



A Proposal to Increase Student Voter Turnout

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Voting by Students at Rutgers University

Classes hindered several voting-eligible students from accessing the voting polls in their respective home districts for the 2016 United States Presidential Election. In an effort to increase student voter turnout, we propose an amendment to the University Academic Calendar to designate any Presidential Election Day as a University Holiday in which no classes will be in session. In our opinion this proposal will have minimal effect on the academic schedule as it will only affect the academic schedule once every four years. As the final decision-making body for amending the the University Academic Calendar is the Rutgers University Senate, this report was created to urge the consideration of this issue within the University Senate. We believe it is important that the University should consider this issue at the highest level of shared governance through the University Senate.

Summary of Investigation:

Only a fraction of eligible voters cast their votes during the 2016 Presidential Election. According to Statistics Brain analysis of data obtained from the Electoral College, Associated Press, and U.S. Census Bureau¹, only 58.5 percent of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 24 voted. There were numerous reasons as to why eligible voters did not cast their vote; this includes being too busy or having a conflicting schedule (17.5 percent), being out of town (8.8 percent), and the inconvenience of the polling place (2.7 percent). All of these reasons apply to university students who, at the time of election, most likely do not reside at their permanent home addresses.

Throughout the United States, classes were not in session on the 2016 Presidential Election day. According to their respective university academic calendars, these universities include:

- Clemson University
- Columbia University
- Delaware State University
- Kean University
- Princeton University
- Rowan University
- St. John's University
- University of Delaware
- University of Hawaii
- University of Kentucky
- University of Montana

¹ <http://www.statisticbrain.com/voting-statistics/>

- University of South Carolina
- West Virginia University
- Wilmington University, Georgetown

A survey was created and completed by approximately 500 students from Rutgers University. The results of the poll show that, of the respondents, 28 percent are members of the Class of 2020, 31 percent are members of the Class of 2019, 28 percent are members of the Class of 2018, and 12 percent are members of the Class of 2017. Of the respondents, 58 percent voted at a polling location, 17 percent submitted an absentee ballot, 14 percent were registered but did not vote, 8 percent were eligible to register but did not, and 3 percent were not eligible to register and vote. When respondents were asked about any obstacles to voting (disregarding their voting status), 81 percent said “classes,” 13 percent said “work,” 33 percent said “inconvenient polling location,” and 21 percent said “confusion with registration/voting process.” In addition, 95 percent said that they would be more likely to vote if no classes were in session.

If Rutgers University were to cancel classes on Presidential Election Day, it would be the first member of the Big 10 Association to do so. This would set a precedent for other universities to develop similar initiatives.

Testimonials:

The following testimonials were directed to Senators Markosian and Serrano by the following individuals from a sample of the aforementioned universities during January 2017:

We are one of the few nations with open and free elections in which they do not have an election holiday or do it on a Saturday or Sunday. I believe that we would get much greater participation from our young citizens by having an election holiday because it would, if nothing else, get people focused on the opportunities of citizenship on that day. In any event, I hope this is of help.

- E. Gordon Gee, President, West Virginia University

With regard to election day, Clemson University always schedules its fall break to fall on election day on even-numbered years. So this includes not only presidential elections, but also local and state election days as well . . . It definitely is a benefit that allows our students to be active participants in the political process, no matter where their voting district is, as they all have the opportunity to go home and vote if they choose to do so . . . It has the added benefit of giving our faculty and staff the day off to vote as well, which is great for those of us who work here.

- Angela Nixon, Spokesperson, Presidential Communication in University Relations, Clemson University

We agree that voter turnout, and particularly student participation, is important to every election. At UB, many of our students are from the surrounding area, and we are fortunate to have a student body that is active on voter turnout initiatives and early voting efforts. Many of our courses are held at night and online, which also helps individuals that may be seeking the time to vote on Election Day.

- Anita E. Harewood, Vice President, Government and Public Affairs, University of Baltimore

On Tuesday, November 8th, 2016, Fordham University cancelled classes in observance of Election Day. This decision benefitted both the resident and commuter populations; both were able to vote in New York City or travel to their home state to vote. Although I voted absentee in my home state of Maine, I know the vast majority of my friends and classmates were able to perform their civic duty. Considering there were cases of long lines for those who voted in the city, having the day off from classes allowed for many students to vote without the fear of missing classes. There was even a documented case in our student newspaper, The Fordham Observer, of a student who was able to travel back to her home state of Wisconsin to vote after discovering an issue with her absentee ballot request. It is for these reasons I believe it is a positive decision for colleges and universities to cancel classes on Election Day. I am providing this testimonial on behalf of my student government to the Rutgers University Senate in support of their initiative to have classes cancelled on Election Day.

- Leighton Magoon, President of United Student Government, Fordham University at Lincoln Center

Recommendations

In order to allow for more active political engagement on campus, we recommend that:

1. The Rutgers University Calendar will be adjusted to include the Presidential Election Day as a University Holiday starting in 2020, 2024, and 2028.
 - a. Each fourth year requires unique adjustments to the academic calendar as planned by the Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee.
2. The adjustments shall follow as listed:
 - a. **2020**
 - i. Election Day falls on November 3rd (Tuesday).
 - ii. Reading Days fall on December 11th (Friday) and December 14th (Monday).
 - iii. The Senate suggests there be one less reading day to compensate for absence of classes on Presidential Election Day i.e. December 11th (Friday) shall be designated as a Tuesday schedule and the only Reading Day shall fall on December 14th (Monday).
 - b. **2024**
 - i. Election Day falls on November 5th (Tuesday).
 - ii. Reading Day falls on December 13th (Friday).
 - iii. Final examination period cannot be extended as it ranges from December 16th (Monday) to December 23rd (Monday).
 - iv. The Senate suggests that the Fall Academic Semester shall therefore commence on August 30th (Friday prior to Labor Day).
 - c. **2028**
 - i. Election Day falls on November 7th (Tuesday).
 - ii. Reading Day falls on December 14th (Thursday)
 - iii. Final examination period ranges from December 15th (Friday) to December 22nd (Friday)
 - iv. The Fall academic semester commences on September 5th (Tuesday).
 - v. The Senate suggests two possible solutions:
 1. The final examination period shall be extended to December 23rd (Saturday) i.e. December 14th (Thursday) shall be designated as a Tuesday schedule, the only Reading Day shall fall on December 15th (Friday), and the final examination period shall range from December 16th (Saturday) to December 23rd (Saturday).
 2. The Fall academic semester shall commence on September 1st (Friday prior to Labor Day) as a Tuesday schedule.