

# MILLENNIAL ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION



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Challenges and Opportunities in Youth  
Voter Engagement on College  
Campuses in California

**CALPIRG**  
Education Fund

# Millennial Online Voter Registration

Challenges and Opportunities in Youth Voter Engagement on College  
Campuses in California

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CALPIRG New Voters Project


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# Millennial Online Voter Registration

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the launch of online voter registration (OVR) in 2012, best practices have emerged that maximize the impact of online voter registration for getting youth from college campuses across the state onto the voter rolls. Youth voter engagement has been identified as a problem of emerging concern by public and community leaders. Only 8% of eligible youth participated in the historically low voter turnout elections of 2014. In the same year, data shows that *only 0.3% of the total students served by public colleges and universities in California are registered through online voter registration opportunities they are provided.*

This report examines the challenges and opportunities that exist in California to engage the more than 3 million students who attend colleges and universities. Based on our review of current practices and an analysis of scientifically researched and proven effective tactics<sup>12</sup>, we provide recommendations to college and university administrators, state leaders, and nonprofit organizations working to encourage the adoption and dissemination of online voter registration opportunities that bring youth into the democratic process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Integrated Online Voter Registration Opportunities.** Colleges and universities should provide a more meaningful opportunity for students to complete a voter

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<sup>1</sup> Wang, Tova. *Election Reforms and Voter Turnout Among Low Propensity Voting Groups*. Draft version April 8, 2015. Final version forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Young Voter Mobilization Tactics: A compilation of the most recent research on traditional & innovative voter turnout techniques. George Washington University. 2006. [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/Young\\_Voters\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/Young_Voters_Guide.pdf).

registration form upon class registration, as required by the Student Voter Registration Act<sup>3</sup>. Given the transient nature of the student population, additional voter registration opportunities should be made available at move-in day, whenever a student updates their address and/or contact information with the administration, or upon graduation from the school.

- 2. Campus Policy Should Actively Encourage In-Person Outreach to their Student Body.** Online outreach alone is not enough to engage new potential voters. Deeper engagement of millennials is required in order to maximize their awareness and participation in elections, especially in low-profile elections. Campus policies should encourage voter registration outreach to the student body and invest campus resources into those efforts. There are two areas that can be directly addressed: policy and outreach.

### **CAMPUS POLICY**

Colleges and universities should adopt the following policies for student organizations seeking to offer direct, nonpartisan, peer-to-peer voter registration opportunities, civic engagement opportunities, and get out the vote efforts:

- i. Allow access to on-campus housing
- ii. Allow full access at move-in days, when students first arrive to their on-campus housing
- iii. Allow full access to high traffic locations. This means allowing student organizations to set up tables and/or clipboarding events to actively reach out to the student body.

### **OUTREACH**

Light touches to potential voters, like emails and website links, have far less of an impact during low-information and low-excitement election cycles than they do in high-information, high-excitement election cycles. By contrast, direct peer-to-peer engagement continues to be one of the most effective tactics to increase

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<sup>3</sup> Known as the Student Voter Registration Act of 2003. Last modified January 1, 2015. [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC&division=2.&title=&part=&chapter=2.&article=3.5](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC&division=2.&title=&part=&chapter=2.&article=3.5). (Accessed on May 26, 2015)

youth voter engagement – even in low excitement elections. Campus administrations and student groups should play strong roles in raising the awareness, visibility, and opportunities that students have for electoral engagement. The goal should be to achieve a “saturation” of awareness of the upcoming election, utilizing such tactics as:

- i. **Online:** Website links, voter registration reminder ads, voter registration during class registration, all campus emails, social media messages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others)
- j. **Offline:** Peer-to-peer direct voter engagement, chalking, flyering in high traffic locations across campus and in residence halls, hanging banners, voter registration table tent reminders in dining halls

**3. Institutionalized Voter Engagement.** Colleges and universities should integrate meaningful voter registration opportunities into their offices of civic engagement, service learning, and/or student affairs. There is growing recognition that in order to maximize engagement by the electorate *writ large*, and students in particular, you need to have both policy and an active engagement efforts (an intervention) to maximize results.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Higher education institutions are becoming increasingly aware of, and responsive to, the important role they can play in civic engagement. In this context, colleges and universities should integrate their voter engagement efforts into their existing program by offering voter registration, voter education resources, and get out the vote reminders. Much of this could be accomplished working with external partners and adopting the previous recommendations in this report.

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<sup>4</sup> Romero, Mindy. *California's New Political Realities: The Impact of Youth Vote on Our Electoral Landscape*. CCEP Policy Brief Issue 9. January 2015.

[http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2\\_of\\_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf](http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2_of_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf). (Accessed on May 26, 2015)

<sup>5</sup> Wang, Tova. *Election Reforms and Voter Turnout Among Low Propensity Voting Groups*. Draft version April 8, 2015. Final version forthcoming.

<sup>6</sup> Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Youth Voting. <http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youthvoting/>

## INTRODUCTION

Only 52 percent of eligible youth were registered to vote before the November 2014 election. If California is going to increase the percentage of youth who are registered, we need the active participation of colleges and universities. This report summarizes the best practices to get students onto the voter rolls, utilizing both online voter registration outreach as well as complementary in-person outreach tactics. Recommendations are provided to college and university administrators, state leaders, and nonprofit organizations working to encourage the adoption and dissemination of online voter registration opportunities that bring youth into the democratic process.

Our democracy depends on full participation. Disproportionate representation means that some perspectives get heard more loudly than others. Youth are particularly important because:

- Youth are more reflective of the diversity of the state as a whole.
- Youth arguably have more to lose in key policy decisions.
- If they don't participate now, they are less likely to participate in the future. Voting is habit forming.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

While youth turnout has always been lower than other age groups, it was trending up for several election cycles. But 2014 was a particularly poor year for participation.

One of the barriers to youth participation is logistical. Students are transient, which means they often need to re-register to reflect their new voting home. Further, since young voters are just coming of age to cast a ballot, they are usually unaware of deadlines and requirements to exercise their right to vote. Not only do they need to be registered, they also need to know where their polling place is, hours of operation, etc. All of this, and more, comes together to create an often confusing environment where new voters don't vote – not always because of a lack of interest or desire, but as a simple function of logistical hurdles that prevent access.

If you are registered at your current address, you get reminders about voting – receiving a pamphlet in the mail, maybe your ballot if you are registered to vote absentee, and

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<sup>7</sup> Green, D. and Schachar, R. *Habit Formation and Political Behaviour: Evidence of Consuetude in Voter Turnout*. Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pages 561-573.

<sup>8</sup> Nickerson, D. *Just How Addictive is Voting and Why?* Yale University, working draft. October 28, 2004

<sup>9</sup> Plutzer, E. *Becoming a habitual voter: Inertia, resources & growth in young adulthood*. *American Political Science Review*, 96, p. 42. 2002.



campaign mailings. Young people who don't register, or who moved since their last registration, receive none of those mailings.

The mission of colleges and universities is to prepare students to be contributors in all aspects of civic life.<sup>10,11</sup> This responsibility is already recognized by almost every institution of higher education, through various community outreach initiatives, offices of civic engagement, offices of student affairs, and more. They therefore have an important role to play in making sure young people have voter registration opportunities, are educated about the process, and have opportunities to cast a valid ballot.

Nearly 4 million 18 to 24 year olds reside in California. Over 3 million students are enrolled in California's higher education institutions.<sup>12</sup> They are served by 33 four-year public institutions (10 University of California campuses and 23 California State University campuses), 113 community colleges, 177 private institutions, and over 1,000 for-profit colleges. These institutions serve as the training ground for the next generation of leaders in the business, nonprofit, and public sectors and should be instilling the value of civic engagement into their students.

## THE STUDENT VOTER REGISTRATION ACT: REQUIREMENTS AND OUTCOMES FOR CALIFORNIA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The Student Voter Registration Act<sup>13</sup> (SVRA) requires community colleges and the California State University system to permit students to register to vote online as a part of their automated class registration.<sup>14</sup> This requirement does not apply to the University of California system, though they are strongly encouraged to comply. In addition, the Secretary of State is required to provide a report, at the end of each year, detailing the number of voter registration forms sent to colleges and universities as well as the number of forms submitted online and on paper.

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<sup>10</sup> Mission of the California State University, available at <http://www.calstate.edu/PA/info/mission.shtml> (accessed May 20, 2015)

<sup>11</sup> Mission of the University of California, available at <http://www.strategicplan.uci.edu/?p=20>

<sup>12</sup> Student Snapshot - Total Postsecondary Enrollment, available at <http://www.cpec.ca.gov/StudentData/StudentSnapshot.ASP?DataReport=2> (accessed May 20, 2015)

<sup>13</sup> Known as the Student Voter Registration Act of 2003. Last modified January 1, 2015. [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC&division=2.&title=&part=&chapter=2.&article=3.5](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC&division=2.&title=&part=&chapter=2.&article=3.5). (Accessed on May 26, 2015)

<sup>14</sup> Until 2012 and the advent of online voter registration, paper voter registration applications were provided by the Secretary of State's Office to colleges and universities to conform to the SVRA requirements.

The SVRA also outlines the intent of the state legislature as to what is desired under the law:

*It is the intent of the Legislature that every eligible high school and college student receive a meaningful opportunity to apply to register to vote. It is also the intent of the Legislature that every school do all in its power to ensure that students are provided the opportunity and means to apply to register to vote. This may include providing voter registration forms at the start of the school year, including voter registration forms with orientation materials; placing voter registration forms at central locations, including voter registration forms with graduation materials; or providing hyperlinks to, and the Internet Web site address of, the Secretary of State's electronic voter registration system in notices sent by electronic mail to students and placed on the Internet Web site of the high school, college, or university.<sup>15</sup>*

One of the biggest challenges in measuring the effectiveness of the SVRA is knowing how many higher education institutions are complying with the law. CALPIRG, and others working in the space of encouraging institutional investment in student voter engagement, have found at least a voter registration offering during class registration on the campuses where we have an ongoing organizing presence. However, we do not yet know the full extent of compliance within the entire Cal State system, the Community College system, or the private institutions across the state. There is currently no requirement to verify compliance by colleges and/or universities. Looking at institution specific voter registration data, gathered through unique URLs and provided by the Secretary of State's office, 33 of the 145 schools indicated 0 (zero) online voter registrations in 2014. Given the number of students served by these schools, the fact that over 22% report absolutely no voter registrations raises serious questions about if, and how, those schools are complying.<sup>16</sup>

Further, even if a higher education institution is complying, it is unclear as to whether this meets the Legislature's intent of offering a "meaningful opportunity to apply to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> 2014 Annual Report to the Legislature on Student Voter Registration. Secretary of State's Office. December 2014. <http://admin.cdn.sos.ca.gov/reports/2014/student-voter-registration.pdf>. (Accessed on May 26, 2015)

register to vote”. While doing outreach in 2012 and 2014, CALPIRG identified variability in the quality of the voter registration opportunity offered. For example, some colleges and universities comply with the SVRA by providing a link for external resources located in the bottom corner of the screen in the class registration process. A student then has to click on that link, and then another link, to arrive at the online voter registration opportunity. Similarly, disparities were also found in the quality of and extent to which campuses offer additional voter registration opportunities to the student body through orientation materials, integration of hyperlinks in central campus web sites, and all-campus emails.

## ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION:

### MEASURING THE OPPORTUNITIES GIVEN TO STUDENTS TO REGISTER TO VOTE

In September of 2012, California implemented and rolled out online voter registration for eligible citizens across the state. Under the old system, colleges and universities had a stack of voter registration forms, which often never left the office. With online voter registration, schools provide links via all-campus emails, websites, and during the class registration process, among other options.

The rollout of OVR in California was a resounding success by almost every measure. Younger voters, in particular, took advantage of this new method of registration – they were three times more likely to register online than senior citizens.<sup>17</sup> Youth comprised 30% of all online registrants, despite being just 11.1% of all eligible voters.<sup>18</sup> While OVR provided only a slight increase to the overall number of voters who registered for the 2012 general elections, it did have an impact on the youth share of the electorate. According to an analysis by the California Civic Engagement Project at UC Davis, the youth share of the electorate grew 27% over 2010 (adding 244,049 youth voters to the rolls) with OVR playing a significant role in that growth.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> McGhee, Eric. *Expanding California's Electorate: Will Voter Turnout Reforms Increase Voter Turnout?* Public Policy Institute of California. January 2014. [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R\\_114EMR.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_114EMR.pdf) (Accessed May 26, 2015)

<sup>18</sup> Romero, Mindy. *California's 2012 Electorate: The Impact of Youth and Online Voter Registration*. CCEP Policy Brief Issue 3. December 2012. <http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/publications/ccep/ucdavis-ccep-brief-3-youth-and-online-voter-reg> (Accessed May 26, 2015)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

OVR also affected voter turnout rates. Across all demographics, those who registered to vote online turned out to vote 8 percentage points higher than paper registrations.<sup>20</sup> This effect was even more pronounced in youth. For 18 to 24 year olds, those who utilized OVR turned out 25 percentage points higher than those who registered via another method.<sup>21</sup>

By stark contrast to 2012, 2014 was a dismally low-interest, low-voter turnout election. Not surprisingly, all online voter registrations dropped significantly. Youth had the lowest registration rates of any demographic (only 52% of all eligible young voters were registered). In 2014, youth represented 14.5% of the eligible voting population. However, only 8.2% of eligible youth turned out to the polls on November 4. As a result, only 3.9% of all voters were youth.<sup>22</sup> This was the lowest turnout of any age group and an 18% decline from youth turnout in 2010.

While there are many factors at play that affect registration and turnout rates, it begs the question: **could college campuses do more to provide meaningful opportunities to register to vote and engage youth in our democracy?**

## REPORTED YOUTH REGISTRATION IS TOO LOW AND MUST BE IMPROVED

All of the data indicates that there is much more potential for colleges and universities to be helping students register and participate. According to the 2014 Annual Report to the Legislature on Student Voter Registration provided by the Secretary of State's Office, 23,817 online voter registrations were completed by students on college campuses in 2012, but only 9,708 in 2014. This is nearly a 60% drop in student online voter registrations. One would expect registrations to drop in a non-presidential election year,

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<sup>20</sup> Romero, Mindy. *Online Voter Registration: Impact on California's 2012 Election Turnout, by Age and Party Affiliation*. CCEP Policy Brief Issue 4. March 2013. <http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/publications/ccep/ucdavis-ccep-brief-4-online-voter-turnout-impact>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Romero, Mindy. *California's New Political Realities: The Impact of Youth Vote on Our Electoral Landscape*. CCEP Policy Brief Issue 9. January 2015. [http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2\\_of\\_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf](http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2_of_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf). (Accessed on May 26, 2015)

but the magnitude of the drop is alarming considering there were nearly twice as many online voter registrations from students on college campuses in the 2013 off-year election season – 18,880.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to data on student registrations at college campuses provided by the Secretary of State's office this report also analyzed independent online voter registration data, provided by CALPIRG and TurboVote. Both organizations utilized online tools, connected to the Secretary of States online voter registration portal, that tracked students they helped register to vote. The combined total of tracked nonprofit organizational efforts led to 12,572 students choosing to register to vote online in 2014.

These efforts are laudable, but fall far short of an estimated 723,000 additional registrants needed to close the youth voter registration gap.<sup>24,25</sup> Based on the most recent student enrollment figures from the University of California system, the Cal State system, and the Community Colleges, the number of students currently being served by our public institutions of higher education is 2,793,809.<sup>26,27,28</sup> The California Secretary of State reports that, in 2014, 9,708 students from public universities registered through their online portal.<sup>29</sup> Neither the nonprofit contribution nor the Secretary of State's reported number exceed one half of one percent of the total enrolled student population in California. Taken together (and assuming no duplicative data), ***only 0.8% of the total students served by public colleges and universities in California are being reached and***

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<sup>23</sup> 2014 Annual Report to the Legislature on Student Voter Registration. Secretary of State's Office. December 2014. <http://admin.cdn.sos.ca.gov/reports/2014/student-voter-registration.pdf>. (Accessed on May 26, 2015)

<sup>24</sup> The youth voter registration gap refers to the number of eligible students who would need to be registered to vote, but currently aren't, in order to match the registration rate of the rest of the eligible voting population.

<sup>25</sup> Romero, Mindy. *California's New Political Realities: The Impact of Youth Vote on Our Electoral Landscape*. CCEP Policy Brief Issue 8. October 2014.

[http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2\\_of\\_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf](http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2_of_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf). (Accessed on August 26, 2015)

<sup>26</sup> Fast Facts 2015. Community College League of California. July 2015.

<http://www.ccleague.org/files/public/Publications/FF2015.pdf> (source for community college enrollment, accessed on August 26, 2015)

<sup>27</sup> Fall 2014 Enrollment by Sex and Student Level. California State University System.

[http://www.calstate.edu/AS/stat\\_reports/2014-2015/f14\\_01.htm](http://www.calstate.edu/AS/stat_reports/2014-2015/f14_01.htm) (Accessed on August 26, 2015)

<sup>28</sup> The University of California: Statistical Summary of Students and Staff. The University of California System. Fall 2013. <http://legacy-its.ucop.edu/uwnews/stat/statsum/fall2013/statsumm2013.pdf> (Accessed on August 26, 2015)

<sup>29</sup> 2014 Annual Report to the Legislature on Student Voter Registration. Secretary of State's Office. December 2014. <http://admin.cdn.sos.ca.gov/reports/2014/student-voter-registration.pdf>. (Accessed on May 26, 2015)

*registered* through these voter engagement efforts. We can and must do better for the future of California's democracy.

## STORIES FROM THE FIELD

### San Francisco State University: Institutional Investment in Voter Engagement

In 2012, San Francisco State University (SFSU) invested significant institutional resources to engage the campus community about the upcoming election and to register the student body to vote. They dedicated staff resources to implementing a field outreach program and paid for numerous marketing efforts to achieve total election awareness on campus. The Associate Director of Government and Community Relations, Jared Giarrusso, worked with student leaders, student government, and student organizations to promote the upcoming election to their constituents. He also recruited several interns to oversee key elements of the project. Supporting all of this, all-campus emails were sent to the student body reminding them to register to vote and to get out to the polls on Election Day. Links to the online voter registration portal were posted on core campus webpages. Across campus, students couldn't help but see a reminder of the upcoming election through the blankets of banners, students tabling to help register voters, and more. The results that SFSU saw – over 4,100 students registered both online and offline – reflected its investment of time, money, and staff capacity.

In 2014, Jared continued to oversee the campuses voter engagement efforts. However, the resources dedicated to outreach and election promotion were far more limited. In addition, Associate Director Giarrusso attempted an all online strategy to see whether that would prove a cost-effective strategy. They utilized paid Facebook ads to push students to the online voter registration portal. They also promoted online voter registration through the class registration process, all-campus emails, and through central campus webpages. Even though 2014 was a lower interest election, the difference in magnitude of the results is somewhat staggering: SFSU only helped to register 1,000 students – a drop of 310%!

SFSU's significant dedication of resources and focus on in-person outreach in 2012 and its pared-down online-only approach in 2014 provide a natural experiment in student voter registration. The results suggest that direct contact is more likely to drive student voter engagement than more passive, online approaches. In addition, it should be noted that in 2012 SFSU utilized the Rock the Vote online voter registration tool (CAstudentvote.org), but in 2014 utilized TurboVote. However, Associate Director Giarrusso did not credit the change in vendors with the change in outcome - students reacted equally well to both tools. Instead, he believed that the decrease in registrants was a combination of three factors: 1) the fact that it was a low-interest mid-term election, 2) the change in the tactical approach SFSU utilized to engage the student body (switching from a strong field presence to an online only approach), and 3) a reduction in institutional resources to promote voter registration and voter engagement in general.

### Fair Elections Legal Network:

#### Working to Institutionalize Voter Engagement

The Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN) worked to promote online voter registration and voter education and turnout on two community college campuses in California: LA Trade - Technical College and De Anza College. Instead of running a direct voter engagement program with the student body, FELN staff worked with various college administrators within the community colleges. Their goal was to get administrations to institutionalize voter registration information and voting information on their school websites and to deliver via campus wide emails that information and reminders about when and where to vote. That work was designed to complement the campuses traditionally active student engagement programming. Examples of this include: integration of online voter registration in the class registration process, all-campus emails inviting the student body to register to vote, promotion of online voter registration on core web pages, email and print dissemination of information regarding eligibility, how, and when to vote. Staff from FELN worked directly with key campus administrators to assist them in implementing a set of these best practices to support the school's voter engagement efforts. Both schools used information provided by FELN to build or enhance student

voting pages on their websites. They also distributed registration materials and voting information to the student body to engage them in the 2014 elections.

While FELN reported having successful engagement and implementation of an institutionalized voter engagement program, what is less clear is the impact this had on student voter registration and voting outcomes. This is not necessarily a unique problem to FELN, as it can often be difficult for any organization to track the outcomes of students who register to vote unless they have unique identifying information to compare outreach contacts to the state's voter rolls – something that is unavailable given the federal student privacy laws. FELN is working with the schools with whom they relationships nationwide to have the institutions develop academic research protocols working with faculty in order to analyze and track student data as well as create experiments to test the effectiveness of various education messages and vehicles. As part of FELN's promotion of Best Practices, they urge campuses they work with to join the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (*NSLVE*) program housed at Tufts University. NSLVE uses campus registrations and matches them to the voter file to give schools anonymized information for the number of students registered and voting in each election cycle.

### [TurboVote.org:](#) [Online Tool for Youth Voter Engagement](#)

TurboVote, a 501(c)(3) national nonprofit dedicated to making voting simple, was also active in 2014 on 11 campuses in California. They helped register 968 students.<sup>30</sup> TurboVote attributes their outcomes to their streamlined interface and boasts a “chase” program that ensures students complete the voter registration process (for students unable to complete the process through the online portal). They also offer simple ways that students who use the tool can encourage their peers to register to vote by utilizing simple social media links to Facebook and Twitter.

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<sup>30</sup> Data provided to CALPIRG Education Fund by TurboVote.org



Unlike CAstudentvote.org, which CALPIRG used, TurboVote's tool required partner colleges and universities to compensate them for their service. These colleges and universities were investing in a voter engagement infrastructure, and that commitment often brought with it a dedication of staff time and institutional programming to ensure its effective implementation. TurboVote staff work directly with college administrators to provide technical support and best practices for engaging the student body.

### Rock the Vote & CAstudentvote.Org: Field Organizing Using Online Voter Registration

In 2012 and 2014, CALPIRG reached out to administrators and student government leaders at 150 to 200 of the biggest college campuses to talk about their plans for outreach about online voter registration. To support that work, CALPIRG created CAstudentvote.org by which students could register to vote through a portal with information tailored to the needs of students. CALPIRG also created sample outreach materials. There was close coordination with the staff and student leaders of the UC Student Association, the California State Student Association (CSSA), and the Statewide Senate for California Community Colleges (SSCCC). All of the statewide student associations actively encouraged their membership to promote and use online voter registration.

While CALPIRG encouraged all of those contacted to place links on their websites and post to their official social media accounts, the action item that was emphasized the most was sending out at least one all-campus email from a trusted source about online voter registration.

In 2012, 34 campuses actively partnered with CALPIRG to integrate online voter registration into their outreach to students, either by highlighting online voter registration on their websites using our tool, or by sending out an all-campus email to students about online voter registration using our tool. The all-campus emails had by far the greatest impact, so CALPIRG emphasized that action in 2014. In 2014, 25 schools confirmed that they sent out an all-campus email as a result of CALPIRG's outreach,

either linking to the CAstudentvote.org website, or if they weren't comfortable with that, with the Secretary of State's own OVR website.

In total, CALPIRG helped 14,450 students register to vote in 2012 and 3,150 in 2014.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. The more excitement and buzz around an election, the more likely colleges and universities are to take action. CALPIRG experienced fewer returned phone calls and emails in 2014 than in 2012, and fewer schools followed through with their plans.
2. The more excitement and buzz around an election, the more likely students are to respond to outreach.
3. If schools are incorporating a voter registration opportunity during class registration, most of them aren't doing it very effectively.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Based on the findings of this report, CALPIRG recommends the following to enhance future use of online voter registration on college campuses:

1. **Integrated Online Voter Registration Opportunities.** Colleges and universities should provide a more meaningful opportunity for students to complete a voter registration form upon class registration, as required by the Student Voter Registration Act.<sup>31</sup> Given the transient nature of the student population, additional voter registration opportunities should be made available at move-in day, whenever a student updates their address and/or contact information with the administration, or upon graduation from the school.
2. **Campus Policy Should Actively Encourage In-Person Outreach to their Student Body.** Online outreach alone is not enough to engage new potential voters. Deeper engagement of millennials is required in order to maximize their awareness and

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<sup>31</sup> Known as the Student Voter Registration Act of 2003. Last modified January 1, 2015. [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC&division=2.&title=&part=&chapter=2.&article=3.5](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC&division=2.&title=&part=&chapter=2.&article=3.5). (Accessed on May 26, 2015)

participation in elections, especially in low-profile elections. Campus policies should encourage voter registration outreach to the student body and invest campus resources into those efforts. There are two areas that can be directly addressed: policy and outreach.

### CAMPUS POLICY

Colleges and universities should adopt the following policies for student organizations seeking to offer direct, nonpartisan, peer-to-peer voter registration opportunities, civic engagement opportunities, and get out the vote efforts:

- iv. Allow access to on-campus housing
- v. Allow full access at move-in days, when students first arrive to their on-campus housing
- vi. Allow full access to high traffic locations. This means allowing student organizations to set up tables and/or clipboarding events to actively reach out to the student body.

### OUTREACH

Light touches to potential voters, like emails and website links, have far less of an impact during low-information and low-excitement election cycles than they do in high-information, high-excitement election cycles. By contrast, direct peer-to-peer engagement continues to be one of the most effective tactics to increase youth voter engagement – even in low excitement elections. Campus administrations and student groups should play strong roles in raising the awareness, visibility, and opportunities that students have for electoral engagement. The goal should be to achieve a “saturation” of awareness of the upcoming election, utilizing such tactics as:

- k. **Online:** Website links, voter registration reminder ads, voter registration during class registration, all campus emails, social media messages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others)

- I. **Offline:** Peer-to-peer direct voter engagement, chalking, flyering in high traffic locations across campus and in residence halls, hanging banners, voter registration table tent reminders in dining halls
- 3. Institutionalized Voter Engagement.** Colleges and universities should integrate meaningful voter registration opportunities into their offices of civic engagement, service learning, and/or student affairs. There is growing recognition that in order to maximize engagement by the electorate *writ large*, and students in particular, you need to have both policy and an active engagement efforts (an intervention) to maximize results.<sup>32,33,34</sup> Higher education institutions are becoming increasingly aware of, and responsive to, the important role they can play in civic engagement. In this context, colleges and universities should integrate their voter engagement efforts into their existing program by offering voter registration, voter education resources, and get out the vote reminders. Much of this could be accomplished working with external partners and adopting the previous recommendations in this report.

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<sup>32</sup> Romero, Mindy. *California's New Political Realities: The Impact of Youth Vote on Our Electoral Landscape*. CCEP Policy Brief Issue 9. January 2015.

[http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2\\_of\\_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf](http://www.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2_of_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf).

(Accessed on May 26, 2015)

<sup>33</sup> Wang, Tova. *Election Reforms and Voter Turnout Among Low Propensity Voting Groups*. Draft version April 8, 2015. Final version forthcoming.

<sup>34</sup> Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Youth Voting. <http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youthvoting/>