



**HART Program  
Houston Action Research Team  
Engaged Research Opportunity  
Spring 2021**

## **Evaluating Harris County's New Countywide Voting System**

Harris County introduced a new feature to its elections systems in 2019 when it began operating Election Day Vote Centers (EDVCs) that allow voters to cast ballots at any polling location on Election Day. In 2020, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the County adopted other election reforms including: drive-thru voting, 24-hour voting locations, expanded mail-in ballot drop off locations, and an online line length and wait time calculator. They also implemented a 20-step health and safety protocol at every county polling location. All of these changes were designed to make voting safer, more convenient, and more accessible to Harris County voters.

The Texas Secretary of State requires that the County's EDVC operations be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness over a two year period (2019-2021) before allowing it to become a permanent feature of Harris County elections. However, such an evaluation must take into consideration the other election features recently introduced by the County Clerk's Office. Toward that end, a student team will analyze voters' experiences and preferences during the 2019 and 2020 elections in order to assess the effectiveness and popularity of EDVCs and the other new election opportunities afforded them during the 2020 election cycle. The team's findings will inform which election features the County will prioritize for future election cycles.

### **During the Spring semester of 2021, this Houston Action Research Team will:**

- Use data from the Harris County voter rolls, real-time line length data, as well as online surveys conducted with voters in 2019 and 2020 about their voting experiences.
- Model and identify which polling place attributes are related to factors of voter satisfaction and experience, such as length of lines, time to vote, and ballot completion
- Hypothesize and test explanations for how voters choose when and where to vote
- Measure the turnout effects of offering voters alternative days, times, locations, and methods of voting
- Complete a written report and oral presentation of findings and recommendations for the Harris County Clerk's Office

**This engaged research opportunity is available to Rice undergraduate students for Spring of 2021.** An interdisciplinary team of four students, each of whom will bring different, but equally important, skills, knowledge, and experiences, will undertake this project. Team members will each work approximately 10 hours per week on this project between January 11<sup>th</sup> and May 5<sup>th</sup> under the guidance of Dr. Bob Stein (Political Science) and CCL staff and will receive \$10/hour for their project work. Work time will be flexible, although team members must attend weekly meetings and must coordinate time to work with other team members on the project as needed. Undergraduate students from **all fields of study** with interests and/or skills in at least some of the following areas are encouraged to apply:

Voting, elections, political science, research design, data analysis, public policy, statistics,  
professional writing, public presentations, teamwork, community engagement

**APPLICATIONS ARE DUE November 22, 2020 at 11:59pm**  
**To inquire or apply contact Dr. Jessica Khalaf, [jkhalaf@rice.edu](mailto:jkhalaf@rice.edu)**  
**For more about Rice's HART Program, visit: <http://ccl.rice.edu>**