

# Empowering the Vote

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As students take on a larger share of the cost of their education because of decreasing state budgets, there is a perception that elected representatives are sticking it to students because they aren't appreciated as a voting population.

"Whether that perception is correct or not, the best thing for students to do right now is to register so they can help change that," Westover said.

She said the OSA has long been a champion for the student

Affordability, in addition to accountability, is also an important reason to why registration is so important, said Stevens, because those who attend schools like PCC are enrolled in a public educational center, meaning that a portion of the cost is paid for by the state to help make education more affordable.

She said, however, 2010 was the first time in Oregon history that students paid for a bigger chunk of education than the government itself, which is making it hard for students to stay out of debt.

lege and university students from throughout Oregon rallied on the steps of the Capitol for adequate funding for post-secondary education. Several students from PCC attended, along with students from the other 16 community colleges and the seven schools in the Oregon University System.

The rally drew support from the state's largest teachers' unions, the Oregon Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon.

"We hope that students, with our help, will be more aware of the issues that are affecting them and their power to affect change, and that the state government and federal government will respect students as an active and important part of their constituencies," Desautels said.

Stevens said the rally was an example of the kind of political momentum that can win real victories for students.

Westover is confident that Oregon students will make a huge impact on this year's election.

"We hope that the long term impact of this campaign will be that elected officials look to students as a key constituency in Oregon that deserves to be taken into account and prioritized," she said.

*Amplifying the student voice through voting is a priority for the campaign, because we want to make sure that the decision makers who get elected in November know that students across the state participated in the election in a significant way.*

—Sarah Westover, Oregon Student Foundation vote organizer, PCC Cascade

voice by running strong and impactful voter registration, education and get out the vote drives, and this year, Oregon students have prioritized running what could be the largest non-partisan voter registration drive in the state.

"Amplifying the student voice through voting is a priority for the campaign," said Westover, "because we want to make sure that the decision makers who get elected in November know that students across the state participated in the election in a significant way."

According to Amy Stevens, a member of the student government at PCC, their efforts have gone really well so far. She said, however, she is excited to bring in even more new voters once fall term approaches.

As summer moves into August, voter registration cards continue to be passed around to students from all walks of life in classrooms, where an ASPCC volunteer 'rapper' with the PCC student government informs their peers of key points on how registration directly impacts their individual lives and the institution they are a part.

Tuition costs for students have doubled from \$39 per credit hour at PCC in 2001 to \$82 a credit hour this year, which Stevens believes has a lot to do with the rising percentage of what students are required to spend for their degrees.

"It is important for elected officials to recognize students as a constituency," Westover said. "That should be taken into account, especially when making difficult budgetary decisions because students have so much at stake as tuition continues to skyrocket and student debt is at an all-time high."

"Having registered so many students gives us much more power in our lobbying efforts, which include advocating for the rights of minorities," said Trieste Desautels, communications director for PCC student government.

Great strides have been made. The Oregon Opportunity Grant program received an additional \$10 million worth of funding after the student groups got involved politically. The money was enough to provide an additional 5,000 students with financial aid.

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