

Rock the (student) vote: campus and advocacy groups work to get NAU registered

By Michael Manny October 6, 2020 (Updated October 16)

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. – Election Day is less than a month away, and various student organizations have come together to get the NAU community registered to vote.

[The NAU Votes Coalition](#): a new group of students, faculty, academic departments, campus clubs and outside advocacy organizations, is attempting to increase voter participation and registration on campus.

The coalition is coordinated by NAU Anthropology lecturer Leah Mundell, who also leads the civic engagement minor. It was created as part of the [ALL-IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#), a national campaign to increase student voting participation.

The group's goal is to raise the student registration rate to 80% this election cycle. According to a [report](#) from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, NAU's registration rate was 65.7% in 2016. The voting rate was 42.1%, an increase of 2.7% from 2012.

On-campus participants include the Civic Engagement club, Black Student Union and Young Democrats club. Other organizations such as the Arizona Students Association and Student Public Interest Research Group's (PIRGS) New Voter Project are affiliated as well.

Members of the civic engagement club have helped the coalition plan several [events](#) for this month, including know-your-ballot and know-your-vote events Oct. 8 and 15, and presidential debate watch parties. A virtual [discussion](#) with state Legislative District 6 candidates Walt Blackman, Coral Evans, Art Babbott and Felicia French was held Oct. 1.

Though there was record [turnout](#) from younger generations during the 2018 midterms, [Arizona Student PIRGS](#) intern James Lacno said that some students may think their vote does not matter.

“I would say that I think that it's (past lower turnout) because a lot of students don't feel like their voice counts,” Lacno said. “And that's one of the reasons why I joined personally, is because I wanted to make sure that everyone knows that it does indeed count.”

Due to COVID-19, groups have adjusted their plans by getting students registered virtually, rather than tabling and talking face-to-face.

Civic Engagement Club president Nye Mitchell said it can be difficult to connect with some groups of people.

“I'm a mentor, so I talk to students every day,” Mitchell said. “They're not motivated and they're tired and they're constantly looking at their computer or their stuff in their room most of the time.”

Mitchell said one group that has been challenging to reach are first-year students.

“A big group of people we're trying to reach are freshmen, which can be really hard because freshmen honestly aren't super psyched because of the situation,” Mitchell said.

[NextGeneration NAU](#) is a new non-partisan club this semester that's dedicated to empowering NAU students through political participation, according to its True Blue Connects page.

President Peter Tauscher said they have been visiting Zoom classrooms to reach students.

“It's actually been more efficient since we went online,” Tauscher said. “We go into a classroom and then we give our whole spiel and get people to pledge to vote or register to vote, depending on what they need to do.”

Tauscher said the club also has social media organizers on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram that direct message followers and post content.

Student Public Interest Research Group is similarly visiting Zoom classrooms to give students information about voting, as well as doing phone banking and using social media.

“Voting and helping students realize that their voice matters is a very personal matter,” Lacno said. “So, doing things over Zoom, or remotely is not that personal, because about the most we can do is go into classes and do class announcements when sometimes you have 200 students in there at a time.”

For students who are voting for the first time and want to educate themselves on issues and candidate positions, Mitchell recommends looking at what matters most to them.

“I would suggest looking at the positions they care about the most,” Mitchell said. “But if you don’t care about the positions and care more about the issues, I would suggest starting with the issues that you think are affecting you the most.”

The deadline to register to vote in Arizona was extended to Oct. 23 but has since been cut off at Oct. 15. Students can request an early ballot by mail, vote in-person early or on election day, Nov. 3. To register to vote, visit the [Coconino County recorder’s website](#) or [arizonastudentvote.org](#).

**Editor’s note: the date of the virtual discussion with Legislative District 6 candidates was originally listed as Sept. 29 in the Oct. 6 first draft of this story. It has been corrected to Oct. 1. We apologize and deeply regret the error.*

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