

Voter Efficacy on College Campuses: What Can We Do Better?

by

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Introduction and Purpose

Voting is a fundamental right of our American democracy; it is the most basic exercise that effects change in our country. According to Howard Steven Friedman (2012), the United States has one of the lowest turnout rates in the world. We do not have compulsory voting laws, and Election Day is on a weekday when many people are working. (Friedman, 1) I set out to find how we can change the voter apathy among young people. Beginning with this demographic, voting can be rediscovered as a vital and important way to be involved in the political process.

I caught the “politics bug” when my mother ran for District Judge of Beauregard Parish (pop. 35,000) during my senior year of high school. I helped her in many aspects of the campaign: coordinating sign distribution, phone banks, and accompanying her as she canvassed the parish going door-to-door. This type of campaigning, termed “retail politics,” was a major factor in my mother winning the election.

After experiencing the campaigning process, talking to individuals in the community, and encouraging them to vote, I began to explore the possibility of making politics my career path. I was fascinated by the behind-the-scenes work that went into executing a successful campaign; I had the opportunity to work with my mother’s campaign consultant on a variety of strategic considerations, such as when and where to post billboards or air commercials. The opportunity to learn first-hand in a campaign was incredibly valuable, yet nerve-racking; my mother won by a mere 72 votes.

My mother’s campaign impressed upon me the urgency of encouraging more people to exercise his or her right to vote. Her win was a perfect example of demonstrating that every vote counts. As a campaign volunteer, I quickly discovered that not everyone recognizes the

importance, or value, of voting, much less of getting involved in the political process. Even though I was ecstatic by the outcome of the election, I was discouraged by the lack of civic engagement exhibited by the majority of my community while out campaigning. I want to work in political campaigns, and I believe a campaign is an effective platform for advocating that a stronger electorate provides for better governance.

This was my inspiration for this thesis. I believe the most basic way to mandate change, or ensure the status quo, is voting. Without the ability to systematically vote, our federal, national and even local leaders would never know the will of the people. However cliché this may sound, the will of the people is what built this country in the first place; bringing this value back to the forefront of the political discussion, I believe it is one of the most important things that will maintain this country.

The purpose of this research is to determine what motivates college students at LSU to become involved in the political process via voting, and what could be improved to motivate more students to register to vote and vote, whether by absentee, early voting, or on Election Day. Through two focus groups, previous research on this topic, and recent campus-wide projects completed or underway at LSU, I believe I have created a resource for future campus leaders to incorporate voting awareness and efficacy into the university's Commitment to Community. (Appendix A) I hope this shows the vital need for such education and motivation around this campus, and will urge campus leaders to take action. Young people can change the perception of voting in this country. "Voter education is the key to engaging young people in a lifelong habit of civic participation." (Ritchie, 43)

To avoid any confusion and for the purpose of this research, I have operationally defined some main concepts to include, (a) College Campus: any area where an accredited college or

university claims its main area of operation; (b) College Students: any student enrolled in an accredited college or university between the ages of 18 and 24; and (c) Registered to vote: any person who has filled out the necessary forms that is required to be a registered voter in the United States. Likewise, any person who has not filled out the said forms will be considered “not registered to vote,” or an “unregistered student.”

Literature Review

Voting in regards to Youth Participation

The “youth vote” has become an area of research during recent election cycles as a demographic that has the possibility to significantly contribute to political elections. In regards to my research, this concept is the core of my argument: The turnout of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 can positively contribute to turnout rates as well as increasing political engagement among this demographic.

The renewed interest in the youth vote was studied after the 2004 presidential election. It is argued that this election set the stage for youth participation and the possibility of this age group being a vital resource for candidates seeking election. According to a study conducted by the University of Maryland’s Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), the 2004 Youth Vote (18 to 24 year-old voters) increased 11 percentage points, from 36 to 47 percent, in comparison to the overall turnout increase of 60 to 64 percent. (Walker, 27) Walker (2006) addresses that some main goals for a campaign are to turn out its base and appeal to undecided voters; however, another important point often forgotten is winning over new voters. With this new perspective, young people become extremely desirable: “They are new to the game, their party affiliation is up for grabs, and they are responsive to any serious attention from candidates.” (Walker, 29) Further evidence presented by Walker substantiates that young people impacted the 2004 election, and could make a difference in later years. Young people “demonstrated that they will participate when they are invited to and when their voices are heard.” (Walker, 32)

CIRCLE, which is now associated with Tufts University, will (hopefully) soon be using data from LSU to contribute to research about political participation from college-aged

Americans. By submitting different data sets to CIRCLE, LSU will receive feedback about the student body's civic interests and likelihood of becoming habitual voters. Its research has contributed to important conclusions about youth voter turnout and civic engagement, including the historical opening created in 2004. CIRCLE has a lot of insight to offer about the political climate of LSU, and Walker's article further demonstrates my belief that young people have a unique part to play in political elections. Making history in 2004 and in later presidential election years, it can be argued that young people are eager to fight for something in which they truly believe. Paying attention to young people and feeding off the excitement and desires of this group will give political candidates and public officials a new opportunity to not only garner more votes, but learn the concerns of a different niche of the electorate.

To further expand on the concept of youth voter participation, Niemi and Hamner (2010) discuss the many factors that must be considered when factoring in youth voter participation. They also seek to understand how those factors can be used to understand perceptions of voting and targeting strategies to change or encourage present perspectives. Niemi and Hamner look at traditional theories regarding demographic characteristics, but also factor in different theories including the possibility of strategic registration, the distance between one's hometown and college town, and various interests or majors that were deemed "college-specific factors." (Niemi, 302) It is imperative to include these factors when looking at college students and their voting behavior because they are in a time like no other generation, and as such, must be treated according to unique geographic, social, and developmental classification. A new and refined approach to studying this age group and its position in the voting public is vital to targeting them and motivating them to participate in the voting process.

Habitual Voting beginning in College

While it has been tested over and over again that education is a factor when calculating the level of civic engagement, there has been no explanation as to why. College students are already being exposed to a higher degree of thinking and practice, and as such, they are more apt to become civically engaged. My research focuses on college students and his/her interests in registering to vote and actually voting. While I do not wish to be exclusive, I am focusing on a cohort to which I am most familiar. The studies discussed below address the concept of expanding on the notion that college students are more likely to become civically engaged.

D. Sunshine Hillygus' (2005) addresses the link between education and civic engagement. Her research address this "missing link" and finds that the content of certain college courses determine strong civic engagement, rather than just higher education as a whole. (Hillygus, 26) Her data strongly suggests that students with an inadequate understanding of the social sciences are the least politically engaged. (Hillygus, 28) Regardless of the quality of university being attended, Hillygus empirically shows students who take more social science credits have significantly greater political participation than students who take fewer social science credits, controlling for other factors tested. (Hillygus, 32) Hillygus' research indicates that by integrating social sciences into the curricula of higher education programs, universities increase the verbal and communication skills of their students and thus increase their level of voter participation. (Hillygus, 41) Her research has shown that students with high SAT verbal scores have significantly greater political participation, whereas students' SAT math scores show no significant relationship to political participation, controlling for other factors tested. (Hillygus, 32) In terms of increasing the likelihood of voter turnout, Hillygus shows that social science credits significantly affect the likelihood of a person turning out to vote. In addition, students'

SAT verbal scores also significantly affect the likelihood of a person turning out to vote. (Hillygus, 32) Overall, these numbers mostly support the Civic Education Hypothesis, which “is rooted in the belief that education provides both the skills necessary to become politically engaged and the knowledge to understand and accept democratic principles.” (Hillygus, 27) Hillygus’ further interpretation is that is the content of that education that determines a significant effect on political participation and voter turnout.

I used this study to form my policy proposal for the Harry S. Truman Scholarship. Most public, four-year universities lack a program that integrates communication-intensive courses into all degree programs as part of general education requirements. Communication across the Curriculum, or CxC, is a cross-curricula program that strives to integrate social science skills in all majors at Louisiana State University. As a student employee for the past four years, I have seen first hand the success of this program. Using an established, respected program, that indirectly produces significant results in regards to civic engagement, is a fundamental building block in addressing an overall problem.

A different perspective on how this concept of habitual voting should be implemented involves Robert Ritchie’s article (2007), in which he elaborates on his stance of voter registration and civic education by advocating federal government intervention and mandating universal measures to increase voter registration, civic engagement and effective instruction on civic education. He lays out his personal ideas for making these measures feasible, including targeting high schools as a starting point for a universal registration age (sixteen) and using Constitution Day activities to kick off civic education. (Ritchie, 39) He also presents innovative incentives for the implementation of these measures. Ritchie insists that policy changes are imperative to increase voter participation. Using examples from several states that have led the cause of civic

education and participation, as well as technological advances in voting, Ritchie makes his case that the feasibility of his policy proposals are possible. (Ritchie, 43) The outcome he desires, “a better-informed and engaged electorate,” will surely “have lasting effects for decades on policy and participation.” (Ritchie, 45)

Ritchie’s ideas about appealing to young people and creating incentives for becoming civically engaged is strong, but not necessarily going as far as to propose federal policy and mandates. Non-profit or private advocacy organizations can encourage this implementation in high schools without legislation. It could be feasible to alter his ideas to cater to college-aged students, as well as reaching a greater population; he even addresses starting very early to reach possible drop outs, a group that is often forgotten. Since my project focuses on college campuses, his ideas are a great starting point to structure practices in a college setting.

Along the same lines as Ritchie’s article, Ceridwen Cherry (2012) makes his case for a national voter pre-registration law for sixteen and seventeen year olds. “Currently,” he explains, eight states and the District of Columbia have adopted pre-registration laws.” (Cherry, 482) By nationalizing the law, Cherry finds that it would alleviate much of the confusion that varies from state to state due to different voting laws. Indeed, one of his realizations is that the turnout of registered voters is high, but the need is to recruit new voters, and doing this early will increase the number of new voters. Before making the ballot easier to access, Cherry insists that making registration easier to understand and complete is the vital first component to successful voter recruitment and participation.

Habitual voting involves a certain environment in order to flourish among a certain group of citizens. Therefore, Eric Plutzer (2002) seeks to understand the developmental framework of voting. First a starting level is established, which is the “probability that citizens vote in their

first eligible election,” and then develop inertia, or “the propensity for citizens to settle into habits of voting or nonvoting.” (Plutzer, 41) Most students, Plutzer explains, start as non-habitual voters, but due to contributing factors such as aging, parenthood, partisanship and geographic mobility, most students become habitual voters later in life. (Plutzer, 43) This theory begins to explain the developmental aspect of students and their voting habits; but although it is optimistically expected that students will eventually become habitual voters, it is not an excuse to ignore the importance of encouraging the habit early. Expecting the possibility of an outcome is never a safe route.

Institutionalizing Voting and Applications

Many studies address the possibility that voter registration and political engagement should be “institutionalized,” meaning these practices should be the norm in learning institutions like colleges or high schools. This concept of institutionalizing voter registration practices could positively contribute to the efforts to increase voter turnout and political engagement among the youth population.

Anne Colby (2008) addresses problems with the current decrease of voter turnout and overall civic engagement despite the growth in college educated young people. In her article, she presents the Political Engagement Project, a spinoff of a study of college level moral and civic education that she and her colleagues launched several years ago that confirmed, “education for specifically political learning is not widespread on college campuses.” (Colby, 5) The PEP honed in on select campuses that showed promise and looked into efforts to increase and encourage political learning and engagement. Looking at past pedagogies that increased civic engagement, including “semester-in-Washington programs, inviting relevant speakers and mentors, political action and research projects, and structured reflection on their political experiences,” has led

Colby and her colleagues to a specific goals list that will surely increase political knowledge in college educated Americans and further, increase civic engagement. (Colby, 6)

Colby's advocacy of political learning, and her insistence that it indeed can be done and yield significant, positive results, further encourage the necessity of this project. Louisiana State University is lacking in political learning. Most people are not equipped with this knowledge because we are not making it a priority. As Colby says, "a basic understanding of the political and policy contexts in which people live and work is an essential dimension of liberal learning, and students are not well educated if they fail to develop that understanding." (Colby, 8) Further, this knowledge can indirectly contribute to other skills needed to excel in professional careers, as Colby also addresses. (Colby, 7)

Looking at institutionalization efforts already in place, three authors that examine the University of South Dakota, that touts its political science department and its commitment to political engagement, explain the practice of such places of political learning. They raise excellent ideas that are already working at a university, and have attested its implementation a success. Molina (2008) expounds upon three main goals that the political science department strives to uphold at USD, as well as the excitement of the students to participate. These three goals include creating a civic space "in which members of a community can come together and share in public" without fear of partisan bickering, utilizing course learning objectives by preparing students "with a range of skills and values to carry forward in their life after the course," and finally, promoting a culture of civic engagement that makes "public service experience a desired qualification in all faculty" and encourages students to commit to the same goals. (Molina, 22)

The authors of this article are obviously impressed with the program at USD, and using it to model other college environments is a great building block. Students need these resources and motivation in order to become civically engaged. Many fear ridicule or inexperience, but these resources address those fears and put students in a comfortable environment that encourages students to express ideas and goals.

In order to see this concept go into effect, Allison Dale and Aaron Strauss (2009) look into social connectedness as a persuasion tool that would lead to habitual voting and the action of voting as the norm among a group of citizens. They explain, “Current explanations of effective voter mobilization strategies maintain that turnout increases only when a potential voter is persuaded to participate through increased social connectedness.” (Dale, 787) However, they take it one step further. By inferring that registered voters already signaled his/her interests in voting, a “noticeable message” closer to Election Day would increase the likelihood that registered voters will actually vote. A text message reminder, they hypothesized, will increase voter turnout. Through carefully crafted text messages sent to registrants, this field experiment did in fact yield insightful results. “Impersonal forms of communication,” they found, “can be effective.” (Dale, 802) Further, the “Noticeable Reminder theory” supports the notion of increased turnout through social connectedness. Dale and Strauss offer a concluding thought: “A straightforward, noticeable reminder that Election Day is imminent—such as a text message—helps ensure that citizens who want to vote, do vote.” (Dale, 802)

Text messages appeal to the new digital user, who is most likely a younger voter, and the measure is able to reach a generation that does not rely on landlines. A lot of current campaigns still use automated dialing services that target landlines. Text messaging has become a major form of communication among young people and most prefer this form of communication when

it comes to reminders. A text message popping up on a registered voters phone the day before Election Day caters to a modern generation and will encourage them to make immediate plans to accommodate casting a vote. Whether or not a college campus can facilitate this, however, is a different battle, but one that should be considered.

The application of such a theory is further discussed in Gerber's (2008) article. Three professors from Northern Iowa and Yale present the idea that social pressure creates a significant effect on voter turnout. They hypothesize that purely self-interested behavior does not generally predict high turnout. Therefore, they conducted a large-scale field experiment "designed to prime voters to think about civic duty while at the same time applying different amounts of social pressure in order to induce them to adhere to this norm." (Gerber, 33) Basically, these professors sent mailings to one group that only reminded the group that voting is a civic duty. In the second group, they were told researchers would be looking at turnout through public records. A third group received mailings that displayed turnout records of all in the household. Finally, a fourth group's mailings showed the household's voting record as well as its neighbors. The goal was to compare turnout based on the level of social pressure. (Gerber, 34) As expected, this experiment yielded significant results and opened up a new paradigm of study and the possibility of using social pressure as a new campaign craft to produce larger results.

Shaping this idea to be implemented on a college campus is an interesting idea. Using social pressure in a positive light could further encourage students to become involved in the voting process. Stickers, like "I Voted!," are definitely a great place to start, but "upping the ante" is a good idea, as well. Ideas like publishing the senior college with the most voters or highlighting the students who made an effort to turn out are feasible, while not being totally intrusive.

Methods

Because my research focuses on voter efficacy on a college campus, my population included students between the ages of 18 and 24 enrolled in college. At first, I opened my population size to include possible participants from Louisiana State University and Baton Rouge Community College. However, after emailing various contacts at BRCC and receiving no response, I narrowed my sample search to just include students from LSU.

When deciding on a particular research method, I wanted detailed, qualitative discussion about the voting process, and its perception from young voters, so I decided to have focus groups. To compare and contrast data, I decided to hold two different focus groups on different days in the LSU Student Union. I wanted to compare and contrast discussion between registered voters and unregistered students; therefore, the first focus group would consist of registered voters, and the second focus group would consist of unregistered students. Each focus group would be a 45-minute to one-hour conversation about the importance of voting, being motivated to vote, and the benefits of getting involved in the political process.

I wanted my sample size for each focus group to be relatively small in order to retain the comfortable feeling of a small group discussion, but large enough to obtain a variety of qualitative data. I decided a group of three to six participants would fulfill this goal. While I understand this small size cannot be generalized to the overall LSU population, I was using the group of people and sample size that was realistic within the time frame given to complete my research.

After I formulated a preliminary list of questions, I wanted to test them and gain feedback from a “test group.” My thesis director taught a class during the 2012 fall semester, “See How They Run,” an Honors College course that analyzed the ongoing presidential election at the time.

He invited me to practice my questions and the focus group “environment” as a whole. His students participated in a significant way and gave me great feedback about my question construction and order. Being able to practice made me feel more comfortable and confident for the actual two focus groups where data was collected.

When it came to recruiting my sample for each focus group, I turned to Facebook first. I posted an announcement on my personal profile page as well as different “group” pages announcing to registered voters only that I was conducting focus group research about voter motivation and mobilization. I received a large amount of interest and responses, mainly from close friends, sorority sisters, and students involved in similar organizations as myself. I also made announcements at different student organization meetings such as my sorority’s chapter meeting, Student Government meetings, and other organizations affiliated with various senior colleges. When deciding on participants, I made sure there was an array of ages, majors, and interests to retain validity and reliability, as well as getting different perceptions on topics that would be discussed. Recruiting for my first focus group with registered voters was easy; students who were registered voters were receptive and eager to participate. My first focus group consisted of six registered voters from LSU and from a variety of senior colleges.

Recruiting for my second focus group of unregistered students, I ran into some trouble. I carried out similar recruiting strategies previously stated, but received almost no response or interest. I really had to push students to participate, which led to holding the actual focus group much later than preferred. The ideas behind this outcome will be discussed in detail later, but on the surface, turnout for this particular focus group reflects studies and stereotypes of political participation of this demographic. Nonetheless, I conducted my second focus group with three unregistered LSU students from different senior colleges.

Before each focus group began, I read an informed consent guide to the students, making sure they acknowledged the purpose, benefits, and any possible risks of the research, as well as address any concerns they may have. This guide is included in Appendix B. In addition, transcripts and personal information of each focus group and its participants are included in Appendix C. The consent guide and questions, as well as the overall research on human subjects followed IRB requirements. LSU's IRB board approved my methods and research at the beginning of the 2012 fall semester.

No research is infallible, and I will be the first one to admit mine is far from it. Because I recruited through Facebook and campus organizations that I am involved in, I tended to know the majority of the focus group participants. I almost had a participant I did not know, but his schedule did not permit his attendance. While methodologically this decreases the credibility of my research, I believe it made the focus groups rather successful. The participants felt comfortable and were more willing to open up to me as a moderator, but understood that I had to stay detached from the conversation to a certain extent. The participants did not know each other, but having me as a mutual friend, I think it helped them open up and fully commit to the conversation.

The participants in both focus groups are high achieving students who, regardless of his/her interests, understand the democratic process. This makes my research reliable in that I was seeking highly educated students to contribute to a conversation about voting in a capacity that requires an educated and (mildly) informed background on the discussion topics.

Results

The two focus groups gave valuable insight into students' perceptions of voting and the impact they felt they had on political elections. Even though the two focus groups included student of different ages, backgrounds and majors at LSU, they came together to discuss reasons to register or not register to vote, and the importance it has on his/her view of our government. My goal for these two focus groups was to find possible connections between registered voters' and unregistered students' ideas to encourage each other and his/her peers to become more civically engaged. I have divided this section into different themes that were discussed during the focus groups and what was learned from those themes.

To register, or not to register?

To begin each focus group, I asked the participants about his/her voting interests. For the registered voters, I asked, "Why did you get involved in the political process? What made you decide to vote?" Many of the registered voters answered that it "was pretty much understood" that they would register to vote when they turned 18. Many of them explained similar situations where registering to vote was seen as a rite of passage, of sorts, that everyone in the family did at the appropriate time. Participants explained that many of them registered to vote when they renewed his/her driver's licenses at the DMV, but one participant explained that on her 18th birthday, her mother took her to the local registrar's office to complete her voter registration card. She said, "It was the first thing we did. Like I turned 18 and before I went to school, my mom brought me to register to vote. It was kinda like I didn't have a choice." The same was done for her sister, as well, a couple years later.

During the unregistered students' focus group, the participants explained his/her reasoning for not registering to vote; they all had a different reason. One participant said,

“Because the last election was before I turned 18, and I haven’t been home in a year.” The next participant said he hasn’t registered because, “I really honestly don’t know how to register to vote, first of all, and I don’t really want to vote, because I heard it’s just a long, annoying process.” The last participant stated that she doesn’t “know enough about politics to make an educated decision on a vote.” I asked her to elaborate on this feeling and she explained that she does not feel like she knows enough about the issues or candidates to make an educated vote, and she would rather not make an uneducated choice.

I expected different answers for this question from each focus group for obvious reasons. However, it was interesting to me that family background determined registered voters’ decisions (or demands) for them to become a registered voter. It would be intriguing to look deeper into this factor. Were the families of the unregistered students less involved politically, or did they just not emphasize political engagement as much as the registered voters’ families? This idea was thought provoking to me as I moderated each focus group. Many of the participants at this point will still be becoming comfortable in the focus group setting and environment, so it was hard to draw out more detailed answers.

Benefits of Voting and/or being politically engaged

During the focus group of the registered voters, I asked, “Have you benefitted from being [politically] involved? And that can be going to events, actually voting, seeing how your vote affects or doesn’t affect the outcome.” The participants had various answers to this. One participant stated,

I think I would almost feel embarrassed if I wasn’t a little bit involved, because I mean, we have so many resources you know and so to not know what’s going on and to not vote, I would almost feel a little ashamed of myself...that I can put in the effort to watch *The Real Housewives* of wherever every night but not turn on the news and figure out what I can do.

Another participant explained that for him,

It was cool, you know, actually voting. I mean this was the first election I could vote in. I had been registered to vote for awhile, but it was in Lafayette and I never felt like driving an hour to actually vote, but I had to switch voter registration and so actually voting was a really big benefit. You know actually participating in the process for me was really cool.

These answers were elaborations of why these participants decided to register at the age of 18; I was excited that these students truly believed being a registered voter was beneficial. I learned that these two participants and the rest of the registered voters felt that they have benefitted from being able to vote and because of that, feel like they have responsibility to have a basic knowledge of current events in order to cast educated votes. In addition, one participant explained how she watch a friend realize the importance of voting:

Last night, just watching the results, there was a girl with me and she was just like, “Oh my gosh, in four years we’ll be 24. We’ll be out of college; this is our lives. This affects what happens to us, our jobs, our money and it affects everything that we’re working for.” I thought that was really interesting. It was the first time she realized that it’s more than our parents, it’s our life, too.

I asked the unregistered students if they had were interested in politics or the political process at all. Two of the unregistered students, both female, said they were not interested, but one participant, a male, said he was interested. He also explained that he would feel more motivated to actually register to vote, and not just be fairly interested, if, “they could explain, and I don’t know if they could as a public institution, but they could tell us how and where to register to vote, and talk about, not talk about the sides necessarily, but play the debates in class depending on what the class pertained to.” He added that if it were a political science class or an English class, it would be practical to have those discussions.

Overall, the discussions about the interest in and the benefits of voting were enlightening to me. I learned that the unregistered students would show more interest and motivation to

register if they were educated about the process. However, from each explanation, I also inferred that they were not willing to go out and search for this information, but would be more than willing to listen and digest the information if it was presented and discussed in a class.

Ideas to Increase Voter Participation

Campus wide

Various ideas were thrown around in regards to what administrators and/or campus leaders could do to further encourage voting. The most popular idea was to cancel school on Election Day. I asked, “What do you think are some ideas, or what more would you like to see done from the faculty and administrators?” One participant said,

I think they should cancel school. Honestly, I think it is enough of a “holiday” and enough of a “gridlock” day, that it would make more sense to block this day off every four years.

Other than obvious benefits of not having class, the focus group participants noted this was necessary for students who are registered elsewhere in Louisiana or out of state. One registered voter explained it was hard to make time as she was from New Orleans, “and that takes a lot out of your day.” Not having those obligations at school could make it easier for many students to make the drive home to vote. Another registered voter explained that her hometown high school did not hold class on Election Day, which was ridiculous because the majority of them aren’t old enough to vote:

It was so odd; I didn’t realize high schools were out yesterday. I guess we missed that when that happened. I mean the majority of high school’ers cannot vote, so I thought it was odd that they were out, and all of us can vote and we had class.

In addition, some participants that are involved in Greek Life in both focus groups said they liked the idea of organizations promoting voting and civic engagement. One registered voter

discussed how her organization decorated its chapter house in red, white and blue on Election Day, and watched the returns. She said,

I mean, this sounds cheesy, but our sorority house, like we put everything up red, white and blue and had an election day thing...and I [had] friends that came out of the booth yesterday and they blew up GroupMe and texting: 'I love voting! I can't wait to vote in four years!' They were so excited that they had done it...I think [if we] just harness the enthusiasm that people have right now, like not waiting for four years to re-motivate people, like keep them motivated [it would be a great idea].

Likewise, an unregistered student wished her Greek organization (or someone similar that they trust) would help educate them on the candidates and the salient issues. I asked, "Why aren't you interested in the political process?" She replied, "Because I don't understand it." I followed-up with, "What do you think student leaders or teachers around campus could do to motivate students like you to get involved and register to vote?" She answered, "They could explain the impact that certain candidates would have on myself being a college student and things that would affect me individually." The same participant explained that the main reason they do not vote is because, "I don't know enough about politics to make an educated decision on a vote."

A great point that was brought up was whether or not professors should mention the importance of voting in class. Many participants liked this idea as long as the professor did not promote one particular set of views. One registered voter explained,

I think I understand why professors may be a little hesitant toward saying something because I mean, especially at LSU, there's a bad rap for your "liberal professors are infiltrating your mind," but I can understand why individual professors would be a little hesitant.

Another registered voter explained,

There's also a careful line to tread... Professors are hesitant because they don't want to talk about their political affiliation, and I think that's the way that it should be. Because for me, it is a turn off when a teacher is so one-sided, even if it is toward the one that I believe in.

Limiting the conversation to the importance of voting and resources students can pursue to register to vote, find the correct voting precinct, or learn how to absentee vote seemed to be something all participants agreed on. A registered voter said,

You could focus more on the history of voting, like why it's important to vote in general instead of focusing on one political party or one political affiliation, more of why it matters, like why it matters for you to vote.

Building on these ideas, one registered student said that the university as a whole should foster conversations about voting. He said, "I think there is kind of a, sort of a quasi-ethical responsibility to encourage educated people to vote, or people who are getting higher education to vote." Further, another registered voter said that the university can use this to promote its "Commitment to Community," which includes being an active citizen. Ideas to foster this included broadcast emails directing students to online voter resources and table sits in Free Speech Alley. Some participants suggested sending emails regarding deadlines to register to vote or for an absentee ballot because, "not everyone knows deadlines."

These conversations gave me insight into students' opinions of the university having a responsibility to facilitate this culture shift and/or create an environment where political engagement is ubiquitous. It can be said that many of the participants agree that the university should contribute to creating a more motivated student body.

Utilizing Senior Colleges

There was a long discussion about what individual senior colleges could do to foster voter motivation and participation. Some ideas included building what the Manship School of Mass Communication has done in the past: holding forums about various social and fiscal issues, debate watch parties, and an Election Night watch party. Many participants voiced interest in campus wide activities and "cross-communication" between the university and specific senior

colleges would be beneficial to promote activities related to political learning and engagement. For example, during the last presidential election, the Manship School of Mass Communication and the Reilly Center for Public Affairs held different issue-based forums at different locations on campus. A Foreign Policy Forum was held in the Journalism Building's Holliday Forum, a Healthcare Forum was held in the Business Education Complex, a forum about the environment was held in the Coast and Environment Building's Woods Auditorium, and a Social Issues Forum was held in the Business Education Complex. The fact that these forums were held is fantastic, but to increase interest, it may be beneficial to include student organizations that advocate for the issues discussed to help spread the word about the events and co-sponsor the event when it is held. That way, more students are being exposed to the event and attendance and participation would increase.

Mood/Tone of the Focus Groups

Many connections were made between the two focus groups, as well. The biggest similarity was that all participants felt they had somewhat of an impact on political elections. Statements like, “the youngest voters feel like, ‘I have a voice, I can do something,’” and “There is almost a weight and heaviness that comes with [voting], and knowing ‘You can’t complain, if you don’t vote,’ so I think for every ballot there’s always something important to be lost or gained,” indicated that everyone agreed they feel the younger generation is a vital resource when it comes to impacting political elections. Individually, though, they do not feel they hold a valuable amount of power, especially being from states they have voted a certain way for many years. For example, they have seen the increased turnout among youth as a valuable thing, but because home states (like Louisiana or Texas) have “gone Red” for many years, they do not feel like they should contribute to something they already know will happen, or do not have the

individual power to change it by voting. A registered voter said of her friends, “they just kind of felt like it was almost like a waste of time to go through all the trouble when maybe they felt like their vote doesn’t mean a whole lot.” Further, an unregistered student explained,

One of the reasons I didn’t vote is because Georgia, where my vote reports, is always Red. So like yeah, like I should vote and I could vote, but it really wouldn’t make that big of a difference because it’s pretty much guaranteed that Georgia is going to be Red. I mean, it depends where you are, but, if I was in California, which is usually blue, or like Florida, which is a swing state, or Ohio, then I would vote.

As far as differentiating qualities, the two focus groups obviously had predisposed opinions about voting and politics that is in line with a typical registered voter or unregistered student. Most registered voters that participated felt voting was an understood practice that must be done; if not, they would feel ashamed they did not participate. In addition, registered voter participants were mostly interested in current political affairs and understood basic principles of the democratic process. On the contrary, the unregistered students were not all that interested in politics and felt that registering to vote and voting did not really make a difference, especially since they did not feel educated enough to do it. As mentioned earlier, it was hard to garner interest and participation in the focus group consisting of unregistered students. This reflects the lack of interest in the political process: those that are not interested in participating in the topic at hand are also less likely to be interested in participating in the discussion of said topic. I expected to run into this problem, but it was still frustrating nonetheless, especially when I was limited to one semester to formulate, recruit and conduct the focus groups.

Much of the discussions in each focus group expounded on concepts I was already aware of, or upheld certain ideas I was already privy to; I was not blindsided by anything the participants talked about. I was happy with this, though. I was hoping that my focus groups would substantiate my argument for the need of a cultural shift toward positive political

discourse and participation. Not only did this occur, but the participants also provided insight as to why this is currently not happening, and offered realistic ideas that could contribute a more engaged student body.

Discussion and Implications

It is my contention that students at LSU are not receiving adequate guidance to become more engaged and educated citizens. The LSU Commitment to Community clearly states the value of being an active citizen, so the university administration and campus leaders must do more to further this value. Focus group participants expressed the need for greater education initiatives to inform the student body about basic democratic principles, current issues that concern the general electorate, how to register to vote, and how to apply for absentee ballots. This can all be done at a grassroots level with small groups committing time and resources for the students.

As a member of Student Government, I had the opportunity to learn ways to “institutionalize” voter registration from leaders at the Student Empowerment Training Project. Its mission is to find ways to make voter registration and participation ubiquitous on college campuses, including working with Freshman Orientation, Residential Hall Associations and Student Government to have registration cards in packets and dorm rooms, and installing a polling place on campus specifically for students. During a conference call with the SET facilitators and other Student Government representatives from other colleges and universities, it was apparent how far LSU is behind in terms of creating a culture of political knowledge and engagement. Many other students voiced that his/her respective school was already implementing similar practices the SET facilitators were describing. Granted, most of those aforementioned colleges and universities are smaller than LSU, but I believe we can accomplish these things as well and set an example for the other institutions around the state and Southeastern Conference. This will be discussed in more detail below.

In regards to professors and senior colleges having a part in voter motivation, it is very simple for all professors to mention the importance of civic engagement and voting. As employees of the university, they should be urged to promote the Commitment to Community. It is imperative to create a culture of civic learning and engagement. Students should feel safe to ask basic questions and have civil discussions about his/her particular beliefs on current political issues.

One alarming thing I noticed about the unregistered students is that ideas they suggested to educate first time voters or general college students already exist. Sample ballots, a general polling place on campus, and online resources for absentee ballots already are in place. In addition, one unregistered student participant asked to be reminded of the name of Mitt Romney's vice-presidential running mate. As a student receiving higher education, she should know this basic information. It could be argued that it is the university's responsibility to expect a certain level of engagement from its students, but if a student is not interested in learning and does not pay attention to current events, it could also be said that that is a personal choice, one that cannot be helped. Either way, students need to realize and understand the importance of basic political knowledge and civic participation. What they do with that information is ultimately up to the student, but it is the university's responsibility to provide the information and encourage the dissemination of such information.

If university administration and campus leaders would pledge to improve current perceptions on campus about voting and general civic engagement, the culture of a university could shift in many positive directions. Just as politics is evident in every aspect of an average American's life, civic engagement can impact a student just as much. School spirit, camaraderie among students, student interest in community service, participation in the current budget crisis,

and more would improve greatly if LSU leaders would encourage and create an environment of learning and engagement where ideas can circulate without fear of judgment or ridicule.

Action: What's the Next Step?

As I mentioned above, basic implementation of these ideas have been approached by myself and other campus leaders at LSU. I have had the privilege to be a part of many organizations that promote civic engagement, and the following are a few accomplishments, as well as failures, that we have made over the past year.

As the Director of External Affairs for LSU Student Government Executive Staff, I partnered up with Jonathan Brothers, the Baton Rouge and New Orleans area team leader for HeadCount. HeadCount is a national, non-profit, non-partisan voter registration organization, whose primary environment for voter recruitment is music festivals and concerts. Jonathan and I saw an opportunity to hold numerous registration drives on LSU's campus during the 2012 election cycle. During the fall semester, we held registration drives about three times a week, for six weeks, registering at least 20 people each time. This was a huge accomplishment and Jonathan played a significant role. In fact, Jonathan and I were co-founders of HeadCount at LSU, a registered student organization that will further these efforts after we both graduate.

I previously mentioned facilitating a trial focus group with an Honors College class that was studying the 2012 presidential election during the fall semester. When discussing new ideas to motivate students to vote, a student suggested making a video featuring LSU athletes talking about why they wanted to vote, and encouraging classmates to do the same. I thought this was a fantastic idea, and after getting my SG External Affairs staff on board, we approached the LSU Athletic Department with the idea. Vice Chancellor of Athletics, Herb Vincent, and I met and talked about my goal for the video. Unfortunately, Mr. Vincent was wary of the athletes voicing certain opinions that could have been conveyed in a negative or controversial light, and the idea

never came to fruition. I would love to see this pursued in the future, and airing it at major sports events would have immense impact.

I participated in a training session with the Student Empowerment Training program, or SET. Facilitator Sarah Clader shared a PowerPoint with participants called, “We Voted...Now What?: Institutionalizing Voting Registration on College Campuses.” We talked about numerous ideas that would promote voting and voter education from the time new freshman stepped on campus. Through freshman orientation, residence life, and Student Government, SET’s ideas would definitely create a “buzz” around campus about voting. At Freshman Orientation, students would have the opportunity to register to vote, and orientation leaders would receive training to ensure registration is completed correctly. Through Residence Life, resident hall advisers would also receive training on completing registration forms that would be placed on every bed in the residence hall. Also, voter registration would be a topic of discussion at every floor meeting held during the first week of school. Lastly, through the efforts of Student Government, online resources for students interested in registering or finding the correct polling place would be placed on the school’s homepage as well as the Campus Life page, and on the student portal’s homepage (in our case, on the homepage of myLSU). Creating a polling place in the Student Union just for students registered on campus was also an idea presented.

This is obviously a huge task to undertake and would take many semesters to research the feasibility, garner support, and fund the implementation of these ideas. However, my External Affairs staff and I have already launched the research phase. My Assistant Directors as well as myself are compiling all our campus contacts for the future External Affairs officers to use as resources if they wish to pursue this initiative in the future.

Finally, at the recommendation of my thesis director and long time mentor Professor Bob Mann from the Manship School of Mass Communication, we will be looking to register LSU to participate in the “National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement,” conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, or CIRCLE, now associated with Tufts University. According to its website, civicyouth.org, the NSLVE study “offers colleges and universities an opportunity to measure student registration and voting rates *and* to study the effectiveness of educational programs designed to increase civic learning and engagement in democracy.” (National, 1) This is a huge opportunity for LSU to receive empirical feedback from a renowned institution about the civic engagement and political learning on campus. Further analysis will bolster the credibility of my personal experiences with civic engagement at LSU and will serve as another resource to urge LSU to take action! These efforts, regardless of success or failure, has created a spark of campus and has just scratched the surface of the possibilities to enhance the culture of political learning and engagement at LSU.

My personal research and analysis of previous studies upholds that LSU must move toward a more positive culture of political engagement. Currently, students and professors are apprehensive to discuss his/her beliefs and values for fear of offending anyone, or receiving backlash for “bringing it up.” We need to change the negative connotation of politics, voting, and civic engagement into a positive one at LSU. My experience through this thesis project has given me great insight into the needs of students in regards to civic engagement, and I believe this document will serve as a positive resource for years to come. Voting is a fundamental right we must pass on for generations to come. We need to make voting “cool;” these ideas and proposals will steer us in that direction.

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APPENDIX A:
LSU's Commitment to Community
Established 1995



COMMITMENT to COMMUNITY

Louisiana State University is an interactive community in which students, faculty, and staff together strive to pursue truth, advance learning, and uphold the highest standards of performance in an academic and social environment.

It is a community that fosters individual development
and the creation of bonds
that transcend the time spent within its gates.

To demonstrate my pride in LSU, as a member of its community, I will:

- accept responsibility for my actions;
- hold myself and others to the highest standards of academic, personal, and social integrity;
 - practice justice, equality, and compassion in human relations;
 - respect the dignity of all persons and accept individual differences;
- respect the environment and the rights and property of others and the University;
- contribute positively to the life of the campus and surrounding community;
- and use my LSU experience to be an active citizen in an international and interdependent world.

The continued success of LSU depends on the faithful commitment by each community member to these, our basic principles.

*Adopted as a "Statement of University Position" on behalf of the
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College community
on the fifth of May in the year 1995.*

APPENDIX B:
IRB APPROVAL and
INFORMED CONSENT GUIDE
September 12, 2012

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight



Institutional Review Board
 Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
 131 David Boyd Hall
 Baton Rouge, LA 70803
 P: 225.578.8692
 F: 225.578.5983
 irb@lsu.edu
 lsu.edu/irb

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

-- Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://research.lsu.edu/CompliancePoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item24737.html>

-- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

- (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru F.
- (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
 *If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
- (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
- (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>)
- (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://research.lsu.edu/files/item26774.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Rank:

Dept: Ph: E-mail:

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each
 *If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

<i>Robert Mann</i> Professor 8-2053 <i>rbmann@lsu.edu</i>	<i>Rosanne Scholl</i> Asst. Professor 8-2336
--	--

IRB# <i>E6099</i>	LSU Proposal # _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Complete Application
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title:

Study Exempted By:
 Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
 Institutional Review Board
 Louisiana State University
 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
 225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
 Exemption Expires: *9/11/2015*

4) Proposal? (yes or no) If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either This application **completely** matches the scope of work in the grant
 OR More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)

*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Date (no per signatures)

** I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Exempted _____	Category/Paragraph <i>2B</i>
Signed Consent Waived?: Yes / No	
Reviewer <i>Anne Osborne</i>	Signature <i>Anne Osborne</i> Date <i>9-12-12</i>

Study Exempted By:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 9/11/2015

Voter Efficacy and Mobilization at Louisiana State University:
What can we do better?

INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT

To be read to participants:

This project will be conducted at Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, the purpose being to determine what motivates college students at LSU to become involved in the political process via voting, and what could be improved to motivate more students to register to vote and vote on Election Day.

I'm conducting two focus groups with at least 6 individuals each between the ages of 18 and 24 who understand the voting process, and can either be registered to vote or not registered to vote. Subjects will participate in a 45-minute to 1-hour conversation about the importance of voting, being motivated to vote, and the benefits of getting involved in the political process. There are no real benefits or risks to this study; I plan to use the information gathered to improve efforts to encourage voting among college students.

You may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled. Let me know if you wish to do so. Additionally, results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless the law requires disclosure at any point in time

Do you feel like this study was adequately explained to you? Yes or No.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, the researcher at the following information:

Leslie Leavoy
(337) 343-1186
lleavo1@lsu.edu

APPENDIX C:
Transcripts and Personal Information
Focus Group 1: November 7, 2012

Focus Group # 1

recorded: 4/16/13 10:42 AM

Focus Group 1: Registered Voters
Chelsea, Dario, Tara, Rosalie, Lindsey, Ryan

Transcribed: Begin 12/26/12, End 12/27/12

Leslie: So, again, thank you all for coming, I'm very excited. Ok, so I'm going to read this informed consent thing, and if ya'll have any problems, let me know, and then we'll get started. Ok, so as you know, I'm doing this focus group for a research project for my undergraduate thesis and the purpose of this study is to determine what motivates college students, particularly at LSU, to become involved in the political process via voting, and what could be improved to motivate more students to register to vote and vote on Election Day. So, I'm doing two focus groups with this one with registered voters and another one next week with non-registered voters between the ages of 18-24. So there's not really any risks involved because I'm not like, testing you or doing any clinical things. And if you choose not to be identified, you can go ahead and tell me now, if you have a problem with anonymity. (No one indicated they had a problem) Ok, cool. If you decide otherwise, email me and let me know. If you have any problems after this, feel free to talk to me about it.

Leslie: Ok, let's get started. First, I would like to ask everyone what got you involved in the political process and made you decide to register to vote. And remember, this is a conversation, so just feel free to get started.

Tara: For me, it was just, like, understood. As soon as I turned 18, that was what I was going to do. I had to go and renew my license anyway and so I just did it while I was there. My parents always took me in the polls when I was little and stuff like that, and they always stressed how important it was. It was just understood that as soon as I turned 18. And plus, I turned 18 in 2008. So it was a presidential election, and it just made sense.

Lindsey: I had a similar situation, I was renewing my license at 18 and they asked if I would like to be registered to vote. Like it wasn't even a chance to think about it, like my dad looked at me, and said 'Oh yeah, why don't you register right now.' And that was it.

Chelsea: It was the first thing we did. Like I turned 18 and before I went to school, my mom brought me to register to vote. It was kinda like I didn't have a choice.

Rosalie: Mine was about the same, renewing my license.

Leslie: OK.

Dario: I'm from Texas, and you get sent a card to register to vote through the mail, so it's very much a voluntary thing. This was actually my first election, so it's really just 'if you feel like it'.

Leslie: OK, so have you benefitted from being involved? And that can be going to events, actually voting, seeing how your vote affects or doesn't affect the outcome.

Ryan: For me, it was cool, you know, actually voting. I mean this was the first election I could vote in. I had been registered to vote for awhile, but it was in Lafayette and I never felt like driving an hour to actually vote, but I had to switch voter registration and so actually voting was a really big benefit. You know actually participating in the process for me was really cool.

Chelsea: I think I would almost feel embarrassed if I wasn't a little bit involved, because I mean, we have so many resources you know and so to not know what's going on and to not vote, I would almost feel a little ashamed of myself...that I can put in the effort to watch The Real Housewives of wherever every night but not turn on the news and figure out what I can do.

Leslie: Raise your hand if you did vote in the election this year. (Five (everyone but Lindsey) out of six raised their hands.) And if you were registered to vote, did you vote in 2008? Raise your hand. (Two (Tara and Chelsea) out of six raised their hands.) Raise your hand if you voted in the 2010 midterm elections. (1 (Chelsea) out of six raised their hands).

Ok, so we're at LSU, and, you know, people were talking about a big election. What do you think was one of the biggest topics that got people talking about voting and the political process.

Lindsey: I think voting in general. Part of the reason that I didn't vote was because for my sorority we ran, not a registration drive, but we really were encouraging it and I got so caught up in getting everyone else's stuff sent in that I didn't send in my request for an absentee ballot. And so I think voting in general; like everyone was talking about not necessarily issues of the election, but opportunities for the person vote and people getting excited about actually taking that step that really encouraged others, and it spread.

Ryan: I agree. A lot of people in college, undergrad especially, weren't able to vote in the 08 election, and for most people it felt like the time where this was the first time we got to vote, and this was the first time they got to take part in the process, and that's what drove the conversation.

Tara: Also, I think for this particular election, people had such strong feelings about one candidate or the other and it was just very much either “I’m voting for this person,” or “I’m voting against this person,” and it was very nasty and it got people riled up and they wanted to talk about it and wanted to get involved and it became an important race for a lot of people.

Dario: I think just the polarization aspect motivated people. Especially on campus, being so diverse, but in a polarized environment in the Deep South just motivated people to go out and do their part.

Lindsey: I think it’s also us just being at an age where it affects us now. Last night, just watching the results, there was a girl with me and she was just like, “Oh my gosh, in four years we’ll be 24. We’ll be out of college; this is our lives. This affects what happens to us, our jobs, our money and it affects everything that we’re working for.” I thought that was really interesting. It was the first time she realized that it’s more than our parents, it’s our life, too.

Leslie: What have ya’ll seen teachers and faculty or just administrators, authority figures in general [on campus] do to talk about it [the election], or put it into the conversation.

Ryan: I know the journalism school, they’ve pretty much devised entire curriculums around the election. A lot of the advanced reporting classes are doing very specific election coverage, and not just the presidential election, but researching congressional candidates and mayoral candidates, and including those local politics well and I think that kinda plays it up. Because there was a lot of conversation about the national election. It’s always on TV, it’s very easy to talk about, but I feel the local elections play a big role as well.

Rosalie: I mean, I’m a poli sci major, so we would talk about the debates in class and they [the teachers] really encouraged us to go vote, but I don’t think I’ve seen much conversation about it in other classes not related to my major.

Chelsea: I haven’t had one professor mention anything about the election other than an email a couple days ago saying “If you get a chance, everyone should vote.” And that was it. We haven’t discussed it.

Lindsey: I thought this was interesting: my friend who is an education major, all of her classes got cancelled yesterday to enable them to go vote. She’s an education major, I’m a Poli Comm

major, and none of my classes were cancelled. I'm not asking to have my classes cancelled, but she had more discussion about it in her education classes than my intro to political communication class. My professor just assumed; she never brought up the voting aspect of it, just the poli comm portion, but she never brought up if we were going to vote or if we were registered, none of that. So I thought that was interesting.

Dario: For me, I take two political sciences and a Spanish class. Even in the Spanish class, we would talk about current events and making a decision to do your part. So it would be back and forth about participation.

Leslie: What do you think are some ideas, or what more would you like to see done from the faculty and administrators?

Ryan: I think they should cancel school. Honestly, I think it is enough of a "holiday" and enough of a "gridlock" day, that it would make more sense to block this day off every four years.

Rosalie: I agree, I mean you're from Lafayette, I'm from New Orleans, people went home to vote and that takes a lot out of your day.

Chelsea: It was so odd, I didn't realize high schools were out yesterday. I guess we missed that when that happened. I mean the majority of high schoolers cannot vote, so I thought it was odd that they were out, and all of us can vote and we had class.

Lindsey: I think maybe just making a big deal out of it. I mean, this sounds cheesy, but our sorority house, like we put everything up red, white and blue and had an election day thing, and I know they did something at the Holliday Forum, but something campus wide would be really nice. I wasn't on campus yesterday, I've been sick, so I don't know. But I didn't hear about anything.

Leslie: Do you think that professors should talk about it in their class? Political affiliation, aside, just informing people the importance of voting? What do you think about that?

Chelsea: My major has nothing to with politics, so I don't know how those majors handled it, but I think it would be nice [for professors] to encourage it [voting] a little bit because a lot of people have parents who have no interest in politics whatsoever. So maybe other people don't know, "Hey this is important, you should go vote." So maybe a couple professors could say, "If you're

not registered, this is where you can go to check it out.” I mean, I don’t think everyone should make a huge deal about making their whole class about it [politics].

Tara: I think I understand why professors may be a little hesitant toward saying something because I mean, especially at LSU, there’s a bad rap for your “liberal professors are infiltrating your mind,” but I can understand why individual professors would be a little hesitant. But I think it would definitely be a good idea for colleges and schools to send out a broadcast email. A lot of people that I come in contact with (I actually work for the Reilly Center at the Journalism School, so I’m a little bias), but we came in contact with people where the deadline had passed who it was too late to change their registration or something like that. So maybe instead of saying, “Hey election day is tomorrow,” sending out something that says, “Hey you got six more days to turn in your absentee ballot” or “You have another week to be able to apply to change your registration before Election Day.” I think things like that would be more helpful, than “Hey election day is tomorrow”; everyone knows that. But not everyone knows deadlines.

Rosalie: Yeah, like I turned mine in the day before, and I don’t think a lot of people know that. ??

Lindsey: There’s also a careful line to tread, like you [Tara] mentioned earlier. Professors are hesitant because they don’t want to talk about their political affiliation, and I think that’s the way that it should be. Because for me, it is a turn off when a teacher is so one-sided, even if it is toward the one that I believe in, it’s still like, “Ok, you’re the professor, it is harder to take you seriously because you don’t relate to us.” You could focus more on the history of voting, like why it’s important to vote in general instead of focusing on one political party or one political affiliation, more of why it matters, like why it matters for you to vote. It can be really hard in states like Louisiana, and I’m from Texas as well, and I’ve made the excuse: “There are no Republican teachers.” It’s easy for someone who believes in voting and believes in the political process as much as I do, it can be easy to talk yourself down if it’s not easily accessible.

Ryan: I think the university has much more of a responsibility than (encouragement from?) individual professors. I think there is kind of a, sort of a quasi-ethical responsibility to encourage educated people to vote, or people who are getting higher education to vote.

Dario: And that can relate directly to LSU’s Commitment to Community, which is sponsoring open discussion and activism.

(Ryan agrees.)

Tara: I think it would be good if there were more things campus wide. Because, for me, as far as the journalism school is concerned, there is only so much that I can do because I am in only in control of things that happen in the journalism building. You know, outside of that, I can't do my thing, like expand at all. If there were more campus wide things, it would definitely make more of an impact.

Rosalie: Because there's so many cool stuff that the journalism school puts on but I feel like I don't hear about it until afterwards, until people are talking about it afterwards. And it's only because I think, LSU in general doesn't do a very good job with promoting stuff campus wide.

Tara: Cross-campus communication.

Leslie: Along those lines, do you think your general consensus of college students around campus feel like they have an impact on the election?

Lindsey: It's interesting because I feel like Facebook is more alive than our actual campus is. Like walking to class, or even having class discussions, I feel like it's kind of dead. While on Facebook it's like "Holy crap, everyone calm down. Everyone take a deep breath in and a deep breath out." It's interesting to me that people do feel like they have an impact, but the way they choose to express that, I don't know if it's in the most healthy manner or, like I said, I wasn't on campus yesterday, so I don't know if it was different for any one else....

(Everyone chimes in: No)

Lindsey: ...It's interesting to me that it's that "mask of social media" but walking around, you don't want to wear a shirt or wear a button until the day after when your person's won, but the day before, you're so willing to log on to your Facebook and be like bashing, you know what I mean? It's so fascinating to me, but I don't know if that's the way it should be.

Rosalie: I think it's just hiding behind it, you know, you don't want to be brave enough to say it in front of everybody so you wait and do it from your computer.

Lindsey: yeah.

Leslie: But do you think college students in general think that they have a place in the election?

(A couple participants answer yes.)

Tara: I think it's either one or the other. I think people feel like, especially the youngest voters feel like, "I have a voice, I can do something." The older you get the more disenfranchised you become and the fact you learn more about the electoral college system and you learn that your vote might not actually mean anything. So I think that the younger people are, the more almost ideological they are, and they feel like their vote counts and things like that. And a lot of times when you get older, that wanes a little bit.

Chelsea: There are multiple of my very good friends that really didn't put forth any effort to vote because I think it's not that they don't know where they stand politically, because I think the majority of them do, but they just kind of felt like it was almost like a waste of time to go through all the trouble when maybe they felt like their vote doesn't mean a whole lot. I mean maybe just that they could put their time and effort into something else, I don't know.

Leslie: OK, what do you think would catch students' attention? What would be a great idea to motivate people?

Ryan: I think a radical change in how voting is actually done, I mean, eventually. I think many people view voting as a hassle. But I think at some point there's got to be a way to, you know... I don't know how feasible it is to vote from your computer or vote from your phone, because I know there were a lot of places where people were waiting 45 minutes to an hour, and I feel like that kind of hassle, making people feel like it's going to the DMV, as supposed to celebrating being a part of the political process, I think that would help engage that ability to make it easier.

Tara: I think two things, one thing is a little bit easier than the other, would be to have something set up in Free Speech Alley or the Union where people can do their absentee ballots there or can apply to absentee vote, things like that, make it easy so people literally run into it, and you have a computer right there where people can just do it. Because I change my residency on my computer in five minutes, it doesn't take any time at all, people just don't think about it. And the other thing is, as far as Election Day goes, I would eventually love to see a polling place on campus, so that if people do happen to change their residency to somewhere on campus, which you can do, there would be a place where people could just walk and there would be a polling place here, which we don't have much control over that, but I think it would make a big

difference on people voting in campus if we actually had a polling place here instead of having to find some elementary school that you don't know where it is.

Dario: Or maybe just advertising the polling place before the day of, such as The Daily Reveille, they put it on the front page, under the fold, the day of, but some people don't look at the paper the day of, or they don't look at it until the evening. Something like a mail-in ballot more "online"; there was research done about social media just saying "I voted!" and it goes on the feed that your friends voted, it motivates people to go out, or everybody getting a ballot my mail, that motivates participation, just things like that. Just informing the government or an institution, going to people no matter what and saying, here's how you do it.

Lindsey: I think just harness the enthusiasm that people have right now, like not waiting for four years to re-motivate people, like keep them motivated. I have friends that came out of the booth yesterday and they blew up GroupMe and texting: "I love voting! I can't wait to vote in four years!" They were so excited that they had done it, and what saddens me is that I would like to think that that would stay the same but in four years I don't know where they'll be in their life, maybe they won't remember that feeling, so harnessing that enthusiasm that people have right now, that "after voting high" and keeping that going and then using word of mouth to spread that to others.

Leslie: Do you think that ease of access to the ballot would further that mission to motivate young people to vote? In other words, something online or having an on-campus booth?

Group: yes, absolutely, (nodding)

Chelsea: As a whole, we're all about what is convenient to us. I think young people in general are not interested in things that are going to really inconvenience us when we'd rather be doing other things. So yeah, I think that would make a big difference. Like someone said, voting on their computer...didn't I see that residents in New Jersey were allowed to do that this week? So obviously, it could be possible. I realize that's not something we have the power over...

Leslie: OK, before, ya'll were saying that when you decided to register to vote, it was kind of understood, so what were some things that motivated ya'll to actually vote for this election?

Chelsea: I mean, what's the point in registering to vote if you're not going to vote, ya know? I mean, it's kind of a waste of time. And like I said in my first answer, my dad would have cut me off if I wouldn't have voted. Like the first thing we talked about, I just knew I was going to vote.

Rosalie: I like politics, and I like to talk about politics, and I feel like I almost wouldn't be entitled to talk about it as much if I didn't vote.

Tara: I think on every ballot, no matter what election, there's always important things to be voted on. If it wasn't important, then it wouldn't be on the ballot. So for me, there is almost a weight and heaviness that comes with that, and knowing "You can't complain, if you don't vote." So I think for every ballot that there's always something important to be lost or gained.

Leslie: How many of you absentee voted for this election?

(Rosalie, Chelsea, and Dario raised there hand)

Leslie: OK, so being able to absentee vote, did that motivate you more because it was easier to do?

Rosalie: I mean, it was definitely easier to do from your couch, but I got frustrated with it, because the instructions weren't as clear as I would like them to be.

Chelsea: I agree, and yeah, it was convenient and easy to absentee vote, but there were some things...for example, I think it was govote.com, I'm not sure if that was exactly what it was, but a lot of the instructions were confusing on the website. Like my little sister was so confused, she wanted to quit, she couldn't figure out how to get the ballot in the mail or get it changed to where you are now from where you used to live...it was very complicated. So yeah, absentee voting was easier, but also you have to have voted at home before you could absentee vote.

Rosalie: I thought that too, but that wasn't true. Because I never voted before, and I just sent in a copy of my student ID

Chelsea: Oh, really? OK, well I had a friend who tried to absentee vote but he was under the impression that you had to have voted at home, and he was like, well I can't do this and I'm not going to drive two and half hours to DeRidder...

Leslie: Do you think that if there was a political event on campus it would motivate more people to go and see what it's all about? Such as like when Gary Johnson or Ron Paul came to speak, or an "in general" rallying event from College Republicans or College Democrats?

Ryan: I think one of the main candidates would have to come here. I mean, Gary Johnson and Ron Paul are great, but they're not winning an election. It's kind of a double-edged sword because neither of the candidates are going to come here because it's not really a swing state. I think that is kind of an interesting conundrum at this university. You know, young people are so motivated to vote but at the same time, Louisiana is going Red, no matter what. It's gone Red, and that's kind of the way it is, and so I think that's an interesting paradox.

Tara: For me, I would be much more likely to go to a non-partisan kind of thing, if it was more of like a Rock the Vote kind of thing, instead of like College Democrats, College Republicans because either if you do one of those things, then you're alienating...

Ryan: ...Half of your audience...

Tara: ...Easily half your audience, exactly. I think if it was more of a Get out the Vote, Rock the Vote kind of thing, then you would have a lot more interest in it.

Ryan: Like a "Voting's Awesome" event, as supposed to a "This Party is Awesome" event.

Chelsea: Right, I think people would be more comfortable coming, you know a lot of people become very uncomfortable with political controversy, they don't like it and they don't like being around it.

Tara: Because even if I'm a registered Democrat, I might not want to go to a LSU Democrat thing, because I may think a bunch of left-wing crazy people might come or a bunch of right-wing crazy people would come and you just don't want to get mixed up in that kind of thing.

Leslie: How many of you attended a political event of any kind before? (Ryan raised his hand.)
Ryan, would you like to share?

Ryan: Well I went to one of the debate watch parties here on campus at the Manship School, and I went to Iowa for all the caucuses, and that was an interesting experience, because that was a swing state, and even though they were making decisions at the time for the Republican

candidate, they were also weighing them against Barack Obama because they knew in November, their state was going to be one of the nine or ten states that would swing the election.

Dario: I went to the, I guess you would call it the Tea Party Rally when New Gingrich came to Dodson, and you know I was a Democrat, I just went to see all the crazies. But I think the whole idea of having a political event is discouraging because people don't want to have actual discussion and exchange of ideas.

Leslie: Why do you think that?

Dario: Just in the current political environment, for people that don't study politics or public policy or public relations, they're very much, this is it, I just want to do this, or I don't want to have anything to do with it at all. That's my opinion, that having a certain person come speak, that fosters more interaction and turnout than a non-partisan kind of thing or an open discussion.

Leslie: Anybody else want to share things they've been to?

Tara: I've unfortunately been to a lot of political things. I've been to some that were more non-partisan and I've been to some that were extremely partisan and I've even found that the ones that were partisan, it just got really old, really quick, it was just like a big cheerleading party for "Yay, we're all so awesome..."

Ryan: It was a political pep rally...

Tara: Right, and it get's pretty exhausting pretty quick, even if it's part of your own party. And I think the other ones are a bit more fun, because it just doesn't get as old as quick, at least for me.

Chelsea: I attended that debate in 2009 in DeRidder. Leslie's mother was running for judge, but no, I haven't attended anything nationally.

Leslie: Along those lines, if the university was bringing someone or if someone came on their own accord, whether it be an organization or a specific candidate, and LSU was advertising it and wanting people to come, would you go? Yes or no, or it depends.

Group: It depends on who it is; Yeah, it depends.

Leslie: And going along with what ya'll said before, if it's like non-partisan or kind of opens up more discussion and turnout? (Group nods) OK, cool. So what are some things that you would think would make the ballot easier to access? Along the lines of making it online, what are some other things, and you can repeat what you said, that would make other students think, "This is easier than I thought, I want to get involved and vote."

Lindsey: Like I said earlier, we did a lot stuff with my sorority getting everyone registered to vote and I got really wrapped up in that and that's why I ended up not sending in my absentee ballot, which isn't a good excuse, but it is what it is. Another aspect of that, was my friend and she was submitting hers [absentee ballot] and it was a nightmare, hers got lost in the mail so she called and then they ended up faxing it to her, she went to FedEx, no one would witness for her, like she would ask, "Can you just sign this?" and they said No. The FedEx people wouldn't, no one that was walking in, she ended up sitting for three hours, ended up calling a friend to sign this thing, fax it back, it was just this entire...where she spent four hours at FedEx one afternoon. So after that, I was already late on the ball and I was like "Crap, I'm trying to get in, but I'm doing a million other things at once..." and then I get sick, so it was just like, I heard her nightmare of a story and I was just like "Well, I can't do that, like I can't spend four hours at FedEx in the afternoon, it's not going to happen." So I think anything can relieve that process, like even in the Union like you're actually submitting the absentee ballot, that would have be fabulous. Like if I could've just walked in, filled it out, sent it straight through the office that's in here [the Union] now, like that would have been the difference between me voting and not voting. I know that that's sad that is has to be that convenient, but I don't have a lot of free time, and I know that's not a legitimate excuse, but I really don't, like I have two hours in the middle of my day that I can get things like that finished, and a lot of times I'm in meetings.

Rosalie: Well my absentee process literally was that simple. I got it in the mail, filled it out, sent it right back through the Union, it was that simple for me. So I think you just have some nightmare experiences...

Lindsey: Right. And I mean, you're always going to have those, no matter what. But also, I heard that, you know what I mean, I heard that nightmare experience, and I was like, "I can't do that."

Rosalie: Mmhmm.

Ryan: I really like the polling place on campus idea. Being able to literally walk there, and get it done, and then go to class, or work or just go about your day, I think that would really encourage

people, especially people who come in from out of state, who just, you know, switched their...or people who are from in-state but live far away, just come vote and be done with it.

Rosalie: I wish there was a way to just check off “student” and say you could vote here without having to go through that whole process of changing everything. That would be so much easier.

Chelsea: Being able to talk to someone in person, like on campus, like if you have a question about how to get your absentee ballot or for example that thing you [Leslie] were involved with in Free Speech Alley, letting people register. It’s easier when you can literally look at someone, and not have to call someone on the phone and they connect you to so and so, and then you have to mail all these ridiculous things that you don’t have, it would just be easier. And I think students would be more encouraged if they could just walk up to someone on campus and say, “Hey I’m confused about my absentee ballot, who can help me with it?”

Leslie: All right, what are some things that you have noticed on the news or social media that is going on in the outside world, like outside the college campus bubble that got young people excited for the election?

Chelsea: I mean honestly, we’re all young, so I don’t know how it used to be. I mean, I know my Dad told me that young people used to not be encouraged to get involved with local elections or national elections. They weren’t encouraged to register to vote and to go vote and so I think maybe we’re just encouraged because we’re in college and we’re going to have to get a good job and were putting forth all this effort to get a good education and so we’re excited and maybe we just feel like we have kind of a place in this world that’s kind of ours, like young people who are excited about life, whereas I think used to it might have just been like a young person is trying to get to this like old boring adulthood. And I think that has kind of changed over the past few years, just like with, which personally I don’t like this, but like our favorite musicians and actors and actresses getting people excited and so I think things like that have made a big difference in getting young people to be involved.

Leslie: You said you don’t like that?

Chelsea: No, not particularly, because I don’t want to feel like a bad person because I want to go see Lady Gaga in concert and my grandma thinks she’s the devil, you know what I’m saying. Like Maroon 5, I want to go see Maroon 5, I don’t want to listen to them talk on CNN about what they’re mad about or something, it’s just annoying.

Leslie: So you think there should be a separation?

Chelsea: Well, no, because I mean they have a right to feel that way, I mean it's their right to express the way they feel, absolutely, but, for me it almost like makes me not want to say, "Oh, Eva Longoria is one of my favorite actresses," and I don't want my racist friend to be like, "Oh, you know she...blah blah blah." You know what I'm saying.

Leslie: Yeah.

Chelsea: I would never want them to feel like they couldn't express how they feel, but for me it just gets kind of annoying.

Dario: I think it's more ease of access to information, being able to talk with so many people about it. My grandma told me, I think it was two weeks ago, that people used to not talk about politics. It was, "Those are your thoughts, keep it to yourself." And it's just this open exchange or availability of information that gets people riled up.

Rosalie: I think that's a very mixed blessing though, because like you [Lindsey] were saying earlier, with Facebook, you know, sometimes there's too much information and half of it is not at all correct, and it keeps getting re-shared and re-shared and re-shared and I think that's really frustrating.

Dario: Oh, yeah.

Lindsey: Kind of going along with that, not that I'm saying, you know, that college voters are educated voters by any means or that they're informed, but I think they feel that they are, and it's exciting for them. I know a lot of girls showed me, there was this video going around called "Obama-phone" and there was this woman and she was standing at a polling place and she was talking about how Obama was giving away free phones if they voted for him. And for them, it was exciting to be like, "That's not true!" You know what I mean, they felt informed, they felt empowered. There was also a woman on the local news, it was on WBRZ, it was a really funny interview, but she kind of made like a faux pas, and so people were keeping up with that and they were watching all kinds of viral videos of what was happening throughout the day and they felt like they could almost combat it in a way, like they felt they were the informed voters, the

educated voters that could go out there and really make that decision that was best for them. I think that that's something that got people excited as well.

Leslie: Kind of along that line, do you think that more people pay attention to the political gaffes or you know the uneducated people being on the news because it empowers them and they can feel like, you said, the more informed, they can feel like well I know enough to correct what's going on?

Lindsey: Oh yeah, absolutely, I think it's easier; it's nicer to feel smart than to feel stupid. And so you like to watch those people and you're like, "Well I know that's not true, and they look dumb, and I'm an informed voter," when if you'd actually talk to them, then they probably aren't, but they feel that way after watching the news. And of course just virally, those videos catch on the quickest, and those are the ones that are easier to share and to show.

Chelsea: I think also people keep up with those viral videos, maybe because they do feel smarter, maybe they feel like they're better than that person who thinks that, but I think also it's also a comical relief because I think this whole election things have been so tense and always so serious and all of that stuff and so when you see a lady on the news talking about how Obama is going to give her a new phone, it's kind of nice to relax and be like, "Ok this is getting so crazy," maybe laugh or giggle a little.

Lindsey: I don't know, I actually, and this is kind of going off subject, but I feel like it's different because I actually felt that that added to the tension.

Chelsea: Oh, really?

Lindsey: Like whenever people saw that video, it's funny, we were sitting there, they were like, "That lady shouldn't be allowed to vote." And I said, "Well why not? She's an American citizen." You know what I'm saying? And they would be like, "Well she's uneducated."

Chelsea: So you think it made people angry.

Lindsey: Yeah, and somebody made the comment, "People should have to take a test before they vote." And I'm like, "Really?"

Rosalie: These are the same ones that are moving to Canada.

Lindsey: Yeah, the same ones that are moving to Canada to escape universal healthcare.

Group: Right, yeah, because that how it works....etc.

Lindsey: But people were getting really angry and they would say, “They’re uneducated,” and I’m sitting there [thinking], “You have no idea, you have no idea.” So I felt it created more tension and this animosity towards those voters and it makes people say things like, “They should have to take a test to vote.” And you’re like, “Really, should they?, No!”

(Participants indicated they had meetings/class)

Leslie: Ok, that’s fine! We’ll wrap it up, that’s the last thing I had to ask. Thank you very much for coming, I appreciate it.

Focus Group #1: Registered Voter Personal Information

<u>NAME</u>	<u>GENDER</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>RACE</u>	<u>MAJOR</u>	<u>POLITICAL PARTY</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>
Ryan Brumley	M	21	W	MC	Independent	Lafayette, LA
Chelsea O’Neal	F	22	W	COMMD	R	DeRidder, LA
Lindsey Bennett	F	20	W	MC	R	Katy, TX
Tara Hammett	F	23	W	MC-PR Graduated ‘12	Independent	Minden, LA
Dario Scalco	M	20	W	Poli Sci and Econ	D	Hurst, TX
Rosalie Haug	F	20	W	Poli Sci/HIST	D	St. Rose, LA

APPENDIX D:
Transcripts and Personal Information
Focus Group 2: November 16, 2012

Focus Group #2

recorded: 4/16/13 10:43 AM

Focus Group 2: Non-Registered Students
Kelsey, Sydney, Nathan

Transcribed: began 1/7/13; end 1/8/13

Leslie: OK, if everyone is ready, we'll get started. First, I'll read this consent form to ya'll. Thank you for coming, and as you know, I'm doing this focus group for a research project for my undergraduate thesis and the purpose of this study is to determine what motivates college students at LSU to become involved in the political process via voting, and what could be improved to motivate more students to register to vote and vote on Election Day. So, I'm doing two focus groups, this is the second one, with non-registered voters between the ages of 18-24 who understand the voting process. The first was with registered voters, held last week, and then this one with non-registered individuals. I'll ask you some questions, and there's not really any risks or benefits involved, except eating free Jimmy John's. Do you have any questions or concerns about being mentioned in my research? (No one indicated they had a problem) Ok, cool. If you decide otherwise, email me and let me know. Let's get started.

Leslie: Ok, so why haven't ya'll registered to vote yet?

Kelsey: Because the last election was before I turned 18, and I haven't been home in a year.

Nathan: I really honestly don't know how to register to vote, first of all, and I don't really want to vote, because I heard it's just a long, annoying process.

Leslie: OK.

Sydney: I don't know enough about politics to make an educated decision on a vote.

Leslie: OK, are ya'll interested in politics at all?

Sydney: No.

Kelsey: Not really.

Nathan: Yes.

Leslie: Why aren't you interested in the political process, Sydney?

Sydney: Because I don't understand it.

Leslie: What do you think student leaders or teachers around campus could do to motivate students like you to get involved and register to vote?

Sydney: They could explain it to me.

Leslie: What do you mean?

Sydney: They could explain the impact that certain candidates would have on myself being a college student and things that would affect me individually.

Nathan: They could give us class off so that we could go register to vote.

Kelsey: And give us class off to give us time to go vote. And yeah, if they kind of have a "if you vote for this candidate this is gonna happen, if you vote for this candidate, this will happen" thing. Because a lot of people know like, the positions, or they just think "Democrat/Republican". They don't really know what that affect has on society.

Nathan: If they could explain, and I don't know if they could as a public institution, but they could tell us how and where to register to vote, and talk about, not talk about the sides necessarily, but play the debates in class depending on what the class pertained to.

Leslie: Ok, so you think if the class was related to politics, that would be appropriate?

Nathan: Yeah, like a Poli Sci class, or any English class, just because English has a lot of people in it. (?)

Leslie: Do you think if a professor got up in front of a class and said purely information-based things such as "This is where you can go register to vote, this is how you can do it, by this date," that that would be appropriate, versus them talking about politics in general?

Sydney: Yeah.

Kelsey: Yeah.

Leslie: Why?

Kelsey: Because they're not really trying to...

Sydney:...persuade you or...

Kelsey:...influence your vote by just giving you one side of the story.

Leslie: Do you feel like college-aged students have an impact on the political process at all?

Nathan: Yes, but it also...like one of the reasons I didn't vote is because Georgia, where my vote reports, is always Red. So like yeah, like I should vote and I could vote, but it really wouldn't make that big of a difference because it's pretty much guaranteed that Georgia is going to be Red. I mean, it depends where you are, but, if I was in California, which is usually blue, or like Florida, which is a swing state, or Ohio, then I would vote.

Kelsey: I'm from Florida, so I know that my vote would have counted, and I probably would have been a little upset with myself, if not being registered being the reason why I couldn't vote, if my candidate that I wanted hadn't won, so, um, cause it's usually the last one counted, it's pretty much if you win Florida you win the election kinda deal, so, yeah, in my case, yes, my vote kinda does make a difference, so I can see that, but in other states [like Georgia], one vote probably doesn't change too much.

Leslie: Do you think college student feel like they have a place in the political discussion about who's going to be president?

Kelsey: I feel like a lot of college students don't see how it, um, impacts them. Because we're not, I mean, most of us are still (pinned?) on our parents taxes, most of us still really live at home when we're not at school; we don't really have a lot of independence from our parents, who are the main ones who make decisions, who it [the election/the presidency] really impacts, that's what it seems like. But our generation, we have a lot more people, so if we had, if everybody voted that was our age, we would have a big swing in who was elected.

Sydney: I feel like (nothing would?) affect us now, because we don't have full time jobs. But within the next four years, we'll actually graduate and have real time jobs where the decisions made by the political candidates will actually affect us, but I feel like people don't think about that, so they don't vote when they're in college.

Nathan: I feel like more people, like people in my fraternity kinda cared about it more just 'cause there's a bunch of (chicks?/pledges?) that were really into it, but the general consensus, I feel like doesn't, like a lot of people don't care enough to vote, like not enough at least. And I think it does matter, though, because within the next four years most of the people that are going to college now will be either out or about to be out and the candidate could affect the economy, so it should matter a lot more to kids especially our age.

Leslie: Ok. Do you think if the voting ballot was easier to access, for instance if Election Day wasn't on the most inconvenient day of the week or...I guess what I'm asking is do you think if it was easier to vote would more people our age vote?

(group nods, says yes)

Sydney: I think if they had like a thing on campus where you could go vote, I feel like a lot of people would have done it because it's easier and most people come to campus every day.

Nathan: I thought they did have a place on campus to vote.

Sydney: No, because you do it by district. So if you're, well a lot of people who end up going to college here don't necessarily live in the districts here. So you either have to go home to New Orleans or go out of state and there are absentee ballots, but sometimes that's kinda complicated and like not as easy, so maybe if they made it easier for out of state people or to vote out of your district to vote here then I guess it would be easier, but I think it would be more difficult [to make happen] than it would be easy.

Kelsey: Especially at a university this large when there are so many people from out of state or so many people from Texas, they all had to do absentee ballots which means you really have to plan far ahead to vote, and you know maybe if it [Election Day] was on an easier day, like a Friday, because you know then people could get off of work early, they could cancel classes and people could go home and then spend the weekend at home or something if they need to vote, but like, you're right, Tuesday is a very inconvenient day.

Nathan: Also, there was some stuff I was watching the news about, people were spending like two and a half, three hours standing in lines, which I mean, if you were in an important state, that would be like, that'd be worth it, but like I said, if you're from Georgia and you're standing three hours in line to vote, then it just wouldn't be worth it, just 'cause three hours is too long for that.

Kelsey: I know in Miami something like a thousand people were still in line at seven o'clock at night to vote and it's like, if you're in line by that time, you're allowed to vote, so that's why it takes so long to count them but like, a thousand people, just in Miami, still unaccounted for, that's crazy, and they're going to stand in that line, too.

Leslie: So what are some other suggestions that you might have for making it easier to vote?

Kelsey: Have more places to vote; make it quicker to vote; kinda know what the ballot's gonna look like before you get in there [the polling place], so that, I don't know if they actually have that, but like, so you know, "Ok, when I walk in there, this is what I want to fill out," because most people don't know as you walk in, like there's a lot more than just two candidates on the piece of paper.

Sydney: I feel like you go in there [the polling place] and sometimes you're just going to vote for president, but you vote for amendments and other stuff and I feel like people don't know so they vote for things that they don't know just 'cause they're in there voting for one thing [President], so sometimes they make uneducated decisions, so maybe have like separate things...

Nathan: I think one of the important things for college campuses would be to...instead of you having to go out and do the research and figure out when the deadlines are for absentee ballots, for them [the college] to make it more known, I guess. So they have everyone's email, so they all can send out an email about it, or I don't know, do different things around campus about it, 'cause I know a lot of times, like a lot of my friends didn't do it because they missed the deadline to sign up for absentee voting or whatever.

Leslie: Sydney, you were shaking your head...

Sydney: No more emails.

Leslie: Ok, you hate emails.

Kelsey: Broadcast emails would be, I don't know...I wouldn't like it but...

Leslie: If the emails were from your [senior] college, would you pay more attention to it?

Sydney: If what was from your college?

Leslie: Like an email about deadlines for voting and [Sydney: (shaking head)]...you wouldn't pay attention to it?

Kelsey: Maybe if it said really big in the subject line "Absentee Voting"... I mean that's really all you could do...

Leslie: OK.

Kelsey: ...to get people to try and look at it because if they're interested they'll click on it but if they're not interested in it then they won't put in the energy into it [clicking on and reading the email].

Leslie: Ok, so have any of ya'll attended a political event before, on or off campus?

Sydney: No.

Nathan: I went to a College Republicans meeting one time.

Kelsey: I don't think so, No. What's a "political event"?

Leslie: Just like a College Republicans or College Democrats meeting or when a candidate may come to campus, or like in your town, or like a rally, or if one of your family members was running for office.

Kelsey: In high school I did see, um, who was the Vice President that was running with, um, Romney?

Leslie: Paul Ryan?

Kelsey: Paul Ryan. He came and spoke at our high school, but that was a long time ago.

Leslie: Oh ok!

Sydney: I was once sitting in the cafeteria, I mean, in the Union, and the debate was going on while I was doing my homework.

Leslie: Oh, like a debate on TV?

Sydney: No, they were debating about the presidential stuff, in the Union.

Leslie: Oh, interesting, okay. [To Nathan:] And you went to a College Republicans meeting? Okay, that's cool. Sydney, that's interesting, I never heard...

Sydney: I mean I didn't purposefully go to it, I was sitting there and they started talking, and I didn't want to leave.

Leslie: Gotcha.

Nathan: Was it like a scheduled event?

Sydney: I have no idea, they just had a table set up and they had all these people and they just started debating about like presidential stances...I don't know.

Leslie: Oh, interesting. If there was something like that, on campus, around the time of an important, national election, do you think the average college student would go?

Sydney: No.

Leslie: Why not?

Sydney: Because I was sitting in one and there weren't any students there. I was like the only one.

Leslie: Okay.

Kelsey: Because most people would rather not go, they'd rather, like do something else, you know, sit at home, watch TV.

Nathan: I think a lot of people are already, like, for college students at least, already basically chose their position. There's a few undecided people who might have like changed sides, but like most of them are either Republican or Democrat and who will look on the news and watch the debates and stuff, like the presidential debates to kinda know the positions, or they have friends that do. So they kinda make their positions about that, but I do think that'd be interesting to do.

Leslie: Do you think it would be more appealing if an event that wasn't really associated with one party, like a non-partisan event, happened that more people would be interested or willing to go rather than having one Republican candidate or one Democratic candidate showing up? What do ya'll think about that?

Nathan: I just feel like politics in general isn't too appealing to college kids just because [you either go on your side...?] like in college there's so many different things you can do with your time besides go watch a political thing.

Leslie: Ok.

Sydney: I just feel like if you're not studying politics, it's one of the small things you don't really understand, so you're not gonna go sit and listen to people talk about things you don't understand.

Leslie: Ok. What sort of things did you notice during this past election period, good or bad, that got people saying, "Oh I want to be more involved, I would like to vote in this election." What are some things that caught people's attention?

Nathan: Obamacare...

Leslie: Ok.

Nathan: The debates on TV were good because a lot of people watched those or commented on them. Um, stuff about people's speculations about what the economy would be like, like in two or three years when we get out of college, depending on which candidate got picked.

Leslie: Ok.

Kelsey: Um, I mean, I don't know if this is what got people out to vote, but a lot of them, like the second the debate ended like everybody was posting on Facebook about something, or it was like all these like memes were made or whatever about like different things, kinda making fun of the candidates and um, or which is good to, because like I watched most of the debates or like parts of them and um, but that's actually what caught my attention, was going on the Internet later and all the social media, even though it focused on one or two funny lines or silly things that people said. But that might have caught people's attention and been like, "Oh, maybe I should pay more attention."

Leslie: So do you think that, in the political world, I guess you could say, when candidates mess up or do something they're not supposed to, people call it a "gaffe", do you think those are what people pay most attention to, like things they can make fun of the candidates about?

Sydney: I mean, I think it just reminds people that even though they are, like such political figures, they are still human and they still make mistakes, so sometimes it's nice to know that the people you are electing are actually going to be real people and they are not gonna be, like they're gonna mess up, too. So I don't think it's necessarily making fun of it, but it's comic relief almost, knowing that they're not perfect and that they're people.

Kelsey: I think that a lot of people use it to kinda like throw in other people's face, I don't know, just especially I notice on Facebook, when everybody has their statuses, you know, "Vote for so and so, vote for so and so," they'll like comment on it about like, they'll say, you know the gaffes or whatever, you know they'll have a regular debate, and then some will be like, "Oh he said this, so you know, obviously that's not it," you know it's something that shouldn't be taken into so much consideration when you like go to vote, "Oh well you know he said something about binders of women," like why should that even matter?

Leslie: Right.

Nathan: Like the George [W.] Bush "nuclear" thing? Like he said "nuclear" wrong...I think it's kinda important that the President's educated, even though I liked George [W.] Bush, but I think a lot of things people focus on are like, are like the, like you said, the parts where they mess up, which really isn't a big deal, unless it was like, a mistake in their speech, like, um how do I say this, like they didn't mess up and say a word wrong, but they messed up in [their stances]. I

know, uh, I don't know. I think Mitt Romney jumped back and forth on a few things, which a lot of people pointed out, which was kinda important actually, not like he said a word wrong. And then also stuff about when Romney cut off Obama, I forgot the subject it was, I think those things are important, like those gaffes, but not the other silly gaffes like the other stuff.

Leslie: Ok. Kelsey, you mentioned you saw a lot of stuff on social media like after the debates and after the election, stuff like that, what do you think is the role that social media plays? Like a good one, a bad one, does it get [students] our age talking more about it [the election]? Like what do you think about it?

Kelsey: I think, well, I find it really annoying, but it is definitely good cause it brings it to people's attention our age, it does get them talking about it, and I guess if it wasn't in my newsfeed every five seconds, I wouldn't have thought about it as much, um, but it gets ridiculous, and um, you know, people have, like, fights over it and when you're not going to change somebody's mind over, you know, Twitter or Facebook or something like that, and especially after the election, because what people were saying were just ridiculous, but it shows that people care, so that's good.

Leslie: Mmhmm. What do ya'll think? [to Sydney and Nathan]

Sydney: Uh, I think it could play a positive role, but I think that some people take it too far and there's a thin line between, like, an educated post and an ignorant one and I feel like people tend to use it to post things that make them look ignorant, which weakens their argument or their opinion, in my opinion, at least. So it could be a positive way to learn about things, but it could also be a very negative way to see how people react.

Nathan: I like looking at it sometimes, because I know a lot of my friends, like one of my friends, Destin Sensky, is one of the people that's like head of the College Republicans, and he would always post really interesting things like facts about the election and facts about like the candidates and, you know, that would be educational to me because I personally don't have all the time in the world to go watch all the debates or do all this research about stuff, so it kinda gave you like a quick thing to look at for some of the debates but also, like a bunch of my Canadian friends are Democrats and they also post a bunch of stupid stuff about how Obama is, like, the greatest, and that kinda gets annoying, but it educates me, so I don't think it's too bad, but you know, it's interesting.

Leslie: Ok.

Kelsey: Yeah, like, well I'm roommates with Rosalie [Haug, a participant in my first focus group], and Rosalie knows what she's talking about because she's a Poli Sci major, but I am never go on Facebook and write something about politics, because I am not educated enough to say it, and even if I were, I probably wouldn't say anything either just because, you know, there's some people that just write things to write things and then there's the good people who are like, educated and want to show the information, I think that's good, but if you don't know what you're talking about, you shouldn't say anything.

Leslie: Ok. Anything else that I didn't touch on? Because my main purpose, like my inspiration for this, is to write something that any college can use as a resource saying, "Ok, we need to go in this direction to get our students excited about voting." So any more ideas about that part of it?

Sydney: Maybe you should focus not just, like, I feel people only talk about voting when it comes to presidential voting, but you actually vote for a lot of different things, so maybe they [colleges] should try to make it more known about other things that you can vote for, not just, oh you know, it's the presidential debate, but maybe have knowledge about other political candidates, like, locally.

Nathan: Um, I think they should have a day off for voting, and then for college campuses, like I said earlier, make it more widely known about when the deadlines are for out of state voting or different deadlines that you need to reach if you're trying to vote through absentee ballots.

Leslie: Ok. So Sydney, what you were saying about local things, do you think if, for instance, if LSU would somehow educate their students about a local election coming up, this is how it impacts our college community, more people would pay attention to that?

Sydney: Yeah, especially like budget cuts and stuff like that, like if people knew, "If you don't go out and vote for this to pass, they're going to cut this department, or this major can no longer exist," and I mean, that actually affects people directly, sometimes presidential candidates, their stances are on something that don't necessarily affect us directly, because we're not, we don't have real jobs, and a lot of us don't pay taxes, so, um, they could maybe let us know the things that are going to directly affect the campus, or you know, the lifestyle of the student, like that would probably be more beneficial to us and we would be more likely to go out and vote to change something if we knew it was actually going to make a difference and impacting our lives.

Leslie: ...If it "hit closer to home"?

Sydney: Yeah, like "directly" here as supposed to "nationally" here, because it's so immediate.

Kelsey: And if they were to explain, like she was saying, what we're actually voting for, because a lot of the lingo that they use in these amendments and laws that they're passing is, you know, higher than most people's reading levels, or something like that. So if people knew what they were reading, if they knew what they were talking about, um, then they would be able to make a more educated decision and like, I just remember, there was something that we needed to vote for to get, like, arts and music and stuff, something like that, and it was worded opposite. It was like, "Vote for this if you want it to get cut," so it was kinda confusing it was, "Vote Yes if you want it to go away, Vote No if you want to keep it." So a lot of people don't read it close enough and vote the opposite of what they actually want. And making it easier to register, or like just having someplace to register on campus, or like something like that.

Leslie: Do you think if an any student organization that wasn't like associated with any particular party would have table sits in Free Speech Alley and say, "Hey, you can register to vote here, you can fill out an absentee ballot here, you can find out any question you want," do you think people would walk up?

Nathan: No, because I walk around Free Speech Alley.

Sydney: Maybe like during Fall Fest...

Leslie: That's a good idea.

Sydney: ...because Fall Fest is like around the time, not necessarily around the time when you're immediately voting, but obviously far enough in advance where you can get an absentee ballot or you can register if you need to.

Nathan: I feel like something in the middle of the Parade Grounds, because then it would kinda spread by word of mouth, I feel like that's where you could do it. Free Speech Alley kinda sucks because it...

Kelsey: ...it has a bad connotation.

Leslie: Yeah, it's always kinda inundated with people. Ok, great, anything else? That's all I really have, and ya'll gave me some really good stuff, so thank you!

Focus Group #2: Non-Registered Students Personal Information

<u>NAME</u>	<u>GENDER</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>RACE</u>	<u>MAJOR</u>	<u>POLITICAL PARTY</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>
Nathan Witsken	M	20	W	Mechanical Engineering	R	Atlanta, GA
Sydney Smith	F	20	W	Biochem	R, don't really know	New Orleans, LA
Kelsey Messonier	F	21	W	Math	D	Naples, FL