

March 4, 2026

TO: University Life Faculty Fellow Program managers

FR: Jennifer Victor, Schar School, UL Faculty Fellow (summer 2025 – fall 2025)

RE: Report of Faculty Fellow Productivity

Introduction

In the summer and fall of 2025 I build a partnership with University Life, the Provost's Center for Engagement and Civic Learning (CECiL), the local chapter of the League of Women Voters of Fairfax (LWVF), and motivated GMU students to engage and support student voting during the 2025 Virginia election.

Activities

Starting in June 2025, I developed and deployed a recruiting system to identify students with an interest in supporting student voting on campus. These "Mason Voting Ambassadors," are critical to the objective of affecting student voting. Research shows that peer-to-peer contact is one of the most effective ways to encourage and support college students to exercise voting rights.¹ Along with my LWVF expert partner, we **trained more than 60 undergraduate students** in the rules, laws, and regulations of voter registration, absentee voting, and in-person voting in Virginia. This group of students became the backbone of this project.

¹ Elizabeth A. Bennion and David W. Nickerson, "I Will Register and Vote, If You Teach Me How: A Field Experiment Testing Voter Registration in College Classrooms," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49, no. 4 (2016): 867–71, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096516001360>; Elizabeth A. Bennion and David W. Nickerson, "Decreasing Hurdles and Increasing Registration Rates for College Students: An Online Voter Registration Systems Field Experiment," *Political Behavior* 44, no. 3 (2022): 1337–58, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09666-7>; Elizabeth Bennion and David Nickerson, *What We Know about How to Mobilize College Students to Vote*, October 31, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.33774/apsa-2019-t0f6g>.



The Mason Voting Ambassadors (MVAs) were eager participants in our project. This all-volunteer army of students tirelessly engaged their peers in conversations about voting wherever they could. They hosted more than **20 tabling events** at campus fairs, sporting events, and kiosk opportunities. They gave **presentations to more than two dozen Registered Student Organizations and classes**. They helped to maintain an **email hotline** where they responded to students' questions about voting and provided informed, non-partisan advice.

In addition, I helped organize the MVAs to engage in a rigorous and systematic **social media campaign**. To be fair, I helped set up the students to be able to run a Mason Votes Instagram account, but this entrepreneurial group of students took the campaign to a new level. They created original content for Instagram that was appealing, appropriate, and informative. The campaign helped to draw attention to the challenges of student voting, provided encouragement and visibility to voting, and helped Mason Votes to become a ready resource for student looking for support. It's hard to overstate how important and effective this effort was---most of our student population is on Instagram and this

generation of students is accustomed to using Instagram to find all sorts of information, including civics. Having a strong presence on this platform has become an important, and on-going, aspect of Mason Votes.

Another component of our project was to work with **Mason Murals** to bring to life a vision that I provided for a high-impact, mobile, interactive art piece about voting. With the help of Yassmin Salem, Soojung Park, and Michael Galvin, they identified and contracted with a Mason-based artist to design a mural consistent with my vision. They then contracted with a production company to have the mural created and we were able to deploy the mural at several events starting in mid-October. University Life and CECiL funded the project and the voting mural can be used at civic events for years to come.



Along with three other intrepid MVAs, I spent a few hours on the Election Day eve, creating **sidewalk art** and messages around campus. This chalk artwork provide motivation and direct instruction about voting.

We also worked with Mason Media to create content for the **Mason Votes website** and written material produced through Mason Media. Working with Jason Harstel was key to unlocking the formal portion of our web campaign.

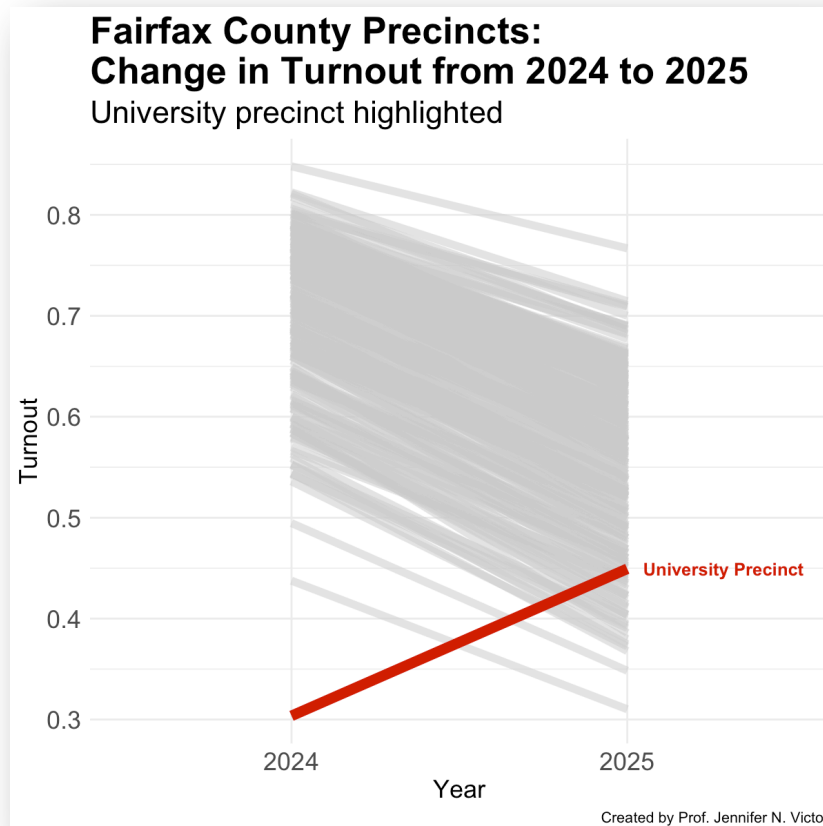
On **Election Day**, we had dozens of MVAs staffing a table outside the Merten Hall polling place, and roaming campus to recruit students to the polls. This was a hands-on effort that required dedication, coordination, and fortitude, and the MVAs did not disappoint. I observed several other campus, local, and national organizations and campaigns at GMU on Election Day to support student voting. I have been involved with student voting at GMU for about five year and never seen so many groups focused on student voter turnout.

Outcomes

Not only did our efforts keep dozens of Mason undergraduates involved with civic activities throughout the fall, but the efforts were meaningful. While we cannot isolate the impact of Mason Votes and the MVAs versus other organizations pointed at affecting student voting, we can measure student turnout at the campus polling place relative to prior years.

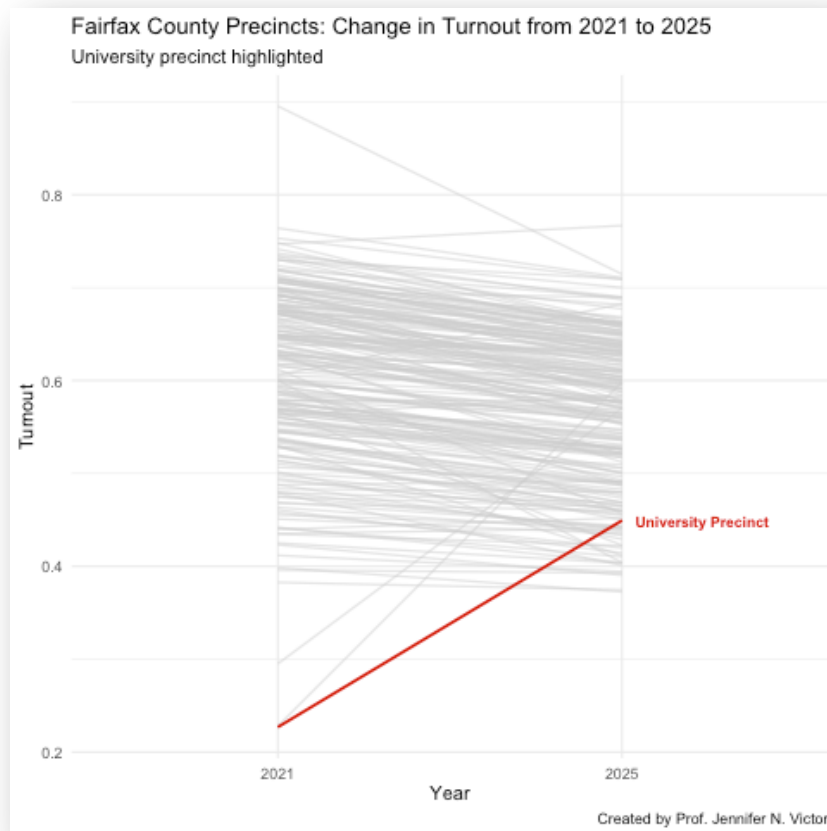
Figure 1 shows the turnout—measured as the portion of voters registered to vote at a polling place who cast a ballot for an election—in 2025 compared to 2024. The graph shows that the **Merten Hall polling place increased its turnout by about 15 percentage points**. Moreover, the graph shows the turnout at all other Fairfax County precincts in 2024 and 2025. At all other precincts, turnout was *lower* in 2025 compared to 2024, except at Mason. Typically, one expects lower turnout in a state election relative to presidential election (2024), so it is most unusual for the GMU precinct to have seen an increase. We attribute this increase to the efforts of this project and the dozens of staff and MVAs and community partners dedicated to helping Mason students vote.

Figure 1 2025 GMU polling place turnout relative to 2024



One might ask whether turnout increased relative to the last gubernatorial election, rather than comparing to the previous year. In Figure 2 I show the turnout of all Fairfax County precincts in 2021 compared to 2025—these are both the same type of election, with gubernatorial candidates on the ballot. Again, we see a marked increase in turnout at the University precinct, one of four that saw higher turnout over this period.

Figure 2 Voter turnout in Fairfax County precincts, 2021 versus 2025



Altogether, I can draw a straightforward conclusion: helping college students vote increases college student voting participation.

Conclusion

College students face numerous barriers in exercising voting rights. The rules and laws about how, where, and when to vote can be confusing for students, especially for those who live in temporary housing. Universities have an obligation to help students vote and this project, along with similar others across the country, demonstrate how effective such efforts can be.

Democracy doesn't happen by accident—people make the democracy happen.

