Engaging Your Campus in the Elections—Six Key Ways to Act

How do we engage America’s 20 million students in America’s elections? The Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) talking with over 500 campuses in 2008 and 750 in 2012 to do exactly that, with three quarters of them implementing new election engagement approaches as the result of our suggestions. In 2013, we ran a highly successful pilot project for Virginia’s statewide off-year elections. Drawing on this experience, we’ve compiled this list of effective nonpartisan approaches that colleges and universities can use to engage their students. We hope you’ll use this resource to help your students register to vote, learn about issues and candidates, volunteer in campaigns, and get to the polls, while ensuring their votes count despite all the obstacles. This is particularly important in off-year election cycles. Four out of five students stayed home in 2010 in most contested states, so there’s huge room for improvement.

Successfully engaging your students will depend on collaborating with others on your campus to follow through on your existing approaches and complement them with effective new ones. When schools make a coordinated institutional effort, it matters: In our 2013 off-year pilot project, Virginia Commonwealth University saw a 43% increase in voting rates for on-campus students between the 2009 gubernatorial race, when they did little institutionally to engage their students, and their 2013 totals, when they began to implement exactly the kinds of approaches we’re suggesting. They did this despite a late start and a race where the two major candidates had near-record lows of approval and enthusiasm.

We’ve listed lots of examples, each of which have value, but their most powerful and most long-lasting impact will come from their combined effect. You don’t have to do all of them to make a difference on your campus. But you want to make sure you address all the key areas of electoral engagement, choosing approaches that fit your campus best, planning them at appropriate points in the election cycle and in your academic year, and dividing them among different people on campus so the responsibilities get divided up. Think of this as your election engagement checklist, or a menu of options to choose from. In all cases, the earlier you start the better, especially for areas that take significant institutional planning.

Key areas include:

I. Build a Team
II. Register Students to Vote
III. Educate on Issues and Candidates
IV. Encourage Student Volunteering
V. Create Home-Stretch Visibility
VI. Get Out the Vote

Postscript—Document as You Go, Measure Your Impact, And Build For the Next Round

I. BUILD A TEAM, GATHER THE NECESSARY INFO, AND PLAN FOR KEY TIMELINES

1) Build your team. It’s hard to engage a campus alone, so create a core group of administrators, faculty, and staff to coordinate campus election-engagement efforts, spread out the work and ensure key people talk with each other across different departments and disciplines. Enlist key campus leaders to help engage your campus, using approaches drawn from this list. Include Deans, Provost,
President, Student Affairs, Service Learning Coordinator, Registrar, IT department, Residence Life, Campus Newspaper Advisor, Faculty Development, Coaches and academic departments.

**a)** **Review what your campus has done previously** and brainstorm ways to build on it. Conduct research interviews with program staff, student activists, and recent graduates, getting as much detail as possible about what they did. Try and get program materials from them so you don't have to completely start from scratch.

**b)** **Help students organize students.**

**c)** **Approach student leadership.** Connect with student government, organizations and programming boards early on. Encourage them to allocate resources to campus electoral engagement, coordinating with administrators, faculty, and staff.

i) **Form an all-campus student coalition.** At Ohio State University, OSU Votes worked during welcome week and student move-in day to register students as they soon as they hit the campus, then conducted a coordinated effort to educate the campus on the issues and get students out to the polls. In 2012 they also registered not only students, but also campus janitors, housekeepers, groundskeepers, and food service workers.

ii) **Give stipends to engage student volunteers or compensate them with academic credit,** and put them in charge of organizing other students. In 2013 we used CEEP funds to hire stipended interns on key campuses, to see if it would work. They coordinated nonpartisan teams of 15-20 student volunteers who conducted registration and Get Out The Vote campaigns and educated students on issues and candidates, and most made a significant impact. CEEP funds will probably not be available for this in 2014, but schools can use work-study funds or other internal resources to compensate campus student coordinators (students receiving federal work study funds are eligible, but not current Americorps/VISTA volunteers). Faculty and administrators can also give academic or service credit hours to help organize campus election-related activities. At Virginia’s James Madison University, **four social work grad students received academic credit to coordinate the campus’s successful nonpartisan engagement effort, DukesVote.** If you can reach faculty as they’re planning their Fall courses, you’ll have the maximum success with this approach. However you do this, students can be the most effective messengers for reaching their peers with a voter engagement message, and the messengers with the most energy.

**d)** **Encourage the student newspaper** to serve as a key source of information, empowering students to get past the blur of campaign ads and spin. Begin planning with them early for fall—or to cover key candidates in late-spring primaries. Although their staffers are often chronically overworked, emphasize the powerful role they can play on your campus and the degree to which students may have few other trustworthy sources of electoral information and context.

i) **Encourage the paper to challenge the reflex response of “they’re all the same” or “they’re all equally corrupt” by exploring real differences in positions between opposing candidates, debunking misleading campaign ads, and starting early to highlight the importance of off-year elections.** When we create our non-partisan candidate guides, encourage your paper to distribute them as inserts (which happened at James Madison University) or use them as take-off points for more in-depth stories.

ii) **Encourage the paper to particularly cover down-ballot races and primaries.** It’s important that students vote in a race for Governor or Senator. But other positions like the Secretary of State who administers voting rules can be equally important, and are often overlooked by mainstream media, as are important Congressional and local legislative races. And primaries are where the candidates get chosen.

iii) **Use student-produced reporting to educate the campus on candidate stands through on-line media,** using the approach of George Mason University’s Mason Votes. If you have a faculty blog, invite faculty to comment on election-related issues, as Princeton did in theirs.
2) Pull together key information about voter registration and election regulations and timelines in your area, and about organizations that can provide assistance in navigating complex rules. Integrate this information with the timelines of your campus calendar.

a) **Check state voter registration and ID rules.** These may have changed since 2012, so it’s critical to be on top of new rules and ensure you have accurate information to share. CEEP will be distributing concise summaries of each state’s voting rules drawn up with our partners, the lawyers of [Fair Elections Legal Network](https://wearefeln.org) (FELN). Each state coordinator will distribute these summaries to your school directly and will also post them on their statewide election engagement website, most likely housed at the local [Campus Compact affiliate](https://campuscompact.org). We’ll also be sending periodic updates as new rules come into effect and organizing webinars with FELN to walk schools through their state rules, approaches that drew excellent responses in 2012.

b) You’ll find additional summaries of your state rules as well as candidate information and a nationwide polling place locator at the [League of Women Voters VOTE411.Org](https://www.vote411.org), more detailed information at [Fair Elections Legal Network](https://wearefeln.org) and [The Brennan Center](https://brennancenter.org), and links to your official Secretary of State’s site at [Nonprofitvote.Org](https://www.nonprofitvote.org).

c) **Check out Key Resources.**
   i) Visit our [Campus Election Engagement Project](https://campusvoteproject.org) website to view our latest resources and tools, and to sign up for regular updates.
   ii) Check out some excellent engagement resources from our partners.
   iii) [www.Campusvoteproject.org](https://www.campusvoteproject.org) from the Fair Elections Legal Network
   iv) [The New Voters Project](https://newvotersproject.org) from the student PIRGS
   v) Non-Profit VOTE’s [Campaign Starter Kit](https://www.nonprofitvote.org). Their site also has detailed information on what nonprofits can and can’t do in terms of electoral involvement, which are useful for campus community service projects.

3) **Create a working calendar.**
   a) **Identify key electoral dates for your state or city.**
      i) Deadlines to get an on-campus voting station.
      ii) Voter registration deadlines.
      iii) Fall early voting timelines.
      iv) Deadline to apply for absentee ballots
   b) **Highlight key campus timelines, dates of major events, and critical dates in your engagement effort**
      i) Deadline(s) for the site students use when they register for fall classes, so you can work you’re your campus IT department to integrate [Rock the Vote’s online registration tool](https://www.rocketthetvote.org), which they’ll supply you for free.
      ii) Deadline(s) for submitting election-related materials to be integrated in campus registration packets.
      iii) Deadline(s) to get student orientations to include voter registration and other election-engagement activities.
      iv) Academic calendar, including first and last days of classes, and key dates to work around like mid-terms and holidays.
      v) Major campus events (e.g., football games and concerts) for engaging and registering students, taking advantage of the large number of people present in one place.
4) Create an election-related section on your campus website. This shows institutional commitment, gives official legitimacy, and provides a central public presence for your work.
   a) Include information on state voting rules, deadlines and resources.
   b) Highlight your existing campus voter participation initiatives and those you’ll be developing.
   c) Highlight visible links to the page on your main campus website, and on high-traffic pages like those where students register for classes or buy tickets for campus events.
   d) Include links for students to register to vote, find their polling station, learn about issues and candidates (see below).
   e) Promote the site through campus-wide websites and listservs, media and student organizations.

5) Brainstorm funding sources for ideas not already built into campus budgets. The earlier you start on this the more successful you’ll be.
   a) For instance, printing of voter engagement materials, food and sound systems for get-out-the-vote volunteer parties, and transportation for students who want to register voters off campus.
   b) Look at student activities funds, community service funds, and funds from departments or key administrators.
   c) If you have a non-federally funded student philanthropy program, they might be able to help with this. We can also give them ideas for election-related micro-grants to help engage other schools.
   d) Look to other community organizations (like your local League of Women Voters) who may already be producing nonpartisan voters’ guides or other materials that they could make available for free or at minimal cost.

II. REGISTER STUDENTS TO VOTE

The 2008 reauthorization of the Federal Higher Education Act requires that colleges and universities make a “good faith effort” to distribute voter registration materials to all students. So take the lead in helping get your students registered. The challenges may be harder now, but in 2008, 87% of students who registered ended up voting. Announce campus-wide goals and goals for departments or residence halls, both to measure progress and to motivate.

1) Find out your state rules and timelines, then provide critical information and resources.
   a) In Ohio, for instance, residential students at public colleges and universities need a letter from the president or chancellor to vote as local residents, while students at private schools ones need a school-issued zero-balance utility bill. In Pennsylvania, student ID’s require an expiration date to meet the state’s voter ID laws. We’ll supply up-to-date state information in our voting rule guides and also hold state-wide webinars where campuses in your state can ask questions of Fair Elections Legal Network lawyers.
   b) If your school runs into particular hurdles trying to help your students register and vote, like from your local county clerk, visit 866ourvote.org or call the 1-866-OURVOTE hotline to connect with voting rights experts who can advise you.

2) Bring the vote to campus - literally! Work with local and state officials to host an on-campus voting station, which makes student voting hugely more convenient. This usually takes some lead time, but can significantly increase turnout by making it easier for students to vote. Here’s how Collin County Community College (Texas) did this.

3) Use the free online registration tool from Rock the Vote, or the customized version from the student PIRGs if you have a PIRG chapter at your school.
   a) Rock the Vote has been developing their online registration tool for years, and it’s well-tested and easy to use. You contact them to tell them you want to be a partner and they’ll send you a simple embed code that you can copy and paste into your campus websites the way you would a code for a YouTube link. The widget that appears will then allow students to either register online, or fill out the necessary
online forms, print them out, and mail them in with the necessary signatures and identification. It also lets them do the same to change their registration—ideally to their residence at the school.

b) You can also co-brand this same tool branded with your school logo, which we’d highly recommend. That will help you integrate it into classroom registration, as described below, or when you sell tickets to campus concerts or sporting events.

c) Rock the Vote will send all students who’ve registered through their form state-specific electronic reminders of key dates and deadlines.

d) Using their form also allows you to track both registrations and the eventual voter turnout of those who’ve used it, while protecting individual privacy. You can also use the tool to add in your own custom survey questions and recruit volunteers onto your email and mobile lists, and authorized representatives of your team have access to your registration data to help in getting students out to the polls

4) If you’d prefer and can add it to your budget, have Turbovote send them filled out forms and envelopes to mail in. You can use their tool instead of Rock the Vote’s, or offer two different registration options.

   a) Like Rock the Vote, Turbovote has an online tool that allows students (and citizens in general) to sign up to receive the forms they need to register to vote and update their registrations, and also sends out electronic reminders. If your school can cover the costs, they’ll also send out pre-filled-out forms along with stamped self-addressed envelopes, so all students need to do is sign and mail them in. For $1,000 for the first 4,000 students and $2.50 per participating student beyond it, plus $1.15 per each envelope Turbovote sends out, your school can offer this technology to as many students as you can sign up. Turbovote will then send ready-to-sign absentee ballot applications and a stamped envelope to every student who wants to participate. Contact Turbovote Partnerships if interested.

5) Make a coordinated effort to register students during orientation, registration and other key school activities. Register students at move-in day to campus residence halls. This may take some lead time, to arrange, but models like UVote or integration of voter registration with classroom registration are extremely effective, so the advance preparation is worth it.

   a) Nothing will register more students than integrating voter registration with classroom registration, since all students have to pass through this procedure. Ask your campus IT department to set up a page with the Rock the Vote or Turbovote links that will be integrated with your classroom registration pages so that students will need to make an active choice not to register or update their registration.

   b) Northwestern University’s UVote model uses peer-to-peer outreach to help all first year students register to vote as part of the process of receiving their student ID for the first time. Students are able to register in any of the 50 states with each state’s mail-in form, and staff processed and mailed the completed forms to the appropriate Board of Elections. They registered between 90 and 95% of incoming freshman by the end of orientation week. Contact Rob Donahue at Northwestern for more information.

1) If you’re a residential campus, work with student organizations to do a “dorm storm,” where they go door to door to register students where they live. (This requires residence life, student activities, and campus security to coordinate and waive normal security rules.)

2) Get students to register or re-register on campus—to avoid having to drive back home. And do this early on so they don’t get in a last minute crunch

   a) Students often don’t realize they can register on campus, so end up not voting because they don’t have the time to drive back home on Election Day. Even if students are already registered, encourage as many students as possible to re-register on campus, to make it as easy as possible for them to participate. The Supreme Court has ruled that students can make this choice, but many of them don’t know this.

3) Distribute and collect voter registration forms—especially in classrooms

4) Include them in course registration forms and have faculty distribute them with course materials and collect them later in class or set aside a time for students to fill them out online.
a. Where possible, visit classes to make a “pitch” for voter registration and to hand out and collect completed forms or to have students register online. Classrooms are shown to be the most effective way to engage one-on-one with students.
b. Mass mail paper registration forms and email online registration links to all students. Hold public events to collect the paper forms.
c. Keep records of students who register so you can follow up with email and text reminders. RockTheVote’s online tool includes the latter capacity.

6) Use all available technologies, and use them to complement each other
Create a prominent link on the university homepage to your designated election-engagement website, and to the voter registration widgets of Rock the Vote or the student PIRGs.
a. Promote the links to the registration widget and to your election engagement site through campus-wide email and by having them pop up during classroom registration, as mentioned, or when students order tickets for entertainment or athletic events.
b. Display a QR code on the football stadium Jumbotron with links to a campus or external website with voter registration links. Have the football team follow Central Michigan University’s lead and publicly celebrate their registration at half-time, while the Jumbotron shows how other students can follow their lead.
c. Integrate a QR code linked to a campus site into other election-related posters, banners, and other forms of visibility.
d. Send out campus-wide voice and text messages for key registration-related deadlines.
e. Ask students to follow the “Each One Text One” approach of Norfolk State students who worked together to create a series of texts to remind their friends of registration and voting deadlines, and encouraged them to forward them to their friends.
f. Create a simple campus-specific video on why voting matters. You can adapt the template created by Bowling Green State University. Bowling Green aired theirs on the Student Union TVs, during the commercial breaks on the residence hall movie channel, and in every other visible location on campus. Or the approaches created by the Virginia Commonwealth University students

7) Work with your service learning center to have students register community members through their service work, particularly in underrepresented communities, or those who’ve lost their rights through felon disenfranchisement.
a. Nonprofitvote.org has excellent resources on what non-profits can and can’t legally do in terms of electoral involvement (like campuses, they usually do less than they could). So ask students to show these guidelines to the non-profits that they volunteer with and encourage them to register their constituencies.
b. Create student-run off-campus registration drives.
i) In 2008, North Carolina A&T University registered over 12,000 students, staff, faculty, and community members by combining on-campus registration with service projects where students registered voters on six successive weekends in nearby low-income neighborhoods.
ii) In 2012 and 2013, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) students partnered with the tenants union of the nearby Mosby Court public housing project to help other residents register, restore their rights if they were former felons (a major issue in states like Virginia and Florida), and secure rides to the polls. Electoral participation of the Mosby residents increased by 59% as a result, as did that of the participating students. They’re now expanding the effort to other Richmond, Virginia housing projects, and we’re hoping you’ll use the guide that VCU wrote up to replicate their approach in your own community.

8) Build on your school’s brand to create a comprehensive campaign. VCU Honors College students used their mascot to encourage their peers to register to vote and get engaged with the slogan, Uncle
Ram Wants You. Students also wrote issue briefs for their classes and posted them to social media sites created as a part of their mass communications classes and their comprehensive school election engagement effort.

9) Compete with rival schools for the highest percentage of students registered. University of Colorado Boulder and Colorado State did this in 2012, with great success. You can also compete, using the Rock the Vote Registration tool, on the highest percentage of registered voters who participate at the polls.

10) Get students registering students. This is one of the most important roles that student leaders, interns, and volunteers can perform
   a. Encourage student and relevant off-campus groups (like the student PIRGS or) to register voters in public spaces, like campus quads and the student union and at football games and other events. Your local League of Women Voters chapter can help train your participants.
   b. Encourage campus Republicans, Democrats and other political groups to do joint registration drives.
   c. Weave election engagement into existing courses or programs. Approach faculty early enough for them to weave this into their courses. Invite representatives from your local registrar or the League of Women Voters to train students in classes, and then have them register their peers. Western Carolina University’s student-led committee created a voter training seminar that met twice a week for 10 weeks straight, helping register 1300 new voters.
   d. Host a registration or voter competition within or between residence halls or departments, or between a rival campus or statewide.
      i. Florida, Virginia and several other CEEP efforts sponsored the Democracy Cup, where they gave awards for the best campus engagement projects, statewide. University of Miami students won the first Cup for registering 4,000 students on campus and 10,000 off campus.
      ii. At Delta College in Saginaw Michigan, teams of students competed to register their peers: Students who brought 10 or more individuals to register won DeltaVotes! t-shirts, and the team that engaged the most peers won a pizza party.
      iii. University of Colorado Boulder and Colorado State have had highly successful competitions to see who could register more voters.

11) Help students choose whether to vote at home or at school. Deciding where to register determines which issues and races will be on their ballots, so is an important strategic decision. Students wanting to vote absentee in their home district/state will have different rules, procedures and deadlines from those on their campus. LongDistanceVoter explains absentee ballot options and provides resources to register either at school or at home.

12) Host a Party where you’ll invite students to register as they enter. Play music. Wear organizational t-shirts. Approach participants with clipboards for a more personal, one-one-one approach. Offer stickers to identify those who have registered.

13) If students are cynical about the election, remind them that they can wait to decide who to vote for, but they need to register by the deadline or lose their potential choice.
III. EDUCATE ON ISSUES, CANDIDATES, AND WHY OFF-YEAR ELECTIONS MATTER

1) **Distribute and display nonpartisan information.** Students often say they don’t vote because “they’re all lying and spinning. You can’t tell what they believe.” Offering clear information on where candidates stand therefore plays a critical role.
   a) When CEEP creates and distributes [our nonpartisan voter’s guides](http://votesmart.org/) closer to the election, distribute and publicize them widely, including online, encourage the student newspaper to use them as a beginning point to cover the differences between candidates. Don’t forget to include often-overlooked down ballot races, like Secretary of State or Attorney General or Congressional or local legislative races, or for statewide initiatives. Virginia’s [James Madison University distributed them in their student newspaper](http://viterbo.edu/). [Wisconsin’s Viterbo University placed them in every student mailbox](http://viterbo.edu/). Other schools have distributed them through campus-wide email.
   b) Create specific guides to key issues, and build conversations around them. Or use our [nonpartisan Dialogue Guides](http://florida-campus-compact.org/), created by Florida Campus Compact on issues students considered important, like [education](https://www.florida-campus-compact.org/), [immigration](https://www.florida-campus-compact.org/), [health care](https://www.florida-campus-compact.org/), [jobs and the economy](https://www.florida-campus-compact.org/), [unemployment](https://www.florida-campus-compact.org/), and [student debt](https://www.florida-campus-compact.org/).
   c) Ask your election board or [League of Women’s Voters](http://www.lwv.org/) for official nonpartisan VOTER’S Pamphlets for your area. Place copies in key locations.
   d) **Display information on candidate positions in the student union**, blown up large enough to be visible to passing students. Also information on state-wide initiatives, which are likely to be far less high profile, so a source of greater potential confusion.

2) **Create your own nonpartisan guide to local races** by having students draw up local guides under the supervision of political science, communications, or honors faculty and distribute them in the campus and community. Virginia Commonwealth honors and communications students did this in 2012.

3) **Hold debate watch parties** and follow-up conversations in major common spaces like large auditoriums or more intimate spaces like residential dorms. **Hold follow-up classroom discussions.**
   a) Ideally hold these in large spaces and have faculty give credit for attending. Florida Atlantic University gave extra credit to 1100 students who attended a 2012 DebateWatch party in their football stadium. You can do the same thing for a statewide Senatorial or Gubernatorial debate.
   b) If you hold smaller parties, make sure you hold enough of them, like working through residence life to hold simultaneous parties in every dorm, to give you a chance to reach a decent number of students. You don’t want to waste time on a 40-person pizza party where only those most interested attend.
   c) Classroom follow-up discussions can be extremely helpful, particularly if they extend beyond the courses where people are already the most interested. We’re still developing our faculty approaches, but faculty can have students reflect on the debates through presentations or papers or explore relevant policy aspects that they raise.
   d) You can also social media to foster discussion on the themes of the debates, though you may want to set up ground-rules to keep the focus on content as opposed to name-calling
   e) You can also invite students to attend debates or forums hosted by the League of Women Voters or other community groups, but the goal should be to get as much of the campus community talking about the issues that were raised, so you always want to include some way to bring the discussion back to the broader campus community

4) **Post and link to credible sites with info on candidate stands** from high-traffic campus sites. Create displays highlighting them in libraries, study areas, dorms and other common areas, and steer students to them in courses. Key nonpartisan sites include [Votesmart.Org](http://votesmart.org/), [VOTE411.org](http://vote411.org/), [Factcheck.org](http://factcheck.org/), [Politifact.com](http://politifact.com/).

5) **Talk about the role of lower profile elected officials**—from Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General to state legislators, and the influence their positions can have. If you have a race for Secretary of State,
ask your student newspaper to discuss how they’ve implemented voting rules, including ones that affect students like voter ID rules, or if they’re challenging an incumbent, how they believe the rules should be implemented.

6) Work with local media. New Mexico’s Santa Fe Community College joined with the city’s public radio and TV stations to create a series of 60-second ads on why youth voting matters. University of Nevada, Reno’s journalism school organized a team of graduate and undergraduate students to design and launch a website that provided statewide nonpartisan election information specifically tailored for students. Michigan State University teamed up with the city of East Lansing to create a similar YouVote initiative with a website featuring voting rules, registration links, and information on local, state, and national races.

7) Work with your student newspaper.
   a) Ask them to explore specific policy differences between candidates—so students have more to go on than ads, sound bites and personality spin.
   b) Ask them to cover issues with particular salience to students, like the politics of student loans, federal and state support of higher education, the Dream Act, the new voting laws, youth job opportunities, abortion, and gay rights.
   c) Ask them to also explore candidate stands on more general issues from climate change to tax and economic policies, restoration of voting rights to former felons, and any key local issues.
   d) Stress that students don’t have a lot of trusted information sources on political candidates, that campus newspapers can play a key role, and that it’s not enough just to cover candidate visits or alumni who are running for office.
      i) Encourage them to highlight misleading campaign ads using resources like the Annenberg School’s Flackcheck.Org, and encourage students to look at who’s funding them and use Annenberg’s resources to challenge their airing. Encourage debate on whether the ads accurately define differences between particular candidates.
      ii) Encourage them to counter student cynicism by recalling close races where a handful of votes tipped the difference, like the 537-votes in Florida’s 2000 presidential race, the 312 votes in Minnesota’s 2008 Senate race, the 133-vote 2004 Washington State governor’s race, or the 165-vote 2013 Virginia Attorney General’s race.
      iii) When you produce nonpartisan voter guides for your state or when CEEP produces them, encourage the paper to reprint them, link to them, adapt and expand on them, or otherwise cover them.
      iv) Once you form a campus election coalition, get members in the group to write a brief column for the newspaper with regular updates on campus election activities. Include both nonpartisan institutional activities and accounts of what groups like the campus Young Republicans and Young Democrats are doing.

8) Ask faculty to engage students via their courses, including giving course credit for volunteering in campaigns of their choice, as described below, or in your school’s nonpartisan campus election engagement effort.
   a) Encourage them to explore the complementary relationship between electoral choices and social movements, from the civil rights movement to the Tea Party and Occupy movements. See CEEP-founder Paul Loeb’s article, My Vote Doesn’t Matter for more on combating cynicism.
   b) Talk about where candidates stand on key issues of student interest. Be accurate and fair, whatever the political views you may hold as a faculty member or student.
   c) As above, use sites like Flackcheck.Org, to explore misleading ads and come up with strategies to help them backfire, and steer students to sites like votesmart.org, Factcheck.org, and Politifact.com, where they can find accurate information on candidate stands.
d) Encourage students to register and engage their friends.

9) **Foster student discussions.** If enough students hold one-on-one or small-group election-related discussions these can be the most powerful ways of engaging their peers.
   a) **Have students create teams** to hold one-on-one nonpartisan discussions where they’ll ask fellow students to pledge to vote, to volunteer for election-related events, and to help in passing out nonpartisan election related materials, like CEEP’s candidate guides. If they can then get some of the students they talk with to join the nonpartisan teams, it’s a great way of multiplying their impact.
   b) **Hold formal and informal debates and discussion sessions** in public places and residence halls where students can discuss issues and candidates and help decide how to vote.
   c) **Hold dialogues across political lines.** Bring students and community members to find common ground while respecting differing perspectives. See the guidelines and manuals of the Public Conversations Project, those on the site of the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, and the small conversations model of LivingRoomConversations.
   d) Have political science, sociology, or communications classes survey other students for their perspectives, then publicize the results.
   e) **Encourage specific campus constituencies to hold forums** and educational events and comment in the student paper on how differing candidate stands can affect their lives, linking their particular experiences with the issues at stake. For instance, vets could host or co-host a forum on our current wars or issues surrounding our treatment of veterans. Disabled students could address where candidates stand on issues of accessibility and inclusion. The campus multi-cultural center or groups representing immigrant students could talk about candidate stands on immigration or disparate racial sentencing. University of Miami hosted a “Healthcare Games” event where the college Republicans and Democrats debated the Affordable Care Act.
   f) **Screen election-related films** such as Iron-Jawed Angels (discussion guide here), The Youngest Candidate or Journeys through the Red, White and Blue.
   g) Help students personalize the issues. Miami Dade Community College ordered 4,000 “This is Why I Vote” buttons with their Center for Engagement’s logo and a blank space where students, faculty, and staff wrote in why they were going to vote, and students used these personalized responses to spark individual election-related conversations. State University of New York at Cortland did the same thing with their “I’m voting because....” posters. North Carolina Campus Compact held a statewide “Why I Plan to Vote” contest to collect and distribute the best student video testimonials on why elections mattered.

10) **Get students to sign a “Pledge to Vote,”** creating a card for them to sign or sending them to sites collecting online pledges, like Rock the Vote’s, where they can commit to showing up at the polls.
   a) **Encourage faculty to distribute pledge cards in class** and allow class time for students to research issues and candidates plan how they’ll cast their ballot.
   b) **Follow up with emails and text reminders on key dates,** which the Rock the Vote and PIRG tools allow you to do.
   c) If you create your own pledge card, it should include: Places for people to make specific commitments to themselves about when they’ll learn about issues and candidates and decide how to vote; How and where they’ll actually cast their ballot (polling place, home via absentee, or by early voting); How they’ll get to the polls (bus, walking, driving); What time they’ll go or fill out and mail their absentee ballot; What they’ll take with them to vote (e.g., id, sample ballot, directions to polling place); And who they’ll take to the polls. Voting with friends increases the likelihood of actually voting and gets others to vote as well.

11) Talk about local races as opportunities for students to get involved and have a disproportionate impact, because turnout tends to be low. **They could even run themselves,** like a 22-year-old William
& Mary senior who his fellow students helped elect to the Williamsburg City Council, and a recent James Madison University graduate just re-elected to his second term. If graduates of your school hold electoral office or are running for office, invite them to speak at forums along with their opponents.

12) Create and distribute a sample ballot that includes a nonpartisan guide to local issues and candidates. Again, ask your political science, political communications or sociology faculty to have their students help create such a guide, then circulate it in the campus and community.

IV. ENCOURAGE STUDENT VOLUNTEERING

1) Talk of how students can multiply their impact by volunteering—with partisan or nonpartisan campaigns of their choosing. Encourage them to volunteer at the polls or for initiatives and campaigns on Election Day and in the period leading up to it. Talk about how they can multiply the power of their individual vote by enlisting others.
   a) Our campus efforts have to be meticulously nonpartisan, but there’s nothing wrong with encouraging students to embrace their own beliefs, and act on them, particularly since patterns of early civic involvement tend to stick.
   b) Make information on campus-based and off-campus opportunities to volunteer widely available—but make sure to give equal visibility to the contacts for both major parties. If a third party candidate has a significant presence, give their campaign information as well.
   c) Again, mention races decided by as little as a few hundred votes, where grass-roots volunteers helped tip the outcome. Encourage them to knock on doors, make calls, or volunteer as poll-watchers—playing a critical role by getting others to vote who might otherwise stay home.
   e) Cite examples like one described in CEEP-founder Paul Loeb’s Soul of a Citizen, where a young Wesleyan student registered 300 of her peers in an election where her congressman won by 21 votes. Or Loeb’s own experience volunteering in an election where the Washington State Governor was decided by 133 votes.

2) Remind students that they can volunteer in their own voice, voicing their own complex feelings. If they’re ambivalent about the candidates for a key office, but still distinctly prefer one over the other, suggest that when they do volunteer, they can voice their mixed sentiments to voters they approach, acknowledging areas where they have differences, yet talking about why they still believe their candidate is still worth electing. This is likely to draw much greater participation than if students feel they have to line up behind a set “party line” or imply that their preferred candidate is a saint. This refusal to get caught in what Loeb calls “the perfect standard” is also an important argument for getting students to vote, even if they judge the leading candidates as significantly flawed.

3) Encourage students to join our non-partisan campus engagement teams. For many, volunteering with partisan campaigns will be a perfect fit, and it’s an important form of civic engagement. But there are lots of students who will prefer to work on getting their fellow students to vote and not have to publically promote a particular candidate. Those are the ones that we want to recruit for our nonpartisan teams.

4) Ask faculty to require students to volunteer in campaigns of their choosing and report back through journals, papers or classroom presentations. Or to give incentives for volunteering, like extra credit, since the more students get involved now, the more likely they’ll stay involved in the future.
   a) Faculty can’t mandate particular partisan allegiances when they do this—that would be grossly inappropriate. But they can encourage students to select campaigns that resonate with the students’ individual values, and encourage them to give voice to their convictions.
   b) Faculty can also ask students to reflect on their volunteering experiences, perhaps sharing them with the rest of the class and exploring how they’re similar or different from students volunteering for an opposing political party. Or ask them to write reflection papers.
c) A concrete example: In 2008, Dr. Tiffany Hansbrough of Ohio’s Baldwin Wallace College assigned her leadership students to volunteer with a campaign of their choice. She gave them the contact information for the McCain and Obama field offices and for the nonprofit Greater Cleveland Voter Registration Coalition, then required the students to volunteer for 15 hours with a presidential campaign of their choice, a local or state election race (including ballot initiatives), or a nonprofit group engaging in election-related activities. She also had her students log their experiences in journal entries, providing details about what occurred, the participants, and their impressions. After the election, students were required to write a paper evaluating their experiences.

5) **Publish campaign contact information** (for all parties, candidates and initiatives) in the **school newspaper** and encourage students to volunteer in these ongoing efforts. Include campus-based partisan volunteer opportunities (like College Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians) or outside grassroots groups that will be involved in the election like the student PIRGS, or campus affiliates of the NAACP, the Tea Party, NARAL Pro Choice America, National Right to Life, etc, so students can easily participate. There are lots of ways to volunteer in the election, and in the process connect with a broader community of like-minded citizens.

6) **Reach out to a variety of student organizations, not just the College Democrats, Republican, Libertarians, etc.** These groups include, but are not limited to disabled students, veterans, LGBT students, and students involved with campus multi-cultural or diversity centers. As discussed, encourage these students to hold forums and educational events for the general campus, as well as reaching out to their own specific groups. If you have living/learning communities, follow Virginia Wesleyan’s example and have them make election-engagement a core common theme.

7) **Encourage** students to **sign up as nonpartisan poll-workers** (and even get paid in some states), including at the precincts where their fellow-students will be voting. Work with your local county clerk to arrange this. Law students can volunteer with the nonpartisan Election Protection coalition.

8) Remind students that they can **volunteer not only in their own state, but by telephone in other key states** either with particular major campaigns or allied partisan groups like MoveOn.org or Tea Party Patriots.

V. CREATE HOME STRETCH VISIBILITY

1) **Plan coordinated election activities**
   a) **Enlist key campus leaders** to help register and engage students. Include deans, orientation directors, student affairs officers, service learning coordinators, registrars, IT departments, residence life, campus newspaper advisors, faculty development, coaches, and academic departments, as well as key student leaders.
   b) If you’re a high-enrollment campus, **invite your local county elections supervisor** to speak and/or distribute election-related information. Columbus State Community College (OH) did this, as did Nova Southeastern University (FL), while Colorado Compact had Denver’s supervisor address a state-wide student gathering.

3) **Educate on the mechanics of voting. Set up mock polling places and hold mock elections**, perhaps in the student union, with sample ballots, voting machines if you can obtain them, and related information for students to practice voting and consider how they’ll vote. University of St. Francis (IN) did this as part of their registration drives. Such dry runs can assure new voters they’re bringing the proper ID and filling out
the ballot as they intend. They also encourage them to learn about issues and candidates in advance of election day.

4) **Hold rallies and election-related festivals leading up to the vote.** These should be combined with concrete activities like registration drives, and solicitation of volunteers and pledges to vote. North Carolina A&T’s 2008 “AGGIES Get Out to Vote” rally included live music, food, and voter registration tables. The school estimated their voter engagement efforts reached 12,000 students, faculty, and community members.

Northern Iowa University’s Voterpalooza has become a major anticipated event.

5) **Capture students’ attention with Guerrilla theater:**
   a) **Use flash mobs and theater** to gather crowds in visible places and then hand out voter pledges and registration and voting information. Entertain as you engage and educate.
   b) **Hold flash mobs or skits about voting, or to publicize key events.** Florida State students formed a flash mob, gathering in the student union with t-shirts promoting the voting date and slogans like “I vote for education” or “I vote for health care.” They froze for five minutes to let the crowd look at them. Then they moved on, did the same thing elsewhere on the campus, and repeated it again. Similarly, Eastern Michigan University students wore orange arm bands listing issues they cared about, using them to start election-related conversations.

6) **Use Halloween to highlight the election:**
   a) **Trick or Vote encourages canvassing** on or around Halloween with templates and examples. Take advantage of parties to spread, voter education, voter rights, and get out the vote messages.
   b) **Hand out candy messages.** Get some bags of candy and stick or tie small messages to them ("Vote Nov 6", “Bring ID to the polls”, “What time are you voting?”, or “How are you getting to the polls?” Then put on a costume (or not) and hand them out on campus (having more information available can be helpful but people are much more likely to take a flyer if it comes with a piece of candy).
   c) **Hold Halloween parties with election-related themes**—Minnesota’s Anoka-Ramsey Community College held one called “Are You Scared to Vote?”

6) **Create a visual presence** to encourage voting, remind of key deadlines, and educate about what to bring to the polls.
   a) **Display posters, banners, signs and sandwich boards** (as permitted)
   b) **Create posters** on your own, by using Campus Compact’s existing templates. Hand out stickers to go on everything from book covers to water bottles to bicycles.
   c) **Create voter-participation commercials to play on the football stadium Jumbotron.** Central Michigan University did this with CMU athletes and volunteers. Include QR codes that link to online registration sites—ideally a campus site that will also have other voting info.
   d) **Provide chalk so students can draw messages** and images on campus walkways to encourage voting, share key websites and reasons they are voting this year, and announce activities.
   e) **Draw on student creativity.** At Bunker Hill Community College, the largest in Massachusetts, the Office of Community Engagement helped students in Visual Media Art create 300 Get Out the Vote posters that they displayed throughout the campus—faculty and administrators then displayed them on their doors as a way to invite student questions on voting logistics. Schools could also combine these kinds of visual approaches with social media outreach through Instagram, Tumblr, or Vine.

7) **Hold absentee ballot parties.** Westfield State (Mass.) held an absentee ballot party with snacks.

Students could get their necessary ID info photocopied while privately casting their ballots, addressing them, and stacking them to be mailed. Other schools gave students stamps to mail back their ballots.
8) **Use old and new social media** to promote campus events, remind of key deadlines, and connect students with the Twitter and Facebook sites of candidates they might support.

   a) **Use social networking sites to carry your messages.** Use existing groups and cause networks. Encourage students to post onto their sites encouraging their friends to vote. Suggest student organizations promote election-related events through their Facebook pages and Twitter feeds.

   b) Encourage students to **send Get Out the Vote messages through Facebook and Google +**. Being asked by a friend to vote has been found to increase voter participation significantly.

   c) **Write op-eds and letters to editors to the student newspaper and local newspapers** about the importance of each person’s vote, campus initiatives to engage students and such. Encourage students to carve out the time both to make educated electoral choices and to make a concrete plan on when and how to vote. Remind people to bring the necessary ID and be prepared in case lines are long.

   d) **Provide reminders in unusual contexts and places** (halftime of athletic games, intermission of performances, above restroom sinks or in stalls) -- Download free templates.

   e) **Consider placing Facebook ads targeting students on your campus.** Perhaps do a new ad each day in the period close to the election with a slightly different message, including a countdown to remaining deadlines and to Election Day.

9) **Publicize the Election Protection SmartPhone app** and encourage students to download it for free from the Itunes or Google Play store. It allows students to verify their registration, register to vote, look up their polling place, review key state rules and regulations, see what kind of machine they vote on, and contact the national Election Projection coalition via phone or email if they have questions or encounter problems.

**VI. GET OUT THE VOTE**

1) Combine face-to-face and online technologies, so text messages and dorm storm canvasses complement each other

   a) **Work with your campus IT department** to send reminder emails, voicemails and texts to every student. Texts have been found to have the strongest impact.

      i) Messages can include **links to resources** such as Vote411.org of the League of Women Voters where students can find out where to vote and what they need to bring, and sites where they can verify registration. **Encourage students to make a logistical plan** for how and when they’ll cast their vote. Research shows that asking people to make a concrete plan for when and how they’ll vote significantly increases the likelihood. And asking them to pledge “to be a voter,” **which is more effective** than “will you vote.”

      ii) Ideally send at least one message before the absentee ballot ordering deadlines as a reminder for those cannot get to their polling places or vote in other states. Send follow-up messages leading up to the election, and then a final election-day message to **remind all students to vote.**

      iii) Create an election-related hashtag for the school, get prominent campus leaders (like athletic stars) and prominent alumni to retweet. Encourage student creativity with social media.

   iv) **Check that key campus websites have updated information**, like links to key voter information sites including the 866ourvote.org voter protection site. Include a **countdown to Election Day.**

   v) In the weeks before the election encourage students, faculty, and staff to set computer **homepages to nonpartisan voter education sites** like Project Vote Smart or to CEEP’s nonpartisan candidate guides

   b) **Ask students to text, tweet and send Facebook messages** to their friends with voting reminders leading up to Election Day and on the day itself.
2) **Encourage early voting.** Early voting avoids jammed schedules or long polling place lines, plus gives students the chance to correct any problems. Piggyback early voting efforts with reminders for students to vote absentee if they’re from other states.

3) **Hold get-out-the-vote rallies** leading up to Election Day.
   i) North Carolina A&T’s “AGGIES Get Out to Vote” rally included live music, food, and voter registration tables

4) **Have students call students.** Electronic reminders can help, but research shows that nothing is more effective than direct peer-to-peer outreach. Enlist student groups to call their peers.

5) **Help Students Get to the Polls**
   a) **See if local transportation authorities or community groups can run special buses,** as they would for major stadium events.
   b) **Publicize polling locations**— include directions, hours, and transportation options.
   c) If your prime polling place is off-campus, encourage your campus to **rent buses or vans to shuttle students** from campus to their polling places, posting departure and return times in central locations. Also have a central site to arrange carpooling rides.
   d) Follow the lead of Virginia’s Longwood University by having faculty use their cars to drive students to the polls. It’s a powerful statement on the importance of voting.
   e) James Madison University’s 18,000-student campus got 10,000 people attending a series of convention and debate-watch parties, then arranged election-day vans and buses when local transportation authorities refused to help.
   f) When University of Southern Mississippi’s van driver surveyed students he shuttled, two thirds said providing this service made the difference in their voting.

6) **Ask faculty to let students miss classes, if need be, to vote.** This is particularly valuable at community colleges, where students often have little time between work and school, so can’t afford to stand in long lines. Virginia’s Liberty University **cancelled all classes** on Election Day and scheduled shuttle buses to take students to the polls. They replaced the usual academic routine for their 10,500 students with an all-day concert that morphed into an election party.

7) **Make voting reminders highly visible … and creative.**
   a) Organize election-day dorm storming. **Knock on doors and offer rides or company going to the polls to registered students considering staying home. Make “I voted” buttons or stickers to give to students who’ve voted. Invite others to get theirs once they do.**
   b) **Phone bank all registered voters** for whom you have phone numbers, especially those whose contacts you gathered during registration drives. If you have no records of your own, the county election board may have lists of those registered from your campus.
   c) **Encourage “Take a Date to the Polls” and “Real Friends don’t let Friends Vote Alone” messages** to foster support within peer groups (publicize through posters, fliers, text messages, Facebook ads, etc).
   d) **Mention voting wherever students are present** in the week before voting: in class rooms, on posters around campus, on the campus radio station, at sports events, in email signatures, at dorm meals, as inserts in the school newspaper, in restaurants where students congregate.
   e) **Again use theater and flash mobs.** One of James Madison University’s star A Capella singing groups **did pop up concerts** in key locations all over campus on election day, encouraging the gathered crowds to go vote while passing out our nonpartisan election materials and those of our partner Rock the Vote.

8) **Make voting a community activity.**
a) **Hold parades to early voting sites.** Many schools did this in 2012, building on a sense of school pride. Schools where sites are further away can do this with carpools.

b) Encourage students to participate together.

c) Encourage local restaurants and businesses to give special discounts to students with “I voted” stickers.

9) **Make sure students’ votes count – Protect their voting rights.**

   a) Publicize state **voter ID requirements** and help students secure all necessary materials, like letters from the president or the right kinds of student or other IDs.

   b) Educate students about potential **voter intimidation practices** and how to avoid being turned away at the polls.

   c) Stay in touch with your state CEEP effort for updates on last minute changes or attempts to make voting more difficult.

   d) Encourage student groups to **organize poll watching activities** to guarantee voter rights.

   e) Distribute the **1-866-OURVOTE hotline** so students can call for expert advice if problems develop or they think they’re being unfairly denied their rights at the polls. In 2012 this number made all the difference in states like Virginia where some local poll workers initially refused to accept legitimate forms of identification.

10) **Plan for entertainment and snacks near the polling places** while students wait in line or wait for their friends to make it through. University of Minnesota hosted a Party at the Polls at their 50,000-student campus: printing posters and flyers to publicize the day; providing hot beverages and snacks to encourage students to withstand lengthy voting lines despite bitter cold; and bringing laptops to answer last-minute questions regarding local races, same-day registration rules, and which precinct to select.

11) **Plan election night parties** to watch returns in student unions, dormitories, fraternities, sororities, and other places where students gather. Request proof of voting to get in. Also distribute a list of community parties around town so students can join in with those who’ve volunteered in the campaigns.

**Postscript—Document as you go, Measure Your Impact, and Build for the Next Round**

1) **Document your most effective electoral engagement efforts through student videos.** Have students, particularly communications and digital media students, create and edit concise videos where they interview those involved in your campus engagement efforts and document their outreach, as the VCU students did. You can post the most inspiring videos on your campus website, and send them to your state CEEP coordinators so we can suggest your approaches to schools in other states, and help them learn from your approaches. The videos will also help your school and others get involved in other election cycles.

2) **Have your senior administrators sign up for the National Study of Student Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE),** based out of the highly respected CIRCLE research institute at Tufts. **Participating in the survey is free.** The costs are covered by a grant. And if you do participate, you’ll be able to get precise data on the percentage of your eligible students who register to vote and turn out at the polls, going back several elections. Anonymity of individual students is strictly protected, so you don’t need Institutional Review Board approval, but NSLVE will give you invaluable data to measure your success in engaging your campus, and give CIRCLE invaluable data to measure student participation in general. We’d also ask you to have senior administrators permit the release of your data to CEEP, so we can measure our (and your) effectiveness as we refine and hone our nonpartisan engagement strategies in each electoral cycle.
3) In addition to NSLVE, which will take around five months to get 2014 results, you can also track your on-campus or near-campus voting rates by precinct participation. Figure out which precincts students vote at, get the numbers from your state election board, and tally the percentage of active voters who showed up at the polls, if possible comparing the numbers to the comparable precincts from four years ago. Then forward the data to your state CEEP outreach person.

4) If you sign students up through the Rock the Vote tool or Turbovote tool, you can set up your own page where you can find out how many students registered and voted. Forward this information to your state CEEP contact.

5) Hold a debriefing for your team on what worked and didn’t work in terms of engaging your campus. And then convey the lessons to your state CEEP outreach person. This is an ongoing learning experience for all of us, and the more we learn about the most effective ways to get students engaged, the more we can convey those lessons to other schools.

6) Write up your notes as a follow up to help your team and others continue the work of engagement. Who was involved and what’s their contact info. Which approaches worked best for the culture of your campus, both in terms of getting people excited about the work and in producing concrete results, like numbers of students registered and numbers who turn out at the polls? Which approaches would you have wanted to do if you’d had more lead time? Which could you continue to pursue before the next election, like integrating voting registration into classroom registration and first year orientation, or securing an on-campus voting station.

7) Celebrate your good work, but keep your team going. Rest and relax. Let participants know how much they’re appreciated. Then continue plan ways to continue engaging your students in elections and other ways of having their voice heard no matter whoever wins the vote in November.

Produced by the Campus Election Engagement Project a nonpartisan effort to help colleges and universities involve students in the election. For more info, or to share campus election engagement ideas, email us here.