



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

150 West State Street, Trenton NJ 08608

Phone (609) 989-1100

QuickTakes!

William Paterson University President Waldron Inspires All to Exercise the Precious Right to Vote

November 7, 2016

The following op-ed appeared in NorthJersey.com on Sunday, November 6, 2016

I had the great honor of welcoming 35 immigrants who took the Oath of Allegiance last month and became American citizens during a naturalization ceremony at the historic Paterson Great Falls National Historic Park. It was such a fitting location for this wonderful ceremony, the same location where Alexander Hamilton, himself an immigrant from the West Indies, envisioned how the Great Falls could generate the power for running factories and mills as the young country began to industrialize.

These new citizens came from many countries – Bangladesh, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Venezuela – following in the path of the millions of immigrants who have made the often difficult decision to leave their homes and come to the United States to build a new life. The 35 individuals obtaining citizenship that day deliberately chose to become active citizens of this country and to cherish its rights and responsibilities, including the right to vote.

For me, the ceremony was particularly moving. I, too, am the descendant of immigrants who were naturalized. My grandparents emigrated from Italy at the end of the 19th century for economic reasons. My grandmother, who arrived at Ellis Island as a child accompanied by her teenage aunt, left her parents in Naples and never saw them again. My grandfather emigrated from Rome and also passed through Ellis Island to start a life in Brooklyn, New York. He met my grandmother, they got married, started a family and eventually owned their own printing business.

My grandfather, who was naturalized in 1928, voted every year for the rest of his life, kept informed about politics and current events, and thought America was the greatest country in the world. He was proud of his eight children and 30 grandchildren, of which I am one.

At William Paterson University, many of our students, about 30 percent, are the first in their families to go to college. Many have parents born in other countries, and bring their unique

www.njascu.org

*The College of New Jersey
Kean University
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Rowan University*

*Stockton University
Thomas Edison State University
William Paterson University*

backgrounds, cultures and experiences to the campus in their quest to live their own version of the American dream.

We are proud of our university's commitment to civic engagement, including our requirement that new undergraduates complete at least one course that includes a community participation activity.

Students on our campus contributed more than 7,200 hours of community service last year. We are especially proud that many have partnered with the Great Falls National Historic Park on projects that will help the community learn about this historic resource.

One of the most important ways we express active engagement as citizens is by voting. With today's explosion of information technology – from Facebook to Twitter and YouTube – we all have a more direct way to make our voices and opinions heard, to engage in public life. But the one way in which your voice truly makes an impact in a democracy is when you choose to cast your vote.

We work hard each year on our campus to register students to vote. It is our right and our responsibility as members of a democracy to help choose the direction of our country on the issues that matter to us. I urge everyone to participate in this essential right as an American citizen.

Thirty-five new citizens were sworn in just in time. Over 1,000 new student voters are now registered just in time. Exercising the precious right to vote should never be taken for granted.