

RU Voting motivates students to gather at polls

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Published: Sunday, September 18, 2011

Updated: Sunday, September 18, 2011 23:09

As part of a Constitution Day celebration, voter registration drives were held Friday at each University campus center to mobilize students to participate in the upcoming Nov. 8 state legislature election.

The drives, which brought in nearly 200 new student voters, were the start of RU Voting's several efforts this fall to get University students registered, said Elizabeth Matto, RU Voting project director.

Harini Kidambi, RU Voting student coordinator, said the current Millennial Generation, which includes individuals from ages 18 to 30, has a unique power through numbers, cultural diversity and a command of social media that no other generation has.

"[The Millennial Generation] has the power to really define an election, and thereby truly define politics," she said.

The project will continue to hold voter registration drives until registration deadline on Oct. 18, Kidambi and Matto said.

RU Voting's efforts will also include keeping students informed on polling locations and important deadlines via follow-up phone calls and information on their website, Matto said.

"During these off-year elections, turnout is traditionally low," she said. "What I would remind RU students is that it's in those elections in particular that voting can make the most impact."

The group will also be holding events around campus to raise awareness about upcoming elections, such as "Pizza and Politics" and "Popcorn and Politics," she said.

"'Pizza and Politics' is meant to allow students to come together to discuss and learn about the importance of the general state House election that will be held on Nov. 8," said Kidambi, a School of Arts and Sciences senior.

Members of the Eagleton Institute of Politics and political science department faculty will lead the discussion so students can voice their opinions, she said.

During "Popcorn and Politics," students are invited to watch a politically themed film with relevancy to current events, Kidambi said.

What RU Voting hopes to stress is that not only do politics matter in students' lives, but also that students are important to the political process, Matto said.

When talking to students, Matto said they tell her they understand the significance of voting but plan to be politically active later



Nelson Morales / Staff Photographer

Younus Ahmed (left), a School of Engineering senior, registers to vote on Friday at the Busch Campus Center, while Hima Potluri, a School of Arts and Sciences senior, informs him about the upcoming state legislature election and RU Voting's semester programs.

in life when they have a home or family.

"What they don't know is that the political process affects the tuition they pay, whether they will have a job after graduation and how they will get loans or financial aid," said Matto, an assistant research professor at the Eagleton Institute of Politics.

Kidambi, who is active in encouraging students to vote, said political actors and decisions made everyday impact people who are simply living a town or state.

"I would feel like I have done my job if even one student felt the same way after interacting with our organization," she said.

Matto said another distinct quality of the Millennial Generation is the tendency to be committed to volunteer and civic participation.

"Many opt for volunteering and community service without recognizing that service can come in the form of political participation," she said.

Kidambi said she believes the reason why many students are not registered to vote is because they have either just turned 18, or in the case of sophomores and juniors they were not 18 during the 2008 presidential election so they saw no reason to register.

Matto said many first-year students and sophomores are still adjusting to the college life, so registering to vote does not always take top priority.

"It's unlikely that many students are going to actively pursue this information," she said. "We are trying to be as out there and as visible as we can."

RU Voting takes on the job of providing students with the registration and encouragement they need to get involved during every election, not just presidential elections, Matto said.

As a part of the Eagleton Institute of Politics, RU Voting is an entirely nonpartisan organization, Kidambi said.

While some University students are prepared for the upcoming elections, some are not aware of the Nov. 8 state legislature election and are not registered at all.

Jamie Senkewicz, a School of Arts and Sciences junior, is not registered to vote and is not interested in voting at all because she does not think it makes a difference to a politician's agenda.

"No matter what, whoever gets elected will do things some people like and some people don't like," she said. "It's a matter of who's a lesser idiot."

Unlike Senkewicz, Alex Barree, a School of Environmental and Biological Sciences first-year student, is registered and believes in the power of a student's vote.

"It's important to vote because you can try to get the representatives you think have the beliefs most similar to yours into office."

