

COMMON CAUSE NC

HBCU STUDENT ACTION ALLIANCE

END OF SEMESTER IMPACT REPORT

SPRING 2021



MISSION:

The Common Cause NC HBCU Action Alliance aims to strengthen North Carolina's democracy by activating, training, supporting, and uniting the next generation of civic leaders at our state's Historically Black Colleges and Universities as they work to hold power accountable at every level.

IMPACT ON CAMPUS ADMINISTRATORS:

Our organizers work intentionally to form community and lasting relationships with campus administrators. A core aspect of our work is to provide resources and support to administrators through message guidance, memos, and funding support for programs. This academic year, we have disseminated a voting guidance memo to share best practices with administrators on how young people can vote during the pandemic, a memo on the biennial Voter List Maintenance Process, voter mobilization programming, and continued working to support campuses in developing civic engagement curriculum.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS:

We provide students with extracurricular experiences that allow them to develop as leaders, organizers and academics. Our students this semester led programs, researched policies, and connected with lawmakers around a host of issues pertaining to pro-democracy and good governance reform. Furthermore, we provide our students direct resources through a semester stipend and other paid developmental opportunities; such as lobby days in Washington DC and Raleigh, and any financial support for conferences and summits.

OVERVIEW:

This semester our fellows focused on activism and advocacy. To accommodate a non-GOTV virtual semester, the program developed three specific tracks to continue providing students an immersive experience in civic engagement. In addition to the baseline requirements of the fellowship (Op-eds, trainings, meetings with campus organizers, etc.), the track requirements were as follows:

- **Online Engagement:** Fellows planned and hosted at least one online event. They created graphics to promote events and initiatives.
- **Speakers Bureau:** Fellows scheduled and participated in one speaking engagement: meeting with an elected official, speaking at a public meeting, etc. They also created PSAs for social media on a topic of interest.
- **Research:** Fellows created surveys to find out information about young voters. They also researched policies and developed white papers on issues of relevance; as well as provided policy support to other fellows on their initiatives.



SPRING SEMESTER PLANS:

This semester our eleven fellows focused on the following initiatives: Government Transparency, Metropolitan Housing Crises, Redistricting, Supporting K-12 Public Education, Felon Voting Rights, and policy issues focused specifically on women.

- **Bennett College:** Ashley created a social media public service campaign focused specifically on educating students and participants about Felony Disenfranchisement. Additionally, her op-ed focused on racial bias in jury selection.
- **Elizabeth City State University:** Denarra partnered with local elementary schools during Black History Month to work with them on education programming about the history of HBCUs. This work contributed to Denarra's op-ed focused on the way black history is taught in K-12 schools. Additionally, Denarra worked with staff on developing a social media strategy and graphics to promote the Our Voices Matter: NC Youth Town Hall.
- **Fayetteville State University:** This semester our fellow, Vanessa, originally planned to host programming around the For The People Act and the redistricting process. Unfortunately, she dealt with two severe personal crises this semester that disrupted her plans. However, she has written an op-ed on the importance of passing the For The People Act and focused this piece on why it should matter to young voters.
- **Johnson C. Smith University:** Sainey at JCSU worked this semester on developing a comprehensive survey to get an understanding of the voting patterns and habits of students at JCSU. This survey was developed in partnership with university leadership. Sainey's op-ed this semester focused on police accountability and criminal justice reform.
- **Livingstone College:** The major focus of the Livingstone Fellow, Jalen Robinson, was on curating community conversations between Livingstone students and local government officials. Jalen planned and marketed an event that sought to bring students and lawmakers together to discuss issues relevant to the Salisbury community. However, the week leading up to the event 50% of the panelists had to pull out of the conversation causing the event to be cancelled.
- **NC A&T State University:** Our two fellows at A&T worked this semester on redistricting reform. Nijah participated in our Youth Redistricting Initiative, which was a campaign designed to get students connected with municipal officials as well as host community sessions focused on educating students about the redistricting process. Jacob wrote his op-ed on policy solutions such as ranked choice voting and nonpartisan commissions to combat gerrymandering.
- **North Carolina Central University:** This semester Jazmyne Abney focused on how the state funds and supports K-12 education. Jazmyne worked to design a campaign that would engage all Triangle fellows in this outreach. However, due to scheduling conflicts and complications with COVID-19, Jazmyne's statewide campaign did not reach its full scope.
- **Saint Augustine's University:** Because of COVID-19 we were unfortunately unable to hire a Saint Augustine's Fellow this academic year. While this was a setback, we were still able to maintain an active and impactful program at Saint Augustine's through our faculty and staff connections. We look forward to hosting a Saint Aug fellow this upcoming academic year.
- **Shaw University:** This semester Shaw Fellow, Jameliah Pinder, focused predominantly on policy issues affecting women. Her op-ed analyzed the perniciousness of the angry black woman stereotype and her signature program this semester was a webinar "I Will Not Be Silenced". The all women panel included the president of Shaw University, abortion rights activists and educators.
- **Winston-Salem State University:** Fellows Fatima Rodriguez and Marcus Ponder spent their semester focused on government transparency and the way that UNC leadership govern and support HBCUs. A component of this work was a social media campaign, "What's Happening at WSSU" that updated students about recent board of governors actions and decisions.

In addition to these campus initiatives, our team also led a statewide program, **Our Voices Matter: NC Youth Town Hall**, in April. This initiative was an end of semester interactive conversation that brought students, activists, and lawmakers together to discuss a range of issues of importance to young voters. Panelists included three members of the North Carolina State Legislature (Sen. Kirk deViere, Sen. Mohammed Mutjaba, Rep. Zack Hawkins) Dawn Blagrove the Executive Director of Emancipate NC, and Kristie Puckett-Williams the Statewide Campaign Manager for NC ACLU's Smart Justice Program. This discussion was moderated by Senior Democracy Fellows, Jazmyne Abney and Ashley King.



CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED: As with students nationally, the past academic year provided a unique set of obstacles for college students. Though our program was positioned to weather the last effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we still encountered a number of challenges this semester that impacted our work.

- **Campus Policies:** The first challenge we encountered was the continued implementation of campus policies and scheduling changes to accommodate the pandemic. This spring many campuses continued to maintain restrictions on in person programming as well as limit the presence of off campus visitors. This limited the reach of the work we were able to conduct on campuses. Along with restrictions on in-person programming, many schools also had modified academic calendars.
- **Modified Academic Calendars:** In a normal semester, students would have spring breaks and other rest periods; this semester many of the universities we work with canceled the spring break holiday for students. The result that we noticed from this was that many students encountered burnout and stress towards the second half of the semester. We believe that this greatly impacted the enthusiasm and interest that students had for external non-academically required programming. This burnout was also exhibited among our Spring 2021 Fellows cohort. The lack of a mid-semester break combined with the general feeling of pandemic fatigue created tangible obstacles for our initiatives.
- **Pandemic & Virtual Fatigue:** The appetite for virtual programming and gatherings has decreased exponentially. We've experienced difficulties in securing speakers for events, exciting our base to participate in webinars, or engage with us.

Student Mental & Physical Health: Our greatest challenge was that three of our students contracted COVID-19 this semester. Three students at three different institutions suffered from COVID; with one student needing to be hospitalized. These diagnoses caused delays and cancellations in our plans and initiatives this spring. Thankfully, all of the students have made full recoveries with limited lasting symptoms. Apart from COVID-19, multiple of our students encountered exceptional challenges in their personal lives.

CONCLUSION: This semester presented a range of challenges for our program. In response to these hurdles, our staff provided mentorship and guidance by working with fellows on addressing the complications presented by the pandemic; as well as maintaining an innovative and nimble mindset in problem solving. Our team is still properly positioned to implement effective and equitable campaigns to mobilize black and brown voters throughout the state. As our program begins to slowly shift out of its virtual model, we look forward to maintaining a robust commitment to North Carolina's HBCUs and working to prepare campuses for the fall municipal elections and the subsequent 2022 midterms.

SPRING 2021 DEMOCRACY FELLOWS:



Ashley King | Bennett College

English | Junior

Rocky Mount, North Carolina

"I became a Common Cause fellow to spread political awareness around my campus."



Denarra Kimble | Elizabeth City State University

Kinesiology | Junior

Virginia Beach, Virginia

"Voting is important to me because it gives everyone a chance to voice their opinions. Voting is essential because we get a chance to pick a future leader who fits best under our personal views & will make the best change."



Fatima Rodriguez Caba | Winston Salem State University

Social Work and African Studies | Junior

Charlotte, North Carolina

"I wanted to join Common Cause to educate and advocate for the students on my campus's rights and access to voting."



Jacob Richardson | North Carolina A&T University

Information Technology | Junior

Fayetteville, North Carolina

"I wanted to become a common cause fellow because I wanted to dedicate my time to my community and getting other young people civically engaged was a great way to do it."



Jalen Robinson | Livingstone College

Political Science | Freshman

Hempstead, New York

"I joined Common Cause to increase my impact in my community so I could help improve the voting process, build better relationships with people, and build a better democracy."



Jameliah Pinder | Shaw University

Political Science | Sophomore

Raleigh, North Carolina

"Living the hope and dream of our ancestors isn't only accomplished through breaking barriers – it is also appreciated through practicing the rights they fought day and night for."



Jazmyne Abney | North Carolina Central University

Political Science and Mass Communications | Junior

Charlotte, North Carolina

"I became a Democracy fellow because I enjoy encouraging my peers to exercise their right to vote and remain involved in our democracy."

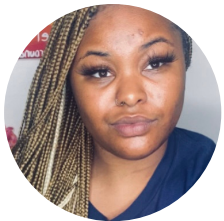


Marcus Ponder | Winston Salem State University

Political Science and Justice Studies | Senior

Charlotte, North Carolina

"I became a Common Cause Fellow to do my role of informing my peers on and off campus about the vitalness of voting, knowing deadlines and the candidates."



Nijah Williams | North Carolina A&T University

Political Science | Junior

Washington, District of Columbia

"I wanted to be a Common Cause fellow because I knew it would give me an opportunity to push my passion for politics and advocacy to the next level."



Sainey Ndure | Johnson C. Smith University

Criminology | Junior

Charlotte, North Carolina

"I became a Common Cause fellow to help motivate my fellow students to vote"



Vanessa Ward | Fayetteville State University

Public Administration | Junior

Rocky Mount, North Carolina

"I became a Common Cause fellow because I wanted to bring awareness to my community and have a impact on colleges in terms of voting and education about our democracy."

