



CAMPUS ELECTION ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

www.campuselect.org

HOW CAMPUS NEWSPAPERS CAN COVER ELECTIONS

As the prime newspaper for your campus, you can play a key role in getting students to vote. The national nonpartisan [Campus Election Engagement Project](http://www.campuselect.org) has pulled together some suggestions that we thought might help you do this. If you address candidates and issues well enough, students are far more likely listen, respond, and participate at the polls.

So we hope you'll cover the election in your paper, doing your best to make it as salient as possible. Campus papers sometimes just cover elections in terms of specific news hooks, like a candidate who makes a campaign visit to their campus, or who graduated from their school. But you can do a lot more by being proactive--exploring the tangible differences between the candidates and how the positions they take can have an impact on student lives. You also play a key role helping navigate students through complex and daunting new voting laws. And announcing registration or get out the vote drives where students have a chance to participate. All this helps create a campus climate where students recognize how much their electoral participation can matter.

Students have repeatedly told us that they don't vote "because the candidates and their ads are always lying, so you don't know their real stands." You may be the only news source that they read and consider credible, so you can help overcome this. You can do so by covering the differences in the positions candidates have taken, both now and in the past; by clarifying complex and intimidating voting and registration rules; and most of all, combating the cynicism that says participation doesn't matter. This could mean highlighting close races like the 133-vote Washington State governor's race in 2004, the 312 votes that decided Minnesota's U.S. Senate race in 2012, the 76 votes that determined control of the Washington State legislature in 2012, or the 743-vote New Hampshire US Senate race in 2016. You can interview local and state-wide candidates, cover debates, and highlight issues affecting your students.

One key way to highlight issues is to distribute or expand on the nonpartisan voter guides to some of the major state-wide races that our outreach staffers will be sending to you and to your school. Students have responded to them wonderfully, saying they allowed them "to actually see where candidates stand, and break through the spin and the lies." We've put a lot of effort into pulling together stands from major media sources and nonpartisan research outlets. Our lead research spent 20 years as a senior editor and manager at Encyclopedia Britannica. So we'd be delighted if you wanted to reprint them, as newspapers at many of our schools have done. Or you could adapt and expand on them, using them as a basis for more extended discussion of candidate positions and stands than our two-page format has room for (including pinning candidates down on areas where we had to leave their positions unknown). You can also explore more local races which our project doesn't have the resources to cover. There's no more important role in an election than to provide accurate information. For your campus, you're a prime trusted source.

In addition to exploring candidate stands, you can debunk misleading ads or statements, drawing on resources like factcheck.org, politifact.com, or local media outlets that do a good job with their fact-checking.

You can also provide key practical information. That means walking students through often daunting voting and ID rules, which students often find enormously confusing. Or furnishing information on early voting hours and locations, and how to find their polling station, using resources like vote411.org from the League of Women Voters. Our partner organization, [Fair Elections Legal Network](#) has created excellent guides to the rules [for every state](#).

Since students may be looking for ways to participate directly, it's also valuable to highlight what they're doing on your campus to get their peers engaged. If your school has a nonpartisan election engagement coalition (and if we're working actively with your school, most will), you can interview participants and promote its events. You can provide a forum for students to passionately argue or debate in support of their respective candidates. Or you can interview students from the partisan campaigns, exploring how their experiences converge or differ. You could even follow the volunteering of a couple of individuals through the campaign.

You can also supplement your print reporting through helping cover the election through social media. Here's [our guide](#) to how students from Virginia Commonwealth University and Rhode Island's Roger Williams University did this.

However you approach the election, the more you do, the more students will understand why their participation matters. You may well make the critical difference in whether they participate.