Students don’t vote.

The 2018 midterms saw a surge in student voter turnout, but even then, only about 40 percent of college students who were eligible to vote turned in a ballot.

As the 2020 general election approaches in November, we believe the college student vote matters more than ever. Not only because North Carolina is a swing state that has potential to help decide the presidential contest, but all down the ballot, too. Our state legislature appoints members to the UNC System Board of Governors, but those candidates are rarely asked what makes a good candidate. Yet these nominees then go on to make decisions that affect the state’s public university students.

That’s what brought One Vote N.C. together. We’re a collaborative made up of seven college newspapers across North Carolina, and we want to be a resource as students cast their votes.

Elections and voting can be confusing, even for a long-time voter, let alone for a college student who might be voting for the first time or moving to a new area for college. In this voter guide and on our website, we break down who the candidates are and why these races matter.

So request your absentee ballot or look up your polling site. It’s time to vote.
Voter suppression hurts Black communities
Gerrymandering, ID laws target Black Americans in thinly veiled ways

By Allison Gilmore
The A&T Register

Since the Reconstruction Era Voter Suppression has been a commonplace activity during American elections. Despite the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965, the Black vote has still been muffled by state laws. Long ago literacy test and poll taxes were the choices of weapon against Black voters. Today, restrictive election laws disguised as racially neutral, giving them a sheen of legitimacy, hinder the Black and minority vote.

Currently, Black people in America are experiencing Voter Suppression in different ways.

Voter IDs are restricting those without a drivers license or federal ID from voting. Felonies hinder people from voting and prevent them from integrating back into society which affects Black men the most.

In the North Carolina Constitution, Article VI, Section 2 sets out the disqualification for a felon, stating: “[N]o person adjudged guilty of a felony against this State or the United States, or adjudged guilty of a felony in another state that would also be a felony if it had been committed in this State, shall be permitted to vote unless that person shall be first restored to the rights of citizenship in the manner prescribed by law.”

Gerrymandering is affecting the campus of N.C. A&T, but this election cycle, they were strategizing on how to maximize Black people from having their voice heard.

Early voting has been used throughout history to ensure that everybody has an equal opportunity to work. Because Election Day is normally on a weekday, polls are opened on earlier dates and the weekends to ensure those that have to work during voting hours have the opportunity to vote.

This year, the schedule looks a little different. Early voting begins on October 17th, but the polling sites are closed almost all Saturdays. The only Saturday that the polls happen to be open is Nov. 3. That date is oddly familiar because from voting as N.C. A&T’s homecoming game.

While Polls are open on Saturday, Nov. 3 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., the largest concentration of Black people in Guilford County will be at a parade preparing for a tailgate and enjoying a football game.

There is no way that this is a coincidence. With crucial amendments on the ballot such as “Voter IDs” and the ability for the Black community to get out and vote. The early voting period is Oct. 15 through Oct. 31. During this time, voters can show up to any early voting location when they are open and cast the same ballot as given on Election Day.

On Election Day, Nov. 3, registered voters can vote at their assigned polling place from 6:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m.

Registered voters are not required to show an ID at the polling place.

Polling sites are in different locations for early voting and Election Day voting, and they can be found on the county board’s website. Raper said voting locations will be set up differently for all early voting and Election Day voting locations. There will be six feet between workers and voters, and polling places will have volunteers to clean after every voter.

In order to vote by mail, the voter must request a mail-in ballot by either using the online portal on the state board’s website or filling out a paper form and then mail it in or drop it off at their county board of elections.

For the election, there are three ways to vote: early voting, voting on Election Day and absentee voting.

In order to re-register, Bell said voters must fill out the voter registration information again. Voter registration applications must be submitted by Oct. 9. People may still do same-day registration at early voting polling sites in their county.

What are the different ways to vote?

For the election, there are three ways to vote: early voting, voting on Election Day and absentee voting.

Raper said voting locations are about where someone considers their residence to be. “It’s where you lay your head at night with the intention to return,” Raper said. “Is it back home with your parents? Or do you consider home to be here and you were simply displaced from campus but do intend to return?”

Individuals should re-register if any voter information has changed, including name, address and party affiliation.

There are several ways that the ballot can be returned to the voter’s county Board of Elections. They can mail it back to the county board postmarked on or before Election Day, drop it off in person to the county board office or they can drop it off in person at any early voting site during voting hours.

Voters can track their ballot through the mail with the new BallotTrax portal, which launched Sept. 11.

That’s a new tool that we have in place and hopefully will help alleviate some concerns,” Bell said. “Especially because we have so many people voting absentee by mail this year.”

She said voters can see if their ballot has been accepted through the voter search tool on the state board’s website.

Raper said for someone who’s deciding between mail-in versus going in person, they should do whatever works for them. “Voting by mail, voting early in person or voting on Election Day in person are all safe, secure ways to vote,” she said. “So I want you to do what makes the most sense for you.”

What if I’ve moved?

Bell said there are several options if a student has had to move away from campus and was already registered at their campus address. A student can request an absentee ballot from the county Board of Elections of where they are registered and get it delivered to the address they are staying at. If they don’t want to do that, the other option is to come back to the county during early voting or on Election Day to vote in person.

Another option would be to re-register into the county where they are staying at. This would allow them to get an absentee ballot for that county, or go in person to the election poll places in that county.
A look at gerrymandering at N.C. A&T

By Lauren Mitchell
The A&T Register

Walking from the cafeteria to the library takes about two minutes. You go up some steps, cross an on-campus road and you’re there. However, “there was another world politically speaking, until last year.”

North Carolina

In 2011, the N.C. Republican-controlled General Assembly redrew the congressional maps and divided North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University’s campus into two different state congressional districts. The line was in the middle of campus.

The redistricting took the primarily Democratic-siding campus and moved it and its votes into Republican districts.

The mounting obstacles affecting students’ ability to vote have moved Student Government leaders as well as students to action. Student mobilization pressured lawmakers to act in the public’s best interest. N.C. A&T students organized and took on the task of encouraging young people to vote.

“[Voting is] something we need to do,” said Cole Riley, a sophomore political science student and member of the Student Government Association’s Political Action Committee after creating an online petition calling for the addition of an early voting site on campus.

“I know everyone brings up that our ancestors died for it but think about our kids. Our ancestors made it better for us to vote so let’s make it easier for our kids to vote.”

Federal judges ruled the last two N.C. redistricting maps (2011 and one redrawn too recently to be used) as partisan gerrymandering to favor Republicans. A new map was approved for use in 2020. It places the campus, and all of Guilford County, in one district.

“I think that now that we’re in one district and we have an early voting site it makes voting so much more accessible,” said Allison Gilmore, Student Body President. “It makes our students feel so empowered, and makes voting so much simpler for everybody.”

What is gerrymandering?

Gerrymandering is the practice of drawing voting district lines in a way that influences the outcome of elections.

It originated in 1812 when Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry drew voting districts to favor his party. The term merges his last name, “Gerry,” with the shape of a salamander, which was the of the new district he drew.

Refinements in computer technology and modern software have taken gerrymandering to a whole new level, especially in states where the legislature is controlled by one party and that same legislature draws the voting district maps, as in the case of North and South Carolina, which in 2019 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states must decide partisan gerrymandering cases, not the federal court.

South Carolina

Right now in South Carolina, the state legislature is in charge of drawing political maps, which have now resulted in one of the nations least competitive elections in the nation. Seventy percent of their districts have been designed by politicians to offer only one major party candidate in the general election, which leads to critics saying that in South Carolina representatives are being allowed to pick their voters rather than letting voters elect their chosen officials.

Fair Maps SC Coalition is a nonpartisan grassroots campaign led by individual advocates and organizations across the state working to empower voters by passing legislation to create a citizens’ commission to draw district lines.

Also with the work of grassroots organizations and the upcoming 2020 U.S. Census, South Carolinian could see a drastic change to how district maps are drawn.

Organizations like Fair Maps SC Coalition have helped lawmakers write legislation to create a South Carolina Citizens Redistricting Commission in charge of drawing maps instead of lawmakers.

The H.3492 and H.3390 bills each lay out guidelines the commission must follow in creating the new maps.

In the Carolinas there is growing movement against gerrymandering. While the campus of N.C. A&T can celebrate their success at stopping gerrymandering. This issue is a complex and ever evolving one. Reform is happening even the Supreme Court hasn’t ruled a federal remedy for partisan gerrymandering. It is a calling for changes to the redistricting process — and many states are hearing that call.

city@dailytarheel.com

N.C. Elections Board offers mail-in voting advice

By Audrey Selley
The Daily Tar Heel

As many UNC students change living arrangements with the University transitioning to remote learning, some have expressed concern about how to vote in the November election.

Cora Martin, a sophomore political science major at UNC, said figuring out the absentee voting process has been confusing.

Martin said she was initially going to live on campus for the fall semester but decided a week before classes started to live at home.

She is planning on voting early in person in Durham County, but she requested an absentee ballot just in case she decides to vote by mail instead.

“I’m worried about the USPS delays almost as much as I’m worried about coronavirus, so it’s been a back and forth for me,” Martin said.

Theodore Shaw, professor of law and director of the Center for Civil Rights at UNC, said it’s important for young people to vote. He said they should take their privilege and civic duty to vote seriously.

“Once they are eligible, they have in their grasp — they hold in their hands — the power, the ability to have their voice weigh as much as anybody else in the country,” Shaw said.

The North Carolina State Board of Elections released guidance Monday for college students who plan to vote by mail in the upcoming election.

“We released this guidance to try to help students navigate the absentee voting process because we heard that many students may be confused about how it works given the circumstances with COVID and the fact that a lot of students have been displaced from their campus housing,” said Patrick Gannon, the Board’s public information officer.

At what address should students request their absentee ballot?

Students who want to vote by mail should make sure they request their ballot to be sent at an address where they know they will receive it, according to the press release. Students who registered to vote at their campus address and have not yet requested an absentee ballot can request a ballot and have it sent to an address of their choosing.

What should students do if they already requested an absentee ballot on campus but have left?

Students who have already requested an absentee ballot but must leave campus due to COVID-19, or for any other reason, may submit a new request to have their ballot sent to a different address, the press release said.

They should make a note on the new form, such as “updated” or “changed,” to alert county elections workers that it is an updated request. Students can email or contact their county Board of Elections office to double check that the new absentee ballot will be sent to the updated address.

What should students do if they’re not sure if they want to vote in person or by mail?

North Carolina voters who are unsure whether they want to vote in person or by mail have until Oct. 27 to request an absentee ballot if they decide to vote by mail, according to the press release. Voters still have the option to vote in person during the 17-day period of early voting from Oct. 15 to Oct. 31, or on Election Day on Nov. 3.

Can students request an absentee ballot online?

Beginning Sept. 1, all registered voters in North Carolina will be able to request an absentee ballot through a portal on the state Board’s website, according to the press release.

“The form online will be just like the form you fill out on paper, however you can sign it and submit it online without having to print or mail anything,” Gannon said.

Shaw said no matter what someone’s personal views are, everybody has a responsibility to vote and participate in the democratic process.

“People have lost their lives for the right to vote. People fought for decades and decades,” Shaw said. “The right to vote was bought and paid for in blood and in struggle, and so I don’t think anybody should take it for granted.”
Meet the collaborators for the 2020 VOTER GUIDE

Sonia Rao
City & State Editor, The Daily Tar Heel
Sophomore journalism & economics major

Anna Pogarcic
Editor-in-Chief, The Daily Tar Heel
Senior journalism & history major

Michael Taffe
Data Editor, The Daily Tar Heel
Senior statistics & economics major

Guillermo Molero
Senior Writer, The Daily Tar Heel
Sophomore political science and global studies major

Brandon Standley
Editorial Managing Editor, The Daily Tar Heel
Senior public relations & psychology major

Moss Brennan
Politics Editor, The Appalachian
Senior journalism major

Jarod Hamilton
Editor-in-Chief, The A&T Register
Senior journalism and mass communications major

Lauren Mitchell
Managing Editor, The A&T Register
Senior journalism and mass communications major

Matthew Griffin
Editor-in-Chief, The Duke Chronicle
Junior political science major

Chris Kuo
Features Managing Editor, The Duke Chronicle
Sophomore political science and English major

Anna Zolotor
Local & National News Editor, The Duke Chronicle
Sophomore global health and statistics major

Chloe Easton
Editor-in-Chief, The East Carolinian
Senior journalism and English major

Madison Dobrzenski
Editor-in-Chief, The Niner Times
Senior media studies & Spanish language/literature major

AnnaBeth McCormick
Co-News Editor, The Technician
Junior public relations and communications major

The Daily Tar Heel’s new podcast
Before You Vote
Everything you need to know about voting. Every Tuesday until the election.

Listen on Spotify and Apple Podcasts
Students adjust voting plans in unprecedented election

By Kathryn Thomas and Miles King
The Duke Chronicle

With an unprecedented and consequential election just under 50 days away, voting has become a particularly important talking point of discussions on campus. Between voter power index, mail-in-ballot logistics and the unknown variable of where students will be on Nov. 3, Duke students have lots of questions about where to vote this November.

To register to vote in North Carolina, college students must be physically present in their college community, meaning that many Duke students living in Durham are eligible to register and vote in Durham County. This has left many students with a choice: vote at home, or switch their registration and vote at Duke.

Currently, polling averages in North Carolina show a close race, with the race predicted within half a point in November by FiveThirtyEight-- and Democratic nominee Joe Biden leading. And young people will have a particularly large say, according to the Youth Electoral Suggestion Index created by researchers at Tufts University.

According to that index, North Carolina is the second most State for young people to cast a ballot in during this election. Because of the unique opportunity that youth voters have to influence the state’s electoral outcome, many Duke students have decided to switch their voter registration and vote in North Carolina in Jan 22.

Student groups such as Duke Votes, Duke Students for Biden and the Duke Intercollegial Relations Association are working to help Duke students decide what state or district to vote in and provide them information on how to cast their ballots. Such initiatives have played a critical role in the number of Duke students who voted early during the spring primaries and are expected to vote this election season.

"In spring of 2020, 11.4 percent of registered North Carolinians cast early ballots in the primary," said Duke Votes post-graduation. "Of those, 30 percent of students expected to vote by mail, while only 5 percent of students who responded on voting in person Nov. 38.3 percent plan to vote by mail, and only 5 percent plan to vote in person on Election Day.

Among 60 students who responded to an informal survey, 46.7 percent plan to vote early. 48.3 percent plan to vote by mail, and only 5 percent plan to vote in person on Election Day.

Another huge barrier is how difficult it is to not just yourself, but everyone else in your state agree with you positions. Not voting is doing a disservice to the best possible way to make your voice heard block the opposing opinion on social media, feel like your vote doesn’t matter. After all, our election system leaves the possibility for the candidate who loses the popular vote to still win the presidency thanks to the electoral college. It happened in 2016, and has happened in the past as well.

However, even despite this, the electoral college bases its votes on which candidate wins each particular state. So it is still important to participate in the process in the hopes that enough people in your state agree with you for your candidate to win.

And finally, the world has the ability to elect their government, and that provides a certain level of accountability for politicians who don’t want to lose their jobs. Voting is doing a disservice to not just yourself, but everyone else in the country.

While everyone has the right to choose whether to vote or not, I urge all students at East Carolina University to register, whether here or at home. By exercising this right, you can help create the society you want to live in post-graduation.

THE DUKE CHRONICLE/HENRY HAGGART

Register
To vote

THE DAILY TAR HEEL / JEN FOUNTS


Column: Voting is essential for young people

By Pat Polomchak
The East Carolinian

Last year, I took a writing course in the political science department and wrote my term paper on factors that impact voter turnout rates in America. Overwhelmingly, young people just do not go to the polls.

As you would expect, there are a lot of things that contribute to low voter turnout numbers among youth. This is especially true depending on what kind of election is happening, as the numbers are better when a president is up for election than there are in midterms.

One of the biggest factors I found in my research is simply the fact that young people tend to be more mobile than older generations. Once you settle down it’s easy to register to vote and simply stay that young, meanwhile, young people are still figuring their lives out and that often means moving every few years with the jobs.

Another barrier is how difficult it is to register. There is a lot of misinformation out there, and it can be confusing to first-time voters. Personally, I went online and automatically registered a person once they turn 18.

Regardless, this past midterm election, in 2018, recorded higher than the 2014 election. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, turnout rates among those 18-29 years old jumped from 20 percent to 36 percent, nearly double.

It’s an encouraging statistic, because it is more important than ever for young people to get involved with politics. With the echo chambers that are created by the ability to block the opposing opinion on social media, the best possible way to make your voice heard is still to vote.

It can be easy to get discouraged and feel like your vote doesn’t matter. After all, our election system leaves the possibility for the candidate who loses the popular vote to still win the presidency thanks to the electoral college. It happened in 2016, and has happened in the past as well.

However, even despite this, the electoral college bases its votes on which candidate wins each particular state. So it is still important to participate in the process in the hopes that enough people in your state agree with you for your candidate to win.

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opinion@theeastcarolinian.com
For two North Carolina counties, Watauga and Robeson have little in common. Until recently, Democratic candidates could count on the votes in Robeson, and Republican candidates could count on Watauga. But in 2016, they switched. This divide, however, followed a pattern — in general, the 2016 election saw counties across North Carolina shift their vote based on divisions of class. And Watauga and Robeson have long sat on opposite ends of several demographic spectrums.

Just over 53 percent of Robeson County residents hold a bachelor’s degree, while nearly 42 percent of Watauga residents hold one. Out of 100 North Carolina counties, Robeson has the smallest percentage identifying as white, while Watauga is one of the least diverse. And 80.6 percent of Watauga residents have broadband in their home compared to just 54.2 of Robeson County residents.

With competitive elections up and down the ballot in November, these counties are a microcosm of two faces of North Carolina voters.

‘The old mountain folk way’

Stacey “Four” Eggers IV was born and raised in North Carolina’s high country in the Town of Boone, the seat of Watauga County.

“I’ve sometimes joked that my folks have been here before there was even a road to get here,” he said.

Eggers is part of multiple generations of lawyers. He attended Appalachian State University for his undergraduate degree and now sits on its Board of Visitors.

“The community has had a very seamless back and forth with our college that provides the legal profession and the local economy,” he said. “Boone flourished in his time there.”

Eggers said the growing pains of the Town of Boone and Watauga County are much like the back and forth with our college that provides the legal profession and the local economy, “We’re a 68 percent or 70 percent minority community that used to be 80 percent registered Democrat,” Douglas said. “And we just voted for Donald Trump.”

Some may find it surprising that the least white county in the state had the biggest vote swing toward Republicans between 2012 and 2016. It was the first time Robeson had voted for a Republican presidential candidate since 1972.

“We’ll, if they’re surprised they evidently live outside the county because it’s no surprise what’s going on,” said Robeson County Commissioner Jerry Stephens.

Stepphens was born and raised in Robeson County and is now the chairperson of the Unified Robeson NAACP’s PAC.

“It’s really about, ‘What have you done for me lately?’, of ‘I’m still voting for a party and they’re not delivering to your community, why keep voting?’”, he said.

Stepphens said that even while he’s seen the Native American population thrive in the area, he feels the Black community has continually been left behind. He pointed to rural broadband access and affordable housing as two major issues facing the region.

“I can’t say it’s bad as it was in 1953 or 1960 when I was growing up, but it still got its challenges,” he said.

Harvey Godwin Jr. grew up in Robeson County. He was first elected to the Lumbee tribe in 1909. Today, he is the chairperson of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina.

One of the major economic obstacles the county has had to overcome is the impact of two major hurricanes in the last three years. “We’ve been working since two hurricanes to get back to the poverty level we were at before they occurred,” Godwin said. “But I think we’re doing better now.”

Godwin said traditional values have been the deciding factor that drove many voters to shift from Democrats to Republicans in 2016. But while Robeson may have a socially conservative voting base, the tribals said its politics are also defined by its reliance on social assistance programs.

“As I like to say — and this is said somewhat cynically — we like our checks,” he said. “I mean we’re number one in the state in disability, and truthfully welfare is our leading industry.”

But one of the most prominent issues Godwin said the Lumbee vote on is the issue of federal tribal recognition, which Godwin said would bring additional health care and housing benefits for the tribe’s members.

But on top of the economic struggles affecting the county as a whole, Stephens said Robeson’s Black community has had to fight for a seat at the table.

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Campus organizations encourage civic engagement

By Jennifer Sieg
The East Carolinian

Campus political organizations at East Carolina University will continue to work to encourage student voting as the 2020 presidential election approaches and have now incorporated virtual gatherings in an effort to gain civic engagement.

The ECU Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE) Assistant Director Alex Dennis said the voter registration and engagement processes will be different this year due to the lack of large tabling events on campus. However, the center has created a virtual plan for Watauga County, which includes planning an early voting plan in Watauga County, according to Weber. She said there will be virtual events held such as debate watch parties and voter education sessions.

NextGen's focus over the next few months is to make sure ECU students know how to vote and cast their ballot, whether that consists of an absentee ballot request, early voting or a plan for election day, according to Weber. She said there will be virtual events held such as debate watch parties and voter education sessions.

Weber said she encourages young people to make a plan for election day as soon as possible. She said it is important for students to research, look to see how they have been personally affected by COVID-19 and find what they are looking for in the presidential candidates.

"Interestingly, I think even amid the pandemic, we're seeing that civic engagement and attention to politics in the U.S. is at an all time high among young people," Weber said.

NextGen's Greenville field organizer Dustin Queen hosted a Zoom webinar on Friday to feature voter registration, early voting and absentee ballots.

Queen said, due to difficult circumstances and uncertainty triggered by COVID-19, it is important for young people to have the information they need to vote safely and securely this fall.

Information on Future NextGen events is located on the NextGen North Carolina website. Information on voter registration and processes is located on the ECUnited website.

The East Carolinian

Controversy surrounds ASU polling site

By Moss Brennan and Abi Pepin
The Appalachian

Republican members of the Watauga County Board of Elections are challenging the legality of the App State’s one-stop early voting site one month before early voting starts.

Board members Eric Eller and Nancy Owen filed the lawsuit Friday in Wake County and are asking the court to stop the state board of elections from adopting the App State early voting site.

Eller and Owen are arguing that Watauga County BOE Chair John Queen was not acting on behalf of the full board when he notified App State that they would require the Blue Ridge Ballroom as an early voting site.

Queen said, due to difficult circumstances created by COVID-19, the board will continue to work to provide an early voting plan for Watauga County, which includes planning an early voting plan in Watauga County, according to Weber. She said there will be virtual events held such as debate watch parties and voter education sessions.

The early voting site on App State’s campus has seen a variety of lawsuits in the past 10 years. In 2014, after the Republican-majority Watauga County BOE voted to take away App State’s campus voting site, the Watauga County Voting Rights Taskforce sued the state board of elections.

A superior court judge agreed with the plaintiffs and ordered the county to submit a new plan that included an early voting site on App State’s campus.

The student body remains divided on the issue of App State hosting an early voting site on campus.
‘Something that I need to do’
Duke students swap classroom for campaign trail

By Ann Gehan
The Duke Chronicle

Driving home from work last winter, Lindsay Morgenstein had an idea. ‘What if I just didn’t go to school next fall?’ she remembers thinking.

Morgenstein, then a sophomore, started considering alternatives to a semester abroad or a fall class. ‘I live on campus too, so I think if everyone else would do the same, there would be less travel,’ she said.

Morgenstein announced in June that all fall study abroad would be canceled after she was informed that she would coincide with the 2020 election. For Morgenstein, who wasn’t old enough to vote in 2016, sitting on the sidelines of another presidential election was out of the question.

‘I’m not going to be in another country for the 2020 election — that’s the most important election I’ll vote in, probably forever,’ she said. ‘The idea that I would be in another country frollicking around while the most important thing that I could think of was happening at home was not for me.’

When she got home, Morgenstein emailed her dean to request a leave of absence for fall 2020. After talking to a friend who was working for the Kamala Harris presidential campaign in Iowa, she decided that organizing would be the most meaningful way to spend her time away from campus. Now that COVID-19 has dramatically changed the nature of this semester, as well as the presidential election, Morgenstein is confident that her work for Planned Parenthood Votes in North Carolina is making a difference.

‘As soon as I found out that organizing was the thing that would actually win elections and create change then I was like, “Well, this is something that I need to do, since I’m able to and I have nothing that could be more important for me to do right now than organizing,”’ she said.

Morgenstein is not the only Duke student who traded the classroom for the campaign trail this semester. Some, like her, had long had the fall of 2020 earmarked for a leave of absence from Duke for election-related work. For others, the decision came in response to COVID-19, after a spring and summer filled with Zoom meetings and a lack of clarity from Duke about what the fall semester would look like on campus.

Junior Dora Pekec had planned to study abroad this semester, but after Duke announced in June that all fall study abroad programs would be canceled, she began to consider other plans. Pekec first considered campaign work when a friend working on a Senate campaign posted about job openings on Twitter this summer.

Pekec’s announcement in late July that only first-years and sophomores would be permitted to live on campus made the decision even easier. “That (annoucement) really pushed me to go after it,” Pekec said.

Duke’s late-breaking announcement also made junior Allison Janowski’s decision to take time off from school to get involved politically.

“It was looking every day more and more like this semester wasn’t going to be great,” she said. “I figured this was sort of a natural next step for me and something that I’ve always been interested in and passionate about. This was the best time in my life to do it, which was good to coincide with a crucial election.”

After learning that they likely wouldn’t be able to return to campus in the fall, both Pekec and Janowski requested leaves of absence for the semester and dove into the interview process for campaigns.

On Aug. 15, Pekec moved to Portland, Maine to work as a field organizer for Sara Gideon, a Democrat challenging Susan Collins (R-Maine), a four-term senator who has been criticized for her support of the Trump administration despite her reputation as one of the most liberal Republicans in the Senate. Janowski is organizing in Kentucky for Amy McGrath, who is challenging Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), in one of the country’s most high-profile races.

While COVID-19 has changed what a typical day for a field organizer looks like, the goal of reaching as many potential voters as possible remains the same.

“I was expecting to mostly be knocking on doors and working in a campaign office, and instead I’m working out of my childhood bedroom, calling voters instead of knocking on their doors,” Morgenstein said.

Because of low COVID-19 case counts in Maine, Pekec is able to work from a field office sometimes, although the atmosphere has changed significantly from the typical frenzied final weeks of a close race. “Usually there would be interns and volunteers everywhere, with the field office always super packed, and now there’s a few desks spaced out 15 feet apart,” she said.

Like Pekec, Janowski was able to move to the area she is working in, though in-person opportunities are more limited because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Morgenstein is currently working 50 hours a week and expects that number to rise to 80 or more as the election approaches. “I’m so much busier than I have ever been before, but it’s the good kind of busy where I’m actually doing things that matter,” she said. “I’m not sitting in the library moping — I’m taking to voters and building a plan for how they want to be engaged civically in the future.”

Morgenstein is confident that her work for Planned Parenthood Votes in North Carolina has dramatically changed the nature of this election year. “I had the attitude of volunteers too — just do your best — and that’s all they can really ask.”

Although Janowski is currently working 60 hours a week, she expects that number to rise to 80 or more as the election approaches. “I’m so much busier than I have ever been before, but it’s the good kind of busy where I’m actually doing things that matter,” she said. After Election Day comes and goes, organizers anticipate returning to school in the spring with new skills and a fresh perspective.

“It’s been a fun exercise in how good I can be at selling people on things on the phone,” Morgenstein said of her organizing work. “Now I can convince anybody of pretty much anything in less than three minutes.”

As for her return to school?

“I think it’s going to be a tough transition, going from working insane hours for something that really matters to going back to like the mundane everyday life of school, which now just seems kind of boring,” she said.

By Ann Gehan
The Duke Chronicle

Junior Dora Pekec took the semester off school to work as a field organizer for Sara Gideon, a Democrat challenging Susan Collins (R-Maine) for her Senate seat.

“There’s a lot of hurdles for people to actually make it to the polls this year, so it’s just so important that we’re making sure people actually know how they can physically go and vote, since there’s been so many changes on that end,” she said.

Although these students took the semester off entirely, other students are balancing campaign work with their class schedules.

Senior Jimmy Toscano is working as a fellow for the North Carolina Democratic Party and is also working for Matt Cartwright, a House Democrat running for reelection in Pennsylvania. Most days, Toscano spends almost three hours on the phone and makes at least 200 phone calls to voters.

Although adding in election work on top of part-time classwork is demanding, Toscano credits his coworkers with understanding the tricky balancing act of class, COVID-19 and the election.

“A lot of people are just doing this because they’re passionate about it,” he said. “That’s the attitude of volunteers too — just do your best — and that’s all they can really ask.”

September and October are crunch time in election years. As Nov. 3 approaches, the pressure increases and hours get longer, but organizers still say they appreciate the change of pace from the nonstop grind of the academic calendar.

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The student organizers say that working with voters and volunteers, even while stuck at home, remains the most rewarding part of the job.

Janowski has found it easier to connect with potential volunteers and encourage them to get involved.

“Being able to say you can literally change the outcome of this election from your living room, that’s a big sell for people,” she explained. “They don’t have to go out and do anything other than click the link on their computer. We’re really promoting the idea that especially now, you can make a difference from anywhere.”

After a spring and summer filled with virtual classes and Zoom meetings for her internship, Pekec is happy to have a chance for more interactive work. “It’s kind of weird to go from class and nothing else or a virtual internship to something that’s very hands-on and talking to people all the time,” she said.

“That was really important to me — to be able to meet other organizers in person, work with them in an office, and actually get to speak to people on the phone,” Pekec continued.

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North Carolinians, don’t vote twice

By Ella Layn
The Daily Tar Heel

Those voting in North Carolina for the November election shouldn’t vote twice, according to the N.C. Board of Elections. President Donald Trump visited Wilmington on Sep. 2 to commemorate the city as an American World War II Heritage City. At the event, he said North Carolinians should test the voting system by both submitting an absentee ballot and attempting to vote in person.

“Let them send it in and let them go vote, and if their system’s as good as they say it is, then obviously they won’t be able to vote,” he said at the event.

However, voting twice is illegal in North Carolina. In accordance with state law, attempting to vote twice or encouraging someone to do so is a Class 1 felony. This preexisting law directly contradicts the president’s comments, creating confused voters and an increase in predicted workload for polling staff.

In response to the president’s statement, Karen Brinson Bell, the executive director of the North Carolina State Board of Elections, released a message reminding voters of the law. In the press release, Bell said voters can check the status of their absentee ballot by contacting their county board of elections, using the State Board’s Voter Search Tool or signing up for BallotTrax, a newly created service that ensures accurate tracking of voter ballots.

“The State Board conducts audits after each election that check voter history against ballots cast and would detect if someone tries to vote more than once in an election,” Bell said in the release.

Ferrel Guillory, professor at the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media, said if people vote twice in the election, it could increase the work of the poll workers at the voting sites on Election Day with people showing up simply to check on whether their early votes were cast or not,” he said.

Guillory said it’s important that voters comply with their state’s voting procedures.

Jamie Cox, chairperson of the Orange County Board of Elections, said voters don’t need to worry about their vote not counting. “There are safeguards in place to make sure that those who choose to vote by mail are able to do so safely and securely,” Cox said.

The safeguards include electronic poll books at every early voting site across the state, which detail who has already voted. Those who have already voted absentee will be prevented from voting with a regular ballot.

The regular voter registration period ends Oct. 9, and absentee ballot requests are available until Oct. 27 at 5 p.m.

city@dailytarheel.com
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some states have turned to mail-in ballots as an option for those who feel uncomfortable going to the polls during COVID-19. In North Carolina, registered voters can request a mail-in absentee ballot for the election with no excuse needed. North Carolina has had the option for voters to mail in no-excuse absentee ballots since 2000, said Rachel Raper, the director of elections in Orange County.

Orange County has already processed more mail-in absentee ballot requests as of early August than it did in the 2016 general election, Raper said. There have already been over 6,000 requests for mail-in absentee ballots in Orange County, Raper said. She said this number is more than normal for a general election.

Mail-in ballots have been a topic of political controversy over the last few months. Some politicians, including President Donald Trump, have criticized mail-in ballots, stating they could lead to an increase in voter fraud. Michael Bitzer is a professor of politics at Catawba College who specializes in analyzing American politics, with a focus on the South. He said there has been misinformation circulating in regard to mail-in voting. He said he thinks the state has done a lot to ensure the integrity of the mail-in ballot. He said after a controversial election in 2018 in North Carolina’s 9th congressional district, the state took measures to try to prevent elections with allegations of fraud from happening again.

One of the things that was learned after the 2018 9th congressional district fiasco was that people were using the public information of who had requested mail-in ballots to contact them,” he said. “What they have since done is closed off that public information, and that information about who has requested a ballot only becomes public when a ballot is returned and accepted.”

Marc Hetherington is a professor of political science at UNC and an expert in party political debate over the last few months. Raper said she encourages voters to look into all options when it comes to deciding how to vote this fall.

The deadline to request a mail-in absentee ballot in North Carolina is Oct. 27. Mail-in absentee ballots must be returned to the county Board of Elections by 5 p.m. on Election Day, or postmarked on election day and returned three days after.

As the November election approaches, many counties across the state are experiencing large shortages in poll workers. In Orange County, there are over 500 people on the poll workers waitlist, said Rachel Raper, director of the Orange County Board of Elections. But just to the south, Chatham County is still short on election workers. Both counties have seen changes in poll worker demographics, with a notable decrease in older volunteers and increase in younger volunteers, said Raper and Chance Mashburn, elections specialist for Chatham County.

Noah Goldstein, founder of The Poll Workers Project, an organization aimed at recruiting younger people to serve as poll workers in 2020, said it is incredibly important that people step up to volunteer. He cited potential issues with mail-in voting and the many negative effects of closed polling locations to show this.

Goldstein said in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin primary in April, 180 polling places were consolidated to five because there weren’t enough poll workers. However when former Carrboro Town Council member Bethany Chaney called the Orange County Board of Elections after seeing the state’s call for poll workers, she was notified that there was a 300-person waitlist for the job she was trying to get.

“I was overjoyed because I think that shows that people are invested in this election regardless of COVID-19 and are willing to do what it takes to make the election happen, and they’re excited about the election,” she said. The State Board of Elections website says some people may be able to volunteer as poll workers outside of their home precinct this year, but it does not say how. However, Mashburn said Chatham County welcomes volunteers from outside the county for early voting.

“If they’re on the waitlist for Orange County, we can use their help during early voting in Chatham County,” he said.

When it comes to helping the democratic process, Goldstein said he thinks being a poll worker is an easy and effective way to make a big impact.

“I think it's easy for the individual to make a big difference and a lot of these problems might seem really big and insurmountable,” he said. “But I think that this is one that’s really approachable and easy to make a difference with.”

By Stock Photographer
Republican members of the Watauga County Board of Elections are challenging the legality of the App State's one-stop early voting site one month before early voting starts.

Board members Eric Eller and Nancy Owen filed the lawsuit Friday in Wake County and are asking the court to stop the state Board of Elections from adopting the App State early voting site.

Eller and Owen are arguing that Watauga County Board Chair Jane Hodges was not acting on behalf of the full board when she notified App State that they would request the Blue Ridge Ballroom as an early voting site.

"The general statute requires that the local Board of Elections request the use of a building 90 days in advance of the time of voting, the time of voting being Oct. 15," said Nathan Miller, the lawyer representing Eller and Owen. "Since the board didn't do it, the state board has zero statutory authority to essentially seize the building and take control from ASU."

Patrick Gannon, spokesperson for the state Board of Elections, said he will comment after the state board responds in court.

Miller said the lawsuit asks for the state board to instead use the Holmes Convocation Center as the early voting site, which representatives from the App State administration said was available for use.

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The lawsuit, if successful, could mean the early voting site on App State's campus has seen a variety of lawsuits in the past 10 years.

"Because of COVID-19, the university is holding classes every weekday in the Blue Ridge Ballroom in the Plemmons Student Union," Dockham said. "Voting in this location will displace classes for hundreds of students for 20 days during the fall semester."

Dockham said the administration supports the Holmes Convocation Center because it allows for a greater “assurance of health and safety” for county residents and members of App State.

He also said it offers close parking, wheelchair accessibility and is a recognizable building that is well known in the community.

"Appalachian State University is nonpartisan and unequivocally supports student voting rights.""
N.C. Senate candidates for Wake County

Dan Blue (D) District 14
Blue supports increasing teacher pay and improving school security. He supports expanding Medicaid and improving the state's mental health care delivery system.

Alan David Michael (R) District 14
Michael supports raising teacher pay and freedom of school choice. He wants to reduce the burdens of small businesses and cut regulations that impact job growth.

Jay Chauduri (D) District 15
Passed an act that expanded the scope of hate crimes. He supports reducing gun violence, and increasing mental health funding in schools.

Mario Lomuscio (R) District 15
Lomuscio supports open enrollment and school choice. He is pro-life and wants to limit taxes and regulations to promote economic growth.

Wiley Nickel (D) District 16
Nickel supports funding public education, reducing class sizes and raising teacher salaries. He wants to make renewable energy more accessible, and he wants to protect Planned Parenthood funding.

Will Marsh (R) District 16
Marsh is a veteran and business owner. He believes in lowering taxes and less government regulation.

Sam Searcy (D) District 17
Searcy supports public schools and higher pay for teachers. He wants to prioritize higher education by funding public universities in North Carolina.

Mark Cavaliero (R) District 17
Cavaliero is against the confiscation of legally-owned guns from law-abiding citizens. He is pro-life. He supports affordable, accessible health care.

Sarah Crawford (D) District 18
Crawford works at the nonprofit Single Stop, where she connects families to resources that help put them on the path to economic stability. She believes in reducing class sizes and raising teacher pay. She supports Medicaid expansion. She believes in prioritizing clean energy.

Larry Norman (R) District 18
Norman wants to appoint Board of Governors candidates who are Christian, conservative and have educational experience. He believes in a healthcare system that is based on free enterprise and choice. He does not believe in new laws to promote racial equality.

Vote early at Talley
Cassie Englund
The Technician

The Wake County Board of Elections has selected Talley Student Union as an early voting site for the 2020 presidential election. At an early voting site, voters may register and cast a ballot on the same day, regardless of which precinct they currently live in. Early voting is also referred to as one-stop absentee voting.

According to Wake County Board of Elections member Gerry Cohen, the November 2020 election will be the fourth time Talley has been used as an early voting site. In the 2020 primary, Talley was the sixth most used early voting site in Wake County, Zapata said in the letter. 6,991 votes were cast at Talley during the March 2020 election. Similar to past elections, the Jeter Drive parking lot will be designated for voters. In her letter, Zapata explained that, in response to figures showing increased voter participation during the last four days of an election, NC State will double the availability of voter parking during that time. Transportation through the Wolfline will also be available.

New cleaning and sanitation practices will also be used at Talley, both in preparation for the Aug. 10 reopening of campus and the presidential election. The University will “partner with elections staff to support those efforts of social distancing and cleaning practices,” Zapata said in the letter.

technician-news@ncsu.edu

www.technicianonline.com
@ncsutechnician
@ncsutechnician
Jackson wants to expand Medicaid coverage to 500,000 people. He wants to reinvest in affordable housing to invest cities to make zoning reforms.

Sonja Nichols is the President and CEO of Nicholant Enterprises. Nichols supports affordable housing and job equity.

Brosch supports eliminating the U.S. Dept. of Education and cutting EPA funding. He supports penalizing legislation for companies that hire immigrants illegally.

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Niday supports school choice and is in favor of salary raises for teachers. He is in favor of holding police accountable for misconduct but in opposition of defunding the police.

Salvador is part of the Youth Empowered Solutions and Clean Air Carolina Leadership Boards. She wants to invest more into education to remove systemic barriers for students.

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Shields believes in lessening the tax burden associated with home ownership to combat the housing crisis in Charlotte. He wants to expand Medicaid to close the health care coverage gap.

Waddell supports increasing the state minimum wage. She is in support of expanding Medicaid coverage. She wants to raise teacher pay and reform the school district’s resource distribution system.

Marcus wants to provide better funding for public K-12 education. She supports police and criminal justice reform, including reinstating the Racial Justice Act and supporting the Second Chance Act and First Step Act.

How to request an absentee ballot for the November 2020 election

Due to the pandemic, some may find it difficult to physically go to the polls on election day. Common solutions people are turning to are absentee/mail-in ballots.

To receive a mail-in absentee ballot, you must request a ballot via the Absentee Ballot Request Form via the North Carolina State Board of Elections website, or you must send a signed paper form via mail, email, fax or by dropping it off in person at your county’s Board of Elections.

The two steps voters must complete after marking their ballot are: seal the ballot in the container-return envelope and complete the Absentee Application and Certificate on the ballot container-return envelope.

You should return your ballot to your county Board of Elections no later than 5 p.m. on Election Day. Don’t wait until the deadline to submit your ballot; submit it as early as possible.

As we continue to adjust to this new situation, it is important to remember that we are still capable of having our voices heard. Getting to the polls may be more challenging this election than in previous years, but that should not stop the American people from voting for what they believe in.

The Niner Times
For formerly incarcerated people in North Carolina, the beginning of September brought news of re-enfranchisement just eight weeks before the 2020 presidential election. 

On Sept. 4, the Wake County Superior Court ruled that the state must allow citizens who owe fines, fees or debts from a felony conviction to vote. 

Dennis Gaddy, founder and executive director of Community Success Initiative, said up to 5,000 people in North Carolina were made newly eligible voters by way of this decision. CSI is a Raleigh-based nonprofit and the lead plaintiff in the case. 

Gaddy said, “That’s something that the Second Chance Alliance team is trying to figure out.” 

The N.C. Second Chance Alliance is a statewide alliance of people with criminal records, service providers, congregations, community leaders and concerned citizens that address the barriers that criminal records pose to successful re-entry. 

Many organizations and individuals involved in the Second Chance Alliance acted as plaintiffs in the CSI v. Moore case, litigated by the Durham-based law and policy center, Forward Justice. In May 2020, the plaintiffs filed a motion for summary judgement — a decision by the court not involving a trial. 

The plaintiffs also commissioned Frank Baumgartner, a professor of political science at UNC, to draft an expert report on North Carolina’s disenfranchisement of formerly incarcerated people. 

Baumgartner found that post-conviction financial obligations average more than $2,000 per individual on probation, and over $3,500 for those on post-release supervision. 

He also investigated racial disparities, reporting that Black people are disenfranchised by such policies at a rate 2.76 times higher than white people. 

“Was not surprised by the findings in the report, but as I often tell people, we have to put a number on these things,” Baumgartner said. “My role was simply to calculate what that number was, and what I found was 2.7.” 

Gaddy, in addition to his role at CSI, serves as the criminal justice chair for the North Carolina NAACP. The court’s decision, he said, was an “implicit win” for the Black community, given that Black people make up 32 percent of North Carolina’s population, but 55 percent of the incarcerated population. 

Gaddy comes from a family engaged in the democratic process. His mother, he said, worked to register voters during his summers growing up, while his father served as precinct chair for his local voting site. 

However, after spending over five years in prison, Gaddy was released on probation and unable to vote in the 2008 presidential election. 

“I was unable to vote for the first African American president,” he said. “I kind of lived for that day, when that would happen. So, for me, (disenfranchisement) is a personal experience.” 

Leaders in the formerly incarcerated community celebrated the decision along with Gaddy and CSI. Kristie Puckett Williams, manager of the statewide Campaign for Smart Justice at the ACLU of North Carolina, is a formerly incarcerated scholar and activist for disenfranchised communities. 

“It felt really good to see a decision that meant our people would be able to be reconnected in a way they hadn’t been connected in years,” she said. “Incarcerated people are people. Helping our people would be able to be reconnected in a way they hadn’t been connected in years, it’s a powerful thing.” 

As 5,000 new voters are identified and registered in North Carolina, the push for re-enfranchisement is not over. Around 51,000 people on probation or post-release supervision are disenfranchised – and the court’s ruling applied only to the 5,000 unable to vote because of financial obligations. 

“We broke a little bit of the glass ceiling,” Gaddy said. “But the verdict was a perfect solution to what we were trying to do, which was expand the right to vote.”
Durham County

N.C. Senate candidates for districts 20, 22

Natalie Murdock (D) District 20
Murdock wants to raise the minimum wage to $15. She wants the state to offer alternatives to incarceration and decriminalize non-violent crimes, including marijuana use. She wants to expand Medicaid and have equal healthcare access in every county by 2025. She believes in expanding mass transit, higher water treatment standards and having 100% renewable energy by 2050.

John Tarantino (R) District 20
Tarantino did not respond to our questions and we could not find information about his candidate platform online.

Rick Padgett (R) District 22
Padgett wants to boost the economy by encouraging new businesses to come to North Carolina. Padgett is a strong defender of police. One of his goals is to “work to improve the quality of life for law enforcement and other public safety personnel.” Padgett’s main educational goal is to increase the presence of armed police in schools.

Mike Woodward (D) District 22
Woodard has worked on expansion of work opportunities, increasing training and apprenticeship programs, and the expansion of public transportation. He also supports Medicaid expansion. He wants to increase teacher and principal pay to match the national average, and supports increasing the number of teacher assistants and nurses in schools.

Student political groups gear up for an election during a pandemic

By Pilar Kelly and Hattie Halloway
The Duke Chronicle

With a presidential election just around the corner, Duke’s student political groups are working to mobilize the youth vote amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Without the option of hosting in-person programming this fall, groups like Duke Votes, Duke Students for Biden and Duke Democrats are working hard to facilitate creative virtual events aimed at getting out the vote.

Duke Votes
Duke Votes is a non-partisan student-run organization focused on registering Duke students to vote.

Students often have to update their voter registration when they move from East to West Campus or to North Carolina, a process that has been particularly confusing because of coronavirus-related changes. Duke Votes aims to help students easily navigate all aspects of the registration process.

“As a historically low-turnout group, students have the potential to make a large impact if they do go out and vote,” said Duke Votes Chair Jessica Sullivan, a senior.

In the absence of large events, Duke Votes is focusing on community-oriented outreach. One of their primary initiatives is a voting information sign-up tool. Students answer questions about where they currently live and whether they intend to vote with their campus or home address, and the organization will send them information tailored to their specific voting situation.

“At its core we’re still doing the same community-oriented outreach as we did in 2018. We have the same mission and guiding principles, it’s just that the methods of doing that have changed,” Sullivan said.

In addition to voter registration drives and other virtual events, Duke Votes has partnered with student groups who can pledge to register 100% of their eligible members, and with resident assistants who distribute information to their residents.

“We’re trying to do more person-to-person contact, so we’re having people reach out to their friends and their communities, and do it more on an individual level,” Sullivan explained.

Duke Students for Biden
Sara Tavakolian said that Duke Students for Biden was formed at the beginning of the summer as a “coalition of students on Duke’s campus who are really passionate about voting for Joe Biden this November.” The organization has four executive members—Tavakolian, senior Rahul Krishnaswamy and sophomores Jack Kochansky and Daniel Marshall—as well as almost 1,000 Instagram followers, as of early Thursday, and a rapidly growing GroupMe chat.

For a Zoom meeting, Krishnaswamy stressed the importance of simply getting Duke students out to vote, stating that “if you have voted once, you don’t need to vote twice. If you’ve voted in the past, you have a responsibility to vote.”

Duke Students for Biden has four major objectives: educating students on political issues, making sure students are registered to vote, getting students excited about a Biden presidency, and engaging with North Carolina voters at large through phone banking and texting.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the organization has had to do online speaker, voter registration and phone banking events.

“It’s been a lot more virtual,” Marshall said in response to how their programming has been different as a result of Covid-19, “We have a pretty big social media presence.”

Krishnaswamy emphasized that “over the last couple of elections Duke’s turnout has been kind of sad, but there is no reason why [Duke students] can’t be leaders for everyone else.”

The executive team hopes that Duke’s voter turnout will improve this year. “I think we can get our turnout up to 60, 70, maybe 80%, which would be amazing,” Krishnaswamy said.

Duke Democrats
Duke Democrats helps left-leaning students get involved in politics on and off campus. Anyone can sign up for their weekly Political Blast email that contains information about events and initiatives organized by democratic groups such as the Durham Democratic party, Swing NC and Duke Students for Biden.

Duke Democrats also provides a way for liberal students to network and find job and internship opportunities in the Democratic political sphere.

Echoing other leaders of student political groups, senior James Toscano, a member of Duke Democrats, said that political organizing looks very different right now.

“In the past, we would have things like phone banks in person, which were fun because you got to meet people instead of feeling like you’re making calls into the void by yourself. We also would do voter registration events and set up tables around campus. All those things you can’t do anymore,” Toscano said.

The Duke Chronicle
You can register to vote now using your campus address.

You can vote early.

You can vote by mail.

You can vote on Election Day.

Go to voteamerica.com/students