

Newsletter - November 2020



The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy faced a challenging question as COVID-19 disrupted life in every way. Live public events, the staple of Hughes Center programming, were suddenly not an option. How would the center fulfill its mission of civic engagement?

We had to brainstorm new ways to reach people. But I'm happy to report that the center continues to conduct research, promote civility, develop student leadership and inform the public about policy, politics and government despite the pandemic.

In June, we held an online Democratic debate in the 2nd Congressional District. This fall, we hosted debates with candidates for Congress and Atlantic City mayor that had no audience but were broadcast or streamed. The 2nd District debate was broadcast statewide (NJTV) and nationally (CSPAN). We also held an online Atlantic County forum. These marked the most debate events ever held by the Hughes Center in any year, and they were viewed by thousands of voters.

With Research Associate Alyssa Maurice on board, the Stockton Polling Institute adapted to coronavirus safety restrictions and polled voters statewide and in the 2nd District.

The center developed and continues to hold small-group online discussions about improving civility in politics with the public, Stockton faculty and students. We sponsored student research that attracted media coverage over the summer, and we are supporting student interns at Stockton and in the Washington Internship Program this fall. And stay tuned: A big event is being planned for early next year!

There's more, but the bottom line is that the Hughes Center remains focused on engaging the public and the Stockton University community on important issues. We will never forget the bipartisan leadership modeled by the late Amb. Bill Hughes, and we are continually guided by his example.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Froomjian, Executive Director



[Election Season Debates](#)

Read about the debates the center sponsored this Fall



[Hughes Center Updates](#)

Welcome our new Steering Committee members and



[Latest Poll Results](#)

Learn about the 2020 election season at the Polling Institute

Research Associate



Hughes Center Conversations

The Center discusses state-sponsored violence in Belarus

Civility Discussions

The Hughes Center promotes civil civic engagement

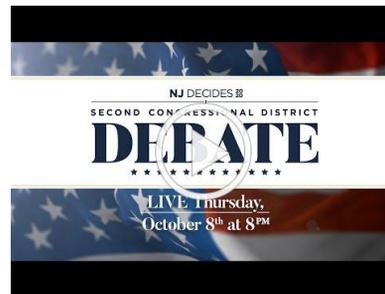
Student Engagement

The Hughes Center supports Stockton students

Election Season Debates

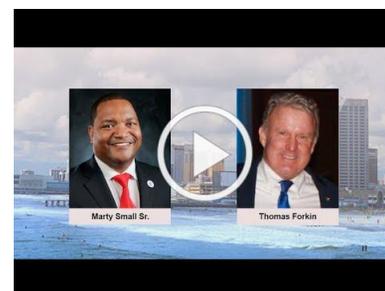
In the last few months of the 2020 election season, the Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University co-sponsored two live debates as well as one virtual forum for competitors in various political arenas.

The most prominent of these was the debate held on October 8 between 2nd Congressional District candidates Democrat challenger Amy Kennedy and Republican incumbent Jeff Van Drew. The debate was co-sponsored by the Hughes Center and NJTV, New Jersey's public television network. It was televised from the Fannie Lou Hamer Event Room at the John F. Scarpa Academic Center in Atlantic City, was aired live on NJTV and C-SPAN and was also streamed on the Hughes Center website. John Froomjian, executive director of the Hughes Center, moderated the debate. Panelists included Briana Vannozzi and David Cruz of NJTV News, and NJ Spotlight Editor-at-large Colleen O'Dea. The candidates faced topical and pressing questions regarding critical issues, including COVID-19 relief, police violence against minorities, gun control, abortion, fracking, the health of the New Jersey shore, voting by mail, the Affordable Care Act, and other important topics. The 2nd District race was one of the most important House races in the nation, according to Froomjian.



NJ 2nd Congressional District Debate

The Hughes Center also partnered with The Press of Atlantic City to stream a debate between Atlantic City mayoral candidates Marty Small Sr. and Thomas Forkin. The debate was held live on October 13 in the Fannie Lou Hamer Event Room at Stockton's Atlantic City campus. It was moderated by Atlantic City Press Staff Writer David Danzis along with Hughes Center Executive Director John Froomjian. Questions to the candidates were submitted by Atlantic City residents. In an exchange that at times turned personal, the candidates responded to questions about the city's finances, drug usage on city streets, and a potential marijuana legalization ballot.



A.C. Mayoral Debate

On September 30, The League of Women Voters of Atlantic County and the Hughes Center co-sponsored a Virtual Candidates' Forum via Zoom for candidates vying for various positions. Celeste Fernandez (D), Caren Fitzpatrick (D), John W. Risley, Jr. (R), and James Toto (R) were the candidates for Freeholder at Large; competing for Freeholder in District 3 were Andrew Parker (R) and Thelma Witherspoon (D); running for Atlantic County Sheriff were Joseph A. O'Donoghue (R) and Eric Scheffler (D); and for Surrogate the candidates



Atlantic County Virtual Candidates' Forum

were James Curcio (R) and Stephen Dicht (D). The event was moderated by Mary Conley, Co-President of the Cape May County League of Women Voters.

All three of the candidate forums can be viewed online at <https://stockton.edu/hughes-center/events.html>.

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New Steering Committee Members and Research Associate

Frank D. Formica

Frank D. Formica is an associate at Salmon Ventures, having recently joined the team after spending 30 years in both government and the private sector. He is an entrepreneurial and driven executive who has founded wholesale manufacturing and real estate development companies in Southern New Jersey, and boasts an established track record of championing the interests of both public and private institutions.



From 2009 until recently, Formica served as freeholder in Atlantic County and as chairman of the Freeholder Board. In his capacity as freeholder, Formica supervised the administration of county government, acted as a formulator of policy, and interacted with local municipalities. From 1987 until 2019, Formica owned and operated Formica Bros. Bakery in Atlantic City, where he managed a robust operation that maintained more than 120 employees and delivered 85,000 pieces of bread daily to more than 400 wholesale customers throughout southern New Jersey. Prior to this, from 1979 - 1987, Formica was Executive Administrator at Resorts International in Atlantic City. From 1972 - 1974 he managed waste and water operations for the United States Air Force.

Formica is a member in good standing of SAG-AFTRA, is a founding member of the Ducktown Revitalization Association Board, is a member of both the Greater Atlantic County Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, and is Chairperson of the Veterans Affairs Committee. He has been recognized for his expertise in public and private infrastructure projects and has received the NJ Leading Infrastructure Project Award from Stockton University for the Atlantic City Gateway Project. He was also honored with the NAACP Freedom Fund Business Award for his advocacy and public service.

Irenonsen Juliet Eigbe

Irenonsen Juliet Eigbe is a Stockton sophomore majoring in biology with a concentration in pre-professional studies. Eigbe is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of Oakcrest High School in Mays Landing, where she was a member of the National Honor Society and the Biomedical Magnet Program. A talented student who has shown lots of promise, she has demonstrated her abilities relating to teamwork, creativity, communication skills, conflict resolution, leadership as a teacher's assistant, Girl Scout, and Student Senator. Eigbe is also an accomplished dancer and choreographer, having performed at Disney World, Carnegie Hall, the Miss America Parades, Hershey Park, and the Cumann Rince Gaelach competition in Ireland.



At Stockton, Eigbe is Governmental Affairs Committee Chairperson of the Student Senate, and she was an interviewer for the Polling Institute at the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy. She has also participated as a volunteer at various events in the local community, including a Red Cross Blood Drive, at the Community FoodBank of New Jersey, and as a third grade Religious Education Teacher's Assistant.

Alyssa Maurice

Alyssa Maurice is the Hughes Center's new Research Associate. She joined the Hughes Center team in April and manages the Stockton Polling Institute. A graduate of Columbia and Monmouth Universities, Maurice has experience as a program assistant at the Center on Global Energy Policy

in New York City and as an Elections Research and Quality Control Analyst at the Associated Press. In this last role she managed multi-state projects where she surveyed election officials and maintained extensive voting data to analyze the electorate. This research helped inform the AP's election coverage, but also increased the speed and accuracy of vote tabulation and race-calling. Maurice also monitored results in real time for quality control, using statistical tools to find anomalies as they were tabulated and transmitted to various media outlets on election nights.



Prior to this work, Maurice conducted public opinion research as a graduate student of political science at Columbia University. She conducted mixed-methods research ranging from multivariate regression post-stratification, focus groups, survey analysis, and more. During this time, she also interned as a researcher for NBC News and worked as a program assistant for the Center on Global Energy Policy, coordinating events to engage the public with independent analyses.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the center's Steering Committee.

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The 2020 Election Season at the Polling Institute

During this heated election season, the Polling Institute at Stockton University adapted to coronavirus safety measures to ensure New Jersey voices were still heard ahead of Election Day. Voters were polled both statewide and in South Jersey's 2nd Congressional District. The findings were borne out in the results of the November 3 election. The polls not only gauged views on election matchups but also on timely issues facing New Jersey voters.

The statewide poll correctly found that Democratic former Vice President, and now president-elect, Joe Biden held a double-digit lead over Republican incumbent Donald Trump among likely voters. Incumbent Democrat, Sen. Cory Booker, was also cruising to victory against his Republican challenger, Rik Mehta, in the U.S. Senate race. The poll showed overwhelming support, at a rate of 66 percent, for the state's ballot question to legalize marijuana which passed on Election Day.



Notable differences were found between North Jersey and the southernmost counties in the state, with Trump viewed more favorably in South Jersey. Views on how the COVID-19 pandemic has been handled, as well as racism and police violence, were found to be highly polarized, driven in large part by partisan affiliation. The economy, coronavirus pandemic, and health care were most cited by voters as their top issue in this year's election.

The U.S. House race for District 2 between Republican incumbent Jeff Van Drew and Democrat Amy Kennedy was in a dead heat in the week heading into Election Day, according to the 2nd District poll. Van Drew, who came out victorious, was slightly more familiar to poll respondents than political newcomer Kennedy, but also had slightly higher negative ratings. Major party voters showed little crossover support, while Independent voters favored Van Drew.

The Polling Institute implemented several new measures to keep student interviewer staff safe while conducting these polls, including staggered seating to comply with social distancing, mask requirements, and providing ample hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes for call stations. Despite the challenges of this year, Stockton students were still able to gain meaningful work experience as interviewers with these protocols in place. However, with fewer students permitted in the call center at one time, outside vendor Opinion Services was enlisted to supplement the field work so that polls could still be done efficiently.

To learn more about the poll results, visit: <https://stockton.edu/hughes-center/polling/polling-results-2020.html>.

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A Hughes Center Conversation: State-Sponsored Violence in Belarus

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy explored issues related to state-sponsored violence in a recorded conversation with three Stockton University faculty members. The panelists were Dr. Tina Zappile, associate professor of political science, who serves as faculty adviser to Stockton's Model U.N. and as a member of the Hughes Center Steering Committee; Dr. Lauren Balasco, assistant professor of political science, and an expert on the subject of state-sponsored violence; and Mariana Smith, MFA, assistant professor of art.



A Hughes Center Conversation:
State-Sponsored Violence in Belarus

The panelists analyzed the massive and unprecedented historic upheaval against an authoritarian regime in Belarus following the recent presidential election that is widely believed to have been illegitimate. The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled for 26 years and is often described as Europe's last dictator, was declared the winner of the election. Ever since, the country has seen protests of tens of thousands of participants. The demonstrators were met with violence from the government, which included the police spraying tear gas, beating and shooting the protesters, and making thousands of arrests. Recently the country has started a coordinated national strike in an effort to convince Lukashenko to step down. Darya Hrybava, a Hughes Center for Public Policy staffer and native of Belarus, moderated the conversation and posed questions to the panelists.

The conversation got underway with Dr. Balasco explaining what state-sponsored violence is, and the various ways it can manifest itself. Dr. Zappile then provided some examples of state-sponsored violence that have occurred throughout history, the most notorious and infamous of which was perpetrated by the Nazis. Mariana Smith recounted her experience as a firsthand witness to state-sponsored violence in Russia in the early 1990s, when as a student she participated in the protests after the fall of the Soviet Union. The conversation then shifted to the main issue at hand, namely the political protests in Belarus. The panelists addressed possible sanctions, the involvement of Russia, the response of the EU, and the reaction by the USA, and also talked about the interesting fact that the opposition movement in Belarus is being led by three women.

This discussion is the latest in a series of recorded online Hughes Center Conversations about relevant public policy issues. Find a list of all recordings to date [here](#).

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Hughes Center Civility Discussions



The spirit of civil civic engagement exemplified by the late Ambassador Hughes guides the Hughes Center as we conduct a series of small-group and student discussions about the lack of civility in modern American politics.

In fall 2019, the center became a community partner in the Revive Civility program of the National Institute for Civil Discourse. Former New Jersey Governor Christie Whitman, who received a Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award at the Hughes Center Honors 2019, is an honorary national co-chair of the NICD, and its advisory board is chaired by former President Bill Clinton and includes former U.S. Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright and Colin Powell, former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and other bipartisan political leaders.

In June, Dr. John Froonjian began leading online discussions via Zoom with members of the public and Stockton faculty and staff about the effects of incivility on U.S. society and politics. The discussions are not political in nature, and are neither a debate nor an airing of partisan views. The discussions focus on incivility in politics and government, and participants share their feelings about and experiences with incivility, as well as the potential impacts on our political life and on our own behaviors.

Hughes Center Research Associate Alyssa Maurice observed the sessions and noted recurring themes and interesting observations that will form the basis of a future analysis piece. The Hughes Center invited Stockton students to participate in their own civility sessions, and nearly two dozen students will have discussed the issue by the Nov 3 election.

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The Hughes Center Supports Student Engagement

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy is proud to sponsor research conducted by Stockton University students. The Hughes Center established a student research internship in fall 2019. Each semester, a student intern researches a public policy issue and produces a paper on that topic.

In a student research paper published by the Hughes Center this September, Stockton University student Garrett Bolton found that the coronavirus pandemic and resulting lockdown caused food insecurity to spike in Atlantic County, where workers were already struggling to feed their families. Economic conditions following the March lockdown threatened food security all over New Jersey, but Atlantic County was more severely affected because of the heightened impact of business closures on the Atlantic County casino industry and the regional hospitality economy.



Atlantic County also saw unprecedented unemployment rates and higher numbers of food stamp recipients. However, due to enhanced unemployment benefits, many unemployed casino workers were ineligible for food stamps, and were forced to rely on community efforts. By the end of June, the Community Food Bank of New Jersey (CFBNJ) had distributed nearly 70,000 emergency meal kits statewide. "Behind all the statistics in this report is a portrait of real people grappling with the

challenge of providing enough food for their families," said John Froomjian, executive director of the Hughes Center.

The Hughes Center undertook this student research project as a follow-up to a March Stockton University Poll that found that even before the lockdown, a significant percentage of Atlantic County residents struggled with food insecurity. Nearly one in five residents said they had run out of food and did not have money to buy more right away, while 14 percent had skipped a meal because they could not afford to buy food, according to the poll. Among those with children, 17 percent had skipped a meal so that their children could eat. "Thousands of people were out of work and relying on unemployment to keep a roof over their head and food on the table but finding it difficult to do both," the report said. "Food pantries have been the go-to resource for those who cannot buy groceries."

This semester's research intern is Ifrah Qadir, a Stockton senior majoring in Political Science with a concentration in International Affairs and minoring in Philosophy. Qadir is a Stockton Presidential Scholar, Dean's List member, serves as President of the Stockton Model United Nations Club, is a founding member of the Stockton Student Alumni Association, and is a member of the Alpha Lambda Delta National Honor Society. Qadir's research project undertakes a comparative analysis of the effects of New Jersey's withdrawal from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, and further examines the implications and benefits of what rejoining the initiative may mean for the state.

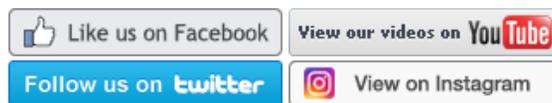
See more student research projects [here](#).

The Hughes Center also continues to financially support Stockton University students in the Washington Internship Program, which provides work experience in government, business and nonprofits for participants in the nation's capital. For the fall 2020 semester, the center has provided a \$1,000 scholarship to Justin Spusta, an undergraduate criminal justice major.

The Dean's List student is interning at the Behavioral Intelligence and Economic Development Society think tank. There he conducts analyses and shares his findings with society staff, other interns and online. Justin plans to pursue a Master's degree in criminal justice following his expected May 2022 graduation from Stockton.

Learn more about Stockton's Washington Internship Program [here](#).

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William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University,
101 Vera King Farris Drive, Galloway, NJ 08205

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