage Votes Committee
- [www.democracymatters.org](http://www.democracymatters.org)
  - For information on Democracy Matters
- <http://www.democracymatters.org/organizing-tools/downloadable-materials/>
  - For downloadable Democracy Matters materials
- <https://bingobaker.com/view/3464020>
  - Bingo Baker (Debate-specific created by Megan Paluzzi)

## **Fall 2020 End of Semester Report**

### **Russell Sage College Chapter of Democracy Matters**

**Your name:** Megan Paluzzi

**School name:** Russell Sage College

**Have you organized a group?** Yes

**How many regulars?** 10

**How many others?** 20

**How many meetings have you held this semester?** 10

**Is the group an “official” college group?** Yes

**Have you met with other groups?** Yes

**If yes, please list.** Sage Votes Committee, WLD 401, Women’s Institute, Theatre Department, Sodexo, SGA, Career Services, BLSA, Diversity and Inclusion

**Have these groups signed on to your campaigns?** Some, yes

**Did you get coverage by campus or local media outlets? (newspaper, radio, TV, etc)? Please list.**

Yes! News10 for National Voter Registration Day, Sage Engaged, and RBG tribute (collaboration with Sage Votes, Career Services, and Women’s Institute respectively)

**What social media did you use and how successful was each?**

Facebook: Very successful

Google sites/hangout: Very successful

In process of setting up Instagram (SPRING 2020 EDIT: SUCCESSFUL)

**Which Democracy Matters materials were most/least helpful (flyers, brochures, banners, t-shirts, buttons)? Why?**

Buttons were very helpful, especially because of the button traditions on our campus! Stickers were also helpful and my group has expressed interest in T-shirts and banners.

**Please attach separately your general evaluation of your experience with the Democracy Matters internship. Explain whether and how it has changed your view of politics, of activism, and of grassroots organizing.**

Here is an excerpt from my early October log:

“This internship made me realize a lot about the people around me, especially students. So many students, even upperclassmen, have never voted before and they feel unprepared in the election. When registering students to vote, many said to me that they never knew how easy the process was. Who knew you could register to vote *and* request an absentee ballot from your own phone? I was also shocked to learn about some of the faculty who do not vote; my boss at one of my work study jobs told me that he writes his five-year-old son’s name on every ballot instead of voting for a candidate running. Another adult told me that they did not know where their polling place was and that they were too busy to change it to a closer location. Something that I learned now that early and absentee voting has started for many states is that people are not aware of all elections. So many of my friends have approached me asking who the people on the ballot are. Some even thought they received the wrong ballot because it had more than presidential candidates on it! A couple of students also had questions on the ballot, which confused them even more.

The work I do with Democracy Matters is more important than I initially realized. So many individuals think that their votes do not matter yet neglect to realize the amount of people with that same mindset. Unfortunately, this is a high-stakes election for many people; fortunately, more people are aware of the importance of voting. While my earlier campaigns were focused on getting students the ballot, I am now shifting my focus to making sure they understand the ballot. Hopefully, I can achieve this with my Votes and Floats event coming up soon. I had the tendency to place emphasis on the 2020 Presidential Election because that is the only election I, as a Massachusetts resident, have in common with New York State residents. I am trying my best to learn more about local candidates so I can help inform students who are confused about the additional names on their ballots.

Accepting my internship with Democracy Matters may have been the best decision of my college career. I sincerely hope that more students take a chance on this internship down the line, regardless of their academic major and professional aspirations. Although it initially appeared to be completely unrelated to my career goals, it has helped strengthen my passion, network, and skillset that I would need to succeed in life. I have made so much progress thus far in the initial stages of the Democracy Matters chapter and I can only improve from here.

By taking these small steps to educate my campus community, I am impacting our government. You can never truly predict the outcome of an election as people do the voting, not the polls. Hopefully, my work with Democracy Matters will encourage my generation to keep fighting for what is right and using their voices through the ballot. The ballot is the first step to true change.”

## Events and Brief Descriptions

- National Voter Registration Day
  - Volunteers managed tables and canvassed to register students to vote or help them make their 2020 voter plan
  - Giveaway table with touch keys, Sage Votes masks, cookies from the dining hall with QR code stickers, stickers, buttons, and absentee applications
  - Very successful! Many students were already registered to vote, but a lot were unsure. We had many people come up to make a voter plan with us and get some freebies
- Politics in Pajamas
  - Evening event with local politicians online featuring a PJ party!
  - Three events:
    - i. Meeting with Dorcy Appylrs
      - Successful! Great Q+A event too
    - ii. Paul Tonko and Liz Joy
      - Pretty successful, it was a great opportunity to see where each candidate's stances were
    - iii. Voter Suppression: Rigged viewing and discussion with local politicians
      - Super successful and we got to meet a lot of great local politicians, including one RSC alum!
- Sage Engaged
  - Canvassing campus to help students register to vote and make their voter plan
  - Mildly successful... campus is rather empty on Wednesdays, especially when everyone is out doing community service
- Election Debate Bingo
  - Virtual event with an online bingo game involving common topics and phrases in debates. First to get bingo won some Democracy Matters merchandise!
- Floats and Votes
  - Online and in-person event consisting of root beer floats and a mock election. Three theatre majors portrayed different parody candidates (Peppa Pig, Leslie Knope, Barbie) and had a debate. Everyone practiced filling out ballots correctly.
  - Incredibly successful and has been my favorite event!
- Hamilton Watch Party
  - Meeting with Joan and politician/RSC alum Thearse McCalmon to discuss staying politically involved after the election as well as campaign finance reform. Then, we watched the film Hamilton!
  - Successful, but low attendance (about 20 instead of the 40 that signed up). Big curveball in planning the event due to the activity being shut down last minute and having to be made remote.





## Interest/Club Advertising Flyers



# DEMOCRACY MATTERS

*The National Student Movement  
Big money out. People in.*



## INTEREST MEETING

*Tuesday, September 15  
12:30pm on Zoom  
Meeting ID 036 1193 9396*

**Big \$\$\$\$  
Out**

**Votes  
In**



Join the  
Russell Sage  
Chapter of  
Democracy  
Matters

Email [paluzm@sage.edu](mailto:paluzm@sage.edu)

 Democracy  
**MATTERS**

## Watch Party Flyers





Democracy Matters

# WATCH PARTY

+ a conversation with NYS activists

**Tuesday, 11/17**

**6:00pm**

**Zoom**

**Meet Dr. Joan  
Mandle and  
Thearse  
McCalmon**



**HAMILTON**



**Scan the QR code  
to sign up!**

## Voter QR Codes



**Vote411**

Insert your address  
and find information  
about YOUR  
candidates!



**isidewith.com**

Take quizzes to see  
which parties,  
candidates, and  
initiatives align with  
your personal views



# GET PAID TO VOLUNTEER!

**BECOME A NYS POLLWORKER**



[HTTPS://WWW.ELECTIONS.NY.GOV/BECOMEPOLLWORKER.HTML](https://www.elections.ny.gov/becomepollworker.html)

## Floats and Votes Materials



# FLOATS & VOTES

Tuesday, October 27

7:30pm

The Aggie, Troy Campus OR Zoom

**ROOT BEER FLOATS  
VOTER RESOURCES  
THE DEBATE OF A LIFETIME**

*Featuring Leslie Knope, Barbie, and Peppa Pig*

Scan the QR Code to Sign Up

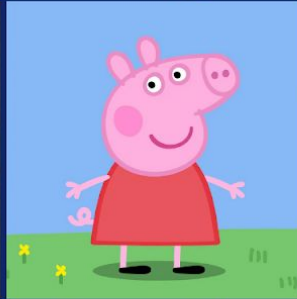




10/27 7:30pm in the Aggie (Troy) or via Zoom



Leslie Knope



Peppa Pig



Barbie

# The Ultimate Face-Off

FLOATS AND VOTES

Parody Presidential Debate, Mock  
Election, Voter Resources,  
Giveaways, Root Beer Floats



*Register here or email [paluzm@sage.edu](mailto:paluzm@sage.edu)*



## Event Sign Up Form (General example for all events held)

<https://forms.gle/yTZgxkK2UJJYXw767>

### Debate Questions (From those who signed up)

- Describe your experience. Why are you qualified to become President of the United States?
- How will you support the arts?
- What would life be like in Barbie's world?
- What do you think is the most pressing issue when it comes to climate change and how do you plan on fixing it?
- How would you handle the political unrest in America?
- Do you support packing the courts?
- How would you handle the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Can Peppa Pig whistle?
- How would your healthcare plan differ from your candidates'?
- Why have you chosen your running mate?
- Why do you want to become President of the United States?
- What is the biggest problem in America today?
- What would be the first thing you do as president?

### Mock Ballot (Based on NYS ballot)

OFFICE	PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT (Vote for ONE)	MEMBER OF ASSEMBLY 108th District (Vote for ONE)	REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS 20th District (Vote for ONE)	STATE SENATOR 44th District (Vote for ONE)
<b>SPARKLE</b>	<input type="radio"/> Barbie FOR PRESIDENT Bibble FOR RUNNING MATE	<input type="radio"/> Sharon Murray	<input type="radio"/> Sara Schuman	<input type="radio"/> Karina Hernandez
<b>WAFFLE</b>	<input type="radio"/> Leslie Knope FOR PRESIDENT Ron Swanson FOR RUNNING MATE	<input type="radio"/> Stacy Gonzalez		<input type="radio"/> Grace Giancola
<b>ANIMAL</b>	<input type="radio"/> Peppa Pig FOR PRESIDENT Sally Sheep FOR RUNNING MATE	<input type="radio"/> Don Richards	<input type="radio"/> Ali Schaeffing	<input type="radio"/> Shylah Addante
<b>WRITE-IN</b>	WRITE-IN	WRITE-IN	WRITE-IN	WRITE-IN

## Voter Friendly Campus Report



## 2020 Designated Campus Report

Submitted January 31, 2021

## Russell Sage College Institutional Commitment To Student Voters

The current pandemic has created unmatched crises within education, public health, healthcare and the economy. The variability in the type and sensitivity of diagnostic testing, the inconsistency in contact tracing, and lack of reporting of positive COVID-19 cases have each contributed to the underrepresentation of the true frequency and prevalence of this virus.

Yet despite the astounding global impact of the pandemic, history has taught us that with great challenges and adversity comes new strength and countless opportunities for transformation. In many ways, we are at a crossroads right now within higher education. Even the most astute leaders and researchers continue to find themselves in uncharted waters.

Academic institutions were forced to close their campuses and rapidly transition to remote teaching and learning earlier this year. While many professors were adept at providing online learning, others found themselves in unfamiliar territory with remote and high flex learning. Many students struggled, especially those with a strong preference for face-to-face learning or residing in areas with limited access to technology. Yet despite these challenges, the professional transformation of students, faculty, staff and administrators has been impressive. Together, at Russell Sage College we have grown into a new living-learning community that is stronger, more inter-dependent, confident and flexible in responding to change.

For over 100 years, Russell Sage College (RSC) has been a leader in preparing students for careers and life. With 2,300 students, RSC offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees on our campuses in Albany, the capital of New York State, and in historic downtown Troy. Students participate in a learning environment that offers varied interdisciplinary academics, opportunities for community engagement, options to study abroad, and a range of artistic and athletic endeavors.

RSC is committed to promoting civic learning throughout our students college experience. Civic engagement is central to our mission, which includes our aims to 1) empower students to contribute to the larger society a group of diverse, thoughtful and competent citizen-leaders who continue to be engaged in the pursuit of lifelong learning; and 2) translate learning into action and application, recognizing the obligations of educated persons to lead and to serve their communities.

Developing citizen leaders is an institutional value and disseminated throughout the academic and co-curricular experiences provided at RSC. Consistent with these values, RSC put forward a community wide action plan to earn a Voter Friendly Campus Designation in the fall of 2020. Branded as "Sage Votes," this report summarizes and analyzes the impact of Sage Votes Voter Friendly Campus Initiative participation.





## Sage Votes

Authors John B. Holbein and D. Sunshine Hillygus state in their 2020 book, "Making Young Voters", that purposefully difficult registration and voting requirements interrupt students efforts to vote.

Understanding the existing barriers and myths to student voter turnout was the impetus of Sage Votes work. Existing barriers include strict proof-of-residence requirements, restrictions on the types of ID that a student can use, finding their polling location, and growing misinformation campaigns.

COVID-19 created an additional complication that could hinder student voters. With nationwide campus shutdown, students grew more removed from the voting resources and reminders they used to get from their schools, but none the less students were eager to vote.

Motivated by concerns regarding education debt, climate change, racism and healthcare, college students mobilized around the November election. Sage Votes attempted to close that gap on its campuses by trading in-person programming and on-campus voting drives for virtual programming and digital campaigns. Sage Votes worked to connect with students suffering from being removed and isolated by the pandemic.

### Sage Votes Committee

SAGE VOTES is a student led, comprehensive, non-partisan initiative whose mission is to promote voter registration, voter participation and voter awareness through on-campus and virtual activities. The Sage Votes committee is comprised of students, faculty and staff. The committee represents a diverse audience, including student government officials, student athletes, professors, student affairs, external relations and communications professionals.



### Sage Votes Committee Goals:

- Provide engaging programs that educate and empower students to be civically involved
- Create virtual and socially distanced activities that build access to students understanding of voters rights, absentee ballots, process and registration that address and eliminate barriers to voting and increase voter turnout
- Develop a structure where student advocates lead programs and conversations that are supported by faculty and staff

October 2020

### The Sage Colleges

### NSLVE Campus Voting Data: At A Glance



"For too long, higher education's civic movement has been defined in ways that are apolitical. This is no longer an option. Now is the time to educate and act to eradicate systems of discrimination and injustice both in public life and within the academy."  
-Nancy Thomas, Director, IDHE

Read more about what presidents, provosts, faculty, and staff can do to advance political learning and participation in this historic election season in *Election Imperatives 2020*: [idhe.tufts.edu/electionimperatives](http://idhe.tufts.edu/electionimperatives)

Questions about your data? Read our FAQ here: [idhe.tufts.edu/nsolve/frequently-asked-questions](http://idhe.tufts.edu/nsolve/frequently-asked-questions) or email us at [NSLVE@tufts.edu](mailto:NSLVE@tufts.edu)

INSTITUTE FOR  
DEMOCRACY &  
HIGHER EDUCATION

IDHE's signature initiative, the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), is a service to colleges and universities that provides more than 1,100 participating institutions with tailored reports of their students' voting rates. Data in this report are current as of fall 2020. For more information about IDHE and campus voting data, visit us at [idhe.tufts.edu](http://idhe.tufts.edu) or email us at [info@idhe.tufts.edu](mailto:info@idhe.tufts.edu).

Tufts Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life

### Setting Measurable Outcome/ NSLVE Data

Sage Votes will share the 2020 The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement data with the campus; incorporating the data into determine the most effective strategies for voter registration and turnout. Sage Votes will also post this data on the Sage Votes website so they can easily be accessed by all interested constituencies on campus.

Our primary objectives last fall were to:

- Increase the number of registered voters on campus from 76.8% to 81% (+4.2%)
- Increase voter turnout from 49.3% to 60% (+10.7%)

## Sage Votes Team

### The Sage Votes Team

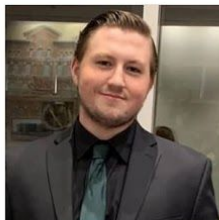
The Sage Votes team was led by Grace Giancola, Assistant Director of Residence Life. The committee roster can be found listed below. The team met initially in early July 2020 and weekly through November to discuss plans review, and evaluate programs.

In addition, the group communicated through Zoom, email, maintained a Google drive for documents and materials, and populated a web page with event details and resources. Committee meetings were informal, with attendees providing updates from members' respective groups and departments.



### Sage Votes Committee Members

Grace Giancola, Sage Votes Chair, Residence Life  
Donna Barkhuff-Health Center  
Samantha Bourgeois, Student  
Sarah-Gabrielle Casimir, Student  
Allison Davenport, HEOP  
Liam Dowd, Student  
Ryan Jennings, Student  
Julianna Klein, Communications  
Dayna Maniccia, Faculty  
Geoffrey Miller, Government Relations  
Megan Paluzzi, Student  
Ali Schaeffing, Faculty



## Sage Votes Campus and Community Partners

Sage Votes was a community wide movement and all of its accomplishment were made possible by the internal and external partners that believe in voters rights.



### Russell Sage College Institutional Partners

RSC 101  
School of Arts and Science  
The Arthur O. Eve HEOP  
The Women's Institute  
Student Life  
Sage Athletics  
Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Health Services  
TSC Information Technology  
Communications Office  
Sage Thrives Initiative  
Opalka Gallery  
Office of College Services  
Sodexo-Dining Services



### Russell Sage College Community Partners

Democracy Matters  
League of Women Voters of Rensselaer County  
National Voter Registration Day  
The Sanctuary for Independent Media

American Issues Initiative  
The Hart Cluett Museum  
Alliance for Youth Action  
Voter Friendly Campus



### Sage Votes in the News

<https://wnyt.com/news/russell-sage-college-encourages-students-to-vote-troy-rensselaer-county-national-voter-registration-day-/5871677/>  
<https://www.dailyadvent.com/news/518d85b30b612631eae4eadd41022f8a-Russell-Sage-College-helps-register-students-to-vote>  
<https://www.news10.com/news/local-news/sage-engaged-local-college-students-giving-back-to-community/>



## Analysis of Sage Votes Activities

Based on the Voter Friendly Campus description of work outcomes, Sage Votes goals fit into 3 areas:

- Voter Education
- Voter Access and Turnout
- Voter Advocacy

### Voter Education

Sage Votes hosted a series of virtual voter education events entitled "Politics in Pajamas". Students indicated that evening programs fit better into their school/work schedules. Each program began at 8PM. The approach to these events was to create a casual environment in which students could attend a virtual forum in their pajamas with political leaders and hear directly from elected officials in the comfort of their home or dorm room.



#### *Voter's Rights for College Voters*

Wednesday, September 16, 8:00-9:00 PM

The Sage Votes Committee invited the Honorable Dr. Dorsey Appllys, Chief City Auditor for the City of Albany and Clinical Associate Professor at UAlbany School of Public Health, to talk to students about the importance of civic engagement and the power in their vote.



#### *Candidates for College Voters*

Tuesday, October 13, 8:00-10:00 PM

Incumbent Congressman Paul Tonko (D) and his challenger Liz Joy (R) ran for The 20th district, located in the Capital District and includes all of Albany and Schenectady Counties, and portions of Montgomery, Rensselaer and Saratoga Counties. Tonko and Joy agreed to participate in an open forum and talk to students about their positions on matters that are important student voters.



#### *Voter Access for College Voters*

Monday, October 26, 8:00-10:00 PM

Students viewed the digital screening of the award-winning film "RIGGED: The Voter Suppression Playbook". The documentary highlights how strategic, intentional voter suppression tactics – from purging voting rolls and restrictive voter ID laws to gerrymandering and voter intimidation – undermine our democracy. Following the film, panelists spoke to students about voter suppression in our community. Panelist included Thearse McCalmon alumnae and State Senate Candidate, Owusu Anane, Albany City Council Member, and Sam Fein, Albany County Legislator, and talked about their political experiences and provide the tools to identify voter suppression and ensure that their vote counts.

Program Title	Total Attendance Count	Survey Respondent Satisfaction
Voter's Rights for College Voters	59	91% rated the program good or better (21 respondents)
Candidates for College Voters	58	88% rated the program good or better (16 respondents)
Voter Access for College Voters	46	100% rated the program good or better (9 respondents)

## Analysis of Sage Votes Activities

### Voter Access and Turnout

#### *National Voter Registration Day*

Founded in 2012, National Voter Registration Day is designed to create an annual moment when the entire nation focuses on registering Americans to exercise their most basic right – the right to vote.

Held during a uniquely challenging time, including a global pandemic and national movements for racial justice, RSC joined as a partner with thousands of organizations and volunteers across the country to promote National Voter Registration Day, a nonpartisan event that aims to increase voter participation in upcoming elections.



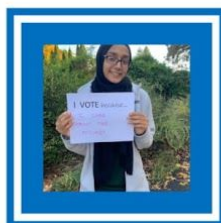
On Tuesday, September 22, Sage Votes was committed to doing a, safe and socially distant, in-person event. On both campuses, 20 student volunteers tabled and canvassed to help fellow students register to vote and complete their absentee ballot application. The Troy campuses was supported by the Women League of Voters of Rensselaer County. Other tactics used included the Sage Votes website, posters with QR codes were displayed all over the campuses, faculty members encouraged students to register that day, and flooding digital platforms with urgent messages to register to vote.

Nationally, the day was a tremendous success, with an estimated 1.5 million new or updated registered voters. Locally, Sage Votes efforts were shared with the Capital District. 2 news outlets, WTEN and WNYT reported on the efforts to register voters.

#### *Sage Engaged*

Every fall, Russell Sage College plans a day of service in the Albany and Troy communities called “Sage Engaged”. This event is open to all students and Sage Community. The goal of the day is for students to get to know their immediate community, get involved and learn the opportunities for volunteering.

On Wednesday, September 30, Sage Votes was able to participate in another tabling opportunity for student leaders to assist students with voter registration and absentee ballot applications.





## Analysis of Sage Votes Activities

### Voter Access and Turnout

#### Additional Efforts

In a normal election year, college students voting for the first time grapple with a unique set of questions. But while many Americans are turning to mail ballots this year because of the pandemic, that voting option can be uniquely challenging for college students — some of whom have never used the Postal Service or had to buy stamps.

Understanding these challenges, Sage Votes jumped into action to address the added hurdles students face voting in a pandemic. The committee ensured that quarantined students registration and absentee ballots were delivered to their Board of Election. And thanks to a grant made possible by the Alliance of Youth Voters, stamps were available to students to mail their registration forms. Sage Votes committed to turning out its student voters.

#### Digital Efforts

In summer planning, Sage Votes knew it would be facing a challenge: reaching young voters when campuses are empty and students are scattered. The Covid-19 pandemic and the social distancing that followed have affected how information is disseminated. In order to keep Sage Votes running, it had to quickly adapt to the situation. This has resulted in a strategic use of digital platforms.

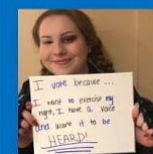
**Website- [www.sage.edu/sagevotes2020](http://www.sage.edu/sagevotes2020)**

Sage Votes spent the summer building a website to educate students about the upcoming elections, voting registration, event information and additional resources. The website was launched prior to the fall semester to serve as a quick and easy way to access voting information.

As of Dec. 30, 2020, the **webpage had 832 page views with an average time on page of nearly 5 minutes**. These data results are encouraging and demonstrate the usefulness of the site.

College students love social media — Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and more remain popular platforms in which students receive news. And this past election, social media played an increasingly larger role than in prior years.

Sage Votes primarily utilized Facebook and Instagram. Posts included event invitations, reminders and deadlines, tips and facts and helped drive traffic to the Sage Votes webpages. Students and partners also helped spread #sagevotes2020 across the virtual globe.



## Analysis of Sage Votes Activities

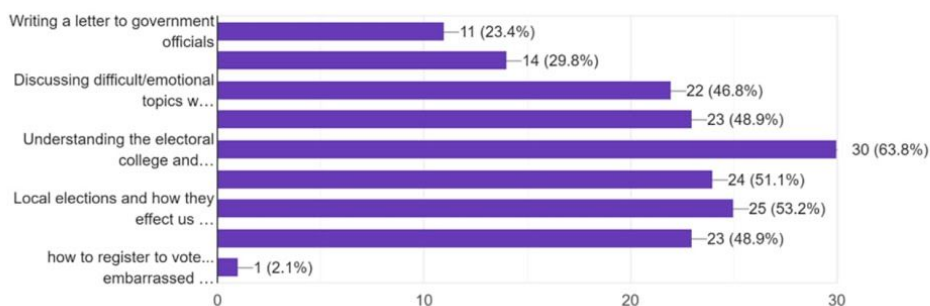
### Voter Advocacy

Advocacy and activism efforts mobilize communities to use the power of a united voice to create positive change in the world. Sage Votes was designed as an infrastructure to develop and empower college voter advocacy. Through mentorship, resources and encouragement, student leaders became a point of contact to educate their peers, build allyship, and bring students together to be collective agents of change.

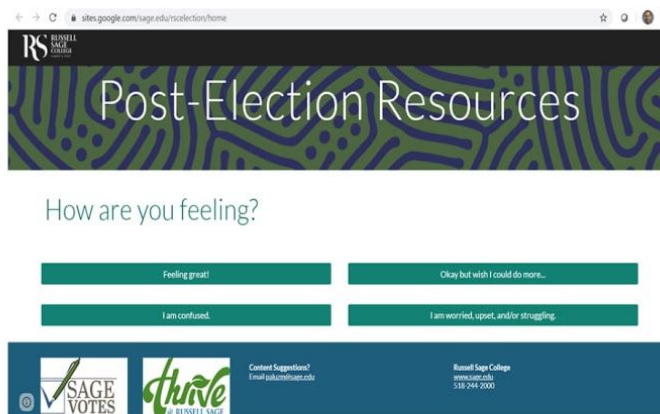
As the country awaited the elections results following November 3, Sage Vote students planned an institution-wide post-election reflection forum. The virtual community forum gave students the opportunity to lead discussions about how to recognize and accept each other's differences even when they may be politically at odds with one another. The hour long program drew over 120 participants.

Following the program, 47 participants responded to a survey asking questions about areas of voter participation and desire for civic engagement.

- 76% of participants voted
- 80.6% voted in Presidential election
- 100% indicated they are ready to get involved and will do so by:



Sage Votes student leaders also created a website to help students identify how they were feeling about the election. Students could choose from options ranging from feeling great to upset. When a student selects their emotion it will bring them to a page of resources that fit their feelings.



## Analysis of Sage Votes Activities

### Voter Advocacy

To truly understand the advocacy development impact of Sage Votes, please review the abbreviated op-ed article submitted to the Chronicle of Higher Education on student led initiatives:

By Trish Celleme  
Vice President of Student Life at Russell Sage College

Generation Z won't be defined by the viewpoints of its demographic predecessors, who often stereotype young people as "lazy" and "entitled." The members of Gen Z, born between 1995 and 2021, are already changing history, especially when it comes to American elections.

Approximately 55 percent of young people who are registered to vote (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/18/the-2020-election-shows-gen-zs-voting-power-for-years-to-come.html>) actually cast a ballot, in contrast to 44% in 2016 (<https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/election-week-2020#youth-voter-turnout-increased-in-2020>). And that turnout may well have affected the outcome, as young people showed the greatest preference for Biden over Trump of any age group (61-36%) as reported by the Circle group at Tufts. <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/election-week-2020#vote-choice-by-age-and-by-race-and-ethnicity>

"The idea that young people are civically lazy and simply don't want to participate in politics is unfair," said Sam Bourgeois, a senior at Russell Sage College, a private, four-year institution with campuses in Troy and Albany, New York. "This claim is most often backed up by the lack of young voter turnout at elections. I am honestly getting sick of the blame being put on us as young people, rather than the older generations taking responsibility for not teaching us or encouraging us to be civically engaged."

Bourgeois helped organize Sage Votes, a coalition of students who rallied across two campuses to engage students in the November election and encourage greater voter participation.

"Our nation was divided in the middle of a global pandemic, and we had students whose voices deserved to be heard," said Megan Paluzzi, a Russell Sage College senior and Sage Votes committee member. "Between online meetings and socially distanced classes, Sage Votes worked tirelessly to ensure students at Russell Sage College had the chance to fight for change one vote at a time."

Paluzzi, who also leads the campus Democracy Matters group, collaborated with fellow students to keep classmates engaged — a task complicated by remote learning and social-distance restrictions related to COVID-19.

"We worked individually with students to ensure they had a plan to vote in this unusual election during a health crisis. We held

online events through Zoom with local officials to share how college students could participate in government through elections and beyond. Democracy Matters even held a mock election with characters from TV and ballots that replicated the New York State ballot," Paluzzi said.

Although in-person events were limited by the pandemic, the Sage Votes committee worked with the campus to observe safety guidelines while setting up tables to distribute voter-information fliers and prepackaged treats with QR code stickers that linked to voter-registration pages.

"Through Sage Votes, I had the opportunity to reach out to the other students around me and see what it was that they wanted to see from us as a committee in the future. What could we do to help them be more engaged? The majority of answers we got centered around just wanting to understand," Bourgeois said. "Young people in our student body want to better understand the role of the Supreme Court in our government and in our lives, how the Electoral College functions, how local elections work and how they affect us — and how they can get more involved in the political process outside of just the elections. The fact that so many of us just wanted to understand shows that it's not laziness, but a lack of education that is preventing a lot of young people from being politically active."

Bourgeois would like Sage Votes to become a model for other college campuses.





## Conclusion

Participating in the Voter Friendly Campus initiative has provided Russell Sage College with an opportunity to advance its commitment to civic engagement. Once NSVLE data is available, results will demonstrate the effectiveness of Sage Votes.

In the meantime, Sage Votes anecdotal successes will resonate with a generation of new voters. Sage Votes masks, distributed to students, faculty and staff, will be preserved by The Hart Cluett Museum, the former Rensselaer County Historical Society, as a reminder and symbol of this historic election year.

Sage Votes intends on maintaining its momentum with its eyes set on the 2022 mid-term election. Sage Votes will expand on its 3 goals (education, access & turnout and advocacy) and continue to identify and eliminate barriers. It also plans to add a broad membership with diverse perspectives which will inform and build out Sage Votes student led, comprehensive, and non-partisan initiative.

