

Martin Richard Institute for Social Justice



OUR MISSION

The mission of the Martin Richard Institute for Social Justice is to build knowledge about social justice, to develop skills for advancing social justice through individual and collective action, and to serve as a catalyst for actualizing Bridgewater State University's commitment to social justice.

CONTRIBUTORS

Thank you to our BSU partners, advisory board, sponsors and individual donors for their dedication and support of our work. We look forward to continuing this important work as part of the Division of Outreach and Engagement.

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Social Justice in the Classroom

A truly interdisciplinary program, the Social Justice Studies minor brings to life the mission of MRISJ in the classroom by intentionally building social justice into the academic curriculum. The two required courses (SOJU 200 and SOJU 400) help students build a strong foundation in social justice, and are specifically developed to prepare students to address issues at the local and national levels.

BSU's new Social Justice Studies minor was approved in spring 2024, passing governance in a coordinated effort by former MRISJ Academic Director Dr. Kevin McGowan, campus administrators and faculty partners.

In fall 2024, MRISJ's new Academic Director Dr. José Lara hit the ground running as minor coordinator to ensure the program's success. Through hands-on recruitment efforts including individual student outreach, relationship development with student-facing offices and strategic engagement of BSU faculty, Dr. Lara played a pivotal role in the successful launch of the Social Justice Studies minor in its full first academic year.



Dr. José Lara and Dr. Kevin McGowan with the first students to graduate with the minor.

"I have learned that social justice is something that still needs to be talked about and fought for because, to this day, not everybody has equal rights, opportunities or access to resources..."

BSU currently offers 135 approved, existing elective courses that fulfill minor requirements for its four elective courses, making the minor accessible to students from many disciplines by design. Many of these courses also offer online or hybrid options, and with increased student interest, the minor was recently approved for students in the College of Continuing Studies.

In fact, 57% of the eligible courses also fulfill at least one core requirement, including the required SOJU 200 introductory course, which was designed to meet the necessary criteria for core designation. These factors help facilitate student graduation by making it easier to complete the minor alongside other graduation requirements.

In just its first year, the Social Justice Studies minor already has an enrollment of 32 students, offered the first sections of both required courses and saw the first two students graduate with the minor.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

A Culture of Service

The MRISJ organizes large-scale service projects in observance of three national days of service: 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance, MLK Day of Service and Earth Day. These annual events encourage BSU students, faculty, staff and alumni to come together in service to our community.

Annual days of service help build a culture of service across the university and teach students the importance of community engagement through a social justice lens. Through participation in our annual service events, students learned about topics including food insecurity, survivor support, sustainability and housing instability directly from our community partners.

For some students, these service projects serve as their first touchpoint with MRISJ, helping to establish a foundation in volunteerism. Whether a student is volunteering for the first time or signing up for an annual favorite, our service projects and local service trips provide a pathway for students to find their community, forge new friendships and connections with peers from various disciplines and find inspiration to serve their community throughout college and beyond.

In academic year 2024-2025, 429 Bears joined us to serve a total of 1,358 hours on campus and with community partners in Acushnet, Attleboro, Bridgewater, Dartmouth, East Bridgewater and Pembroke across all service opportunities, including local service trips and annual days of service.



Volunteers assemble comfort kits with Project PACK at MLK Day of Service.

Exploring New Partnerships

In partnership with local nonprofit organizations, MRISJ also offers regular service opportunities throughout the year that allow students to learn about different social justice topics and make an impact in their community. These service trips take students off campus and into the community to gain hands-on volunteer experience in small groups and build their network beyond campus.

MRISJ cultivated new partnerships with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Plymouth County and the Old Colony Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Attleboro in 2024-2025. These projects offered students the opportunity to engage in hands-on service as they assisted on a house building project in Plymouth and completed reorganization tasks to enhance the ReStore space and help raise funds for Habitat for Humanity in Attleboro.

Wearing the Bear

As part of our on-campus voter engagement and education efforts last November, the MRISJ sponsored a special BSU Votes edition of Wear the Bear Wednesday. Joined by Bristaco, MRISJ staff and student employees visited Boyden Hall, Rondileau Student Union, University Park and East Campus Commons to encourage students to get out the vote with a chance to win limited edition BSU Votes t-shirts created in partnership with Program Council and Student Life. With only 500 BSU Votes t-shirts up for grabs, students answered voting trivia to win their prize.

Later that day, voting and civic action ambassadors also hosted a voter registration table where they helped students check or update their voter registration, register as a first-time voter and offered another chance to win a shirt.



Vice Presidents Diane Bell and Lucy Croft pose with Bristaco.

ALTERNATIVE BREAK

MRISJ's Alternative Break program continued to expand this year, offering four social justice-focused experiences for undergraduate students. All four opportunities were designed to be affordable while providing enriching, engaging experiences for students to explore their values and how they connect with their academic and career goals.

Alternative Break provides an immersive experience for BSU undergraduates from all disciplines to explore social justice themes, discover their values and build skills. This year a total of 27 student participants, eight student team leaders and nine faculty and staff learning partners participated in the Alternative Break program.

The 2025 Experiences

Coastal Restoration & Environmental Justice | New Orleans, LA

Eight students explored the impacts of climate change and natural disaster on coastal communities with Common Ground Relief in New Orleans, Louisiana. Throughout the week, participants planted over 500 trees to aid in the restoration of coastal ecosystems, a lasting impact of Hurricane Katrina even 20 years later. Students also witnessed the economic and racial disparities that exist between neighborhoods as they traveled within the city, noting predominantly Black neighborhoods still have many homes needing to be rebuilt or fixed.

Advocacy, Policy & Storytelling | Southeastern MA

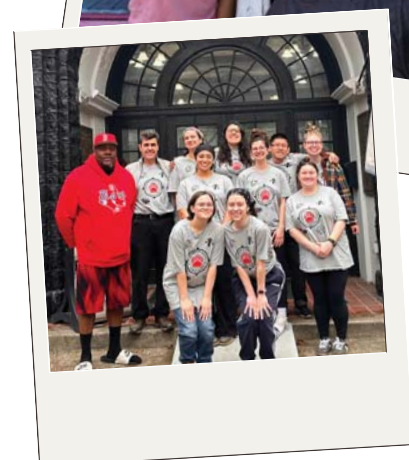
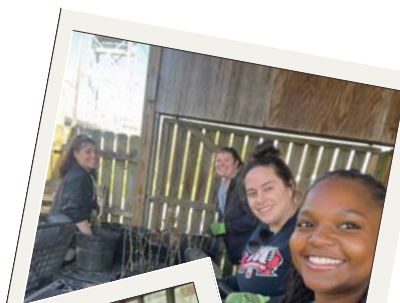
In partnership with local community organization Coalition for Social Justice (CSJ) Education Fund, eight students spent an immersive week learning about advocacy and policy work across Southeastern Massachusetts. The team was trained on storytelling as a tool for advocacy and communicating with legislators as they prepared to visit the State House. Participants also met with representatives from BSU's Center for Student Support to volunteer with BSU's Food Pantry and learned about food insecurity on college campuses, a topic that hits close to home for many students.

Civil Rights & Restorative Justice | Selma, AL

Returning to the Selma, Alabama, eight students kicked off their experience at the turning point of the Civil Rights movement with the Selma Center for Nonviolence, Truth and Reconciliation alongside two BSU learning partners. Participants immersed themselves in the local community through direct service and trainings on nonviolent conflict resolution, racial equity and restorative justice. The experience also included excursions to the Voting Rights Museum in Birmingham as well as the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum in Montgomery.

Community Health & Wellbeing | Williamson, WV

For the first time, a group of seven students and three learning partners collaborated with local organization AllPeopleBeHappy to learn about the diverse culture and heritage of Appalachia. The team learned about economic sustainability and community agriculture through hands-on service. Touching down just one month after devastating floods in the region, participants experienced firsthand the impacts of natural disasters on rural communities. Participants also witnessed the power of community coming together to aid in rebuilding efforts as they attended a local benefit concert.



Top to Bottom: (1) Students and learning partners work in the nursery in New Orleans, (2) the local team travels to the MA State House for a day of advocacy, (3) the Selma team enjoys an ice cream, (4) students in Williamson pose in front of the Chamber of Commerce.

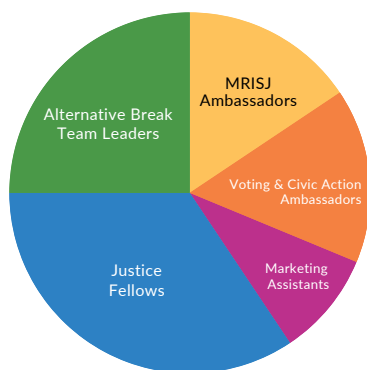
STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

The Next Generation of Leaders

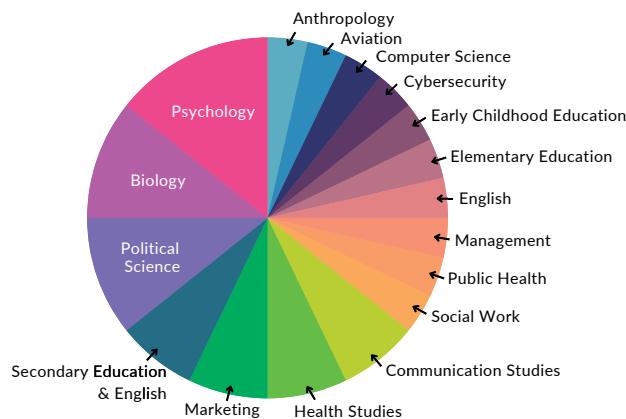
Student employees play an important role in fulfilling the MRISJ's mission while gaining important skills and professional experience. Undergraduate students are paid to work in a variety of roles including Alternative Break team leaders, ambassadors, justice fellows, marketing assistants and voting & civic action ambassadors. Through training and hands-on experiences, they identify the distinct ways that service, community organizing and individual and collective action can create positive social change.

Student employees learn about important social justice issues, explore their personal and professional values and discover the implicit and explicit ways that social justice connects to their disciplines and future career. Each of our student employees is compensated for their time – including trainings, meetings and mileage reimbursement (for those working in the community) – to promote equity and make these opportunities accessible to students from various backgrounds, experience levels and majors. The following charts highlight some key demographics of our 32 student employees during 2024-2025.

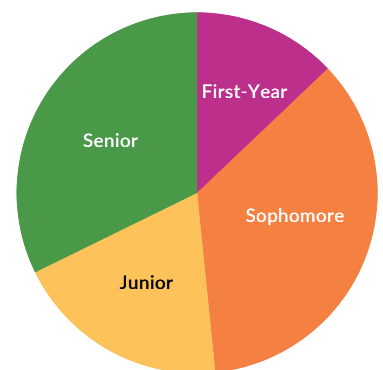
Student Role



Major



Class Year



Alternative Break Team Leaders

Team leaders work in pairs to plan and implement our Alternative Break program with support from MRISJ staff. They work with us throughout the year, attending regular cohort meetings and trainings on topics such as communication and conflict resolution, as they develop the plan for each of their Alternative Break experiences. Team leaders support the recruitment of Alternative Break participants and prepare their teams for direct service and hands-on education during the week of spring break. Following the experience, team leaders reflect on their own experiences, facilitate post-trip reflection for participants and help prepare for the next year's program.

Ambassadors

Our ambassador program allows returning students to continue their work with MRISJ while pursuing new employment, student teaching or internship opportunities in their majors. Ambassadors represent the institute for a few hours each month and engage their peers at various events across campus to spread awareness of MRISJ programs and initiatives, encourage peers to sign up for events and support recruitment of new student employees.

Marketing Assistants

Marketing assistants gain hands-on experience creating digital and print materials to spread the word about MRISJ's many programs, events and initiatives. These students collaborate with MRISJ's Marketing Coordinator to create peer-to-peer voter education materials, flyers, videos and other digital content, bringing our work to life through social media and across campus.

Justice Fellows

The MRISJ's Justice Fellow program offers a unique cohort-based learning opportunity to undergraduate students, pairing them with a nonprofit organization or campus initiative. Students engage in project-based work to develop skills and knowledge of different positive social change strategies.

Justice fellows are paid by the MRISJ for up to 14 hours of work and training per week. They engage in meaningful work around topics such as educational equity, youth development, voter engagement and education, community organizing and volunteerism. This past year, justice fellows worked with:

Community Partners

- Bridgewater Senior Center, *Bridgewater*
- ■ ▲ ● Brockton Interfaith Community (BIC), *Brockton*
- ◆ Easterseals MA, *Bridgewater*
- ● Habitat for Humanity of Greater Plymouth County, *Plymouth*
- ▲ ◆ ● Old Colony YMCA, *Brockton*
- ▲ ◆ Raising Multicultural Kids (RMK), *Easton*

Campus Initiatives

- ■ ◆ ● Accessibility with Student Accessibility Services at BSU
- ■ ▲ ● Community Health and Prevention with BSU Wellness Center
- ● Peer Sexuality Educator with BSU Sexual Violence Advocacy and Support Center

Key: ● Community Engagement ■ Civic Engagement ▲ Racial Justice ◆ Educational Equity ● Advocacy

Voting and Civic Action Ambassadors

Voting and civic action ambassadors work alongside MRISJ staff and BSU's Newman Civic Fellow to enhance the institute's portfolio of student-led civic action events and activities. These students host voter education and registration drives and lead educational events for students to learn about advocacy strategies on campus and in the community.



EXCEL-ling in the Workplace

This year MRISJ welcomed back Shannon for her second and final year as EXCEL program intern. During her internship she planned and executed two on-campus service projects creating fleece tie blankets to be donated to local organizations. Through collaboration with other student employees, Shannon gained hands-on experience in program planning, community building and marketing.

Shannon also showcased her passions for social justice and accessibility by creating a poster for Student Accessibility Services' annual BeSeen event. Displayed at MRISJ's table, her poster outlined the ways in which different accommodations support people with cognitive disabilities.

Accomplishments and Awards

In addition to their work with MRISJ, many of our students are leaders in other areas across campus. Please join us in celebrating a few notable accomplishments from this year.

- Andrea was selected as a recipient of the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship.
- Three students participated in study abroad experiences through BSU's Study Abroad Office.
- Sophia Q. and Sophia V. (Impact Award for Student Leadership) and Summa (Bridgewater's Best) received Impact Awards through the Center for Student Engagement.
- 20 MRISJ student employees made the Dean's list at least one semester this academic year.



President Clark & Vice President Croft pose with MRISJ student employee Summa.

VOTER ENGAGEMENT

This academic year, MRISJ hosted a total of 30 events promoting voter education and engagement among BSU students, faculty and staff. Of these events, 26 took place during the first ten weeks of the fall semester to provide students with the knowledge and resources to be informed voters in the 2024 Presidential Election.

Voter Registration

To meet our goal of increasing the number of students registered to vote outlined in BSU's Civic Action Plan, the MRISJ team hosted a total of 30 voter engagement events on campus, including 18 voter registration tables, seven workshops focused on voter registration and creating a voting plan and one campus engagement event ahead of the voter registration deadline.

Collaborating with Residence Life & Housing, Dining Services and Off-Campus and Commuter Services we offered targeted vote plan workshops and voter registration tables in high-traffic student spaces across campus. This included events in three residence halls, three dining halls and two commuter parking lots to reach both resident and commuter students.



VCAA Andrea helps a student register as a first-time voter.

Educational Resources

Our voting and civic action ambassadors led the charge and provided peer-to-peer education on the importance of voting, shared voter education resources and assisted students looking to register as a first-time voter or update their voter registration status. Among these resources were our *Get Out the Vote* and *Voting After Graduation* brochures. Designed through a collaboration between our justice fellows and marketing assistants with support from MRISJ staff, they provided students with information about voting and connected them with reputable sources and organizations.

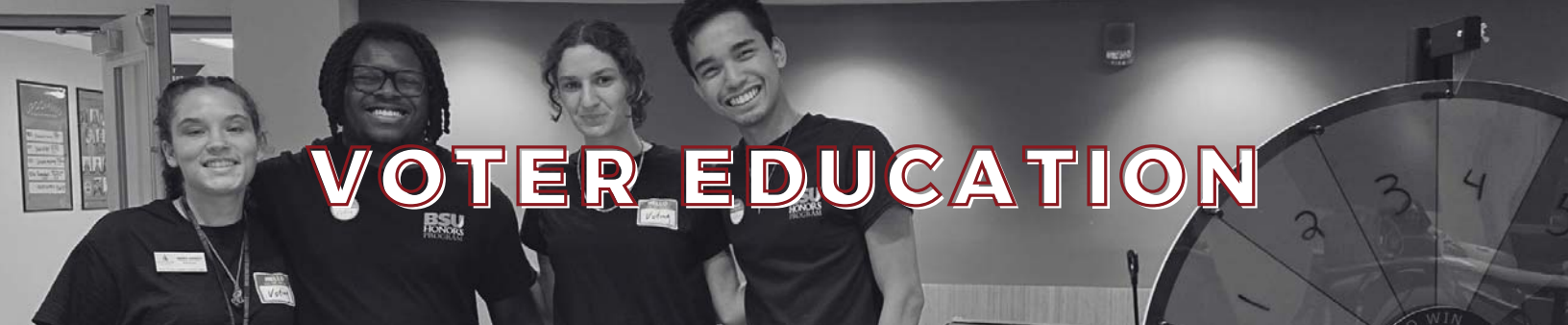
We also introduced our #VoteReady bookmarks and voting plan postcards. Each bookmark outlined actions steps for students to be #VoteReady along with important deadlines and upcoming elections in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, while our vote plan postcard provided an outline for students to plan when, where and how they would cast their ballot. Informed by frequently asked questions from students about voting, MRISJ also finalized a new brochure for first-time voters debuting in fall 2025, developed by student marketing assistants and staff.

Communicating Across Campus

To further promote the campus-wide BSU Votes initiative, MRISJ developed and distributed an Election 2024 toolkit for faculty and staff use. This toolkit included BSU Votes-branded slide decks with voter information and deadlines, sample copy for communication with students, digital copies of our two voting brochures and links to additional voter engagement resources.

In addition, MRISJ collaborated with the Division of Enrollment, Marketing and Communication to send regular all-campus emails identifying upcoming voter registration deadlines, voter education events and links to additional resources. These emails directed folks to *Get Vote Ready BSU*, a temporary intranet page developed through this collaboration as a one-stop-shop for voter education.

Our staff also worked closely with campus partners from the Center for Student Engagement to provide regularly scheduled content for the BSU Mobile App promoting important election dates and deadlines, voter education events on campus and to coordinate Mobile App takeovers for National Voter Registration Day and National Voter Education Week. Our marketing team also created Election Day videos featuring messages from folks across campus including President Clark, students, staff, faculty, student athletes and coaches from Athletics and more, encouraging all members of the community to get out and vote.



VOTER EDUCATION

Celebrating the Civic Holidays

Each year, MRISJ coordinates the development and submission of BSU's Civic Action Plan, which describes our campus's strategies for achieving goals for student voter registration and student voter turnout, as part of ALL IN's Campus Democracy Challenge. In order to meet these goals, MRISJ served as a campus partner for the Civic Holidays: National Voter Registration Day (Sept. 17), National Voter Education Week (Oct. 7-11), Vote Early Day (Oct. 29) and Election Hero Day (Nov. 4).

Our participation in these nonpartisan days of action helped to strengthen and celebrate our nation's democracy and achieve excellence in nonpartisan student democratic engagement. The Civic Holidays celebrate the voting experience with each holiday correlating to the distinct phases of democratic participation: registering to vote, making a plan, casting a ballot, and thanking those who make elections possible.

National Voter Registration Day

The team hit the ground running in September with our VoteFest voter engagement fair in celebration of National Voter Registration Day. Over 100 members of the BSU community joined us in MRISJ's backyard to check or update their voter registration, register as first-time voters and learn about the democratic process in preparation for Election Day in November.

In addition to our voter registration and activity stations, MRISJ's faculty associates distributed pocket constitutions to honor Constitution Day and representatives from Community Health and Prevention shared information about civic wellness and the #Vote4Health initiative.



Valerie Bassett (Community Health and Prevention) talks with students about Vote4Health at VoteFest.

National Voter Education Week

Get Vote Ready Fair

MRISJ kicked off National Voter Education Week with our Get Vote Ready voter resource fair joined by local organizations, campus partners and BSU student groups involved in voter education efforts on campus and in the community. Attendees connected with our partners to learn more about key issues on the ballot, gain a better understanding of the election process, create personalized voting plans and discover where to get information on candidates, ballot questions and more to be informed at the polls.

Voting Your Values with ACLU of Massachusetts

Guest speakers from the ACLU of Massachusetts' Racial Justice Team joined us on campus for a presentation on the importance of voting your values. They highlighted key voting rights, discussed the ACLU's legislative and legal work within the Massachusetts system and emphasized how students can influence policy in their communities. Presenters also provided insights on how to navigate the ballot and understanding the importance of election protection before, during and after the election.

The Power of Young Voters

To close out the week, MRISJ welcomed Manny DeBrito, '00, and Mark Pacheco, '17, back to campus alongside Ryan Lyons and Melissa Langham for an interactive workshop on the power of young voters to affect change. Mr. DeBrito (Chairperson of the Election Commission, New Bedford), Mr. Pacheco (Director of Elections, Taunton), Mr. Lyons (Chairman and Director of the Election Commission, Fall River) and Ms. Langham (Election Commissioner, Taunton) shared the importance of involving people of all ages in the election process within their local communities. The workshop also highlighted the many ways young people can impact elections, voter turnout and other ways college students can get involved in local government such as volunteering as poll workers.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic Speaker Series

Our 2024-2025 Civic Speaker Series brought 131 students, staff, faculty, alumni and members of the greater Bridgewater community together to highlight civic leaders. This signature series features multiple speakers throughout the year and inspires attendees to spark conversation, share ideas, and act for social change, in line with our mission to advance social justice through individual and collective action.

In October 2024, we welcomed Dr. Danielle Allen for a conversation on the importance of civic education and democratic engagement in young people. Our second Civic Speaker of the year, Dr. Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, joined us in February 2025 for a discussion on the power of representation through art and media to spark change.

Discussing the “Hot Topics”

First introduced in fall 2024, our *Hot Topics* series broke down and demystified “hot topics” from the election cycle and provided students with information needed to be well-informed voters. With many complex issues appearing on their ballots, these sessions helped participants identify what they knew, thought and felt about these important issues and engaged them in healthy political conversations in a welcoming, nonpartisan space. These topics included: climate change, immigration, LGBTQIA+ rights, reproductive rights and the second amendment and gun control.

Each *Hot Topics* session was facilitated by one of MRISJ’s faculty associates and included panelists who provided a crash course on the various aspects of the hot topic issues. Panelists included BSU faculty members, students and representatives from local community organizations to provide an overview and facilitate conversation among students.

The series returned in the spring to take a deeper dive into immigration, LGBTQIA+ rights, reproductive rights and Project 2025, to help students navigate these issues in a post-election landscape. *Hot Topics 2.0* sessions facilitated timely conversations about Presidential and Congressional actions as these issues evolved at the federal level. In conversations facilitated by MRISJ staff and student voting and civic action ambassadors, MRISJ provided information on each of these issues and introduced local organizations and resources available to learn more and get involved.

Serving as issue experts, guest speakers from Reproductive Equity Now, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of MA, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition, BSU’s GLBT Pride Center and BAMSJ’s Trans Community Outreach Resources & Empowerment (TCORE) team presented on how new and proposed federal actions could impact individuals and communities. Across both semesters, a total of 350 members of the BSU community joined us for these important conversations.

Campus Compact Newman Civic Fellowship

Each year BSU nominates one student to serve as a student leader on campus through the Campus Compact Newman Civic Fellowship. This program offers leadership opportunities, mentorship and connects the fellow to a network of student leaders from across the nation. BSU hosts a fellow as a member institution of Campus Compact, a higher education association dedicated to civic and community engagement in higher education.

Our 2024-2025 Newman Civic Fellow, Summa Slater, ’25, represented BSU at the Newman Civic Fellow national convening where she connected with a network of student leaders from member institutions across the country. We look forward to welcoming Joshua Neff, ’27, as our 2025-2026 Newman Civic Fellow.



Summa (left) conversing with other Newman Civic Fellows at the national convening.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Creating a Culture of Advocacy

This spring MRISJ hosted our second annual advocacy fair on campus, inviting community organizations from across the region to share more about their work and the important role advocacy plays in creating sustainable, lasting change. This event connected students with peers from BSU and local organizations to learn about advocacy efforts and the different ways they can engage on campus and in their communities. Advocacy topics included accessibility, civic engagement, civil rights, gun violence, immigration, LGBTQIA+ rights, mental health and more.

Activate the Advocate

This spring we launched a new Activate the Advocate series developed by BSU's 2024-2025 Newman Civic Fellow Summa Slater and supported by a \$1,500 mini-grant she was awarded from Campus Compact. She worked collaboratively with MRISJ staff to bring her program to life from the initial proposal to post-program evaluation. This two-part series offered students the opportunity to build their advocacy knowledge and skills in a hands-on advocacy 101 workshop, followed by an optional trip to the Massachusetts State House.

Advocacy 101 Workshop

In part one Activate the Advocate participants attended an interactive workshop led by our Newman Civic Fellow and supported by voting and civic action ambassadors and MRISJ staff. These sessions helped students identify their social justice values and provided them with the knowledge and resources to become more civically engaged. The session started with the basics, reviewing the branches of government to identify the many ways their voices can advocate for change at the local, state and national levels. Equipped with this foundational knowledge, students were introduced to the various tools available to identify state legislators and advocacy organizations. Students walked through the process on their own devices, looking up their state representatives to become familiar with these resources.

Participants also learned about the impact of storytelling as a tool in advocacy work, crafting narratives that convey their thoughts, ideas and experiences and make their voices heard. As a group they practiced using legislative scripts as a template for communicating with legislators, using these as a step-by-step plan to put their thoughts into action. In total, 43 students completed one of our two advocacy 101 workshops.

State House Visit

Activate the Advocate also offered an optional part two, a trip to the Massachusetts State House, for students who completed an advocacy 101 workshop. This excursion offered students the opportunity to put their knowledge into action and gain real world experience connecting with their elected officials.

Nine students met with Representative Dennis Gallagher (Plymouth County) and then-BSU senior and legislative aide Evan Francis, '25, before joining them for a guided tour of the State House. Participants also had scheduled meetings with staffers from their state representatives' and state senators' offices to advocate for and discuss the issues that were important to them.



Summa leads an advocacy 101 workshop.



Representative Dennis Gallagher gives students a tour of the House chamber.

FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

Collaborating with Faculty Associates

As MRISJ Academic Director, Dr. José Lara coordinates BSU's new Social Justice Studies minor and consults with BSU full-time and part-time faculty about how to include social justice concepts and approaches into their courses, scholarship and departmental work. MRISJ's two faculty associates, Dr. Seth Meyer (Political Science) and Dr. Sheena Rancher (Special Education), worked with MRISJ staff to ensure that programs and partnerships benefit from faculty expertise and foster connections and collaborations with academic departments and programs. Faculty associates serve as a voice for faculty and librarians as the MRISJ plans and delivers programs and events.

This year our faculty partners served as leaders in social justice education events and initiatives by:

- Planning and serving as co-facilitators of MRISJ's fall 2024 *Hot Topics* series of five voter education workshops.
- Collaborating with MRISJ staff to plan and lead the 2025 MRISJ summer faculty institute on social justice and change making in teaching.
- Co-planning and participating in social justice education events such as a shared community reading of Fredrick Douglass' *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July* in February and a documentary screening of *Las Amazonas de Yaxunah* in March.
- Reviewing the 2025 MRISJ summer faculty mini-grant applications and selecting recipients.

Social Justice Beyond Classroom

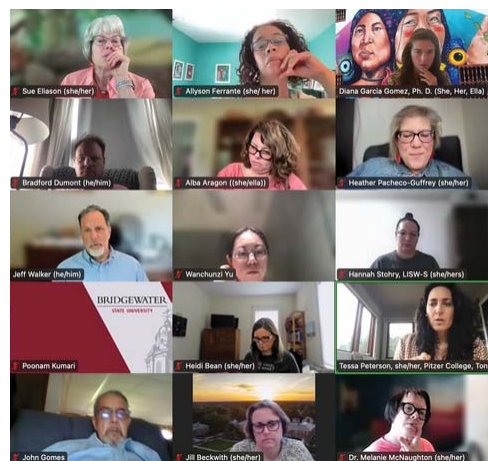
In February 2025, MRISJ co-sponsored an off-campus excursion with the Department of Dance and Undergraduate Research to visit the *Edges of Ailey* exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York City. Led by Professor Tina Mullone, 23 students experienced social justice through the arts as they explored stories of what it means to be Black in America throughout the multimedia exhibit. The trip was a fitting start to Black History Month, touching on themes of Black excellence, representation and inclusion.

Faculty Institute

MRISJ offers an annual institute for faculty to support their professional development and lifelong learning to incorporate social justice in their multifaceted work at BSU.

Our 2025 faculty institute, *Social Justice and Changemaking in Your Teaching*, featured Pitzer College professor and administrator Dr. Tessa Hicks Peterson, author of *Liberating the Classroom: Healing and Justice in Higher Education and Student Development and Social Justice*. Dr. Peterson shared her expertise in how to incorporate social justice into the classroom and how to build relationships and commitment to the community.

We welcomed a total of 45 participants from BSU, with 34 full-time faculty, 6 part-time faculty and 5 administrators from 22 different academic departments including biology, education, childhood studies, criminal justice, English, psychology, mathematics, management, marketing, social work and others.



Screenshot from Zoom of summer faculty institute participants.

"...Tessa provided very good definitions and foundations for social justice. She has a breadth of knowledge and experience in social justice, and.. I really appreciate the opportunity to connect with other faculty on campus who also value social justice. Several faculty shared their own experience, and it was very helpful," said one participant in their reflection.

Faculty Mini-Grants

The MRISJ awards small monetary grants ranging from \$500-\$1,750 to part-time and full-time faculty members at BSU. Grants are awarded to faculty for their original research, teaching projects such as creating a new course or updating an existing course, community-engaged projects, purchasing educational resources and departmental learning projects for multiple faculty members within a department.

All projects must be related to social justice. Those that address civic engagement and racial justice, focus on BSU's connection to Bridgewater and Gateway Cities, or are interdisciplinary and collaborative are given priority ratings.

We awarded funding to 19 BSU full and part-time faculty members to support a total of 17 projects including nine teaching projects, three research projects, two departmental learning projects, two resource acquisition grants and one community-engaged project during summer 2025.

Teaching Mini-Grant Highlights

- Dr. Diana García Gómez (Childhood Studies) developed interdisciplinary course, *Global Childhoods*, that will critically examine the concept of childhood worldwide as a social and cultural construct through an antiracist and social justice lens. Students will learn about some of the most debated and prevalent topics that affect children in the Majority World, including migration, armed conflict, child labor/working children's movements and digital media.
- Dr. Colleen Kelly Poplin (Communication) created *Filmmaking for Social Justice*, a new upper-level course that explores how moving image storytelling can amplify community voices, confront systems of injustice and support real-world advocacy. Students will apply core production skills to create short films in collaboration with local nonprofit organizations, with a focus on ethical representation, emotional resonance and the strategic use of cinematic tools to inspire change.
- Dr. Heidi Bean (English) developed an interdisciplinary 200-level applied humanities course, *Fiction and the Ethics of Emerging Technologies*. Faculty members from BSU's chemistry, computer science, English, mathematics and physics departments contributed suggested content for the course, which will combine humanist ethical thought with STEM technological expertise.
- Dr. Myrlene Jean-Venant (Social Work) created a course *Innovative Approaches to Mental Health: Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Clinical Frameworks*, that will equip undergraduate and graduate social work students with the knowledge, skills and self-awareness to address mental health challenges. Anchored in the DEIPAR (diversity, equity, inclusion, intersectionality, power analysis and anti-racism) framework, students will explore identity, positionality, implicit bias and systemic inequities in mental health care.
- Dr. Renee Somers (English) developed a new first-year seminar, *Writing for Justice - Exploring Inequality and Resistance*, that will explore race, gender, class and inequality through contemporary media sources including podcasts, films, TED Talks and journalism. Students will analyze how these social justice issues are portrayed and perceived in public discourse, developing writing and rhetorical skills while examining systems of power and imagining pathways toward resistance and change.



Researching Voter Engagement

In fall 2025, students from Dr. Ashley Hansen-Brown's applied social psychology course will update, administer and analyze a survey for Bridgewater State University students about their civic engagement and activism activities. The class will compare 2025 responses with those from students in 2018, when the survey was first distributed.

Students will learn research and data analysis skills and provide helpful data that the MRISJ will use to develop future learning opportunities. Planning for this class was supported by a summer 2025 MRISJ faculty mini-grant.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Career Readiness

In alignment with BSU's commitment to provide students with access to professional development, skill-building and thriving career pathways, we were excited to offer several opportunities focused on career exploration and readiness for MRISJ-affiliated students.

Collaborating with our colleagues in Career Services and Internships, MRISJ offered a bespoke Life Design studio in which students were guided to identify their strengths and values, explore the skills gained through MRISJ and other experiences on and off-campus and develop an action plan with next steps to help achieve their goals.

We also invited recent BSU alumni who had been involved in MRISJ programs back to campus for our annual alumni panel. They answered questions from current students and shared how their experiences in college shaped their values, skills and career trajectories.

Martin Richard Fellow Scholarship

Established in 2022 by BSU alumni Bill and Denise Richard, both members of the class of '93, the Martin Richard Fellow Scholarship provides a pathway for students to earn their bachelor's degree debt-free in memory of their son Martin Richard.

Each year one student is selected and awarded \$25,000 per year for up to four years (\$100,000 total) at BSU, which includes the cost of tuition, fees, housing, a meal plan, technology and supplies. The scholarship is awarded to a graduating senior from Dorchester's Neighborhood House Charter School who plans to attend Bridgewater State University.

In fall 2024, we welcomed Ethan Figueroa to BSU as the third scholarship recipient.



Additional Partnerships

Community Partners

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Massachusetts
- American Red Cross
- Bridgewater Communities for Civil Rights
- Bridgewater Senior Center Pen Pal Program
- Brockton Interfaith Community
- Coalition for Social Justice Education Fund
- Easterseals of Massachusetts
- Habitat for Humanity of Greater Plymouth County
- Juneteenth Celebration Committee (BCCR)
- National Marrow Donor Program
- Neighborhood House Charter School
- Old Colony Habitat for Humanity
- Old Colony YMCA
- Outreach Program
- Project PACK
- Rhode Island Blood Center
- School on Wheels of Massachusetts
- Sharing the Harvest Community Farm

Campus Partners

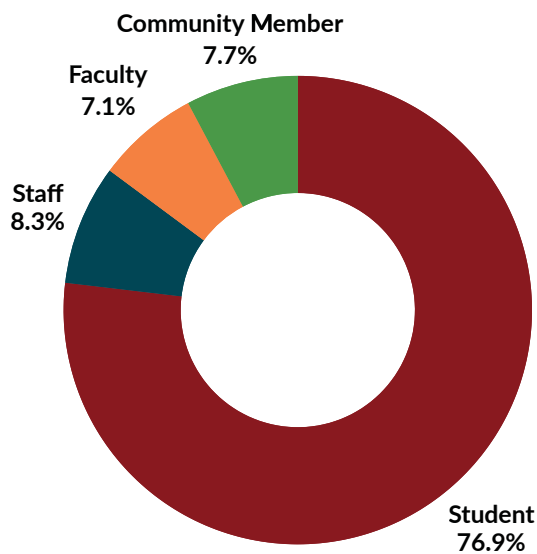
- Academic Achievement Center
- Admissions
- Alumni and Development
- BSU Food Pantry
- Career Services and Internships
- Center for Entrepreneurship and Small Business
- Center for Student Engagement
- Community Health and Prevention
- EXCEL Program
- GLBTA Pride Center
- Honors Program
- International Student and Scholar Services
- Lewis and Gaines Center for Inclusion and Equity
- Residence Life and Housing
- Student Accessibility Services
- Study Abroad
- University Events
- Wellness Center

FACTS & FIGURES

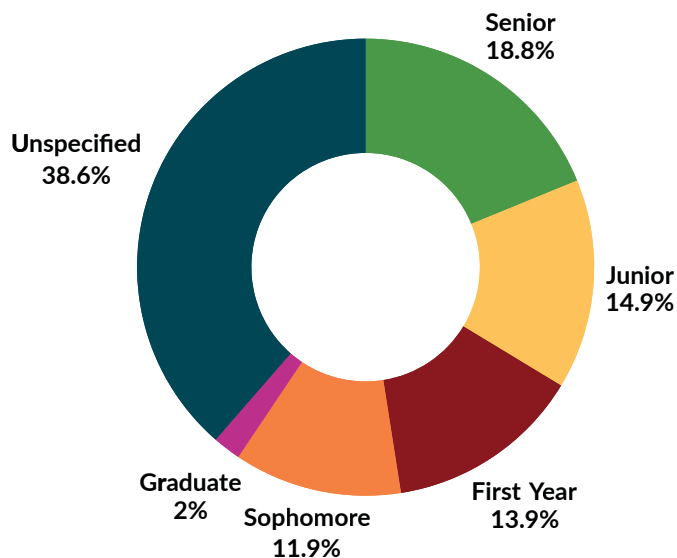
During academic year 2024-25, the Martin Richard Institute for Social Justice welcomed 3,510 students, faculty, staff, and community participants across all of our events and other engagement opportunities. Many folks joined us for multiple events throughout the year, with a total of 1,333 unique participants connecting with the MRISJ. We offered 103 engagement opportunities including service projects, educational events, voter registration tables and cohort-based programs. Cohorts included our justice fellows, alternative break participants and an intergenerational pen pal program offered in collaboration with the Bridgewater Senior Center.

Faculty and students from across the university joined MRISJ, highlighting the interdisciplinary interest in and commitment to social justice within the BSU community. We look forward to continuing our work to advance social justice and empower individuals to take action in their communities.

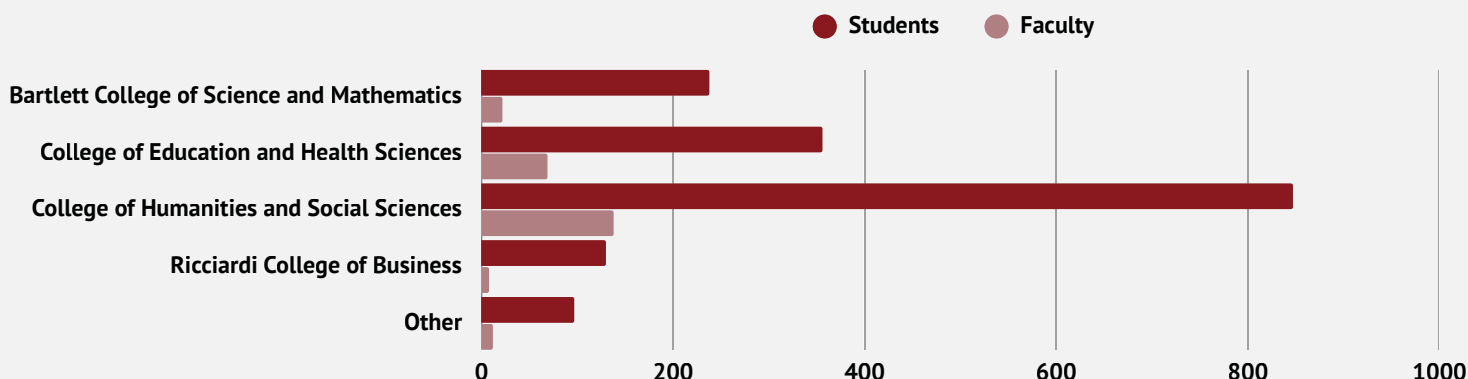
Participation by Affiliation



Student Participation by Class Year



Participation by College Affiliation



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