

STUDENT NEWSPAPERS AND THE 2014 ELECTION

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](#) has pulled together some suggestions that we thought might help you do this. Your potential impact is particularly high in non-presidential years, when most students stay home. Between 2008 and 2010 student participation in Ohio, for instance, dropped from 70% to 22%, in Florida from 61% to 19%, in Wisconsin from 66% to 19%, in Pennsylvania from 66% to 18%. But you help change this because students do read their campus papers, which at most schools can set the tone for campus discussions. If you address 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 165-vote Virginia Attorney General's race in 2013. 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 when we distributed them in 2012 and 2013, 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 like [VoteSmart.org](#) and [ontheissues.org](#). So we'd be delighted if you wanted to reprint them, as Virginia's James Madison University did in 2013. 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 the Annenberg School's [factcheck.org](#), [politifact.com](#), the national site created by the

Tampa Bay Times, or major regional media outlets that have done a good job with their fact-checking.

You don't have to generate all the necessary research. Our state outreach staffer will be sending you the non-partisan guides to major state races. And you can build off coverage in major regional newspapers or other credible mainstream media outlets: In their state's 2013 election, Virginia Commonwealth's communications department created a highly popular [Tumblr page](#) aggregating major local news sources.

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 www.vote411.org from the League of Women Voters. Our partner organization, [Fair Elections Legal Network](#) has created excellent rules [guides 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—as in [our guide to how Virginia Commonwealth University students did this in 2013, and students from Rhode Island's Roger Williams University did so in 2012](#).

But however you approach the election, the more you do, the more students will understand why their participation matters. What you do between now and the election may make the critical difference in whether they participate.