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# Campus groups reach out to increase student voters

Organizers aim to recruit more than 1,000 students to register to vote this year

By Brad Schmidt  
 Oregon Daily Emerald

With the upcoming primary election just three weeks away, today is the last day students can register to vote or change party affiliation for the May 21 primary.

Attempting to raise student turnout in the election, several student groups have been approaching on campus passersby asking them to register. A coalition of campus organizations, headed by OSPIRG, had registered 356 students as of Monday. The ASUO has also aided in the process, registering 315 students.

Jo Voss, a full-time OSPIRG campus organizer, said her group, along with College Democrats, College Republicans, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Alliance and the Alpha Chi Omega sorority, set

an initial goal to register 400 students, while the ASUO hoped to bring in another 1,000.

Sandy Newton, ASUO state affairs coordinator, said that the goal wasn't realistic. She said ASUO now hopes to combine with the other groups to register a total of 1,000 students.

"It's been challenging this primary," said Newton, a sophomore political science major.

The ASUO reported registering about 400 people in the months leading into the May 2000 primary election. Capitalizing on voter interest during the presidential election, the ASUO registered nearly 6,000 voters for the November 2000 general election.

Mike Linman, co-chairman of College Democrats, said he has been trying to raise voter awareness and registration since Earth Day festivities April 22. Linman said it has been difficult to register voters because many students think they're being asked to sign a petition and because some students think that their vote doesn't make a difference.

"It would be a vastly different political scene if more students voted," said Linman, a junior majoring in finance and Japanese. "Students can make a huge difference, yet we're incredibly under-represented."

Political affiliation aside, "all I want is for students to vote," he said.

Megan Edgar, an undeclared freshman, registered Monday to vote in her first Oregon election.

"It's silly not to vote," said Edgar,

who described herself as a "little bit" politically minded. "We live in a democracy, and if we don't take part in it, it's silly."

Annette Newingham, chief deputy county clerk for Lane County Elections, said about 179,000 citizens are registered to vote in the primary election.

Historically, Newingham said, a 50 percent turnout is high for primary elections.

In the May 2000 primary election, which featured U.S. presidential candidates, 173,577 voters were registered in Lane County, with a 57 percent turnout, Newingham said.

In May 1998, the last gubernatorial primary election, about 35 percent of the 189,669 registered voters turned out, she said.

To participate in this May's primary election, students who are not registered to vote must complete registration cards and postmark them with today's date. Voters who wish to change party affiliation must have registration cards delivered by today, however. If already registered, students can make address changes until election day. If unsure about registration status, Newingham suggests students call Lane County Elections at 682-4234.

To register to vote in Oregon, students must be 18 or older, a U.S. citizen and a resident of Oregon.

E-mail reporter Brad Schmidt at bradschmidt@dailyemerald.com.

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