

**Media Contact**

Kiana Miranda

[Kiana.miranda@eagleton.rutgers.edu](mailto:Kiana.miranda@eagleton.rutgers.edu)

(848) 932-8092

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**Press Release**

**Rutgers University–New Brunswick Administrators and Students Participate in Big Ten Democracy Summit with Leading Public Policy Schools**

**New Brunswick, New Jersey (February 19, 2025)** – Faculty and students of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy and Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University–New Brunswick participated in the inaugural Big Ten Democracy Summit on February 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in College Park, Maryland. Hosted by the University of Maryland School of Public Policy and Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan, the Summit brought together faculty, staff, and students from across the Big Ten as they develop pragmatic, actionable initiatives to advance bipartisan solutions that empower institutions to bolster democracy and democratic engagement in their communities, states and the nation at large.



Members of the Rutgers–New Brunswick team served as moderators and panelists in various breakout spaces throughout the two-day event. Dr. Stuart Shapiro, Dean of the Bloustein School, and Dr. Elizabeth C. Matto, Director of Eagleton Institute, served as moderator and panelist respectively on the February 11<sup>th</sup> panel, *Big Ten Universities as Laboratories of Innovation for Democratic Engagement*. Jessica Ronan-Frisch, Associate Director of the Eagleton Institute’s Center for Youth Political Participation, participated as a panelist in a morning session entitled *Broadening the Lens: Students as Agents of Civic Change*.

In addition to faculty and staff, a group of five Rutgers–New Brunswick undergraduate and graduate students attended the Summit:

- Sophia Alexis, graduate assistant, Center for Youth Political Participation, MSW candidate
- Ata Erdal, Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies undergraduate
- Victoria He, English literature undergraduate
- Allyza Pamplona, Public health undergraduate
- Devanshi Patel, Political Science undergraduate

The students participated in a policy simulation of the Building Civic Bridges Act (S. 4196). This bill would establish a national Office of Civic Bridgebuilding to administer grants to support civic bridgebuilding and provide training for skills in civic bridgebuilding. The policy simulation was led by Elisabeth Gerber, Jack L. Walker, Jr. Professor of Public Policy and Faculty Director, Online Master of Public Affairs Program, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan.

Dean Shapiro noted, “The Big Ten now reaches from sea to shining sea, and never in recent memory has there been a better time to reach across the country to discuss issues surrounding democracy and how students can help preserve and enhance it.”

Dr. Matto remarked, “It was gratifying to come together with Big Ten colleagues across the country at this moment in our democracy — demonstrating the public good of higher education by equipping our campus communities for democratic citizenship.”

Rutgers–New Brunswick undergraduate and student participant, Ata Erdal shared, “Attending the Big Ten Democracy Summit was an incredible opportunity to explore ways to strengthen democracy on our campuses and beyond. The policy simulation, where we took on the roles of U.S. Congress members to debate and amend the Building Civic Bridges Act, provided a real-world perspective on bipartisan policymaking that I couldn’t have gained elsewhere.”

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### **The Eagleton Institute of Politics**

[The Eagleton Institute of Politics](#) at Rutgers University–New Brunswick studies how American politics and government work and change, analyzes how the democracy might improve, and promotes political participation and civic engagement. The Institute explores state and national politics through research, education, and public service, linking the study of politics with its day-to-day practice.

### **Rutgers–New Brunswick**

[Rutgers University–New Brunswick](#) is where Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, began more than 250 years ago. Ranked among the world’s top 60 universities, Rutgers’s flagship is a leading public research institution and a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities. It has an internationally acclaimed faculty, 12 degree-granting schools and the Big Ten Conference’s most diverse student body.