



I GOT THE POWER

By Azinwi Numfor

IWL Policy Tracks: Education/Law and

Advocacy Tracks: Education/ Law & Advocacy



MISSION STATEMENT



The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women's Leadership's website at <http://iwl.rutgers.edu>.

The Problem

- Across the U.S., young people, including college students, are becoming **increasingly disconnected from politics and civic processes**
- Many students feel **unsure how government works or where power is held**, which reduces motivation to engage (Phoenix & Chan, 2022)
- Even when students follow the news, they can feel like “**nothing will change**”, a key belief behind political apathy
- Students who don't see leaders who reflect their communities often feel politics isn't meant for people like them, **leading to disengagement** (Phoenix & Chan, 2022)
- Schools typically teach civics as facts to memorize rather than skills and pathways for real action, which leaves students **unprepared to advocate or participate** (Rubin, 2012)
- When young people feel **unheard or overlooked by decision-makers**, they are less likely to vote, attend civic events, or reach out to representatives (Phoenix & Chan, 2022)

This issue matters because when young people, particularly Black and Brown students, stop believing that their voices have power, they are less likely to vote, advocate, or get involved in decisions that directly impact their lives, allowing inequities to continue unchallenged.

How young Americans say they believe things in the nation are going

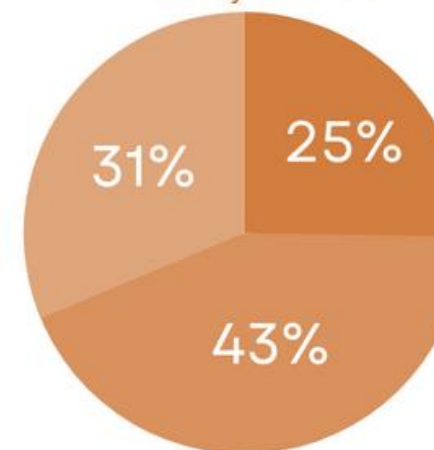
Semi-annual surveys of approximately 2,000 young adults age 18-29; 2009 to 2025



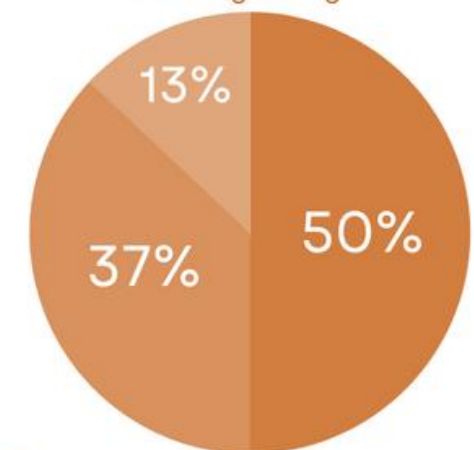
Data: Harvard Youth Poll; Chart: Axios Visuals

Youth Are Concerned about Democracy but Believe in its Power

"I feel confident about democracy in the U.S."



"Democracy is capable of creating change"



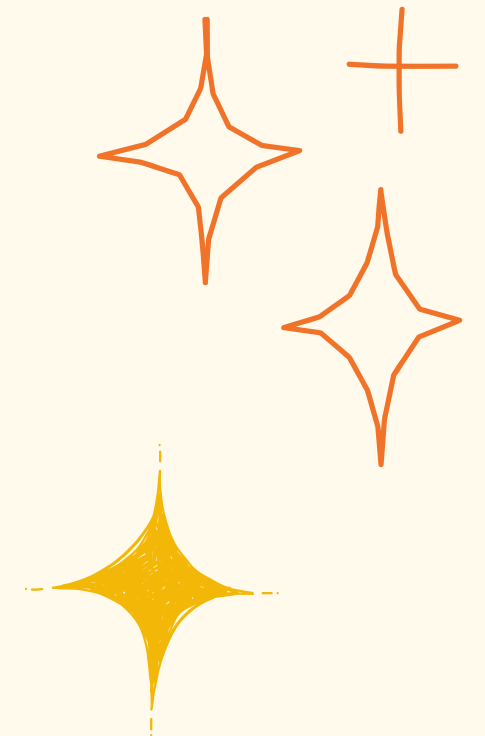
CIRCLE

Source: CIRCLE 2022 Post-Election Survey

Project Description & GOAL



- ★ **I GOT THE POWER** is an initiative that provides Rutgers students with the tools, knowledge, and confidence needed to understand their civic power and take action in their communities.
- ★ **I GOT THE POWER** creates an interactive civic engagement workshop where students explore who holds power in their everyday lives and practice real skills and identifying ways to advocate for change at Rutgers and beyond.
- ★ **THE GOAL:** Shift how students view their political influence, transforming political apathy into a sense of personal agency and belief that their voices matter in shaping their future.



Intellectual/Conceptual Foundation

Phoenix and Chan (2022): Define racial efficacy as the belief that “people like me” can influence political decisions and show that this belief strongly shapes whether people choose to participate in politics. When racial efficacy is low, individuals may understand issues and even care deeply about them, but still doubt that their engagement will matter, which contributes to political apathy and withdrawal

Rubin (2012): Describes a civic empowerment gap where students’ lived experiences often conflict with the democratic ideals they are taught in school, leading many youth, especially from marginalized communities, to adopt a discouraged civic identity that recognizes injustice but doubts the possibility of change

Ballard, Cohen, and Littenberg-Tobias (2016): Find that action civics programs, where young people work on real issues, interact with decision-makers, and practice concrete civic skills, are associated with gains in civic knowledge, efficacy, and intentions to stay engaged

Operationalizing Racial Efficacy

We shift beyond the “people like me” conceptualization to focus on racial in-groups specifically, while maintaining a focus on political actors and outcomes. The measures adhere most closely to the construction of the external efficacy questions, given our interest in perceived government responsiveness to one’s racial group. We list our three measures of racial efficacy:

- How often would you say public officials work hard to help [Respondent’s racial group]?
- How often would you say [Respondent’s racial group] has a say in how government handles important issues?
- How often would you say [Respondent’s racial group] elected to office can make changes for people in your racial group?

Source: Phoenix and Chan (2022)

		Students’ experiences in relation to the learned ideals of the United States	
		Congruence	Disjuncture
Students’ attitudes toward civic participation	Active	<i>Quadrant I: Aware</i> Change is needed for equity and fairness.	<i>Quadrant II: Empowered</i> Change is a personal and community necessity.
	Passive	<i>Quadrant III: Complacent</i> No change is necessary; all is well in the U.S.	<i>Quadrant IV: Discouraged</i> No change is possible; life in the U.S. is unfair.

Source: Rubin (2012)

Timeline

September

- Drafted SAP idea and aligned it with civic empowerment goals
- Identified potential campus sponsors and collaboration opportunities (NAACP + PRCC)
- Began brainstorming workshop structure and objectives

October

- Reached out to potential guest speakers in civic engagement fields
- Confirmed space and partnership with Scarlet NAACP at the PRCC
- Conducted research and began designing workshop activities + potential giveaways (food, prizes, resource handouts)

November

- Confirmed guest speaker: Cassandra Vega (ACLU-NJ Civic Engagement Organizer)
- Met with guest speaker to review program
- Finalized event date, activities, and discussion questions

Event Date: November 19th *

- Hosted workshop from 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM at the PRCC
- Featured keynote discussion + Q&A with Cassandra Vega
- Facilitated interactive activities and a civic action reflections and takeaways



Main Flyer

Scarlet NAACP Presents


I GOT THE POWER

Let's Learn How To Take Action!

A NIGHT OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



FOOD, GAMES, PRIZES AND MORE!

Wednesday November 19th 2025
7:30 PM – 9:30 PM
@ Paul Robeson Cultural Center



This interactive workshop invites you to test your civic knowledge, enter for a chance to win prizes, and leave with steps you can take to make a difference! Whether you're already involved and want new ways to make change, or you're just getting started, come join us and plug into action.

Featuring Guest Speaker:
Cassandra Vega, Civic Engagement Organizer at ACLU-NJ

rutgers_naacp Get ready to turn knowledge into power with Scarlet NAACP! ⚡

In the wake of the election, join us for I GOT THE POWER, an interactive night of civic engagement at the PRCC. Test your civic knowledge, learn how to take action, and explore ways to get involved in your community!

Special Guest: Cassandra Vega, Civic Engagement Organizer at ACLU-NJ
When: Wed, 19th Nov | 7:30 PM
Where: PRCC

Food, prizes, and more!

Promotion

Guest Speaker Flyer

Scarlet NAACP Presents

I GOT THE POWER


Featuring Guest Speaker:
Cassandra Vega, Civic Engagement Organizer at ACLU-NJ

Wednesday November 19th 2025
7:30 PM – 9:30 PM
@ Paul Robeson Cultural Center

BIO

Cassandra Vega is the Civic Engagement Organizer on the Political Advocacy team at the ACLU of New Jersey and a recent Coro New York Fellow in Public Affairs. She previously served as Policy Coordinator at the New Jersey Department of Labor, working at the intersection of labor and immigration. Cassandra holds a B.A. in Political Science from Rutgers, along with minors in Latino & Caribbean Studies and Women's & Gender Studies and certificates from the Eagleton Institute, the Institute for Women's Leadership, and Douglass Residential College.

CONNECT VIA
[HTTPS://WWW.LINKEDIN.COM/IN/CASSANDRAVVEGA](https://www.linkedin.com/in/cassandravvega)



Co-Sponsor Request

Invitation to Co-Sponsor "I GOT THE POWER" – Civic Engagement Event

Rutgers NAACP <scarletnaacp@gmail.com> Mon, Nov 17, 7:26 PM

to bcc: SED, bcc: Mu, bcc: Gamma, bcc: Xi, bcc: IΦΘ, bcc: Henry, bcc: Douglass, bcc: Rutgers, bcc: Black, bcc: Rutgers, bcc: Eta, bcc: S

Instagram Post

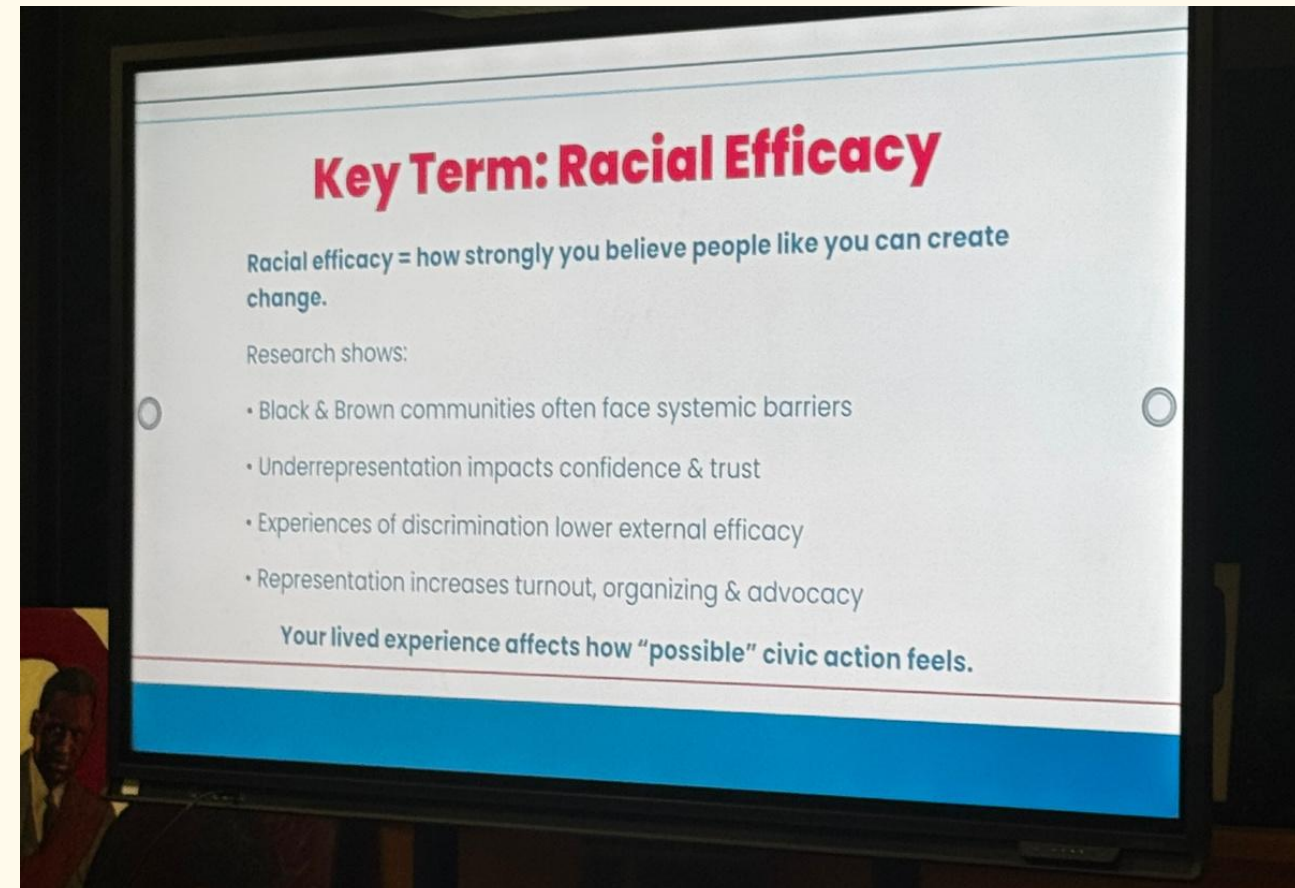
rutgers_naacp Introducing our guest speaker: Cassandra Vega ✨

Cassandra is the Civic Engagement Organizer on the Political Advocacy team at ACLU-NJ and a recent Coro New York Fellow in Public Affairs. She previously served as Policy Coordinator at the NJ Department of Labor, working at the intersection of labor and immigration. A proud Rutgers alumna, Cassandra co-created the Fellows in Racial Justice Learning Community and organized the 2023 Racial Justice Summit—the first student-run, tri-campus event in Rutgers history. She also serves on the Board Member of the Associate Alumnae of Douglass College (AADC), mentors interns at Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and volunteers with Gen Z for New Jersey.

Come hear from Cassandra tomorrow at 7:30 PM @ PRCC for I GOT THE POWER

Food, prizes, and more!

Event Highlights

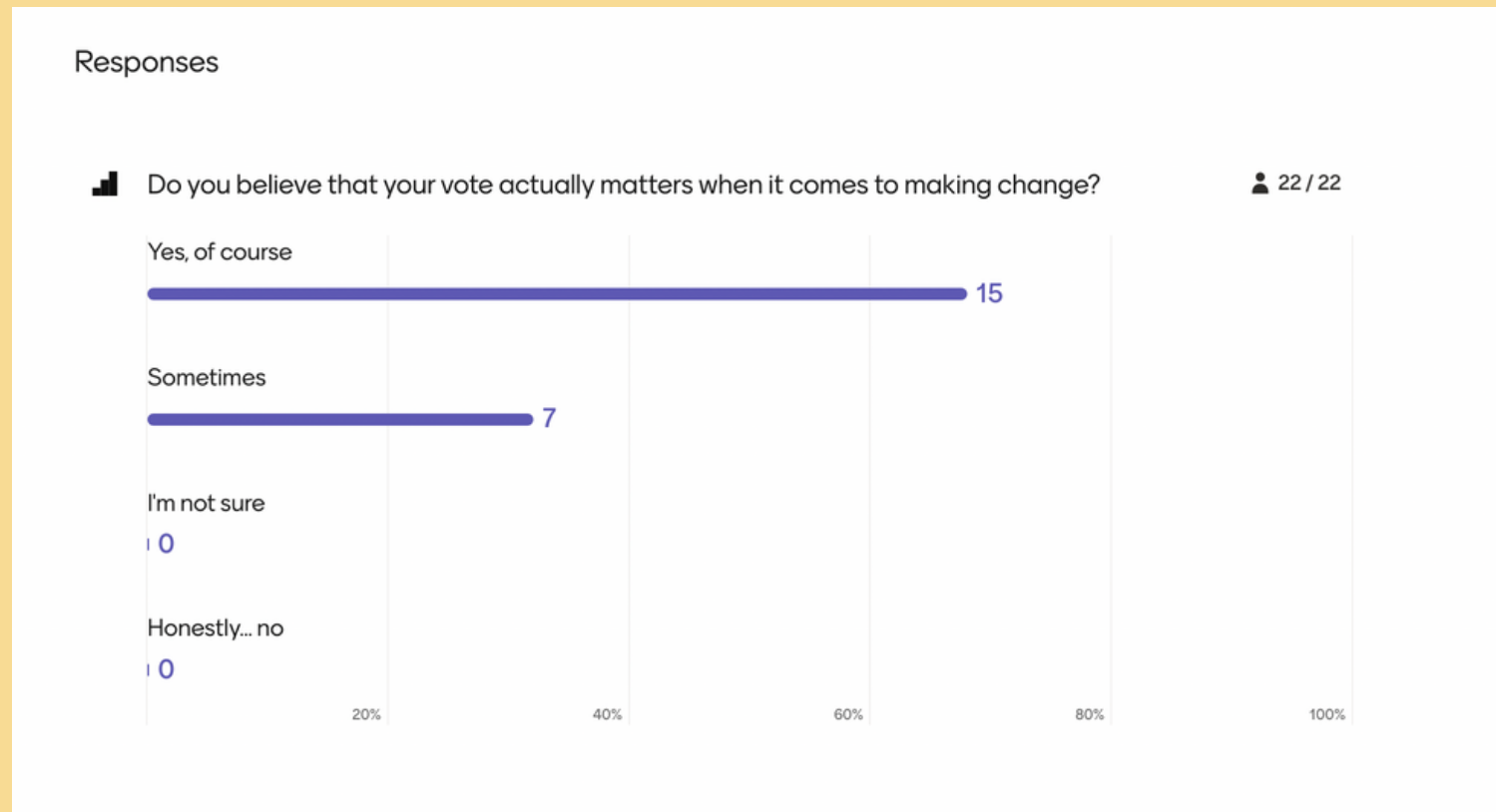


Civic Engagement Bingo

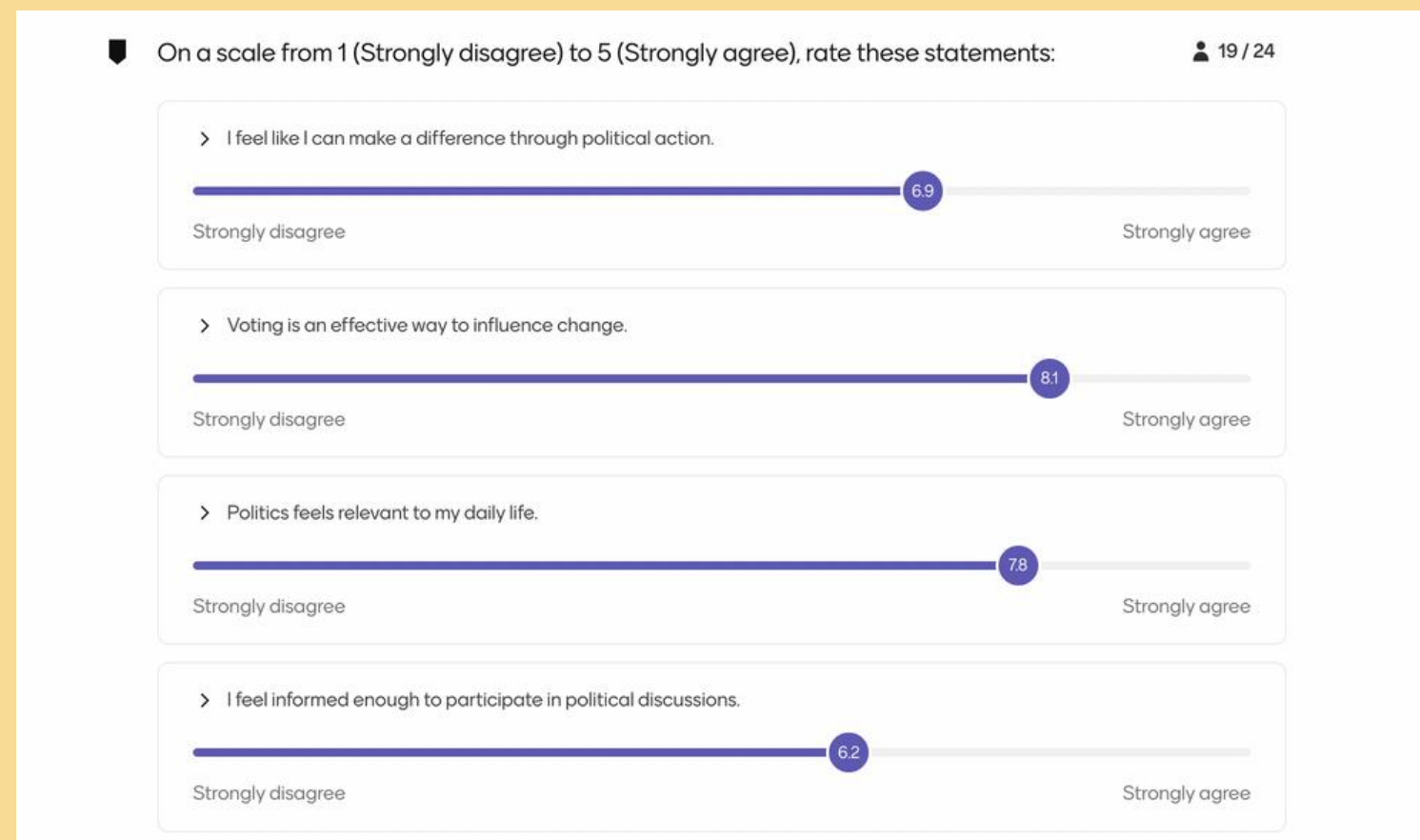
B	I	N	G	O
Signed a petition	Messaged your state representative	Voted in a primary election	Attended a protest	Helped run a political campaign
Gone to a town hall meeting	Visited a city hall	Volunteered for a community issue	Wrote a letter to an elected official	Talked to someone about a public policy issue
Registered to vote	Learned about a ballot measure	Free!	Participated in a school election	Donated to a civic or advocacy group
Attended a school board mtg	Spoke during public comment	Met an elected official	Joined a youth advisory council	Helped organize a civic event



Impact/Evaluation



First Poll



Second Poll

- **30 students** attended the event at the PRCC
- **Received strong engagement on social media, including 1,000+ views** on the recap Instagram Reel and additional post shares throughout the week.
- Students personally shared positive feedback, saying the workshop helped them feel more confident speaking up and getting involved.
- Post-event survey data showed that **students reported higher confidence in political participation** and increased belief that their actions can influence change.
 - Participants strongly agreed that:
 - Voting is an effective way to influence change (**Avg: 8.1/10**)
 - Politics feels relevant to their daily life (**Avg: 7.8/10**)
 - They can make a difference through political action (**Avg: 6.9/10**)
 - They feel informed enough to participate in political discussions (**Avg: 6.2/10**)
- Many attendees expressed interest in future civic action opportunities with NAACP and at Rutgers, **showing ongoing motivation, not just a one-time impact.**

Community Partner



The Scarlet NAACP serves as an active collegiate chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People — the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization. Founded to secure equity and justice for Black communities, the NAACP’s mission is to achieve equity, political rights, and social inclusion by advancing policies and practices that expand human and civil rights, eliminate discrimination, and accelerate the well-being, education, and economic security of Black people and all persons of color. The Scarlet NAACP creates student-driven spaces for advocacy, voter engagement, community building, and leadership development on campus. In recognition of its impact, the chapter was proudly ranked #6 in the nation among all college and youth branches. Partnering with

Scarlet NAACP allowed this project to reach students directly affected by civic empowerment gaps while connecting them with an organization that continues to build long-term advocacy pipelines at Rutgers and beyond.



Feminist Leadership

- Recognizes that systems of oppression shape who feels heard and who feels capable of making change.
- Uses an intersectional lens to address inequities in civic education and political access.
 - Creates a community space where political knowledge is shared, validated, and built collectively
- Encourages students to develop their own voice and agency, modeling leadership that is collaborative, transformative, and rooted in justice.

LESSONS LEARNED

Adaptability is essential

Throughout the planning and execution of this project, adaptability became a key leadership skill. From securing the event space to confirming a guest speaker, deadlines and logistics shifted often, requiring flexibility and creative problem-solving. Adjusting activities to fit student needs and energy in real-time also taught me how to stay responsive and ensure the experience remained engaging and impactful.

Collaboration strengthens impact

Working with the Scarlet NAACP and our guest speaker demonstrated the power of community partnerships in creating meaningful social change. Collaboration expanded the reach of the workshop, provided institutional support, and ensured the content was grounded in real civic advocacy work. Through this project, I learned that leadership is not done alone—building with others strengthens both the project's outcomes and the communities it is designed to serve.

Special Thanks



Sasha, Sam, Professor Brewer, and the entire IWL team: for your guidance, encouragement, leadership support, and funding

Scarlet NAACP: for collaborating to bring this workshop to life

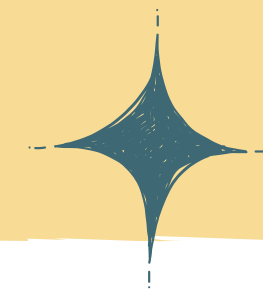
IWL Cohort '26 : for your community, feedback, and shared passion for social change

Cassandra Vega: for serving as our guest speaker and generously sharing her wisdom on civic empowerment

My Twin Sister: for keeping me grounded and cheering me on throughout this journey

Everyone I interacted with and met along the way: for the insights and inspiration that shaped this project

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THANK YOU!!

