

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications

9-16-2020

Gardner-Webb Political Science Assistant Professor Shares Insights on the 2020 Election

Office of University Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

FACULTY

Gardner-Webb Political Science Assistant Professor Shares Insights on the 2020 Election

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 16, 2020



Dr. Elizabeth Amato Discusses Effects of COVID-19 and Importance of Voting

The 2020 election is less than 50 days away. How will the COVID-19 pandemic affect turnout and voting? “No one actually knows,” observed Gardner-Webb University Assistant Professor of Political Science, Dr. Elizabeth Amato. “COVID-19 has shifted the usual playing field for both political parties.”

Amato is more than a casual observer. Politics and the American presidency are among her scholarly interests. In her classes, she stresses to students that voting is an important responsibility. In the following Q&A, Amato shares her thoughts on the issues surrounding the upcoming election.

Q: When looking at national level candidates, has the COVID-19 crisis impacted how people view both sides?

Amato: Absolutely. What will matter most of all is who voters praise or blame for the handling of COVID-19. Who will Americans hold responsible for the suffering COVID-19 and ensuing policies have caused? Who will Americans praise for their leadership and mitigating the worst of a bad situation? Republicans really thought that they were going to run on the pre-COVID economy (a rising tide raises all boats), job creation, and plentiful appointments to the judiciary. Democrats really thought that they were going to run on Trump’s impeachment, an economy that has not served all Americans equally well, some fiery rhetoric about climate change, and hopes for progressive judicial appointments. COVID-19 upended those expectations, tossed ‘em around like a hacky sack, and dangled a jig on their heads.

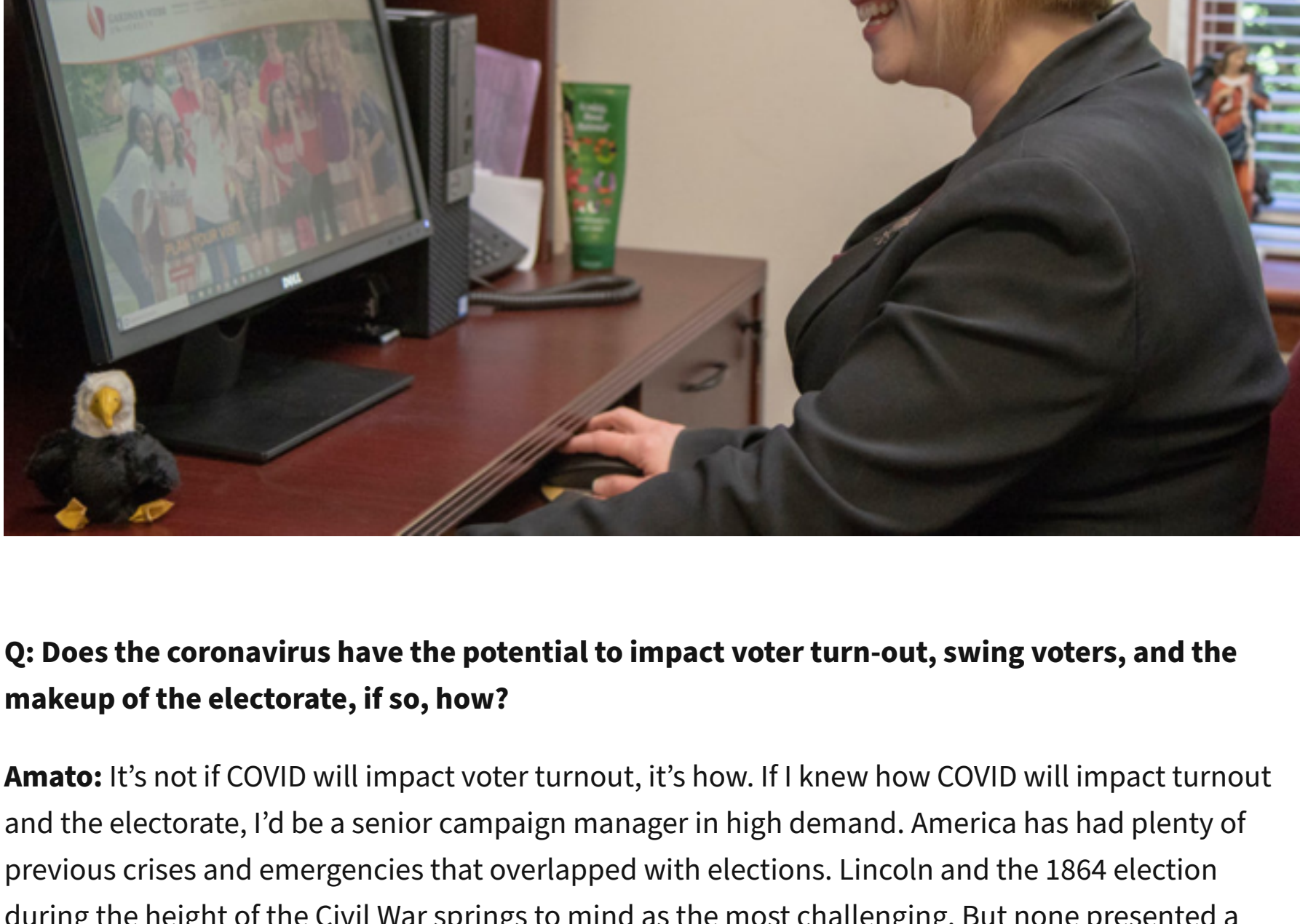
Voters must evaluate candidates based on their performance during the crisis or their promises about what they will do. Voting during a crisis is much harder than during normal times. It’s risky and voters know that their decision will change lives.

The upside is that voters know that their vote matters for their fellow citizens, their friends, neighbors, and their loved ones. During an emergency, we better understand how precarious and precious self-government is.

Q: We have seen a great rise in the media on the topic of voting this fall, how does voting by mail impact election results?

Amato: Voting by mail is like voting in person. Voters should have every confidence that if they mail their ballots, they will be counted. Aside from a very few positions, the United States Postal Service is a civil service institution, and its members are hired on merit and regardless of their political views. The U.S Post Office is an amazing organization and more than capable of delivering ballots to citizens and receiving them. Don’t forget this is the same organization that handles about 2.5 billion pieces of mail during the Christmas season.

Some things you can do: Request your absentee ballot early. Read carefully all the instructions on the ballot. Mail it in at least a week before the general election on Nov. 3.



Q: Does the coronavirus have the potential to impact voter turn-out, swing voters, and the makeup of the electorate, if so, how?

Amato: It’s not if COVID will impact voter turnout, it’s how. If I knew how COVID will impact turnout and the electorate, I’d be a senior campaign manager in high demand. America has had plenty of previous crises and emergencies that overlapped with elections. Lincoln and the 1864 election during the height of the Civil War springs to mind as the most challenging. But none presented a challenge in which voters might be too concerned for their health to go to the polls.

There are two opposing forces on voter turnout. People might stay away from the polls out of an abundance of caution. Or, they may make the effort to go to the polls since so much is at stake with the election, namely, our political leadership during the rest of this pandemic.

I’ll go out on a limb here and make a few predictions. The great thing about studying politics is that you learn to be bold in making predictions. Not because you’re likely to be right, but because human beings are unpredictable and fascinating.

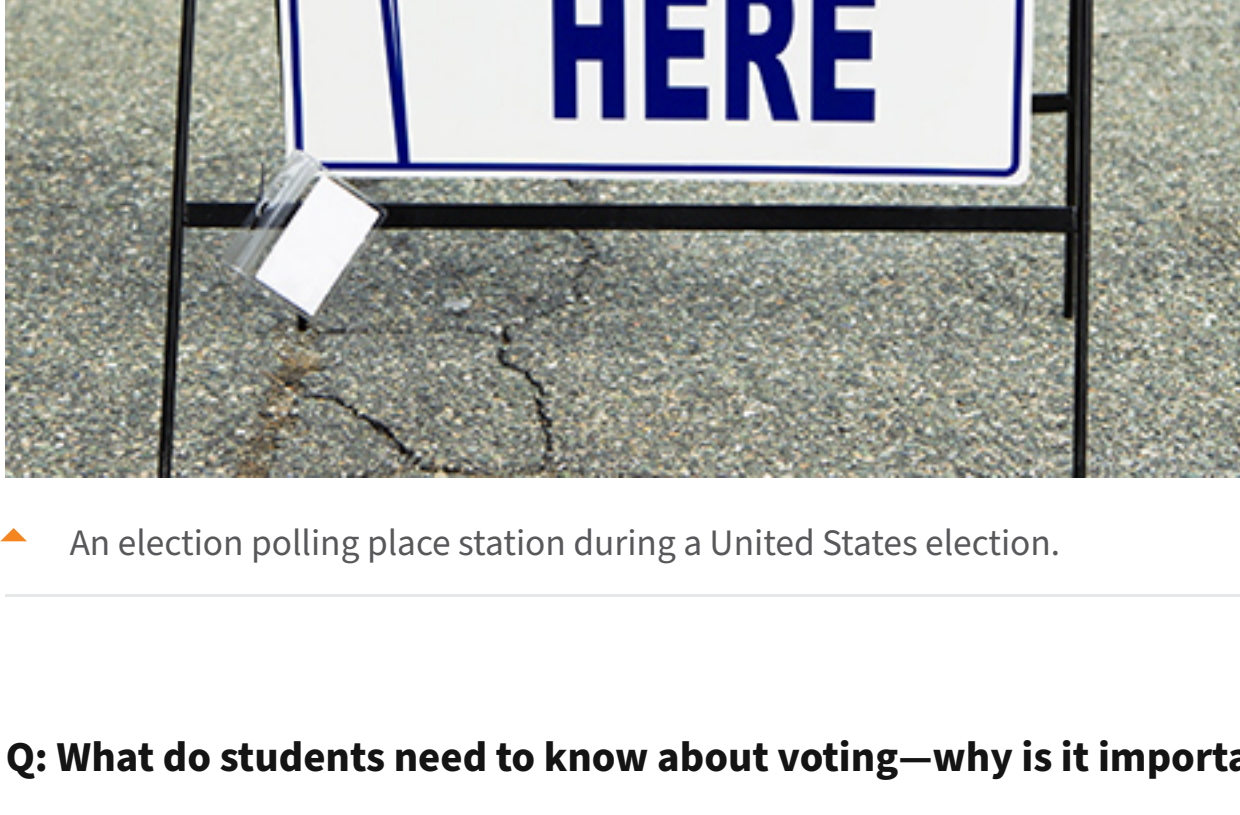
My predictions are likely disappointing—the numbers aren’t going to shift that much. Because they rarely do. Crisis or not.

Seniors are always reliable voters, and I predict that seniors will still come to the polls or turn to absentee ballots. Seniors may be more strategic when they vote, favoring early voting or the early morning, but vote they will.

The bigger issue with seniors is that there’s likely to be a decline in volunteers to serve at polling stations. Seniors are almost half of all polling stations volunteers.

People are always hopeful that the young will have high voter turnout and shift the election. This is wishful thinking. It’s wishful thinking because people want to “lock in” young voters as either Democrats and Republicans.

COVID won’t draw more young people to the polls however much it affects their lives. If more young people go the polls, it will be out of concern for social justice reform and the racial justice protests from this summer.



▲ An election polling place station during a United States election.

Q: What do students need to know about voting—why is it important to vote?

Amato: You should vote.

When I ask students why don’t they vote, they respond that they think it doesn’t matter—their vote won’t make a difference. You should vote because you hold a precious portion of the sovereign power of the American people. Voting is important not because you’re going to swing the election your way, but because it’s up to you to use that power well. You are morally accountable for how you used the political power that belongs to you. So vote and vote thoughtfully. It is a grave and awesome power to vote. Vote according to your conscience and what you believe to be true.

Q: Why should individuals vote in local elections?

Amato: Local elections are so important. Everyone cares so much about who will be president, but the president does not have much influence in your life. Whoever the president appoints to the head of the FDA won’t change your life. Remember, the person who is your sheriff matters so much more for how law will be enforced in your community.

Local officials are the people who live in your community and affect in direct and meaningful ways the lives of your neighbors, your loved ones, and you. Caring about local elections invests individuals in their communities. It’s true participatory democracy. You have a heightened responsibility to care for your local community, precisely because it is yours and you share your everyday life with the people in it.

Q: Any final observations about this election year?

Amato: Buckle up, it’s going to be bumpy ride.

Register to Vote

There is still time to register to vote and become educated about the issues. The last day to register in North Carolina is Oct. 9, but North Carolina also allows residents to register during early voting, Oct. 15-31. In addition, college students can vote in the town where they go to school.

[Learn more about voting in North Carolina.](#)

<p>PREVIOUS NEWS ARTICLE</p> <p>Deaf Alumnus Advocates for and Inspires the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community</p> <p>OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS SEPTEMBER 14, 2020</p>	<p>NEXT NEWS ARTICLE</p> <p>Gardner-Webb President Names Brian Arnold as Interim Vice President of Student Development</p> <p>OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS SEPTEMBER 17, 2020</p>
--	--

Related News

[See All News](#)

NEWS ARTICLE

Each Member of Gardner-Webb’s Delegation to National Alpha Chi Convention is a Winner

Students Bring Home Top Prizes in Scholarships and Collaborative Research Competition BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—At the Alpha Chi National Convention and centennial celebration, delegates from Gardner-Webb University made their own history. [...]

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS | APRIL 1, 2022

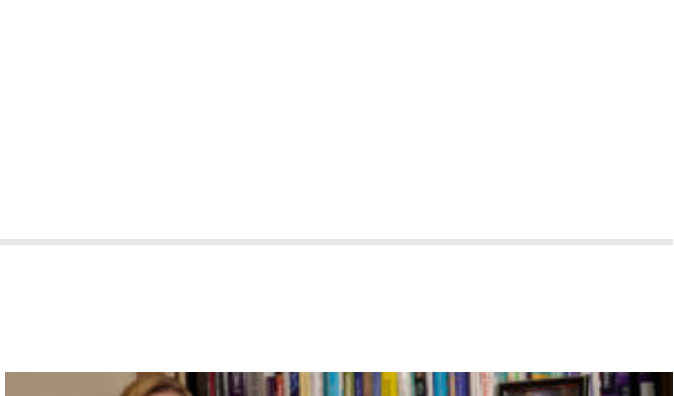


NEWS ARTICLE

GWU’s Noel Center for Disability Resources Promotes World Autism Awareness Day and Acceptance Month

On April 1, Wristbands Supporting Students Living with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be Distributed on Campus BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—World Autism Awareness Day is on April 2, and the observance on [...]

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS | APRIL 1, 2022



NEWS ARTICLE

Gardner-Webb President Downs Appoints New Faculty Athletic Representative

Dr. Sharon Webb will Fill NCAA-Mandated Position to Advocate and Support Student-Athletes BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb President William Downs recently announced the appointment of Dr. Sharon Webb as the new Faculty [...]

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS | MARCH 30, 2022

