

Seattle University

ScholarWorks @ SeattleU

The Spectator Online

Newspapers

10-16-2024

2024-10-16 Are You Registered to Vote? Campus Groups Break Down Barriers to Registration

Tristan Scott
Seattle University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online>

Recommended Citation

Scott, Tristan, "2024-10-16 Are You Registered to Vote? Campus Groups Break Down Barriers to Registration" (2024). *The Spectator Online*. 1364.
<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/1364>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Newspapers at ScholarWorks @ SeattleU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Spectator Online by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ SeattleU.



Are You Registered to Vote? Campus Groups Break Down Barriers to Registration

Tristan Scott, Volunteer Reporter

If you've been anywhere on campus this fall, someone has probably asked if you're registered to vote. Between posters in the halls, stickers on water bottles and groups tabling in the Student Center, the conversation of voting has become an unavoidable one.

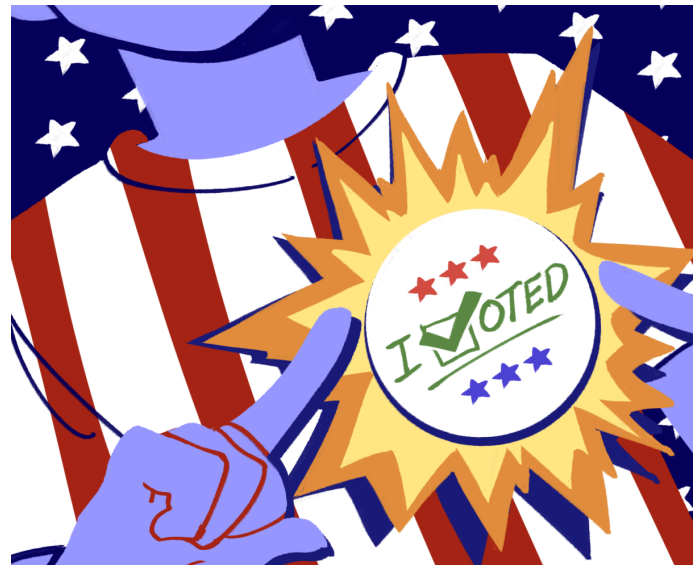
The upcoming election will be one of the most historically significant in recent years, with Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump neck and neck in the polls. It's been an extremely divisive race so far and will likely continue to ramp up as we approach November.

"Historically, young people vote in much smaller numbers than other demographics," Sarah Cate, a professor of political science at Seattle University, said. "Campaigns can't really rely on young voters because they vote in low numbers so it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. They aren't often putting in the work trying to win these voters over."

This year, however, groups on campus have been putting in the work where the campaigns won't. Student activists have been working hard to ensure that as many Seattle U students as possible will be voting in the upcoming election. From the Student Involvement Fair to the Global Street Fair, every event on campus has had someone there to get voters registered.

One recent event meant to draw in potential voters was a pin-making party hosted by the Residence Hall Association (RHA) Oct. 9. Participants got a chance to decorate their own voting-related pins while learning about resources available to new voters.

Second-year Criminal Justice and Political Science Major Gabby Prado was a major player in organizing this event as RHA's director of programming. She thought that a fun and creative activity would be a good way to attract students and encourage them to participate in the political process. Additionally, she wanted to make sure there were resources available on absentee voting, a process that could apply to many students but isn't always talked about. Prado wants these resources to be as easy to access as possible so students aren't lost or confused.



Annabelle DeGuzman-Carino

Many student groups on campus have been hosting voter registration events this year.

"There's a lot at stake coming up in November," Prado remarked. "On college campuses, we're all nearing that age where this is a lot of people's first election that they can vote in. I think when you take that into consideration, you really want to push people to get registered because we're the people who are going to really make the changes."

Also at this event was Seattle U's Political Science Club, a group that has been at the head of a number of these registration events. The club is a non-partisan group on campus aimed at discussing politics and current events with a diverse range of perspectives from a diverse range of students.

"I think maybe it's safe to say we're trying to be the driving force behind getting students registered on campus," Henry Leyden, a fourth-year political science and English major, said.

Leyden serves as the treasurer and secretary of the Political Science Club and has been tabling at a number of events this fall. The club has been offering help with registering to vote as well as encouraging people to pledge to ask their friends if they're registered. They hope to expand these efforts as we get closer to the election.

"We might be trying to bus people to the polls to actually vote on November 4th," Leyden said. "As well as more fun stuff like discussions and election watch parties."

These fun and exciting events are designed to pull in as many people as possible who may not be registered to vote yet. Political Science Club President Gabi Muña elaborated on how the club started hosting these events while they ran a table at the recent Global Street Fair.

"We're working with an organization called the Campus Voters Project. It's a coalition between The Washington Bus, which is a youth civic engagement nonprofit, Fuse, which is about voter information, and the Washington Students Alliance, which is a lobby group for students," they said.

Muña did a fellowship over the Summer with The Washington Bus, which led them to make sure Seattle U was involved. The Political Science Club provides registration and absentee voter forms that can be filled out in under five minutes, then are taken directly to the registrar.

This accessibility is the main focus of these events. RHA Vice President of External Affairs and Fourth-year Isabelle Alamilla said that it's important to make these resources as available as possible.

"A lot of people just are kind of in the dark, they just don't know how to register, or maybe it's not accessible to them. So I think that bringing it to the people where they're at is really important, and that's what we're trying to do here," Alamilla said.

First-year Economics Major Joshua LaForce attended the pin-making event. Coming from California, LaForce wanted to vote but was turned off by the perceived complexity of the absentee voting registration process.

"I didn't know anything about getting registered before this. It was really easy, though, especially with the events they're holding right now. All you have to do is fill it out and hand it to someone at a voter registration table, and they'll take care of mailing it for you. It only took a few minutes to get done," LaForce said.

LaForce's story isn't unique. For out-of-state students like him, navigating registration can be intimidating. This is one of the barriers that many face that prevent them from registering on their own.

"I think for our students, it's really difficult if you've moved from another state. There's confusion about registration rules, and the vote-by-mail process may be unfamiliar for people who come from a state that doesn't have that. U.S. elections are very different depending on where you live, and that can be confusing," Cate agreed. "There's a lot of policies in place that make voting more difficult."

Many voters who are confused or on the fence about voting in the first place may find these roadblocks discouraging and decide to give up. It's the hope of the Political Science Club and RHA that, by removing these barriers, students will be more likely to register and show up to vote.

Not only are student groups focusing on how to vote, they're also teaching students why to vote. Washington is considered a stronghold for the Democratic party, having voted blue since 1988. Because of this, students may not feel that their vote actually "counts," another barrier preventing them from getting involved. Students and educators alike are working hard to shift that way of thinking.

“Make sure that you are informed about not only the presidency, but also what’s happening with the down-ballot. Look at what’s happening with the initiatives and any local representatives,” Muña advised.

A lot of the changes voters hope to see start at the local level, through new policies and positions. While many Washingtonians are focused on the presidential election, voter measures such as Initiatives 2109 and 2117 could affect everyday lives if passed. The 2024 Washington state voter’s guide is available online for voters hoping to learn more.

There are also a number of recent and upcoming events on campus designed to educate voters on some of the lesser known topics on the ballot, such as the Seattle U American Constitution Society’s State Supreme Court Forum Oct. 15 and an open election discussion with a number of Political Science faculty Oct. 17. A number of similar events can be found on ConnectSU.

Events like this also seek to help dispel some of the disillusionment with the current political system felt by young people across the country. A number of students feel stuck voting for the “lesser of two evils,” or are torn between two candidates that they heavily disagree with. These feelings often drive people to avoid voting at all instead of pushing them to become more involved with the down-ballot candidates and issues that will eventually lead to change at the national level. Cate, for example, takes a utilitarian approach.

“I hear a lot of my students saying they couldn’t possibly vote for a person because they don’t believe in a particular policy, and I get that completely,” she said. “But for me, I think about what elected officials will give the best opportunities for me to keep pushing for bigger issues that I want to see happen.”

Prado’s biggest piece of advice for first-time voters?

“I think go vote, period. I think you are losing out on an incredible opportunity if you’re saying you’re not going to go vote. You might not think that’s affecting you, but it’s affecting so many of us. One vote counts. Don’t think yours doesn’t.”

Washington state residents can register online or by mail until Oct. 28 or at the polls Nov. 5. You can register online or check your status at VoteWA.gov, or find a Political Science Club representative at most Seattle U events to mail in your registration.