

FAIR ELECTIONS LEGAL NETWORK

Best Practices to Help Students Register and Vote A Guide for Colleges and Universities and Student Groups

Student and youth turnout at elections is typically around 20% lower than average voter turnout¹. Legal and administrative barriers continue to inhibit students from participating in the political process. Students often have trouble with residency and identification or can be confused by the conflicting information available to them. They may even face hostility from local election officials.

Colleges and university administrations can take many actions to minimize these obstacles and help their students to register and vote. This guide outlines some of the actions colleges and universities should take to ensure students are able to fulfill this important civic duty.

JANUARY

Lay the Groundwork

Establish a College/University Voting Website

Develop a website that includes dates and deadlines (voter registration, early voting, Election Day); information (location of polls, ID requirements); and links to forms (voter registration forms, absentee ballot request forms).

Link to College/University Voting Website from Student Homepage and Facebook and Twitter Accounts

The link to the college/university voting website should be available on pages that are frequently visited by students, e.g. the students' homepage, the library website, email login. If the college/university has Facebook, Twitter or other new media accounts, then they should all be linked to the college/university voting website.

Provide the State Voter Registration Form and the National Form

Students often attend college/university a long way from home, so state and national registration forms should be available online, with paper copies of the forms made available around campus.

Establish a Polling Station on Campus

Contact local election officials well in advance of the primaries and/or Election Day to encourage them to put a polling place on campus. See if funds can be made available to facilitate this.

Plan a Student Poll Worker Program

Work with local election officials to start a student poll worker training program.

Provide Voting Information through Orientation and Curriculum

- Hold a freshman information session on registration and voting.
- Incorporate civics into courses.

Fund Voter Registration Efforts

Encourage student government to use some of its funds on student voter registration and education.

Rewards

Think creatively about what the college/university can offer to students as a reward for registering to vote, or participating in a voter registration drive.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

¹ Figure determined using United States Census Bureau, "Table A-1. Reported Voting and Registration by Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex and Age Groups: November 1964 to 2008", *Voting and Registration: Historical Time Series Tables*, 2008.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

Encourage Voter Registration from Day One

Offer Voter Registration Forms at Enrollment and Class Registration

Provide paper voter registration forms to those registering in person and provide prominent links to the State and National forms to those registering for classes online.

Provide Students with Photo Identification

In states with photo ID requirements that can be fulfilled by student ID cards, schools should provide photo ID cards to all students. If the state law requires a signature or address on the ID card, these should be added where possible.

Grant Access to Residence Halls

Grant student groups access to residence halls or dorms so they can send volunteers to knock on doors to inform students and register them to vote.

Provide Easy Access to College Events for Voter Registration

Ease the approval process for voter registration volunteers to set up stalls at big college/university events (e.g. sporting events, lectures, arts events, student conferences), so they can spend more time registering voters.

Inform Students of Their Street Address and Help Them Prove it at the Polls

- To register, students need a street address, not a P.O. Box. Often a dorm address is also not sufficient. Check with local registrars to find out what is needed and provide it to students living on campus.
- Schools can also provide students with documentation with their name and address that may be sufficient identification at the polls, e.g., zero balance utility bills. Check with registrars to see what is needed and provide it if possible.

Encourage Faculty to Invite Student Groups to Speak to Their Classes

Student groups can address classes to inform them about voter registration, and pass out and collect voter registration forms. Encourage faculty to set aside class time to facilitate this process.

Host Candidate Debates

Hold debates on campus between political candidates.

Hold a Campus Voter Registration Week

- Establish and promote a college/university sponsored campus voter registration week.
- Encourage student groups to set up tables around campus to register students.
- Give permission to student groups to dorm-knock in the evenings.
- Send an email to all students and staff reminding them to register to vote and explaining how and where they can do so.

Encourage Competition with Other Colleges

Engage in competitions like the 2008 Ultimate College Bowl, in which colleges across the country competed to get the highest percentage of their students registered to vote.

Get Out The Vote on Election Day

- Send emails reminding students to vote.
- Give students the day off to engage in GOTV campaigns and/or poll working.
- Allow students to miss class without penalty if they want to vote.
- Arrange for college buses to take students to polling locations.
- Advise students which public transport routes will get them to the polls.

ELECTION DAY

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Examples of Specific School Programs that Encourage Student Voter Registration

The **University of California**, **California State University** and **California Community Colleges** all provide the option to fill out a voter registration form to students when they enroll/register online for classes.

Student leaders at the **University of Arizona** provided voter registration forms to all 6000 incoming residence hall dwellers in 2004.

Michigan State University has a website dedicated to voting issues which includes information about voter registration, absentee ballot requests, deadlines and dates, and links to forms: <http://www.youvote.msu.edu/>.

The **University of Oregon** allows students to access residence halls at pre-agreed times to conduct voter registration activities.

Temple University has links to the National Voter Registration Form and the Pennsylvania Voter Registration form on its Student Forms webpage.

The **University of Florida** has links available to both the Florida form and the national form on its Integrated Student Information System (ISIS) website. This means students will see links to voter registration forms every time they login to their student homepage.

Oberlin College issued \$0.00 utility bills to students who lived in dorms, as this was sufficient evidence to fulfill Ohio identification requirements for first time voters on Election Day.

University of North Carolina - Charlotte worked with Mecklenberg county officials to confirm that the University could provide a list of student names and their student ID numbers to local poll workers so that students could vote using only their student ID cards.

Florida State University issues an FSU card to each student each year. The card contains the student's photo and signature. Under Florida law this is sufficient identification to vote.

Oberlin College holds two voter registration weeks in election years – one before the Ohio primary and one before the general election. These weeks are accompanied by promotion of the week in the campus newsletters.

Elon University ("Engaging Elon") students worked with their administration to bypass paperwork and get access to all school events to set up voter registration stations.

Clark Atlanta University ("Black Youth Vote! Unity '04 – Feel the Power") organized a Friday rally featuring a DJ and an open-mic session to attract students and register them as voters.

The **University of California – Santa Barbara** won the Ultimate College Bowl in 2008 by registering 51.5% of its student population to vote.

Saint Anselm College got the President of the College to donate his parking space for a week. Students who registered to vote through the college program were entered into a lottery to win the right to park in his spot for the week.

The **University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee** held a freshman seminar which focused on the election with a particular emphasis on voting. The seminar involved a service component which connected students with community and political organizations involved in voter turnout efforts.

Cleveland State University has been running a successful poll worker program in conjunction with the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections since 2006.

Arizona State University lobbied election officials for and got a polling place on their campus. All students who are registered to vote in Maricopa County can now conveniently vote on campus. In 2010 the Student Government has worked hard to educate students about the importance of voting on a particular ballot proposition. Early voting for the special election has already shown a huge increase in turnout compared with the March primary city council elections.

Western Washington University provides a link to the state online voter registration system on the student records homepage, while its student government sets aside money from the Services and Activities Fee to fund voter education and registration activities.