

**NATIONAL
RESOURCE
CONSORTIUM
ON FULL
STUDENT VOTER
PARTICIPATION**

INSIGHTS FROM JANUARY - JUNE 2019

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Fair Elections Center (the Center) is a national, nonpartisan voting rights, legal support and election reform organization
www.fairelectionscenter.org



Campus Vote Project (a project of the Center) helps campuses institutionalize reforms that empower students with the information they need to register and vote
www.campusvoteproject.org



The Foundation for Civic Leadership is a non-profit organization dedicated to engaging the next generation of global citizens.
www.fcleadership.org



Mile 22 Associates is a social impact consulting group for the philanthropic and non-profit sector.
www.mile22.org



As the leading voice of student affairs, NASPA drives innovation and evidence-based, student-centered practice throughout higher education, nationally and globally.
www.naspa.org



The NASPA LEAD Initiative on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (Lead Initiative) comprises a network of NASPA member colleges and universities committed to encouraging and highlighting the work of student affairs in making civic learning and democratic engagement a part of every student's college education.
www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/groups/lead-initiative



The Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School's mission is to unite and engage students, particularly undergraduates, with academics, politicians, activists, and policymakers on a non-partisan basis to inspire them to consider careers in politics and public service.
<https://iop.harvard.edu>

FORWARD

As higher education institutions continue to pursue ambitious civic missions, many national partner organizations and campuses are considering what are the best methods for such engagement. One of many ideas is democratic engagement endeavors related to voter registration and education being embedded into programs and services that reach the majority of a campus' student population who are eligible to vote. With this concept in mind, the *National Resource Consortium on Full Student Voter Participation* was conceived in January 2019 to explore such opportunities connected to first-year and transfer student orientation programs and other new student services. This insight brief outlines the steps taken by a select group of national partners (noted as the core team) and campuses (noted as co-designers) between January and June 2019; as well as future explorations for this work.

While the core team works continuously with the co-designers to learn, explore, and understand the current offerings in higher education as well as possible expansions of full student voter participation endeavors it should be recognized that the two groups are working collaboratively to achieve the mission of the *National Resource Consortium on Full Student Voter Participation*.

Develop tactics that colleges can use to reliably achieve near 100% voter participation among eligible students.

The work of scholars such as Robert D. Putnam¹ and Peter Levine², demonstrates both that it is a time of diminishing civic institutions and social capital and increasing inequality, while the drastic polarization and extremism in American politics is readily apparent in a few minutes of television or social media coverage. Even though it is apparent that political participation is only one facet of preparing students for a lifetime of being active community members and citizens, it is also a belief that it is foundational for each new generation to develop robust voting habits to sustain a healthy democracy.

Knowing that in our current system voter registration is a key barrier to voter participation, especially for the newest members of our democracy, as most students are, the core team and co-designers set out to understand the landscape of full student voter registration opportunities at higher education institutions. This led the National Resource Consortium to develop this document which focuses on efforts to embed voter registration into orientation and other new and transfer student programs and services. The aforementioned individuals will continue to pursue this promising practice, however, more research is needed to determine evidenced based high impact best practices related to these endeavors.

Additionally, there is a need to develop strategies for campuses where voter registration in new student programs and services might not be the right fit. The goal is to find opportunities at such institutions to reach most students, such as voter registration in the classroom and using peer networks such as

¹ <http://robertdputnam.com>

² <http://peterlevine.ws>

student organizations, Greek life, and athletics to register students in their social context. Throughout the next year, the core team will be working in tandem with campus partners to continue to explore what we've learned thus far to gain additional information, to determine effective practices, and to understand the gaps in achieving full student voter participation.



Students gathered at the Institute of Politics' for the 2019 National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement annual conference.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *National Resource Consortium on Full Student Voter Participation* seeks to develop and advance evidence-based promising practices that bring institutions and partners closer to a shared goal of full high-quality student participation in the democratic process, particularly in elections. The core team and co-designers seek to achieve this goal by leveraging the Harvard IOP's network of National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement annual conference (NAC) and NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and Campus Vote Project's Voter Friendly Campus (VFC) network to develop strategies that engage opportunities in the field around promising practices for voter registration during orientation and new student programs and services or during other endeavors that reach a majority of students at an institution.

This process began in January prior to the February 2019 National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement annual conference at Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics (IOP). During this in-person convening the *National Resource Consortium on Full Student Voter Participation* was outlined with the help of national partners Fair Election Center's Campus Vote Project, NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and the NASPA LEAD Initiative, the Foundation for Civic Leadership and the Mile 22 Associates group. The outcome of the convening was a collaboration with NAC and VFC campuses and the aforementioned partners to explore full student voter participation opportunities at higher education institutions.

Since this in-person gathering, 19 campus partners participated in informational interviews (See Appendix A) to assist the core team in gathering a baseline understanding of the work being done at NAC and VFC campuses. This group of campuses are considered co-designers in this project and have been engaged thoroughly in the understanding of the potential of full participation in voter engagement at higher education institutions. The list of co-designers are:

1. Alfred State College
2. Chapman University
3. Illinois State University
4. Marist College
5. Miami Dade College
6. Northampton Community College
7. Northwestern University
8. Rutgers University
9. Stony Brook University
10. Tufts University
11. University of Chicago
12. University of Delaware
13. University of Illinois at Chicago
14. University of Michigan
15. University of Oklahoma
16. University of Texas at Austin
17. University of Utah
18. University of Virginia
19. Vanderbilt University

About NAC and VFC

National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement annual conference (NAC)

<https://iop.harvard.edu/get-involved/national-campaign>

Since 2003, the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School has led a consortium of Institute of Politics and civic engagement centers on campuses nationwide. The NAC community currently includes more than 30 colleges and universities that provide perspective across the field of higher education, including four-year and two-year institutions, public and private colleges, and HBCUs and HSIs. These institutions share the mission of inspiring students to pursue careers in public service, foster civic engagement, and provide a strong foundation in civic education. The community consists of both student leaders and campus administrators to ensure initiatives have full community support on campus. The National Campaign consortium continues to lead unprecedented civic engagement initiatives, including efforts to instill a culture of voting on campus communities nationwide.



Voter Friendly Campus (VFC)

www.voterfriendlycampus.org

The Voter Friendly Campus designation program was started through the partnership of Campus Vote Project and NASPA in 2016. The goal of the program is to help institutions develop plans to coordinate administrators, faculty, and student organizations in civic and electoral engagement.

The Voter Friendly Campus designation helps administrators develop a strategy to engage students and set clear goals so a path can be created in advance of upcoming elections. These activities can be institutionalized for years to come, keeping students engaged as they enter, and move through their time at school.

INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

Based on the 19 interviews completed with the co-designers, the core team drew several threads between the institutions based on the information collected. This data set has been organized into three categories: observations, opportunities, and challenges. These three categories will be fully explored by the core team to develop a comprehensive toolkit by 2021 to support campuses interested in developing or enhancing opportunities that enable full student voter registration as a pathway to full student voter engagement.

Observations:

Institutional structures:

Different orientation and new student programs are run by different campus departments and divisions. For example, at some institutions a “welcome week” (focused on adjusting to student life and getting involved in campus life) is sometimes run by the division of student affairs while “orientation” (focused on getting registered for the right classes) is run by the campus registrar, traditionally housed in academic affairs. This is both an opportunity (multiple routes in which to reach everyone) and a challenge (diffusion of responsibility leaves no one in charge).

Lack of senior leadership or support:

A lot of voter engagement champions are junior staffers in civic engagement roles, departments, and/or centers without complete knowledge or capital to fully move institution-wide initiatives forward. Finding ways to pair champions with leaders who have institution-wide experience and utilizing the expertise and experiences of colleagues in student affairs divisions at other institutions to validate voter registration efforts with new student program staffers and departments is important to be set up for success.

Political context:

Even nonpartisan voter engagement efforts can be hard to do at public institutions in states where local political conditions are less welcoming to student voters. The administrative reluctance to engage, the culture of avoiding politics on campuses, and restrictive voting laws are a lot for any individual to deal with. Ironically, this means that often leaders at the institutions facing the largest challenges are the ones with the least institutional support. We need to keep working on validators, framing, and resources that support leaders on those campuses better.

Student leaders are huge assets:

Trained student leaders are great assets and they have a lot of information both for individual campuses and student voting efforts overall. Making sure they are connected to opportunities to grow in leadership both with campus vote coalitions and organizations supporting student voting nationally is hugely valuable.

Opportunities:

Piloting during winter orientation:

Winter orientation and other off-peak endeavors for new and transfer students entering the institution are opportunities to try out a new program, build relationships with orientation personnel and departments, and work out kinks in the program's design.

Pre-work:

Some campuses ask students to complete pre-work before arriving to campus at the start of a new semester and before summer and winter orientation programs. Students can be asked for basic information on whether they are already registered, what address they want to register at, and what questions they have about engaging in upcoming elections. Campuses can share upcoming election dates and deadlines for local and national elections in their registration areas, etc., and could do a much more targeted and personalized approach to meet the needs of each student. Most voter registration activities campuses are doing now are not as individualized.

Overcoming silos:

Campuses without a separately staffed office, department, or center for civic engagement tend to add civic engagement to the portfolio of a staff person. This creates a pocket of campus leadership - like Steven Adelson at Stony Brook University and Hannah Weaver at Alfred State College - who are committed to civic engagement work at their respective institution and that are knowledgeable about the scope and processes of their respective reporting lines (i.e reporting through academic affairs, student affairs, by way of students, or directly to the president). While these leaders are great resources for others vested in civic engagement work, it does not combat the silos that can occur on campuses preventing this work from becoming institutionalized.

Technology:

Civic technology, such as Democracy Works' TurboVote platform, come up over and over again as an organization working with campuses to do campus-wide efforts for full registration, either online through systems like class registration, or offline with computers or tablets at events. Another campus also raised Vote.org and their tools for voter registration and absentee ballot request as well. Most of these campuses were not yet seeing the full completion rates we are aiming for with this work, but it is important that our efforts expand on the foundation that these campuses and partners have already built in this area. More research is needed about the effects civic technology platforms can have on advancing full eligible student voter registration.

Challenges:

Failure rate awareness:

Campuses are not aware of the failure rate (i.e. how many submitted forms are not accepted by local election officials) on either submitted forms or absentee ballot requests. They are also only vaguely aware of the failure rate with the use of online voter registration platforms, but specific data about which students do not make it onto the rolls is generally unavailable. We need to better engage champions in understanding the challenges associated with ensuring students successfully complete the voter registration process.

Timing of housing assignments:

For campuses with residential students, many orientation and new student programs take place before housing assignments have been distributed making it impossible to assist voter registration at campus-based addresses at that time.

Campus size:

The scale of large campuses makes any campus-wide effort extraordinarily hard. Numerous interviewees brought up the literal physical distance between them and other stakeholders on their campuses. As an example, at the University of Utah the science students are literally halfway up a mountain from the Hinckley Institute staff working on voter engagement.

Ad hoc funding structures:

Campus vote coalitions tend to cobble together funding from different sources (university support, student government, external grants, fellowship programs like Andrew Goodman Foundation, etc.) and figure out what is possible within those constraints. A full institution-wide effort requires a more holistic approach with an ongoing budget outlining the total need and different funding sources to support it. Most voter engagement coalitions appear to lack the infrastructure or capacity for that type of ongoing planning.

Guidance on voter registration at campus address vs. prior address:

This is a perennial issue for institutions with non-local student residents. Our field has generally failed to provide campus leaders with quality guidance they can adapt to their campus context and goals. We need to do better ahead of the 2020 election. There is strong evidence that students - especially in their first days on campus - display a preference to register at the address they have used prior to moving to attend the institution (this could be in another state or in the same state) and are more likely to register if that option is given.³ There is also evidence, however, that students who develop a place-based identity around the community where they attend school actually turnout to vote at higher rates than

³ See Graduating Students into Voters, Overcoming the Psychological Barriers Faced by Student Voters at www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ideas42-Student-Voting-Brief.pdf

students who stay registered at prior addresses and spend time and energy having to navigate absentee voting rules and deadlines. Furthermore, different campuses have different goals for their voter engagement programs that may influence their decision to allocate resources in different areas. For example, providing 50-state voter registration training, providing education that cultivates place-based identity in the campus community for students, or other tactics that align the voter registration process with the broader civic experience institutions are looking to provide. The task force will explore this issue and seek to provide more specific guidance to campuses in future iterations of our work.

Case Study: Northwestern University

REGISTERING ALL NEW STUDENTS TO VOTE, AS A WELCOME TO ENGAGEMENT

Created by Professor Michal Peshkin,
Dept. of Mechanical Engineering, Northwestern University

Over the last decade Northwestern University has developing a voter registration program that has resulted in more than 90% of eligible students becoming registered to vote. Our approach starts with the university embracing a responsibility to register students, no matter what state they are from or whether they prefer to vote locally. Our approach is nonpartisan and builds on the principle that being a student at Northwestern requires certain value commitments including academic honesty, moral conduct and democratic participation. These commitments lead to institutional supports for the promotion of these values among students.

That young people are miserable voters is nearly an article of faith. However, for college students, at least in presidential election years, the youth-shaming is not justified. The 2016 average student voting rate⁴ of 48% is not so very far below the all-ages rate, 60%. Further, we know that at all ages, most registered people vote. Ansolabehere et al⁵ report that the primary factor explaining differential registration rates is duration of residence, and not age. So it may well be that the key to college student voting is simply to get our newly resident students registered.

As a result of our near-universal registration of incoming students, our student voting rate was 64.3% as measured by the Tufts University NSLVE study (2016, ref.⁶) That figure is well above the voting rate for US citizens of all ages. We accomplished this through a planned and sustained program led by our Center for Civic Engagement.

Just about all colleges aspire to produce informed and engaged citizens. Voting is understood to be a marker of civic engagement. Some will argue that meaningful civic learning should be prioritized prior to voter registration efforts. We disagree. The process of registering students to vote is finite, and fairly easy to accomplish once the right systems are in place. Civic learning is an open-ended, ongoing undertaking. Voter registration is also a gatekeeping step to participating in elections. Registered students can be activated, educated and mobilized. But activated and educated students who are not registered cannot vote.

We believe the process of registering students helps engage them in democracy. A student who is registered feels an increased responsibility to pay attention to issues and candidates, knowing they are now at least potentially involved in the system of selecting their preferred candidates and policy positions.

Our program at Northwestern is based upon improving the logistics and outreach associated with registering to vote, and with voting. We do not intend to suggest that meaningful civic education is not

⁴ More—and More Diverse—U.S. College Students Voted in 2016, Tufts Now, Nancy Thomas, Ishara Casellas Connors, September 22, 2017 <https://now.tufts.edu/articles/more-and-more-diverse-us-college-students-voted-2016>

⁵ Ansolabehere, Stephen. 2012. "Movers, Stayers, and Registration: Why Age Is Correlated with Registration in the U.S." Quarterly Journal of Political Science 7 (4) (October 17): 333–363. <https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00011112>

⁶ Innovative student voter model earns national recognition, Northwestern news release, October 27, 2017 <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2017/october/innovative-student-voter-model-earns-national-recognition/>

also critically important! Our methods reflect our belief that the most successful pathway to increasing youth participation in elections should prioritize registering students before worrying about education and engagement, rather than the other way around.

We also promote civic education and motivation more broadly. We hold GOTV activities, support student groups and provide civic programs and experiences – these are important and even formative for our students.

Where we have unique methods to share with other schools, however, is in the logistics and outreach associated with voting, and that is the purpose of this paper. The principles of our program, NUvotes⁷, are

1. to listen to and meet the expressed needs of our students with regard to voting,
2. to treat registering to vote as an expected part of coming of age and eligibility, not part of a smorgasbord of activities,
3. to build and exhibit strong institutional support for engagement in the electoral process,
4. to engineer the attentional and practical aspects of the system to high efficiency.

What follows in the next few pages is a road map that might be adapted for use on other campuses. Implementation will differ for different communities. Schools starting new programs may not implement such a comprehensive system at once. We didn't either. What seems a challenge one year becomes routine the next.

Respect and support student preferences to vote by mail, and in other states

Most students prefer to vote in their home state⁸. Three quarters of Northwestern's students are from states other than Illinois. When we began our program in the early 2000's, models for student voting were exclusively for in-person local-jurisdiction voting. We were able to gather absentee voting applications for other states and offer students the choice of local jurisdiction or back-home voting. After the 2008 election we obtained voting records of the students we served. We found⁹ that students were similarly successful voting in person vs. by mail, and locally vs. back-home. Since then we have offered "50-state voting." This has become easier as services such as Vote.org and TurboVote have relieved us of some of the task.

⁷ NUvotes.org

⁸ Niemi, Richard & Hanmer, Michael. (2004). College Students in the 2004 Election. CIRCLÉ www.researchgate.net/publication/265150545_College_Students_in_the_2004_Election

⁹ Local and Absentee Voter Registration Drives on a College Campus. Kim Castle, Janice Levy and Michael Peshkin, CIRCLÉ working paper #66 (2009) www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/66_Castle_Levy_Peshkin.pdf

Forget “drives” – registration should be integrated, systematic, and comprehensive.

Most of the voter registration work taking place on campuses is passive and self-selecting. Certainly not passive for those mounting the drive or staffing a table in the student union – but rather, most efforts focus on making registration available, but still require students to take a proactive step to participate. Yet, this work is an administrative problem in many ways. Universities are already set up to manage a wide variety of bureaucratic processes. For example, in most cases, there is a system in place to assign every student to a dorm. There is a system to send every student a tuition bill. There is a system to issue every student an ID. A similar system can be used to give every student the opportunity to register to vote. By more fully embracing the requirements of the voter registration provision of the Higher Education Act (1998), and integrating comprehensive opportunities for registration into existing University systems, campuses can meet both the spirit and the letter of their compliance responsibility, while also fulfilling their civic responsibility to help students learn how to participate in a democracy.

There are three likely deliverers of voter registration activities on college campuses: students, outside organizations, and the institution itself. We believe the institution is best situated to successfully implement comprehensive voter engagement programs. Most students view their school as trusted, nonpartisan sources of support and information. On the other hand, individual students, student groups, and outside organizations are much more likely to be motivated by partisan interests, or perhaps even some other self-interest (e.g. collecting data for marketing purposes, fundraising, etc.). Colleges have legal commitments to nonpartisan activities, and more importantly, have the resources, power, and institutional memory to develop and maintain successful voter registration and engagement initiatives for their campus communities.

Do it every year

Voter registration “drives” tend to be cyclical, focused on presidential election years. With most undergraduates on a four-year cycle, this results in a lack of sustained impact as well as tremendous loss of institutional memory between elections. Many campuses report struggling with efforts to “reinvent the wheel” every four years.

Talk to every student individually about voting.

We register almost all of our eligible students when they arrive on campus. Individual counseling about voting is fully integrated into orientation. The counselors are peers. Each eligible incoming student is assisted in registering to vote. Since most students have only recently turned 18, we’re preventing them from developing a bystander identity by default.

Most schools create some kind of opportunity to greet every new student. At Northwestern we have a Welcome Week that includes a Move-In Day, and this provides a natural opportunity for us to talk to

each student (as shown in a video¹⁰). Other schools bring students in by waves throughout the summer. Still others greet their new students first in residence hall groupings. The logistics of registration varies according to the format, but the key element is individual attention.

Students desperately need an educated, trustworthy person to answer their questions and help them navigate these processes. Not only are the forms and procedures confusing, but students also have many questions that they need help processing. From broad civic questions like, “What are the implications of registering back home rather than at my campus address?” to very specific questions like, “Can I use my student ID as proof of identity when I submit my absentee ballot request?”, having a knowledgeable peer or staff on hand goes a long way.

Don't even think about email.

An email exhortation to sign up for a web service, to register, or to vote, does not work. A careful randomized controlled trial has actually shown a small negative effect on registration¹¹, possibly because once a message has been received and safely stored, it is put aside to do later and it drifts down the queue, while real and present opportunities are missed. Also, voting is already an activity which is prone to being perceived as submerging individuality. We suspect that the bulk outreach evidenced by the use of email shows that a student's participation is not much valued by the sender. It took us a long time to fully appreciate the uselessness of email.

Get it all done at once.

If a step must be completed later, only a fraction will complete it. As a rule of thumb we figure that 1/3 of participating students will be lost with any and each subsequent step. However, if the follow-up is by email, the loss will be much worse. So, all our services -- registration, absentee ballot applications, signatures, state ID copies, error-checking, addresses, stamps, and mailing -- are completed during a single in-person session.

Assist in form completion.

One-to-one attention by a peer is part of why students will vote, and not just register. To novices, voting feels unfamiliar, individually insignificant, and burdensome (not only the voting per se, but also following politics). Peer assistants, properly trained, show the importance they accord to each student's vote.

Additionally, the one-to-one peer assistance provides an opportunity to help. We find it essential to check for errors and omissions immediately. Repairing errors later is far more trouble. Checking immediately

¹⁰ Student Voter Registration Exceeds 96 Percent, NorthwesternU Youtube channel. www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUxCmP2TaGc

¹¹ Bennion, E. A., & Nickerson, D. W. (2011). The Cost of Convenience: An Experiment Showing E-Mail Outreach Decreases Voter Registration. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(4), 858–869. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912910382304>

requires well trained peer assistance, in sufficient numbers. It also requires an orderly venue with adequate space, tables, and lighting.

Paper often beats computers.

Filling out a paper application on a clipboard takes about half as much time as doing the same on a laptop. Clipboards can also be rapidly handed out in any needed quantity to handle rushes. The disadvantage of paper is the need to have on hand many different forms, especially for absentee ballot applications which vary by state. Checking these forms for errors requires more training of volunteers if the forms are on paper; computers can at least prevent errors of omission. In practice we use Vote.org's online forms on laptops at most locations, and we use paper forms (also from Vote.org) at orientation or other events, to handle the high rate of applicants.

Provide confirmation and follow-up information on paper.

Especially around the beginning of the school year, most email is overlooked and soon scrolls away. Therefore, we hand each registered student essential follow-up information on paper so it is more likely to be read and may even be physically retained. Students need to know what happens next: how will I know I am registered, where and when and in what ways can I vote, what's on my ballot, how do I get information about candidates and issues.

Get Out The Vote is about choosing to vote. It's not about "reminding" to vote.

Electronic forms of reminding have little to no effect. We strive to build a culture of voting participation. We've used vans or marches to the polls, election watch parties, informational websites, the visibility of our registration and absentee ballot stations, issue-oriented lectures, "I-voted" stickers, and so on. These build voting culture over time. Each year's crop of incoming students have all had the experience of registering, which feeds the voting participation culture.

Good faith compliance with the Higher Education Act

We had some initial reservations, in the process of considering whether to add voter engagement support to our portfolio of new programs and services. However, we came across the voter registration provision added by Congress as an amendment to the Higher Education Act in 1998. This provision requires colleges and universities to make "a good-faith effort" to distribute voter registration forms to each student enrolled in a degree or certificate program and physically in attendance at the institution. Later legislation¹² allows compliance by merely sending email, which we now know to be ineffectual. Meeting the spirit of the law would seem to require a more proactive approach.

¹² Higher Education Opportunity Act – 2008

Conclusion

We would like colleges and universities to see voter engagement as a civic responsibility they must help shoulder. Just as supporting student health and safety is a responsibility of universities, so is creating basic structures to help students learn how to participate in our democracy.

Reversing the persistently low voter participation rates among young Americans will be no simple task. But with increasing numbers of institutions, students, faculty, community organizations, and foundations recognizing the need to cultivate responsible citizenship among young people, the opportunity to change this dynamic is significant.

With research helping us to better understand the dynamics and context of youth voter engagement, we can indeed reach a day in the near future where it is the norm for virtually every young person in the United States to register to vote and start participating in our democracy when they reach voting age.

Case Study: Stony Brook University

DEVELOPING A FULL VOTER REGISTRATION EXPERIENCE FOR OUR STUDENTS

Created by Steven Adelson, Co-Director,
Center for Civic Justice, Stony Brook University

About Stony Brook University

Established in 1957, Stony Brook University is a public research university located on Long Island in the State of New York. Its initial mandate was to prepare secondary school teachers in the areas of mathematics and science with an inaugural class of 148 students from across Long Island. Stony Brook University's student population significantly increased over a five-year period, and given the increased demand to support more disciplines, a new campus was built on donated land where it is now primarily situated.

Today, Stony Brook University serves a student population of nearly 26,000—approximately 17,000 undergraduate and 9,000 graduate and professional students—on several campuses in New York, as well as on campus in South Korea with 64 majors and 81 minors to choose from. Its student population is oftentimes considered one of the most racially and ethnically diverse, and its students come from over 100 different countries. Stony Brook University is also recognized as one of 115 R1 universities nationwide, which implies it maintains some of the highest research activity with respect to other doctoral-degree granting universities. This translates to its focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

Stony Brook University Hospital is also an integral part of how the university not only provides hundreds of students with access to a world-renowned academic and research medical center, but its service to the local community as well.

The Past

In early 2015, Stony Brook University received a campus report from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). Produced by Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University, the campus report provided Stony Brook University with important data about its student voter registration and turnout rates from the 2012 presidential and 2014 midterm elections. Of note:

Stony Brook University students voted in the 2012 presidential election at a rate of 43.2%, which was 3.7 points lower than the national average. During the 2014 midterm election, its students voted at a rate of 12.7%, which was 6.1 points lower than the national average.

As a result of the campus report, the university's Office of the Dean of Students conducted a high-level assessment of its current voter engagement practices. Its initial focus was on the voter registration experience of first-year and transfer students at new student orientation.

Following class registration, at the end of each new first-year student orientation experience, there was a series of tables representing various offices and services offered at the university. One of the tables was for voter registration. Some of the tables were staffed with members from those various

offices and services. However, that was not the case for voter registration; it was simply a table with blank voter registration applications and some pens. In speaking with the rare student who engaged with the voter registration table, most assumed they would complete a voter registration application and leave it at the table for someone to process accordingly. Their assumptions were generally correct. The completed voter registration applications were collected by a staff member from the Office of Student Orientation and Family Program and delivered to the Office of the Dean of Students, which assumed responsibility for delivering them to the county Board of Elections.

For context, in 2012, 70 students—approximately 3% of the incoming class—completed a voter registration application at new student orientation. Of those 70 completed voter registration applications, four were completed correctly. There was one common reason for the 66 invalid voter registration applications: Students provided an incorrect or incomplete on-campus residential address.

Furthermore, voter registration was not offered to transfer students as part of their new student orientation experience.

Key takeaways from the initial assessment of its voter engagement practices included that:

- Current voter registration experiences were passive, ineffective, and did not meet the needs of students seeking to register to vote;
- Students need resources and active support to successfully register to vote;
- All undergraduate, graduate, and professional students need an opportunity to register to vote when they arrive to the university; and
- An improved voter registration experience as part of new student orientation will allow for resources to be dedicated to other year-round voter engagement activities such as education and turnout.

The Process

Following the assessment, the Office of the Dean of Students partnered with the Andrew Goodman Foundation and its signature Vote Everywhere program to support and advance student voter engagement at Stony Brook University. The Vote Everywhere program provides extensive training, resources, and a peer network to support students (called Ambassadors) at each stage of the voter experience, reduce voter barriers, and address social challenges.

Its initial partnership with the Vote Everywhere program introduced two \$1,000 stipends (or scholarships) for Ambassadors who would lead these voter engagement and civically-focused efforts. These scholarships provided an accessible and sustainable for students who are passionate about voting rights and want to support this important work on their campus. As part of their outlined responsibilities, Ambassadors

were expected to be present at each new student orientation to support students through the voter registration experience.

Before assuming their responsibilities, Ambassadors received extensive training about student voter registration. The training included information about voter registration in and outside the State of New York, differentiating resident and commuter voter registration, and identifying common invalidating errors made on voter registration applications by students. Given it being the most common error, there was an emphasis on ensuring on-campus residential addresses were correctly provided on applications.

Additionally, step-by-step voter registration guides were developed for students to use as they complete their voter registration application. Most students do not know their on-campus residential address when they attend new student orientation, and the guide provides them with easy access to the information. Students are able to easily translate their on-campus residential address from the guide to their voter registration application. And while Ambassadors are present to support students through the voter registration experience, many students benefit from having an additional and visual reference if and when needed.

With the resources and active support positioned to support student voter registration as a result of the partnership with the Andrew Goodman Foundation and its Vote Everywhere program, the Office of the Dean of Students met with the Office of Student Orientation and Family Programs to assess and modify its current voter registration experience at new student orientation. Outcomes from the assessment included that:

- Students would be expected to, at a minimum, speak with one of the Ambassadors to learn about the opportunity to register to vote.
- Voter registration would be itemized as part of the new student orientation schedule so students could plan accordingly.
- Additional space would be provided to ensure more students could be accommodated at any given time.
- New student orientation staff members -- both student and professional -- would be trained by the Office of the Dean of Students and its Ambassadors to inform students about the opportunity to register to vote.

With the support of the Office of Student Orientation and Family Programs, the Ambassadors were ready for their first summer of voter registration at new student orientation.

The Product

The Vote Everywhere Ambassadors were present at each new first-year student orientation in summer 2015; there were 13 sessions total. Approximately 2,855 new first-year students attended over the course of those 13 sessions, of which approximately two-thirds (1,913) were eligible to register to vote, and of which 1,897 registered to vote. 99.2% of eligible students registered to vote, which was a marked and significant increase from previous years. It is also important to note that 100% of students who registered to vote were successfully registered to vote.

At each session, each new first-year student has an opportunity to engage one-on-one with one the Ambassadors about the opportunity to register to vote. Following class registration, each student is asked if they intend to reside on or off campus, and based on their response, they are provided with a voter registration application and a step-by-step voter registration guide corresponding with their residential status.

Students are offered the opportunity to register to vote wherever they choose. Most residential students select to register to vote on campus because voting at the on-campus polling location is convenient. The on-campus polling location is almost exclusively for residential students. Some out-of-state students select to register to vote in their state of origin if the option is legally available, but the overwhelming majority of them register to vote locally in the State of New York for convenience of voting in person. Students are offered resources about voting in their state of origin by mail or otherwise. New York does not yet have comprehensive vote-by-mail legislation in place.

From there, students are provided with space to complete their voter registration application and to receive responses from Ambassadors to any questions they might have about successfully completing their application. 2 to 4 students would arrive to the voter registration table every five minutes or so, which provided for a steady flow and ensured no student waited more than a few minutes to start their application.

Once a student completes their voter registration application, one of the Ambassadors carefully reviews the application to ensure it was successfully completed. Line by line, the Ambassador verifies with the student that the information provided is accurate. The Ambassador also refers to the step-by-step voter registration guide provided to ensure the student's residential address is accurate. According to the county Board of Elections, an accurate residential address includes the student's building name and room number, as well as the complete street address, so the Ambassador ensures the residential address includes all the necessary specifics.

It is only then that the student is asked to sign and date their successfully completed voter registration application. The Ambassadors and members of the Office of the Dean of Students personally deliver all

completed voter registration applications on a regular basis to receive formal documentation and confirmation for all delivered applications.

The true impact of the refined voter registration experience for new first-year student orientation could be understood through its 2016 NSLV campus report. The campus report indicated that Stony Brook University sophomore students [the students who registered to vote in summer 2015 at new first-year student orientation] voted in the 2016 presidential election at a rate of 41.4%, which was a 12.7-point increase from the 2012 presidential election. The increase in sophomore student voting rates were also significant compared to first-year and upper-division students with increases of 6.4 and 6 points, respectively.

The refined voter registration experience for new first-year student orientation had a significant and positive impact on student voting rates, which justified the need to not only sustain the model, but to expand it to all students as well.

The Process Continues

Building upon the success of the voter registration experience at new first-year student orientation, the Office of the Dean of Students and the Vote Everywhere Ambassadors sought to ensure all students had an opportunity to register to vote when they arrive at the university. To do so most effectively, an incremental process was developed to expand the voter engagement experience over the course of a five-year period.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the Office of the Dean of Students and the Ambassadors identified additional student populations that had alternative new student orientation experiences (i.e. not part of the larger new first-year student orientation experience): students in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), student-athletes, transfer students, and graduate and professional students. The Office of the Dean of Students and the Ambassadors worked with the respective campus units to ensure models were developed to engage the entirety of those student populations.

For students in EOP, the voter registration experience is part of their summer new student orientation and includes an educational presentation about the importance of their right to vote and opportunities to get civically engaged. For student-athletes, it is part of their first year and transfer student seminars. The Ambassadors coordinate directly with each seminar instructor to dedicate 15 minutes during one of their sessions to conduct voter registration. These models were successfully implemented in summer and fall 2016 for all new members of these student populations, respectively.

For transfer students, the voter registration experience is part of their summer new student orientation. The experience for these students is similar to their first-year student counterparts, and given the

sessions are smaller in student numbers, the Ambassadors oftentimes have more intimate and engaging conversations with their new transfer student peers. The Office of the Dean of Students and the Ambassadors met with the Office of Student Orientation and Family Program to discuss and implement the expansion. The inclusion of new transfers students increased the number of students engaged in the right to vote by 50%. The model was successfully expanded in summer 2017 for all new transfer students.

For graduate and professional students, the voter registration experience is tailored to meet the needs of specific academic units. There is no singular orientation for graduate and professional students; in fact, each academic unit, or set of academic units, has their own orientation. In summer 2018, the Office of the Dean of Students (now, the Center for Civic Justice) and the Ambassadors partnered with the School of Social Welfare to pilot a voter registration experience for its graduate students. Over 250 new graduate students in the school engaged in a session about civic and voter engagement, and then had an opportunity to register to vote. The pilot was received well, and now the Center for Civic Justice and the Ambassadors are working with other identified academic units to develop similar models through orientation to meet the needs of their graduate and professional student populations.

The Present

Stony Brook University's current voter registration experience ensures that 100% of all new first-year and transfer student fall admits (as of fall 2018, that includes 3,383 first-year and 1,624 transfer students) have an opportunity to register to vote before their first day of classes, or during the first six weeks of the fall semester, through a defined orientation or transition program. The model was also expanded as a pilot in winter 2019 to include new first-year and transfer student spring admits (as of spring 2019, that includes 79 first-year and 765 transfer students), of which 100% had an opportunity to register to vote as part of their new student orientation.

For graduate and professional students, the development of a voter registration experience and model to meet their needs is ongoing. The Center for Civic Justice seeks to have an established and implemented model for all graduate and professional students by summer 2021.

The Potential

Looking beyond a voter registration experience that meets the needs of its undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, Stony Brook University will seek to prioritize the integration of year-round voter education and turnout initiatives as foundational to the student experience. Establishing these bottleneck approaches for voter registration to maximize efforts in the summer and winter months allows resources to be diverted throughout the remainder of any given year to these other voter engagement initiatives. Since January 2018, the Center for Civic Justice has assumed leadership responsibilities for student voter engagement experiences and will continue to further the experience and model to meet student needs.

The growth and regular success of Stony Brook University's voter registration experience also resulted in an institutional investment to ensure the sustainability of the model. As of summer 2019, the Division of Student Affairs will fund two undergraduate student assistant position to support summer new student orientation voter registration. The experience previously relied upon student volunteers and the Vote Everywhere Ambassadors, but with institutional support, Stony Brook University is able to ensure the sustainability and longevity of this important work.

As Stony Brook University continues to meet its student needs around voter engagement, there are three key takeaways at the forefront of the conversation:

- Students need to lead these voter registration, education and turnout efforts with the support of their university. Peer-to-peer engagement is the most powerful way in which to establish a culture around anything, and the right to vote is no exception.
- Campus partners are integral to the success of any campus-wide voter registration experience and model. From the Office of Student Orientation and Family Programs to the countless academic units servicing undergraduate, graduate and professional students alike, their support allows for voter registration approaches that meet each student's unique needs.
- Year-round momentum around voter engagement is imperative. We have a responsibility to shift from a seasonal mindset around elections to one that is regular, consistent, and impactful for our students.

NEXT STEPS

From the information collected between January to June 2019, the core team has outlined several threads that can be explored to fully understand the possibilities for full student voter registration during first year and transfer student orientation and other new student programs and services. Throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, the core team will work collaboratively with campus co-designers, national partners, and additional campuses from the NAC and VFC networks to research the aforementioned observations, opportunities, and challenges.

In addition, a timely next step for campuses interested in exploring such possibilities, is to utilize the self-assessment guide related to the *National Resource Consortium on Full Student Voter Participation*.

The self-assessment guide created by the core team is intended for voter engagement champions working on college campuses who are interested in doing advanced work to ensure a 100% voter registration among eligible students. In particular, it supports strategies that leverage institutional processes like orientation and new student programs to achieve full registration.

PROGRAMMATIC SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDE: A TOOL FOR EVALUATING TACTICS AND ACTIVITIES RELATED TO STUDENT VOTER REGISTRATION INITIATIVES.

The current draft of the self-assessment guide was developed in April 2019. A revised version will be available with the toolkit in 2021. As campuses utilize the self-assessment guide, it is requested that feedback be provided to the core team.

Steps:

This guide helps advanced campus champions move through seven key steps:

Part 1: Building Strategy

1. Research key information
2. Self-assess current activities
3. Choose your process

Part 2: Taking Action

4. Try your strategy during the current academic year
5. Train staff and students
6. Execution and quality control
7. Reflection and learning

PART 1: BUILDING STRATEGY

1. Research Key Information

Data to gather from National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)¹³ report:

- What is the voter registration rate at your institution?
- What is the voting rate of specific demographics within your institution?
 - Class level (first-year, sophomore, junior, senior, etc.)
 - Education Level
 - Enrollment Status
 - Gender
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - Field of Study
 - Voting Method

Data to gather from an administrator in student affairs:

- What processes under the purview of the student affairs division do all students go through when they enroll at your institution? (e.g. orientation? advising? ID card photos? parking pass registration?)
 - If there are no processes that all students go through, what are the processes under the purview of the student affairs division that reach the largest number of students? What percentage of students go through them?
- Which departments and individuals in the student affairs division are responsible for these processes?

Data to gather from an administrator in academic affairs:

- What processes under the purview of the academic affairs division do all students go through when they enroll at your institution?
 - If there are no processes that all students go through, what are the processes under the purview of the academic affairs division that reach the largest number of students? What percentage of students go through them?
- Which departments and individuals in the academic affairs division are responsible for these processes?

¹³ The National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement offers colleges and universities an opportunity to learn their student registration and voting rates and, for interested campuses, a closer examination of their campus climate for political learning and engagement, as well as correlations between specific student learning experiences and voting. More than 1,000 campuses across the country are enrolled in this first-of-its-kind study which provides us a research database that includes nearly half of all college students in the United States. If you do not have access to your campus NSLVE report, fill out this form to request help in accessing the data: <https://idhe.tufts.edu/nslve/report-inquiry>

Other sources of data together:

- Election Officials: Depending on the methods of voter registration you will be providing what information and materials do you need from local and state election officials?
- Are there other existing assessment and reporting instruments that your institution has that could help inform this work? What are they?

2. Self-assessment of Current Activities

Are you currently engaging in activities that encourage students to register to vote?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

What is the process in which you provide voter registration that reaches the largest number of students?

What percentage of students use that process?

- Over 50%? Over 80%? 100%?

What methods do you use to reach students with voter registration information (circle all that apply)?

- Verbal announcements at official events (e.g. orientation)
- Email blasts
- Distribution of print collateral promoting voter registration
- Digitally delivered online (e.g. inclusion of TurboVote / Vote.org / Rock the Vote in an online registration process)
- Digital delivered in person (e.g. table of laptops to sign up students at orientation)
- Paper voter registration forms submitted to local election administrator by students
- Paper forms collected on site and submitted to local election administrator by your team

What percentage of students who went through the process completed their voter registration form in 2018?

- Don't know
- 0 - 19%
- 20 - 39%
- 40 - 59%
- 60 - 79%
- 80 - 100%

What is the rate of students who complete the process provided by your institution (either online or in-person) who end up on the voter rolls?

- Don't know
- 0 - 19%
- 20 - 39%
- 40 - 59%
- 60 - 79%
- 80 - 100%

3. Choose Your Process

Look at the list of processes outlined above and ask the following questions of each process:

- Does the process you are thinking of targeting (e.g. new student orientation) reach a significant portion of all students at your university? (Y/N)
- Is the department that oversees this process willing to build a long term partnership with your team? (Y/N)
- Does the process occur at a time when you are able to supervise the execution of this program and ensure voter registration quality control? (Y/N)
- Do you have the resources and materials necessary to staff the process comprehensively with trained volunteers or staff? (Y/N)

PART 2: TAKING ACTION

4. Try Your Strategy During the Current School Year

Institutions often have additional new student programs or class registration processes throughout the year, beyond their primary process for new first year students. These are potential low-pressure opportunities to begin working with the relevant staff members and university leaders necessary and to work out the kinks in your own training programs.

When is the next time your institution will be implementing the process you are engaging with?

Is there an opportunity to pilot your effort there? (Y/N)

5. Train Staff and Students

NOTE: this module is still in development. If you already have a training, please share the training materials with the National Resource Consortium Co-Chairs so that we can incorporate them into a set of shared training documents.

Do you already have a training set up for students and staff who collect voter registration forms on your campus? (Y/N)

Have you discussed this training with your local election officials to ensure you are instructing students to fill out forms in ways they can accept?¹⁴ (Y/N)

Have you discussed this training with the department that runs the process you are working with in order to ensure that you are operating in a way that is consistent with their needs? (Y/N)

Do you have a way to collect the contact information necessary to follow up with relevant reminders about upcoming elections and election related deadlines? (Y/N)

6. Execution and Quality Control

Are you or another colleague able to physically be present to ensure quality during the registration activity? (Y/N)

Do have a process for checking submitted forms to see if there are errors that will invalidate them? (Y/N)

Do you have a way to follow up with students who submit forms with errors on them? (Y/N)

¹³ In some states, parts of this training must actually be conducted by the local government itself. In others, anyone can train people to register voters. Make sure to discuss these rules with your local election official to ensure your training is accurate.

7) Reflection and Learning

Do you have a strategy to count the number of forms submitted? (Y/N)

Do you have a strategy to count how many forms submitted by your students are accepted by local election officials? (Y/N)

Do you have a strategy to debrief with the trained students and staff who implemented your intervention to learn how to improve it in future years? (Y/N)

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The core team used the following questions to guide conversations with co-designer campuses.

1. Does your campus currently, or has it ever, offered voter registration during orientation or new student programs?
 - Is every incoming student offered an opportunity to register to vote?
 - Is this opportunity available every year or only during major elections (presidential, governor, etc.)?
 - If voter registration used to be offered at orientation but currently isn't, why the change?
2. If not, what are the reasons for that? (i.e. lack of initiative or existing barriers to implementation)
 - If you wanted to integrate voter registration in to orientation or like programs at your institution what would that take?
 - Timeline, resources, decision makers?
3. If yes, what does this programming look like?
 - Thinking back to how this was started, who was involved, how did the initiative get off the ground, who needed to approve it?
 - Now that the program is going what department oversees this integration?
 - How many people are involved (full-time staff and faculty / part-time staff and faculty / graduate students / undergraduate students / community partners)?
 - Is there a budget allocated to this sort of engagement? If so, how much?
 - Do you have documented results of the program? (i.e. How many students are registered each term, etc.)
4. What resources best support voter registration at your institution?
5. Where is the disconnect between voter registration efforts and programs/initiatives that reach every student at your institution?



THE INSIGHT BRIEF TEAM



NASPA[®]

Student Affairs Administrators
in Higher Education



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