

ON-CAMPUS POLLING PLACE AT NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY

By Sterling Bland, based on an interview with Andrew Goodman Ambassadors Bryan and Brandon Daye and Andrew Goodman Campus Champion Tiffany Seawright on April 7th, 2022

CASE STUDY

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCAT or A&T), America's largest HBCU and home to 12,566 students who call themselves Aggies, is located in Greensboro, North Carolina. According to the U.S. Department of Education, North Carolina A&T produces the most African American undergraduates in Engineering and Agriculture as well as masters degrees in Mathematics/Statistics and Engineering.¹ The school's stellar performance is driven by its rich history. A&T is a university rooted in legacy: on February 1st, 1961, four freshmen, Ezell Blair, Jr. (Jibreel Khazan), Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond, later known as the "A&T Four," started the Lunch Counter Sit-In Demonstrations of the Civil Rights Movement, a call for desegregation.²

The voting rights fight which began during the Civil Rights Movement in Greensboro continues to provoke student activism today. In 2016, A&T was split across two predominantly GOP districts: North Carolina District 6 and District 13 in a racial- and partisan-motivated gerrymander to limit the impact of the student vote. In response, student voting rights advocates launched a "Real Aggies Vote" campaign to gauge students' awareness around the issue and receive their backing in the Fall of 2019. Over two thousand students ran to join the effort, signing a petition to invalidate the gerrymander in under 24 hours. Running off of the support of the student body, both undergraduate voting rights advocates and students across academic departments attended the county's weekly Board of Election (BOE) meetings — following the example set by the A&T Four — until the court invalidated the gerrymander. Subsequently, the students' persistent BOE advocacy for an on-campus voting site was a success.

In the Spring of 2020, students had three locations to vote: an on-campus voting site for the primaries, an early-vote site, and a general election site. Unfortunately, however, the sites were

¹ See <https://www.ncat.edu/about/rankings-and-recognition/index.php>

² See <https://www.ncat.edu/about/history-and-traditions/index.php>

made available at the same time the Covid-19 pandemic ravaged in full swing, giving opponents fuel to justify their closures. Shortly after the primaries, students were sent home to take safety precautions and voting dwindled — but only initially. The Andrew Goodman Campus Team quickly implemented methods to get the remaining students on campus to vote, including voter education initiatives, early voting initiatives, a vote-from-home campaign, and a march to the voting site. But it wasn't enough for the Board of Elections.

Despite the results of this labor — that over 91% of Aggies were registered to vote, 71% of whom voted — the BOE decided that the on-campus voting site was not sufficiently used for continued investment after the 2020 general election. As a result, they removed the early voting site, leaving students to walk a mile to the county courthouse. This is despite the fact that Aggie freshmen are unable to drive, and many of the residents in the Guilford area are older Black and brown residents with limited access to transportation. As Tiffany Seawright, current Andrew Goodman Campus Champion, stated, the removal of the early voting site hurts the communities most vulnerable because of economic concerns: “When you take away convenience for people, it will automatically lower rates of voting...if you put a price on people's vote and on who matters, that's very unfortunate.” The cost of a voting population lost far exceeds that of maintaining a polling location.

Given North Carolina A&T's history, it is no surprise that student advocates haven't given up. As Bryan Daye, current Andrew Goodman Ambassador stated, “when we say Aggie Pride, we have to rejoice in A&T's legacy and make it even better. That's what keeps us going.” To that end, the Andrew Goodman Campus Team, in partnership with the Office of University Relations and the Office of Leadership and Civic Engagement, is currently running an “Activate the Vote” campaign with three steps: register, educate, and execute. The team has put on a multitude of programs to engage students, even for off-campus voting. To name a few initiatives, they have started a Civic Champion Program, which engages a fleet of fifty students to embark in an on-the-ground mission for voter registration, which delivered over 5,000 voter education packages to students living in dorms this academic year. They began a “More than A Vote” social media series, an annual Stroll to the Polls with the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Engagement, and savvy-named educational programming like “Donuts and Democracy” and “Pizza and Politics.” It is this work, in the face of the obstacles at hand, that keeps Aggie voter registration and turnout high even with opportunities far from campus.

The journey of North Carolina A&T is a long, arduous, beautiful, unfinished masterpiece. The resilience and dedication of the Andrew Goodman Campus Team is a witness to the sacrificial advocacy embedded in the history of the HBCU and its prominent role in the fight for civil rights. This work, as current student ambassador Bryan Daye puts it, is far from self-aggrandizing. “This is selfless work. You have to be a truly selfless person. It's more than you at the end of the day. It might be a bit tiring, a little stressful, you might want to pull your hair out. But when you have a team of students rallying behind you, making sure your events come to fruition, it is one of the greatest feelings ever. That you can stand for a greater cause, changing and advancing the world, day by day — that's what it's all about.” For Bryan and the North Carolina A&T

Andrew Goodman Campus Team — and for those who came before them — that’s what it’s about: fighting persistently, not for personal gain, but for the good of the community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To find other case studies, visit [Securing On-Campus Polling Places: Case Studies from the Andrew Goodman Network](#). To learn how to bring a polling place to campus, visit [Securing On-Campus Polling Places: A Toolkit](#).