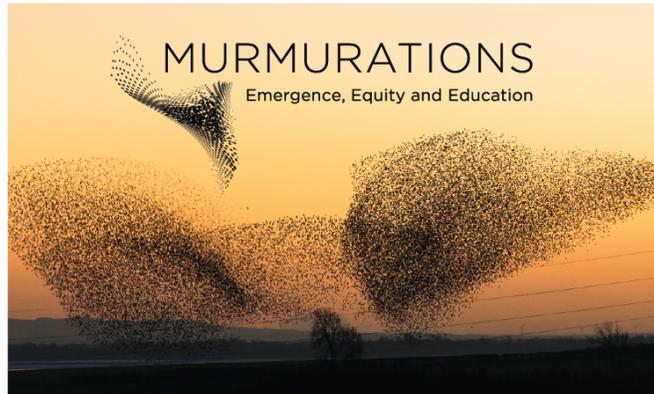# Artifact Download Cover Page

Murmurations emerged as a project by a community of educators who recognize that education and its results arise from interactions of historical, social, political, psychological, biological and environmental factors. As a U.S. institution, education has most reliably produced inequity. We began *Murmurations* with the intent of dissolving the dynamics that support and re-create inequitable educational outcomes.

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The Role Faculty Can Play at Open Access Institutions to Empower Voting Citizens

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Abstract

Point of view: I am a 38-year-old African American Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice in an Urban Metropolitan access school in the inner city of Atlanta, Georgia. My study of student responses reveals anxiety about the voting process.

Value of submission: This article brings awareness to the need for civic guides for students from communities experiencing low incomes, with a particular focus on voting. I also suggest concrete actions and provide a list of open access (i.e., free) resources especially relevant for faculty serving communities that are under-resourced.

Summary: Extensively covered in the media, the 2018 midterm election cycle was an event for the history books, and this year's presidential election is no different. According the U.S. Census Bureau, among 18- to 29-year-olds, voter turnout went from 20 percent in 2014 to 36 percent in 2018, the largest percentage point increase for any age group - an 80 percent jump. As a result of these developments, a unique opportunity presents itself for teaching civic engagement to students no matter what discipline, which is especially important for those teaching at an access institution. Such institutions are mandated to accept all qualified applicants and often serve those from communities subject to chronic or systemic lack of resources. At access institutions, voting and active community involvement, alongside education, could shape and brighten one's future. According to Souto-Manning and Stillman (Souto-Manning and Stillman 2020). we are reminded that schooling is not a direct target of changing the world in itself, however, teaching may alter the overall individual mindsets. Instruction may edify how one may see themselves and what place one may have in the word. Education should provide a way for individuals to acquire the needed change one seeks when pursing a degree, thereby inviting in the feeling of being a part of transforming the world.

Introduction: First-time voters at an access institution

As educationalists, serving students from communities experiencing low incomes, we have the unique opportunity to be ambassadors of parity. The exploration of civic engagement-oriented pedagogical approaches would be useful. Specifically, encouraging students to participate in the electoral process by voting is an example of civic participation, which has the potential to impact one's health. An international data analysis conducted within several countries, and the United States, confirmed a relationship between civic engagement, by way of voting, and improved overall health. These findings were also controlled for idiosyncratic and nationwide demographics (Kim, Kim, and You 2015). Additionally, empirical data also revealed a decrease in well-being for those who did not participate in the voting process for succeeding terms (Arah 2008). While correlation does not confirm a causal connection, these study results suggest that civic participation contributes to one's sense of well-being. Guiding first-time voters in this important civic process is also an opportunity for Administrators and Advisors alike in reaching as many students as possible to support

the effort. Government officials, employers, and higher education professional also recognize educators' significance in fostering civic learning (Torney-Purta et al. 2015).

Embracing our essential roles in empowering, informing, and exciting students as voters helps strengthen American democracy and may be one of our most important teaching and learning goals ahead of the 2020 election. One barrier, however, is dismantling the anxieties students express regarding the political process. The following student responses from an activity offered within a junior level Criminal Justice course through an online learning management system were collected. The activity was an Institutional Research Board approved online activity offered to undergrads. Student A responded:

> I actually already voted on June 9th. This was the [first] time I have voted since moving to Georgia a little over two years ago. I was however, a tad bit nervous because I didn't really know any of the candidates.

> My grandfather was the County Commissioner in the town that I am from for almost 30 years. So, I've been active in politics since I was in high school. Going into the election this year, I didn't know much about any of the candidates or the stances that they took. In addition to being a campaign manager for my grandfather, I have worked the polls off and on since I was 18. It was bittersweet to not really participate; as I am in a foreign place.

This student felt anxious regarding candidate selection with emphasis on relocation and voting in unfamiliar territory.

A second student expressed anxiety about the fairness of this year's presidential election, although they have experience with the electoral process in a similar manner to the first respondent. Student B stated, "I worked the elections this past month and I must say it was a total disaster. It was [very] unorganized, [and] I saw many ways for people's ballots to go uncounted." Student B explained that multiple polling representatives were put to work with little or no orientation and training. They posed the question, "Who knows what type of integrity those people may have?" The student further explained that workers were able to come and go from the polling facility. "Who's to say someone didn't have a back pack filled with ballots[?]" I honestly believe that elections need to be taken a lot more seriously," he said. Student B reiterated that his experience with the election process over the previous month left him wondering if his vote would even count.

Finally, Student C expressed anxiety about selecting the most qualified candidate to tackle the country's issues. They pointed out that this election is momentous, stating:

> With all the things going on in the world right now I think it is especially important to vote for the right person to handle these situations with extreme caution and professionalism. In the year 2020 we have experienced [a lot] of problems such as the coronavirus pandemic and the nationwide Black lives matter movement. My anxiety comes from the feeling of responsibility to choose someone who is equipped with the abilities to handle these matters with efficiency and fairness. Black Americans and people of color have been on the receiving end of police brutality and systematic oppression for hundreds of years and it is important to put someone in office that will right the wrongs that this country has done to minority people. One thing I am passionate about and would like to see take place is a nationwide policing and law enforcement reform to combat the police brutality that so many people experience daily. I look at the [F]lint, Michigan water crisis as a problem that a good candidate for president should show exponential interest in fixing. The people of flint have gone way too long without clean water and the current President and those before him have done nothing about it. Change must happen and the time for change is now.

Helping such students develop greater awareness about techniques for researching candidates' platforms and positions could increase their comfort levels about the overall voting process. What can we do to help with such issues in the future?

In the following sections, I provide concrete steps that faculty at access institutions can take to lower the anxiety barrier for first-time voters.

Teaching How Voting Impacts Their Lives as Citizens

Good citizens are developed, not birthed. As professors, our classrooms are places where we can help young adults access information and shape them into engaged citizens. One of our goals should be to inspire students to understand the importance of moving from verbally expressing concerns or posting them on social media platforms toward active civic engagement that inspires them to act and contribute to helping solve societal issues (Price-Mitchell 2015).

Faculty may also help students understand their vote counts. The ratification of the 26th Amendment in 1971 lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 and heightened the importance of college-aged voters' civic engagement. We can teach them about the influence of their votes on such issues as educational funding, employment, civil rights, and the overall political climate. As a result, they may be encouraged to understand their values without being swayed by campaign platforms, one-sided messages, or biased media coverage.

Help Students Know before They Go

We can also instruct students in becoming familiar with the processes and procedures of voting in an election. Very new or outdated voting systems may make casting ballots in the 21st century more complex than expected. As a result, we can help prepare students for the entire voting experience. Students may be more comfortable with voting if they are acquainted with the structure and language of the ballot. Understanding the practice of voting a straight party ticket, where available, as opposed to selecting candidates from various parties and preparing for possible ballot issues might help. Straight ticket voting (also called straight-party voting or STV) is a fairly simple voting method, but not available in all states. It is when a voter chooses every candidate running for a specific party in a general election. With straight-ticket voting, a voter gets the option to pick every candidate running with a specific party, regardless of the number of other candidates running. Essentially, a voter chooses their entire ballot with a single mark (Curtice and Marsh 2014). New voters may be too embarrassed to request assistance because they fear being ridiculed or slowing down the process of casting ballots at the polls. Devoting a few minutes of class time to civic engagement presents the opportunity to help raise students' awareness about addressing issues such as the possibility of long lines, inexperienced poll workers, and other factors which may potentially decrease confidence in the election process. Table 1 lists a few resources in order to assist faculty with this mentoring endeavor.

Table 1. Open access resources for guiding first-time voters.

Resource	Location
Guide Students on the Registration Process	https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote
Video Walk Through on First-Time Voting	https://youtu.be/JAI9vuvCads
State-by-State Guides and Deadlines	https://www.usvotefoundation.org/vote/state-elections/state-election-dates-deadlines.htm
Straight-Ticket Voting (Process and Availability)	https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/straight-ticket-voting.aspx

Activities occurring at polling locations may have an impact on individual confidence and the outcome of the election. For example, the Georgia 2020 primary election in-person voting was beset by cascading failures (Fowler 2020). Voters waited up to five hours to cast ballots at some polling places due to equipment problems, poll worker unfamiliarity with a new voting system and social distancing measures taken because of the virus. Many voters also showed up to vote in person because absentee ballots they requested never arrived by mail.

We can prepare students for the possibility of malfunctioning voting machines and how to properly resolve such issues if they arise. New voters should know they can request an absentee paper ballot if they are not confident their vote will be counted and also provide

resources if there are issues with receiving a ballot or submitting the ballot. For example, mock voting sessions may be valuable teaching tools for educating students about how to use touch screen voting machines effectively. Students may also have special living and social situations, which require checking for their polling location early, being especially aware of their voting status, and taking the necessary steps to update their information before Election Day.

We can also encourage students to know their eligibility status if they have criminal records or are immigrants. In all cases, "automatic restoration" does not mean that voter registration is automatic. Typically prison officials automatically inform election officials that an individual's rights have been restored. The person is then responsible for re-registering through normal processes. Some states, California is one example, require that voter registration information be provided to formerly incarcerated people (National Conference of State Legislators 2020).

Also, Arrighi and Bauböck (2017) notes permanent residents are non-citizens living in the U.S. who have been granted the right to live and work permanently but do not have American citizenship. Instead, permanent residents hold Permanent Resident Cards, commonly known as a Green Card. These individuals are not allowed to vote in federal elections, although some states and municipalities, including Chicago and San Francisco, allow Green Card holders to vote. Undocumented immigrants are not allowed to vote in elections. As a result, we may be able to educate and encourage immigrant students to find out their status and participate in elections they are eligible for. Immigrants would mostly qualify to participate in local elections where most decisions are made, which directly impacts one's day to day life.

Incentivizing Action Beyond the Classroom

Surak and Pope (2016) posit infusing community involvement into education and learning environments necessitates redesigning the execution of instruction. With limited time for helping students achieve course-specific learning outcomes, it can be hard to find occasions to incorporate more general objectives. However, through changes in course structure, we can incentivize student engagement in activities like hosting teach-ins. A teach-in is an informal presentation and discussion or a series of lectures aimed at educating the public on critical topics. The first teach-ins began in the 1960s as part of the anti-war movement. More recently, teach-ins related to civic engagement have taken place at various colleges and universities throughout the United States. Teach-in organizers help people register to vote and address subjects from voter turnout and the history of voting rights to current matters like voter suppression and fraud. We can opt to help and offer course credit for organizing teach-in sessions as service learning projects in classes. Such projects have the potential of increasing student engagement.

Acknowledgments

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