

NJPIRG advocates voter registration

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Election time is approaching, and that means it's time for students to start registering to vote.

The New Jersey Public Interest Research Group Student Chapters is leading the New Voters Project, aimed at registering University students to vote for November's U.S. congressional elections. The Rutgers University Student Assembly and the Eagleton Institute of Politics are also working to get young people to the polls.

"If we all vote, no matter who we vote for, it's going to show that we do care and that we're important," said NJPIRG member Sophia Fishbane. "[It will show that] it's time to take us seriously and take our votes seriously."

The organizations would like to see at least 3,000 students registered, she said.

"Of course we want more," Fishbane said. "We want every student registered to vote."

At the University's student involvement fair at the start of the semester, NJPIRG helped register more than 250 students, said Fishbane, a School of Arts and Sciences senior.

The youth turnout in the last presidential election created high hopes for midterm election participation, she said.

"The reason we believe so strongly in [our goal] is because, in 2008, students really showed up to the polls and made their presence known," she said.

To get the word out, NJPIRG plans to set up tables around the campuses and visit residence halls in the coming weeks, Fishbane said.

Having NJPIRG members approach students is an effective technique, School of Arts and Sciences senior Stefany Cisneros said.

"Sometimes you're doing so much stuff and you just forget, but if they come to you [door-to-door] and you register it's much easier," said Cisneros, who in the past registered with the organization.

Student government organization RUSA registered 8,000 students over the past three years and reminded 30,000 students to go vote on Election Day, RUSA Vice President Matt Cordeiro said.

“RUSA is the vehicle [through] which students can create change at the University,” said Cordeiro, a School of Arts and Sciences junior.

The Eagleton Institute of Politics is also making it a goal to create political awareness among University students.

“We welcome students to come in and get involved in practical politics instead of just seeing or hearing about it,” said Bobby Irven, an intern at Eagleton.

Eagleton is working with NJPIRG on the RU Voting Coalition to educate students about the advantages of voting and getting students into voting booths, said Irven, a School of Arts and Sciences senior.

Eagleton is also involved in RU Ready, a program aimed at high school students who will soon enter the voting population.

“The program’s mission is to provide young people with encouragement and practical advice to enable them to participate actively in the civic life of New Brunswick,” according to Eagleton’s website.

But the effort is not just limited to the city, Fishbane said. The end goal is to get 10,000 students statewide registered to vote about the issues they care about.

“We are totally bipartisan, so we aren’t in favor of anything, but we just want to get students to go out and get their voices out,” she said.

Cisneros agreed that voting is important for students.

“Everyone should have a say in it and want to vote because it’s for them,” she said.

Since NJPIRG is student-run and student-funded, student involvement is key, Fishbane said. Simply supporting NJPIRG on the term bill makes a difference, she said.

“We really need to make sure that people are supporting us,” Fishbane said. “We want to work with other organizations.”

Students who want to register to vote can go to studentvote.org or sign up through an NJPIRG representative on campus through Oct. 12, she said.

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