

Voter Turnout on Campus during the 2012 Elections: Preliminary Observations

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I. Overview

In the Nov. 6, 2012 election 1719 campus residents voted in the three Vestal precincts that contain Binghamton University's six residential colleges. These voters combined to cast 1715 ballots for president, 1408 for U.S. House of Representatives, and 1290 for Broome County Executive, among an array of other offices. By comparison, in the 2008 elections there were 1303 voters from the (then-four) Vestal precincts comprising campus who cast 1298 ballots for president, 972 for U.S. House, and 901 for Broome County Executive. Thus, campus turnout grew by 32% and the number of votes cast for the two lower ballot races grew even more (45% for U.S. House & 43% for County Exec) from 2008. Bottom line: not only did more students vote in 2012 than in 2008, a much higher percentage participated in (more) local elections.

The rise in voting on campus is especially notable given the decline in the votes cast in Vestal and Broome County. While presidential voting was up 32% on campus, the number of ballots cast for president was down by 9% in Broome County (from 88908 to 81621) and 5% in Vestal (from 13029 to 12343) between 2008 and 2012.¹ Admittedly, this comparison is a bit misleading because of potential population loss in Vestal and Broome during this period, unlike campus whose population has remained fairly steady. This only reinforces the increasing importance of Binghamton students in local elections—should they vote. For instance, campus residents, themselves just half of Binghamton students, cast 14% of the presidential ballots in Vestal in 2012 after casting 10% in 2008. These figures are reported in tabular form at the end of this report.

Another statistic merits attention: the percentage of registrants who voted. A close examination of the names and birthdates of students living on campus with the registered voter

list in Broome County (using a variety of probabilistic matching algorithms) reveals 2017 current residents on campus who are registered to vote.² Thus, turnout of registrants was 85% (1719/2017), a figure on par with (or slightly higher than) estimates of the turnout rate of registrants nationally.³ This result provides strong support for the argument that students, at least those registered on campus, are just as likely to vote as anyone else.

II. Kudos

Numerous individuals and groups contributed to the successful mobilization of student voters in 2012. I identify a few of the key initiatives and players of whom I am aware from my vantage point (with apologies to those I have inadvertently left off this list):

1. Voter registration contest. Allison Alden of the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) organized a voter registration contest (first proposed by Profs. Jonathan Krasno and Dave Clark of Political Science) with a cash prize for the residential unit that managed to register the highest percentage of its eligible residents in Broome County. The faculty masters signed off on the plan and they, along with Vice Provost Donald Loewen, contributed prize money. Even though the contest launched about a week before the registration deadline, there is anecdotal evidence of RAs and residents organizing mini-registration drives. The contest was judged by the Political Science (special thanks to Ben Farrer for doing the probabilistic matching) and the prize was shared between Dickinson and Hinman.
2. Harpur Dean Wayne Jones. Dean Jones agreed to underwrite a pre-election speay to

Election Day activities. His talk was covered in the local press as well, a question he

