

All in Challenge

Contact

Throughout the TCNJ Votes! project, the contact person will be:

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Overview

Throughout the past year, the TCNJ Votes! project worked alongside different student organizations to increase political engagement at the college. The project focused on increasing voter registration on campus with the help of Turbo Vote and engaging students on important issues affecting the 2016 election.

Coalition

The coalition for this project includes:

- William Petrick, Assistant Director of Resident Education and Housing and Coordinator of the Social Justice House;
- Jennifer Loughran, Bonner Community Scholar Political Engagement Intern; and
- Elizabeth Bapasola, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs—Engagement.

Leadership responsibilities for the coalition will be shared between Dr. Michael Nordquist, and Jennifer Loughran. Currently, we do not have off-campus community partners that are actively involved in the project. However, we have deep connections to local and state elected officials that we will rely on.

The coalition was able to collaborate on different events that were held on campus including debate watching parties with Residential Education and walk to the polls with different student organizations. We worked directly with Student Government to help with voter registration and Residential Education on debate watching.

The Coalition will continue to work closely with the 2017 New Jersey gubernatorial election in November. There will be continued political events focused on different topics and another week of voter registration before the New Jersey primaries and another before the actual 2017 election.

Projects

The campus-wide Political Engagement Collaborative has developed a comprehensive political engagement campaign, entitled TCNJ Votes! This campaign plan addresses all aspects of the

Voter Friendly Campus initiative, as described below.

Voter Registration

Throughout the past year, we held voter registration drives for an entire week each semester, both during the day and at night at each event. There was table set up in one of two places that week, both high populated areas. We used Turbovote to help register people and currently there are 680 people signed up to vote through Turbovote. In addition to the coalition, Student Government also held trainings and registered people throughout the semester. For the fall, we will be hosting another full week of voter registration to prepare for the election and registering the entire freshman class during their orientation. We are hoping to at least double the number of people registered.

Voter Education

This past semester, the Coalition hosted a handful of different events. This included bi-weekly discussions called “The Political is Personal” and a week of events every night during the end of September. The topics for the bi-weekly discussions included a screening of the Propaganda Game, Environment and Climate Change, and local and state election. During Politics week from September 26-29, there were 4 other events. This included a screening of the first Presidential Debate, a Women’s Health Panel, a discussion with Ethan Nadelmann, Director of the Drug Policy Alliance, and a screening of the documentary, Not Just a Game: Power, Politics, and American Sports. In addition to these events, the coalition also hosted debate screenings for the rest of the debates with Residence Education, and helped with events hosted by the Political Science Department on campus and with College Republicans, College Democrats, and the Political Union. Besides these events, the Bonner Community Scholars program received a training on how to become registered to vote using Turbovote and participated an event to promote voter registration during the semester. This allowed for 104 students to become fully trained on how to utilize Turbovote to assist with voter registration drives.

In the Spring, the same bi-weekly events occurred, with the largest turnout at the Post-Inauguration event. There was another week of voter registration in April that helped register students before the NJ Primary deadline.

Ballot Access

On Election Day, TCNJ Votes! hosted walk to the polls from 10am-8pm. Different student organizations including Greek Life, community service organizations and student government helped walk students over to vote during the day. Students met up at the student center entrance and walked over to the church across the street from campus where the polls were. In addition, there was always a student at the table in the student center answering question in regards to voting for the day.

Voter Turnout

While we are still waiting for the NSLVE report to be sent out, we are using the number of students who showed up to events and who walked to the polls with the project to see voter turnout on Election Day. About 100 students walked to the polls from campus with different student organizations and attendance at events, particularly debate watches was high, averaging about 150 students at each debate watch. We will have a more comprehensive turnout rate when

we receive the NSLVE report.

Successes

By using Turbovote, TCNJ Votes! was able to help over 650 students become registered to vote. This allowed for students to have easy access to registering to vote either at home or on campus. In addition, attendance at debate watches was high for events held at TCNJ. At the very first debate watch alone there was over 250 students in attendance. The debate watches allowed students to discuss what each candidate's plans for the country were. For each of the following debates, there were about 100 students who attended.

Barriers

The project did face some challenges this year. One of the largest issues that we faced was the issue of registering to vote at home or on campus and requesting absentee ballots. Because TCNJ mailing takes longer than normal mailing, many students had a problem requesting an absentee ballot and getting it in on time. In addition, many students did not understand the difference between registering at home or on campus.

TCNJ also does not have an on-campus polling place. Students who live on campus need to walk across the street to the church where the polling place is. Students who live just off campus as well go to a completely different polling place instead of just being able to vote on campus as many students at other campuses are able to do.

There was also a problem communicating with different student organizations. There was not a single contact list for each organization and this usually led to an attempt to last minute attempts at reaching out to different groups. In order to combat this issue for this semester, we have created contact lists and we will be working with different organizations more directly. For the Spring semester, we did have the lists of student organizations, but communication was still difficult.

Beyond 2016

New Jersey has state elections in November 2017 and the focus for this upcoming semester will be around the state elections. Particularly there will be a focus on the gubernatorial election and the platforms of the candidates. With this in mind, "The Political is Personal" events this semester will have a focus on New Jersey politics including construction, climate change, economy, and corruption. This will allow for students the opportunity to explore politics directly connected to the state. Throughout the week of September 25th-29th, there will be a campus wide voter registration drive. In addition to that, TCNJ is attempting to host a gubernatorial debate on campus to continue engaging students with the 2017 election.

NSLVE Report

When the NSLVE report for this past election cycle is sent out, the TCNJ Votes! project along with the political collaborative will look at the data and compare it with previous voting records.

We are hoping to see an increase in both voter registration and turnout rates from the 2012 presidential election. Our goal was to increase voter registration to 80% and voter turnout to 60%, both of which would be above national average for voting. Using this information, we would be able to see what worked and what did not work in terms of registration and turnout. It would allow the collaborative the opportunity to see if using Turbovote is effective for the TCNJ community and how it helped or did not help increase registration. We would also be able to see if walking as a group to the polls helped to increase turnout rate on Election Day. The NSLVE report would be used as a tool to see what is working and what is not.

Photos



Students helping on National Voter Registration Day in September.



Students attending a documentary screening during “The Political is Personal” event for that week.



Different TCNJ students who walked to the polls together were able to carry signs and take pictures showing that they voted.



Students and Faculty meeting Drug Policy Alliance Director, Dr. Ethan Nadelmann before the campus-wide presentation on drug policy.



Over 200 students attending the first Presidential Debate watch in September.